

How to Know What the Bible Means by What It Says: The Principles of Sound Biblical Interpretation (Lesson 1)

Introduction: A Short History of Biblical Interpretation

- Ezra and the Return from Babylon (Nehemiah 8:1-12)
- The Time of Christ: Literal Method vs. Allegorical Method
- The Early Church (2nd century)
 - Alexandrian “School”: Allegorical
 - Antiochian “School”: Literal
- 5th Century—Middle Ages: Two Emphases
 - Allegorizing + Church Authority
- The Reformation: Sola Scriptura

I. A Definition: Hermeneutics is the art and science of Biblical interpretation

II. The Essential Principle of Biblical Interpretation: CONTEXT DETERMINES MEANING

The Context of the...

- Word
- Sentence
- Paragraph
- Book
- Same Author, Different Book
- Testament (Covenant)
- Bible
- Historical & Cultural Background

III. The Problem of Our Modern Cultural Context for Biblical Interpretation

A. Postmodernism: All truth is relative.

B. The Search for Meaning: Two Possibilities

1. Authorial Intent: What the author intended to communicate when he wrote.
2. Reader Response: What this passage means to me.

C. The Solution: The Authorial Intent Approach to Biblical Interpretation

- a.k.a.: The Historical, Grammatical, Literary (Literal) Approach

 1. NOT “What does this passage mean to *me*?” but...
 2. “What did the *author* mean? How should I *apply* this passage to my life?”

IV. God’s Communication Process

1. Revelation (Deuteronomy 29:29, 1 Corinthians 2:6-11)
2. Inspiration (2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:19-21)
3. Transmission

4. Interpretation/Illumination : Leads to Theological Principles and Doctrine

- 2 Tim. 2:15, Acts 17:10-11, 1 Cor. 2:12-16, John 16:12-14

5. Application: Leads to Experience

- Putting into action the principles of the Word of God, fitted to **our** context, so that a change in behavior results. (James 1:22-25)
- God getting His thoughts into our actions.

V. Foundational Understandings for Biblical Interpretation:

- A. God has communicated His thoughts to His people through the words of Scripture.
- B. God communicated His thoughts through the words of Scripture so as to be understood.
- C. Scripture's meaning is capable of being understood.
- D. The meaning of any scriptural text is the literary meaning intended by the author, inspired by the Holy Spirit. and as understood by the original audience.
- E. The meaning of any scriptural text comes from within the text, itself.
- F. Any given Scripture passage will have one true interpretation.
- G. Any given Scripture passage will have many applications.

VI. Where We're Headed: The Interpretive Journey

- A. Goal #1: **To grasp the literary meaning** God intended for the text as understood by the original audience.
- B. Goal #2: **To discover** within the text **broad theological principles** that are applicable to all of God's people at all times.
- C. Goal #3: **To apply the broad theological principles** of the text **to** the **specific situations** of individual Christians in the Church **today**.
- D. The Basics of the Journey
 1. Grasp the text in their town.
Question: What did the text mean to the original audience?
 2. Measure the width of the river to cross.
Question: What are the differences between the original biblical audience and us?
 3. Cross the principlizing bridge
Question: What is/are the outstanding and abiding theological principle(s) in this text that is/are true at all times for every culture?
 4. Consult the Biblical map.
Question: How does our statement of the theological principle fit with the rest of the Bible?
 5. Grasp the text in our town.
Question: How should individual Christians today live out the theological principles revealed in the text?