# Interpretation of the Bible: Hermeneutics

Proper Biblical Interpretation

In establishing doctrine and determining right conduct, follow the biblical **pattern**. Hebrews 8:5

A rule for correct interpretation of Scripture

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**II Peter 3:16** - As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

*The original word for “wrest,” is a metaphor taken from torturers, who put a man upon the rack and torment him until they make him say things he never meant to say; so these wrest a sense out of scripture which the Holy Ghost never intended.*

**Acts 17:11** - These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

**II Timothy 2:15** - Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

A minister must not get involved in idle disputes and debates, but as a faithful steward, correctly divide the word of truth. By his wisdom in the scriptures and right handling of the Word of God, stop the mouths of those who do not have correct doctrine, who deceive and are deceived being diligent and very careful not to mishandle or misuse the Word of God. He must be beware that he not add anything to it, take anything away from it or distort it in any way.

If we study, cultivating and improving our heart and mind, we will not be a reproach to Him from whom we have received our commission.

CONCLUSION

How do you approach the Bible? With eagerness? With fervency?

When reading God’s Word remember, every book has a message.

Keep reading until you find the message God has in His precious word.

As you read the Word of God let the Holy Spirit Himself teach you. John 16:13, 14

The Word of God is alive; every part of it is necessary for the whole to be perfect.

We cannot tamper with God’s perfect word; this would only mar what the Lord has done through these Holy Scriptures. Revelation 22:18, 19.

* Verifying conclusions and second level accountability.

A rule for correct interpretation of Scripture

There is perfect & unbroken unity from Genesis to Revelation. When interpreting a portion of Scripture, we must study its context. Not only the verses before and after it, but Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. My interpretation of that portion of Scripture must not disturb this perfect unity and harmony of Scripture. Let Scripture be its own interpreter. Remember: We are fully dependant on the Spirit of God to understand His Word (John 16:13 / I Cor. 2:6-14). Ask God to show you His truth (James 1:5).

When establishing one doctrine from a passage, you must never displace any other doctrine of Scripture.

**II Peter 1:20** - Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.

Private idios, id'-ee-os =

Pertaining to self, i.e. one’s own; by implication, private or separate:--apart, aside, his own, their own.

I John 2:27 - But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

Interpretive Errors

Is my meaning imposed on the text, or drawn from it?

1)Original Meaning/Exegesis 🡪 & 2)Personal Application/SIGNFICANCE

These two endeavors conjoined creates a spiral of interpretation called the ‘hermeneutical spiral’ (Grant R. Osborne)

Meaning is Genre Dependent🡪 (Genres most often overlap. Ie. Markan & Gospel)

* Examples of Biblical Genres
  + Author Genre
    - Paul
    - Peter
    - John the Beloved
    - Moses
    - Mark
  + Epistles
  + Gospels
  + Apocalyptic
  + Prophetic
  + Parabolic
  + Poetic
  + Historical

Seek to Justify the unity & diversity of Scripture.

Most new Bible scholars are amazed at the myriad interpretations that may be properly drawn from a single text. ???? correct

Doctrinal statements should be made based not on a single text but doctrinal statements should summarize what all scripture says on the topic.

Progress of revelation🡪historical development(slavery,polygamy)

Error🡪using proof texts, fav passage

Expository sermon 🡪the goal of hermeneutics is the sermon not so much systematic theology

The relationship between meaning and significance summarizes the hermeneutical task. The preacher must ask how the biblical writer would have applied the theological truths of the passage if he were addressing them to the modern congregation.

GOAL OF THE HERMENUETICAL ENTERPRISE🡪Both spheres, the original meaning of the text and the modern significance for our context, are critical in expository preaching, the true goal of the hermeneutical enterprise.

10 stages to the process of interpretation.

INDUCTIVE STUDY🡪in which we interact with the text directly to form our own conclusions.

DEDUCTIVE STUDY🡪in which we interact with other scholars’ conclusions and rework our findings. (helpful in taking us away from our contemporary meanings and personal experiences.)

It is important that we interact with exegetical tools critically and not uncritically parroting other people’s ideas.

The plain meaning--+ read it the way it was written.

