



# UNDERSTANDING SCRIPTURE

## How to Read and Interpret the Bible

## 2 - THE EXEGETICAL TASK

### AN INTRODUCTION

In the next few lessons we will take a look at the task of interpreting Bible passages and provide basic tools. We have two main tasks in Biblical study:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ To find out what the text meant to the original hearers and readers.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ To accurately apply the ancient texts to our contemporary life.

The reason we need to learn how to interpret the Bible is that every reader interprets in some way. Most of us tend to assume that our understanding of the text is the same as the Holy Spirit's intent. As well, we bring everything we are to the text: our experiences, culture, former teachings, etc. Unless we learn the actual intent of a Scriptural passage, to whom and why the words were written, we may end up with an interpretation that is very different than the actual meaning.

Here are a few principles to understand when approaching the Bible...

1. The \_\_\_\_\_ cannot see Biblical Truth.
  - A. 1 Corinthians 2:14 *But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* (John 3:3)
2. We must be delivered from a \_\_\_\_\_. Our minds may be filled with the world's knowledge and trivia but void of Biblical understanding and wisdom.
  - A. 1 Corinthians 3:19 *For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight.* (Proverbs 4:4-9)
3. **Key:** It is in His light (His Presence) that we see light. Read God's Word *in* fellowship with Him.
  - A. Psalm 36:9 *For with You is the fountain of life, in Your light we see light.*
  - B. Psalm 89:15 *Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound! They walk, O Lord, in the light of Your countenance.*
  - C. Psalm 119:130 *The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.*
4. Learn to \_\_\_\_\_ on Scripture. Biblical meditation, unlike the mediational practice of emptying our minds, is in filling our hearts with God's Word and pondering on its meaning.
  - A. Joshua 1:8 *"Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and*

*night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.” (Psalm 119:11-16)*

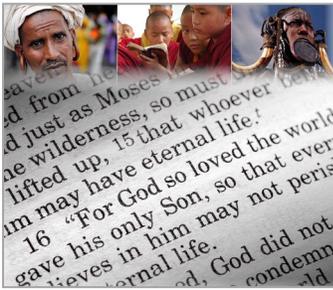
5. Develop a pure life style to hear God’s voice.
  - A. Matthew 5:8 *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* (Hebrews 12:14)
6. Understand the importance of the fear of the Lord of the Lord.
  - A. Proverbs 1:7 *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,...*

## **BASIC RULES FOR BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION**

1. Begin with \_\_\_\_\_ and ask the Holy Spirit to be your Guide (John 16:13).
  - A. Pray for insight to see the message as God would want us to know it.
  - B. Pray for personal application.
2. Generally, the Bible should be interpreted \_\_\_\_\_, exactly as it is written. This is the starting point.
  - A. Skill is required in interpreting Old Testament prophecies, New Testament figures of speech such as hyperbole, similes and metaphors, etc. (Matthew 13:3)
3. Interpret the Bible as a \_\_\_\_\_ revelation of God concerning His Son, the redemption of mankind and His eternal Kingdom.
  - A. The book of Genesis is the seed of every main doctrine in the Bible.
    - Hebrews 10:1 *For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things,...* (Colossians 2:17)
    - John 5:39 *You search the Scriptures the Law and the Prophets), for in them you think you have eternal life; and (but) these are they which testify of Me.*
  - B. The Old Testament is largely foundational truth, the New Testament is largely fulfilled truth.
4. Never interpret Scripture in a way that \_\_\_\_\_ the rest of Scripture.
  - A. How do Ephesians 2:8-9 and James 2:20 relate to each other in light of apparent contradiction?
  - B. Scripture can *never* mean what it did not first mean to the original hearers and readers.
5. Interpret text in light of its immediate \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. Context is understanding the Scripture passage in light of the historical, geographical and cultural issues as well as the circumstances or facts that surround a particular passage or teaching.
  - B. Sentences taken out of context cannot be understood properly without reading the entire portion of Scripture or source material.
6. Wherever possible, let Scripture \_\_\_\_\_ Scripture.
  - A. It is extremely helpful when the Bible interpret itself such as the parable of the sower in

Matthew 13:18-23.

