

Guidelines for the Biblical Interpretation Paper

Scriptures II

2013-2014



In this paper, you will interpret a particular passage of Scripture and discuss its relevance/application to the life of a Christian today. It is hoped that as you do the work, you will learn what is involved in the interpretation of Scripture and that you will use what you have learned as you interpret Scripture in the future.

General Procedure

Getting Started

Select a passage of Scripture from the list provided by your instructor.

Repeatedly read the entire book or letter in which your passage is found **before** opening a commentary or reference book. This will enable you to obtain a sense of the passage's meaning in its literary context before encountering the voices of others. Then, read your specific passage in at least three modern translations (for example, NRSV, NASB, NIV, NJB). Avoid the use of paraphrases such as The Message or The Living Bible. Note any differences among the translations. Are the differences significant? As you read, write down all questions that come to mind. These questions should help guide you in your study. In order to generate questions, try asking yourself, "What do I need to find out in order to understand this passage?"

Doing the Research

The books of the New Testament were written long ago in a world vastly different from the one in which we live. These books reflect the circumstances in which their authors and readers lived. In many cases, they were written to address specific disputes or problems in the lives of their readers. The responsible reader of Scripture, therefore, should learn as much as possible about those circumstances and take them into account when interpreting the Scripture.

Further, certain words and concepts in Scripture are unfamiliar to modern audiences. Other words or concepts that seem familiar take on special meanings in Scripture, meanings that are perhaps different from the meanings they carry in our everyday conversation. Such words and concepts demand special attention from the reader. At the end of these guidelines, you will find a list of resources that can help you to understand the circumstances behind your passage and the words and concepts within it.

For this paper, you will need to use at least 10 sources. Your instructor may make this requirement more specific by requiring minimum numbers of different types of sources (for instance, six commentaries, two articles, and two Bible dictionaries). After you have formulated your list of questions, start reading

commentaries, Bible dictionaries, and perhaps New Testament introductions for material regarding the authorship, date, place of origin, audience, and historical background of the New Testament book in which your passage is found. Next, narrow your focus to commentaries, reading the sections discussing your passage in particular. As you read, look for (1) answers to your questions and (2) any other material that helps you to understand your passage. Probably, as you read, new questions will arise in your mind, and you will find yourself looking for answers to them. It may be that questions that arise as you read one commentary will be answered as you read another. After you have studied your commentaries, you should turn to journal articles. Look for your journal articles only after you have studied your commentaries because you may need to look for articles that specifically address some questions that have arisen during your reading.

Format



Introduction (about one to two pages)

Identify the passage to be studied.

Briefly discuss the following questions:

- Who wrote the book in which my passage is found?
- Who were the original readers of the book?
- When was the book written?
- What circumstance(s) or event(s) in the lives of the author and the readers may have moved the author to write the book?
- What type(s) of literature (what genre[s]) do my passage and the book within which it is found represent? What are the characteristics of this genre (or these genres)?
- What are the major themes or emphases of the book in which my passage is found?

You may find that it would be possible to write an entire book about these questions or even about only one of them. Despair not, however. You need not write a book. In fact, you should discuss these questions as briefly as possible. For instance, your discussion of authorship should be quite simple. If your passage is found in a book whose authorship has not given rise to debate, your discussion of authorship may be as simple as the following:

Scholars agree that the book of 1 Corinthians is the work of the apostle Paul (include a citation).

On the other hand, if you are working with a passage from a book whose authorship is a matter of debate among scholars, you may find that the scholarly discussion is extremely complicated. Your discussion, however, need not be. For our purposes, you can cover the topic sufficiently with a statement like this:

While 1 Peter has traditionally been attributed to the apostle Peter, one of Jesus' twelve disciples, many scholars today consider the letter pseudonymous (include a citation). This paper will assume that . . .

If your passage comes from a book whose authorship is the subject of scholarly debate, you may, if you wish, assume in your paper that the traditional author did, in fact, write the book. For instance, you are welcome to work from the assumption that Paul wrote Titus or that Peter wrote 1 Peter. You must, however, show that you have done your research and are aware of the debate.

In some cases, you may need to answer a question briefly in your *introduction* and then bring your answer to bear on your *interpretation* in the *body* of your paper. For example, since different genres (types of literature) call for different interpretive approaches, the matter of genre may be quite important to your paper and may call for some discussion beyond simple identification. *Apocalyptic literature*, for instance, tends to contain a significant amount of symbolism. If your passage is an apocalyptic passage, therefore, you should approach it with an eye toward identifying and interpreting symbols. A *letter* is usually written to address a specific situation. If you are working with a passage from one of Paul's letters, your interpretation should take into account the situation it was apparently written to address.

