

SOUND PRINCIPLES OF BIBLE STUDY/INTERPRETATION (HERMENEUTICS)

The Bible itself is the primary source of study to learn about God and what the Bible teaches. To get to know God, we must study the Bible, His revealed Word.

It is very important that Christians learn to properly study the Bible. There are sound principles that must be followed to avoid bizarre interpretations, based upon inadequate foundations. Faulty interpretations are most likely to take place when verses are taken out of context of the whole, symbolic meaning is read into verses meant to be taken literally, historical context is not considered, Scripture is not used to interpret Scripture and original language is not considered for difficult passages and concepts.

Below are some basic principles which must be followed:

CONTEXT RULES

1. You must consider the historical, geographical, political, literary genre and cultural context, in relation to the passage/chapter/book.
2. Develop a personal habit of reading the Bible through regularly each year, so that you have a context in which to base your understanding on what a particular passage means. (Download the spoken Word on to your Phone and listen to it while you work or drive, to continue build/refresh your knowledge of the whole of Scripture. Invest in a respected study Bible.)
3. As you study, ask: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?
4. Consider the relationship of various chapters and verses to each other to determine meaning.
5. Don't base your interpretation/doctrine on a single verse, but on the whole of Scripture.

SCRIPTURE INTERPRETS SCRIPTURE

1. Obscure passages must be understood in the light of clearer ones.
2. Remember that no part of the Bible can contradict any other part. If one passage seems to contradict another, one of the passages is being misinterpreted, or even both.
3. As God's Word, the Bible must be consistent with itself.
4. Don't base your convictions on an obscure passage of Scripture.

INTERPRET SCRIPTURE LITERALLY

1. Scripture is to be read in its literal sense.
2. Understand God's words just as you would interpret the language of normal discourse.
3. Look first for the literal meaning, not some mystical, deeper, hidden, secret or spiritualized interpretation.
4. If there is symbolic meaning, use Scripture to interpret Scripture..

CONSIDER GRAMMER/ORIGINAL LANGUAGE TO DETERMINE MEANING

1. Be aware of the sequences of the words and phrases, tenses, and part of speech (verb or noun), to determine meaning.
2. Often it is necessary to consider the original language to fully understand the passage. (Today, there are Greek/Hebrew lexicons, Bible study software, or free sites like www.blueletterbible.org , www.biblegateway.com, etc. that can help you understand.)

CONSIDER THE “TYPE” OF LITERATURE (GENRE)

Historical Narratives: (Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Joshua through to Esther. Parts of the Gospels, and the book of Acts.) These describe specific actual historical events from God’s perspective. They tell us what God is like (His character and nature), what God likes/dislikes, how He deals with people who obey and honor Him, and those who disobey and hate Him, and give principles and lessons. The Gospels take excerpts from the life of Jesus.

Poetry and Songs: (Primary Psalms and Song of Solomon, although Job and some other books contain poetic portions) These are expressions of emotion to God: happiness, joy, love, worship, trust, hope, security, discouragement, guilt, repentance, suffering, fear, anger, despair and repentance. When it comes to exposition of biblical poetry it is important to understand figures of speech, types of parallelism in Hebrew poetry and the different types of Psalms. (1. *Simile* – comparison using “like” or “as”; 2. *Metaphor* – Comparison where one thing represents another; 3. *Allegory* – Extended metaphor around a specific theme; 4. *Metonymy* – Substitutes one object or concept for that of another; 5. *Synecdoche* – a part is made to represent the whole or visa versa; 6. *Hyperbole* – Exaggeration for dramatic effect; 7. *Apostrophe* – Addresses absent/imaginary person as if there, Personification, “Lift up your heads, O gates,” Psalms 24:7; 8 *Antropomorphism* – Speaks of God as having human body.)

Legal Writings: (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Wisdom/Wise Sayings) These writings indicate God’s high moral standard, His idea of justice, principles of commonsense government, health and safety, and His pattern and order for acceptable worship. They are not meant to be legalistic instructions and commands to Christians. They indicate God’s view of wisdom as opposed to man’s view of wisdom. They contain wise sayings, and practical advice on how to live life and avoid trouble and hardship.

Wisdom literature: can be found primarily in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Job. (Note: Proverbs teach probable truth, not absolute truth.)

Prophecy: (Old Testament, from Isaiah to Malachi) It is God’s message to a particular person/group and sometimes to all humanity. Sometimes, but not necessarily foretelling the future. The vast majority speaks of the present (at the time of the prophet).

Teachings of Jesus: (Gospels) These are direct statements of truth from Jesus concerning the nature and character of God, the kingdom of God, heaven, what God expects of us, principles of righteous living, and the ways in which Jesus fulfills the OT prophecies.

Parables: Stories with a punch line. Most parables have only one message or central idea, and even if multiple messages are present, one of them will be the chief idea. Note also that they are not perfect analogies. They are found in parts of the Gospels.

Epistles: (Romans to Jude) Letters written with a clear purpose to an identified audience. The epistle writer presents arguments to correct, rebuke, defend, instruct, praise and encourage the readers.

Apocalypse: (Revelation, and large parts of Ezekiel and Daniel) These describe prophecies in which God “reveals” His hidden future plans and is a view of God’s relationship to human history. Rather than work within it, God radically intervenes from outside it. The book Revelation is a vision of warning and encouragement to the early church as it was going through immense persecution.

APPLY BIBLICAL TRUTH

1. The Scripture is meant to be applied to life, not just read.
2. Ask: How does this apply today? How does this apply to me? What needs to change in the way I think and act?

We strongly recommend that all Bible students invest in one or two respected study Bibles. Be sure to make one of your study Bibles the Fire Bible (Global Study Edition) and, also, include an ESV Study Bible or an NASB Study Bible (Ryrie, Zondervan, or Inductive). The NKJV Spirit Filled Life Bible (compiled by Jack Hayford), is also a great resource. All study Bibles include Bible book background information, cross references, maps, timelines and basic commentary, which is very helpful when study time is limited. Students, who want to go deeper, may wish to invest in some respected Bible study software.