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|  | **Principles of Textual Interpretation**  **(Biblical Hermeneutics)**   * **In interpreting the Bible a number of Principles of Textual Interpretation apply.** * **These principles were not developed by biblical scholars.** * **These principles were not developed specifically for Bible study or interpretation.** * **The same principles are used by courts, historians, literary scholars, editors, news reporters and academicians.** * **The same principles are used when examining texts that have nothing to do with religion, ethics, morality, etc.** * **The rules are based on logic, experience, and common sense, not religious beliefs.** * **This is not a formal set of "rules" adopted by some "Society" or "Association."  It is an informal list of the various principles generally used.** * **Interpretation of text includes study of** [**jargon**](http://www.godonthe.net/evidence/jargon.htm) **unique to the subject matter of the text.**   In the Anglo-American legal system, these rules are referred to as **Rules of Construction**, i.e., rules on how to ***construe*** one or more documents, e.g., contracts.  In religious studies, the study of the principles of textual interpretation is called ***hermeneutics*** (pronounced "Herman OO ticks").  Hermeneutics deals with issues such as:   * What is the 'formal' interpretation of this text? * What is the 'official' interpretation of this text? * How do people interpret the text who are experts on the history, politics, culture, life, times, customs, etc. of the writer? * What did the author intend to say? * What message did the author intend to convey? * Is the use of a particular word, grammatical construction, verb tense, etc., significant in this instance? * Who were the author's readers or listeners, culturally, etc.? * How was the text interpreted by the author's contemporaries?  |  |  | | --- | --- | | **UNLESS THERE IS EVIDENCE TO THE CONTRARY, ASSUME ...** | | | **BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT** | Unless there is evidence of untrustworthiness, every author is given the benefit of the doubt on veracity, accuracy, etc. | | **REASONABLY INTELLIGENT** | The author is ***reasonably*** intelligent.  He is neither a genius nor an idiot. | | **REASONABLY EDUCATED** | The author is reasonably educated ***by the standards of his time, place, occupation, and station in life***. | | **REASONABLY KNOWS TOPIC** | ***By the standards of his time, place, occupation, and station in life***, the author is ***reasonably*** knowledgeable about his topic. | | **REASONABLY WORLDLY** | ***By the standards of his time, place, occupation, and station in life***, the author is ***reasonably*** knowledgeable about how people act, what motivates them, etc. | | **REASONABLY INFORMED** | ***By the standards of his time, place, occupation, and station in life***, the author is ***reasonably*** knowledgeable about science, literature, religion, politics, community activities, etc. | | **REASONABLY NORMAL** | Just because the author lived in ancient Egypt or Greece or Rome or Israel doesn't mean he lacked wisdom, intelligence, reasoning, common sense, curiosity, a sense of humor, or healthy skepticism! | | **REASONABLY ACCURATE** | The author is neither excessively sloppy nor excessively accurate in his recital of information. | | **NOT TOTALLY NEUTRAL** | It is virtually impossible to write about something without leaning toward a particular viewpoint. | | **REASONABLY TRUSTWORTHY** | A person with an interest in the outcome of an event can still present an accurate account!  Consider:   * Does the author seem to present the facts "warts and all"? * Does he admit weaknesses in his case? * Does he try to respond to his opponents' ***arguments***? * Does he try to distract the reader with personal attacks on his opponents that have nothing to do with their arguments? | | **REASONABLY ERROR-FREE** | The author has not made any blatant errors in interpreting or reporting information.  He made ***reasonable*** efforts to verify and report information but did not get ***ridiculous*** about it. | | **NOT LYING** | ***By definition***, a "lie" is a statement which the author represents as being true although he believes it to be false. No matter how blatant or how stupid it is, an ***error*** is ***not*** a ***lie***. | | **INTERNALLY CONSISTENT** | The author didn't intend to contradict himself and in fact did not contradict himself -- even though, at first glance, there is an apparent contradiction. | | **HARMONIOUS INTERPRETATION** | 1.  A section of a document can be interpreted two ways. 2.  One interpretation contradicts another part of the document or another of the author's writings. 3.  The other interpretation is consistent with other text. 4.  ***Both*** interpretations are fairly reasonable.  