Your discussion of the book's important themes in your *introduction* will likely come into play in the *body* of your paper as you discuss the way your passage carries those themes or advances the book's overall message. For instance, your introduction may state that Luke is sometimes called a gospel of prayer because it stresses the importance of prayer in the life of Jesus. (Nine prayers of Jesus are found in Luke, and only two of these are found elsewhere in the gospels.) If your passage shows Luke's emphasis on prayer, you will note this book-level emphasis again in the body of your paper as you place the passage in its literary context.

Notice that the five questions above are listed with bullet points, not numbers. Feel free to discuss them in the order that works best for you or to combine two or more of them. Indeed, relationships between questions may *necessitate* combining questions.



Body (about 4 to 5 pages)

Place your passage in its literary context.

How does your passage fit into the flow of the book? How does it advance the overall message or carry important themes of the book? How does it relate to the material before it and the material after it? For instance, does it answer a question raised in the preceding material? Does it raise a question answered in the following material? Does it give concrete examples to help explain a statement in the previous material? Is it the climactic conclusion to a long discussion?

Discuss the passage verse-by-verse (or perhaps sentence-by-sentence), paying close attention to the flow of thought in the text.

Here, your list of questions and the answers you have found will be useful. Basically, take a walk through the passage, explaining various elements—for example, important terms, concepts, circumstances and cultural norms in the lives of the writer and readers, significant differences among translations—as you go. Discuss, for instance, important terms/concepts such as *sin*, *salvation*, *justification*, *holy and acceptable to God*, *righteousness of God*. How would the original

readers/hearers of the passage have understood these terms/concepts? Important cultural norms might include the Jewish practice of shunning Samaritans as impure. How does knowledge of this practice help us understand how the original readers/hearers would have understood the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-35)?

After you've walked through the passage, figuratively turn around and look behind you.

What do you see? What overall message did this passage hold for its original readers? How did the author want the readers to respond (in other words, what was the desired application)? How do the message and the desired response relate to the themes/emphases of the book in which the passage occurs?



Conclusion/Application (about 3½ to 5 pages)

Consider whether or not the original message and application are transferable across time and space.

Is the original message of the passage directly applicable to the lives of Christians today? Should present-day Christians respond to it in the same way that the author wanted the original readers to respond? If not, does it reflect a principle or principles that are applicable to the lives of present-day Christians? How should present-day Christians respond? (You do not have to be a Christian yourself to give a thoughtful answer to this question.) What does this passage say about who God is, who we are, and how we are to relate to God?

For a further discussion of issues relating to application, see the "Model for Applicational Interpretation" in Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard's Introduction to Biblical Interpretation.

Depending on the student's major, the form for the paper will conform to the standards established by the APA or MLA style guides. Regardless of which writing style is used (MLA or APA), page numbers must be included in notation.

List of Works Cited

This must follow the form prescribed by your style guide. Your instructor may give you further requirements.

Resources

Discussions Relating to the Exegetical and Hermeneutical Process

(Beginning works in Biblical interpretation)

Carson, D. A. Exegetical Fallacies, 2nd ed. (220.6 C239e)

Erickson, Richard J. A Beginner's Guide to New Testament Exegesis (225.601 Er44b)

Fee, Gordon D. and Douglas Stuart, How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth, 3rd ed. (220.61 F32h)

Gorman, Michael J. Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers (220.601 G68e)

Hayes, John H. and Carl R. Holladay, Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook, 3rd ed. (220.601 H327b)

Klein, William W., Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., Introduction to Biblical Interpretation (220.601 K672i)

Metzger, Bruce M. The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions (220.509 M568b)

Mickelsen, A. Berkeley and Alvera M., Understanding Scripture: How to Read and Understand the Bible (220.61 M583u)

Ryken, Leland, How to Read the Bible as Literature (220.66 R982h)

Stein, Robert H., A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules (220.601 St34p)

_____. Interpreting Puzzling Texts in the New Testament (225.6 St34i)

Concordances (Helpful for the location of specific terms and concepts in the Old and New Testaments)

Goodrick, E. and J. R. Kohlenberger, eds. The Strongest NIV Exhaustive Concordance (R220.2 G626s)

Kohlenberger, J. R., ed. The NRSV Concordance Unabridged: including the Apocrypha/Deuterocanonical books (R220.2 K824n)

The Strongest New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance (R220.2 N17z)

Strong, J. The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible (R220.2 ST88n or 220.2 st88n)

Young, R. Analytical Concordance to the Bible on an Entirely New Plan (R220.2 YB6a22 or 220.2 YB6a22)

Language and Word Studies (In-depth study of terms and concepts in the Old and New Testaments)

Aland, K., Synopsis of the Four Gospels: Greek-English edition of the Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum (R226.1 B471s)

Brown, Colin. New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology. (R225.3 N42)

Bullinger, E. W., Figures of Speech Used in the Bible (R220.6 B874f or 220.6 B874f)

Earl, R. Word Meanings in the NT (225.2 Ea75w)

Mounce, William D., gen.ed. Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words (R220.3 M862c)

Robertson, A. T., Word Pictures in the NT (R225.2 R54w)

Vincent, Word Studies in the NT (R225.7 V743w)

Winter, Ralph D. and Roberta H. Winter, The Word Study New Testament (Use in conjunction with The Word Study Concordance ed. by George Wigram and Ralph P. Winter) (R225.52 B471a-w)

Bibliographic Study Guides (Helpful for identifying resources for New Testament Studies)

Carson, D. A., New Testament Commentary Survey, 4th ed. (R225.7 C474n or 225.7 C474n)

Danker, F.W. Multipurpose Tools for Bible Study, Rev. ed. (220.07 D23m)

Fitzmyer, Joseph, An Introductory Bibliography for the Study of Scripture (220.07 F58z)

Scholer, David M., A Basic Bibliographic Guide for NT Exegesis (R016.225 Sch64b)

Standard Commentaries (Helpful for introductory issues, literary and historical questions, cultural practices, textual questions relating to the Greek New Testament, theological insights of relevance for present application of ancient texts to modern society)

Anchor Bible (R220.77 An21a)

The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (R225.7 Iv7n)

New Century Bible (226)

The New International Bible Commentary (R225.7 N42b)

New International Commentary on the New Testament (R225.7 N42e)

The New Interpreter's Bible (R220.77 N42a or 220.77 N42a)

Sacra Pagina (R225.7 Sa14)

Tyndale New Testament Commentary (227)

Wesleyan Bible Commentary (R220.5 Ed53d)

Word Biblical Commentary (R220.77 W891 or 220.77 W891)

Avoid Biblical Illustrator, Pulpit Commentary, Speaker's Bible, Hailey's Handbook, Matthew Henry's Commentary, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, An Exposition of the Whole Bible, any one-volume commentary on the entire Bible or the entire New Testament

Dictionaries, Encyclopedias, and Atlases (Helpful for introductory issues, cultural practices, historical backgrounds and surveys, location of regions and cities, Greco-Roman religions and philosophies)

Anchor Bible Dictionary, 6 vols., Freedman, D. N., ed. (R220.3 An22f)

Atlas of the Bible and Christianity, Dowley, Tim, ed. (R220.91 At65d)

The Cambridge Companion to the Bible, Kee, Howard Clark et al., eds. (R220.9 C144k)

Concise Bible Atlas: A Geographical Survey of Bible History, Laney, J. Carl (R220.91 p47bc)

Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation, 2 vols., Hayes, John H., ed. (R220.603 D56lh)

Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels (R226.03 D56lg)

Dictionary of New Testament Background, Evans, Craig A. and Stanley E. Porter, eds. (R225.95 D56le)

Dictionary of Paul and His Letters (R227.03 D56lh)

Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Development (R225.3 D56lm)

Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism, 3 vols. Collins, John, J. ed. (291.23 En19a)

Handbook of Life in Bible Times, Thompson, J. A. (R220.95 T374h)

The Harper Atlas of the Bible, Pritchard, James B., ed. (R220.91 H231p)

Harper's Bible Dictionary, Achtemeier, P. J., ed. (R220.3 H234)