The interpretation that produces consistency should be used ***even if*** it is ***less*** likely or ***less*** reasonable. | | **CONSISTENT IN TRUTHFULNESS** | If a person has a reputation for exaggeration or lying, ***all*** statements from that person are of doubtful reliability, even those that sound okay.  On the other hand, if a person is shown to be reliable in most things, he is assumed to be reliable even when it can't be proven. | | **CONSISTENT IN PHILOSOPHY** | A trustworthy person does not constantly change his views.  If an author has presented a particular viewpoint in previous writings, he probably still holds those views. | | **ACTIONS WILL BE CONSISTENT** | If an author's ***actions*** are contrary to his ***words***, the reliability of his words is questionable. | | **WON'T LIGHTLY ACT AGAINST OWN SELF-INTEREST** | The author would not act against his own interest without good reason.  If he makes a statement that is likely to expose him to ostracism, ridicule, public scorn, humiliation, contempt, pain, imprisonment, or death, the statement is likely to be true. | | **CHARACTER BY ASSOCIATION** | You can tell a lot about the author's character by the company he keeps, the reliability of his sources, etc. | | **THINGS PROCEED NORMALLY** | Actions, events, etc., follow their normal course. | | **LAWS OF NATURE STAY CONSISTENT** | Under similar conditions, the laws of nature remain consistent. | | **REASONABLE ASSUMPTIONS OKAY** | The reader can make reasonable assumptions consistent with logic, common sense, and known circumstances.  (An assumption is not based on the text, e.g., a person gets hungry and sleepy every day.) | | **REASONABLE INFERENCES OKAY** | The reader can draw reasonable inferences from the text and known information.  (An inference is partially based on the text.) | | **MUST PROVE UNUSUAL** | The burden of proof rests on the person alleging something out of the ordinary, not on the person claiming the ordinary. | | **GENERALIZATION IS NOT ERROR** | A reasonable generalization is not a lie or an error, even if it uses phrases like "all" or "every." | | **APPROXIMATION IS NOT ERROR** | A reasonable approximation is not a lie or an error ***unless it purports to be more accurate than it is***. (E.g., "our income last year was $75,321.62" gives the impression you counted to the penny, not the nearest thousand.) | | **SIMPLIFICATION IS NOT ERROR** | A reasonable simplification is not a lie or an error. | | **SARCASM, ETC. IS NOT ERROR** | Sarcasm, obviously blatant exaggeration, for emphasis, etc., is not error. ("They call me 'Elephant' because I work for peanuts.") | | **WORDS HAVE USUAL MEANING** | Words have their usual meaning.  If we start saying "It ***says*** '...' but it really must ***mean*** '...'", we are ignoring what the author wrote and substituting our own text. | | **GRAMMAR HAS USUAL MEANING** | As with wording, we are not free to "force" an unusual interpretation on a standard grammatical construction.  "***And***" means ***both***.  It does ***not*** mean "at least one."  "***Or***" means "at least one"! | | **UNCOMMON GRAMMAR HAS  SPECIAL MEANING** | If the author uses an uncommon grammatical construction it probably was intentional, either for emphasis or special clarity. | | **PUNCTUATION HAS ITS USUAL MEANING** | Punctuation has its normal meaning, e.g., commas separate. ***Note -- in Biblical times punctuation was not used.*** | | **IDIOMS HAVE THEIR USUAL  MEANING** | Every language has ***idioms*** -- phrases whose meaning is different from the words, e.g. in English "a knight in shining armor" ***means*** "a virtuous hero."  The Spanish equivalent is "un principe azul", which, ***literally*** means "a blue prince." | | **SOME WORDS MAY BE  JARGON** | ***Every*** field has its ***jargon***.  There are two types of jargon:   1. Words or phrases unique to that field, e.g., a legal ***writ*** 2. Common words or phrases that have a special meaning in that field, e.g., in criminal law a "not guilty" verdict ***means*** "the government failed to prove its case ***beyond a reasonable doubt***." | | **USE OF JARGON DEPENDS ON THE TARGET READER** | Whether a word was used as jargon depends on the intended audience. If the author is writing to specialists, he probably meant the word as jargon.  He probably avoided jargon for a general audience. | | **DIFFERENT VIEW IS NOT ERROR** | Just because someone has a different view or interpretation does not automatically mean that person is wrong. | | **AIMS AT AVERAGE TARGET MEMBER** | The author is writing for the average reader ***of his type of material***, not someone who is super educated, super informed, super analytical, super critical, super skeptical, or looking only for weak points or only for strong points. | | **SUFFICIENT, NOT EXHAUSTIVE** | The author attempts to present ***enough*** evidence and arguments to convey his point, not ***all*** the evidence and arguments. | | **HAS PARTICULAR AUDIENCE IN MIND** | The author is writing for a particular audience.  