Harper's Encyclopedia of Bible Life, Madeline S. and J. Lane Miller (R220.3 M616e)
Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters, McKim, K. Donald, ed. (R220.609 H629m)
The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, 4 vols., Bromiley, G. W., Rev.ed. (R220.3 In8b)
Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 4 Volumes plus a Supplementary Volume (R220.3 In8i)
Jesus and His World: An Archaeological and Cultural Dictionary, Rousseau, John J. and Rami Arav
 (232.9 R762j)
The Macmillan Bible Atlas, Aharoni, Yohanan and Michael Avi-Yonah, eds. (R220.91 Ah15m or 220.91
 Ah15m)
The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology, Blaiklock, Edward M. and R. K. Harrison, eds.
 (R220.93 N42)
The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (R220.3 In)
The Oxford Classical Dictionary, 2nd ed. (R913.38 Ox20 or 913.38 Ox20)
Pocket Dictionary of Biblical Studies, Patzia, Arthur G. and Anthony J. Petrota (220.3 P279p)
A Student's Dictionary for Biblical and Theological Studies, Huey, F. B. and Bruce Corley (R220.603
 H871s)
Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, 5 vols., Tenney, M. C., ed. (R220.3275 or 220.3275)

Selected Topics (Helpful for in-depth treatment of specific topics, historical backgrounds and surveys, and cultural practices)

The Canon of Scripture, F. F. Bruce (220.12 B83c)
The Christians as the Romans Saw Them, Robert L. Wilken (270.1 W651c)
The History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ, Emil Schurer, 5 Volumes (296.09015
 Sch86h)
The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament, Craig S. Keener (R025.7 K252i)
The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul, Wayne Meeks (270.1 M471f)
Gnosticism and Early Christians, Robert M. Grant (273.1 G767g)
Introducing the Apocrypha, David A. deSilva (229 D46i)
Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus, Joachim Jeremias (309.133 J472j)
Jewish Sects at the Time of Jesus, Marcel Simon (296.81 Si54j)
The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible, Paul Wegner (309.133
 J472j)
The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction, Brevard Childs (225.12 C437n)
The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic: 200 B.C.-100 A.D., D. S. Russell (229.913 R912m)
The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times, Ralph Gower (220.93 W639m)
The New Testament in Its Social Environment, John E. Staumbaugh and David L. Balch (Electronic)
The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, 2 vols., James H. Charlesworth, ed. (229 O11c)
The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Gospel Texts, Ron Cameron (229.8 Ot3)
Paganism in the Roman Empire, Ramsay MacMullen (200.937 M229p)
Philo of Alexandria, Samuel Sandmel (181.3 P547ys)
The World of the New Testament, Sean Freyne (225.7 N42)
The World of the Old Testament, A. S. Van der Woude (223.61 W893w)

Introductions to the New Testament (Helpful for introductory issues and themes)

Barr, David, New Testament Story: An Introduction (225.66 B27n)
Brown, Raymond E. An Introduction to the New Testament (225.61 B814i)
Collins, Raymond F. Introduction to the New Testament (225.601 c696i)
Gundry, R. A Survey of the New Testament, Rev. ed. (225.07 G956s)
Guthrie, Donald, New Testament Introduction, 4th ed. (225.61 G984n)
Harris, Stephen L., The New Testament: A Student's Introduction, 5th ed. (225.61 H243n)
Johnson, Luke T., The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation (225.61 J634w)
Kee, Howard Clark, Franklin W. Young, and Karlfried Froelich, Understanding the New Testament, 4th ed. (225.16 K24u)
Kummel, Werner Georg, Introduction to the New Testament (225.6 K96i)
Ladd, George Eldon, A Theology of the New Testament (225.66 L121t)
Marshall, I. Howard, New Testament Theology (230.041 M356n)
Martin, R. P., New Testament Foundations: A Guide for Christian Students, 2 vols. (225.66 M365n)
Richardson, Alan, An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament (225 R393i)
Spivey, Robert A. and D. Moody Smith, Anatomy of the New Testament, 5th ed. (225.6 Sp49a)
Varughese, Alex, ed., Discovering the New Testament: Community and Faith (225.61 D631v)

Periodicals and Journals (In-depth treatment of selected topics and texts)

Tools for accessing:

Religion Index One: Periodicals
Religion Index Two: Multi-Author Works
ATLAS (American Theological Library Association Serials)
ATLA Religion Database

A selection of resources with common abbreviations:

Biblical Archaeologist (BA)	Journal of Biblical Literature (JBL)
Biblical Archaeology Review (BAR)	Journal for the Study of the New Testament (JSNT)
Biblical Theology Bulletin (BTB)	New Testament Studies (NTS)
Expository Times (ExpT)	Novum Testamentum (NovT)
Evangelical Quarterly (EvQ)	Westminster Theological Journal (WTJ)
Interpretation (Int)	