No one tries to write an article on nuclear physics for both physics professors and second grade students! | | **TRIED TO BE UNDERSTOOD** | The author was trying to write something his readers would understand. (Of course, this frequently is not the case in wordy legal documents such as insurance and loan agreements!) | | **OCCAM'S RAZOR** | When choosing between two alternative solutions to a problem, ***all other things being equal***, if the simple solution works as well as the complicated solution, the simple solution is probably the correct alternative. | | **TARGET READER REALIZES THESE** | The ***author*** makes similar assumptions about his target ***reader***. He assumes the reader is nearly fluent in the language, can hear, see, is already familiar with the basic concepts discussed, etc. |  * **Note that not one of these principles is specific to the Bible.** * **Again, these principles apply *unless there is evidence to the contrary*.**   **It is important to note that in interpreting certain Bible authors, one or more of these assumptions definitely does not apply,** (particularly the  only ***reasonably*** intelligent, educated, worldly, and informed assumptions):   * **Moses** was raised as Pharaoh's son and trained in ***the best university in the world at the time.***  In today's world he would be the equivalent of a Rhodes Scholar. * **Joseph** became ***prime minister of Egypt***, the greatest country in the world at the time, ***on the basis of ability***, not by birth or political connections. * **Daniel** was specially selected and educated by the Babylonian government because he was considered among "the cream of the crop." * **Paul** studied rabbinical law and theology under Gamaliel, the leading rabbinical teacher of his time.  On the basis of his writings, Paul obviously was a ***brilliant*** theologian with a gift for being able to explain complex theological concepts clearly.   **A WORD OF CAUTION ABOUT 'SHADES OF MEANING'**  English speakers must be very cautious in hermeneutical interpretation of the Bible, for a unique reason: **The English language has more words than any other language** -- far more words than either biblical Hebrew or biblical Greek.  It has many words from Norman French, modern French, Latin, Greek, Danish and Anglo-Saxon.  In many cases, it has two or three words for **the same concept**, e.g., royal (French), regal (Latin), kingly (Anglo-Saxon).  As a result, there often are **fine shades of meaning** in English that **do not exist in the original text**. For instance, "royal" means "having to do with royalty".  "Regal" gives the mental image of "in a grandiose manner, with lots of pomp and circumstance". Often, an English translator **has no choice**; he **must** choose between English words that have more precise meanings than the original language because there is no equivalent 'broad' word in English. In making his choice he is not only **translating** the text, he is also changing the meaning to a certain extent. For instance, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of all wisdom."  The Hebrew word is half-way between "dread" and "reverence". ***No*** English word exists that has a similar meaning.  For this reason, for **serious study** it is important to have several translations "from scratch", i.e., where the translators **translated directly** from the source texts **without** consulting earlier English translations. For instance, the Revised Standard Version (RSV), the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), and the New King James Version (NKJV) **all** are actually **updates** of the King James Version, not **new** translations.  And the KJV is an update of the Geneva Bible. For better or worse, each is perpetuating **interpretations** by prior translators.  It is also important to use literal translations that also show what the original Hebrew or Greek word means. Each biblical Hebrew and Greek word has been assigned a Strong's Number, and dictionaries showing the meanings are available.  A lot of Bible-study software has automatic correlations, so that as you move the cursor through the text (i.g., the NKJV or NIV), transliterated Hebrew or Greek words with definitions appear in another window.   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | [**TOP**](http://www.godonthe.net/evidence/intrpret.htm#page_top) | [**QUESTIONS**](http://www.godonthe.net/evidence/question.htm) | [**HOME**](http://www.godonthe.net/evidence/index.htm) | | [**BECOME  A  CHRISTIAN**](http://www.godonthe.net/evidence/become.htm) | | |   [Email the Webmaster](javascript:mail_it())  [WhatTheBibleTeaches.com](http://www.WhatTheBibleTeaches.com)  [HubbleSpacePhotos.com](http://www.HubbleSpacePhotos.com)  [RomanCatholicTeachings.com](http://www.RomanCatholicTeachings.com) [DidGodLie.com](http://www.DidGodLie.com)  [MessianicPassover.com](http://www.MessianicPassover.com)  [MessianicWorship.com](http://www.MessianicWorship.com)  [MessianicOutreach.com](http://www.MessianicOutreach.com) |  |