7. The Bible may appear to have opposing views and statements which must be handled correctly (2 Timothy 2:15).
  - A. \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, Law and Grace, Israel and the Church, etc.
8. Bible interpretation is \_\_\_\_\_; Bible application may be \_\_\_\_\_.
9. After you have arrived at an interpretation, check it out with others you trust. Get a second (and third) opinion.
10. Above all, be charitable to those who may differ with your interpretation. Never allow yourself to think that you have arrived. (1 Corinthians 13:12-13)
  - A. In essentials: unity. In non-essentials: liberty. In all things: charity. (The Foursquare Creed)



*Because the Bible is God's Word to us, it has eternal relevance. It speaks to ALL mankind, in EVERY age and in EVERY culture.*

*God chose to speak through human words in human history. Therefore, every book is conditioned by the language, culture and historical environment in which it was originally given.*

## WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM STUDYING THE BIBLE?

The Bible is not a book of \_\_\_\_\_. The Bible was not written to simply give us easy answers to life's complex problems. It is an unfolding of God's Kingdom on earth and the redemption of mankind. However, living consistently according to its principles will bring wisdom and understanding resulting in eternal life. Here are a few things we can expect when studying the Scriptures...

1. God is revealed in the history as recorded in the Bible. (Acts 2:14-36; 7:1-54)
2. We can expect personal fellowship with our Heavenly Father. (John 14:25-31)
3. We are confronted with Christ and His Kingdom. (John 5:38-39)
4. We can expect the Holy Spirit to guide us in our study. (John 14:25-26)
5. God's Word speaks to us about love, truth, justice, righteousness, and the effects of sin in our lives and in the world.
6. We can understand God's standards of right and wrong. (Exodus 20:1-17; Matthew 22:34-40)
7. We can understand the problems and challenges of people in Bible times and learn how God responded to their problems.
8. We can learn about ourselves and others. (Hebrews 4:11-13)

9. We can expect spiritual growth and positive change in our lives as we faithfully apply what we learn. (John 13:15-17; Philippians 4:9)
10. Personal Bible study will strengthen us, give us joy and peace. (Psalm 16:11)

### **WHAT SHOULD WE BE AWARE OF IN APPROACHING THE BIBLE?**

If we want to understand the real meaning of Bible passages then we must be aware of attitudes and tendencies that work against us. They include the following...

1. The \_\_\_\_\_. Because of the influence of our society, schools, etc., our approach may be the scientific method of cause and effect to explain the Bible's miracles.
  - A. An example would be the feeding of the 5,000 (over 20,000 with women and children) in Matthew 14:13-21.
2. A strong dedication to traditions and beliefs from our childhood or other churches even though the Bible may contradict those beliefs.
  - A. Matthew 15:1-2 ...*He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?..."*
3. A fear of \_\_\_\_\_. Apparent contradictions can influence our thinking and erode our faith in God's Word.
  - A. The ancient Greeks combined the prefix para (beyond or outside of) with the verb dokein (to think), meaning contrary to expectation.
    - Matthew 10:34-39 ...*And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.*
4. Looking for \_\_\_\_\_ to complex problems at the expense of Truth. This may also include the practice of using the Bible to justify our behavior or beliefs.
5. \_\_\_\_\_. This practice leads us to select commands or teachings we like and ignoring the ones we do not like.
  - A. Great divisions in the Body of Christ occur when we privately and independently determine which parts of the Bible are true or relevant. Divisions can occur over essentials (Christ's birth, death and Resurrection, salvation by Grace, faith, etc.) as well as non-essentials (the Sabbath, foods, style of public or private worship, etc.).

## ASSIGNMENT

1. Weekly assignment includes...
    - Meet with your accountability partner
    - Daily devotions
    - Read the lesson
    - Memorize the Scripture
    - Journal
  2. In your journaling, answer one of the following questions:
    - A. Describe one area you have had to “re-adjust” your interpretation of a particular Scripture based on past teaching. Give Scriptural reference(s).
    - B. In your own words, describe the possible results of Christians practicing “selective literalism?” How does that affect your own life How might that affect others around you?
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## ANSWERS

Exegesis  
Hermeneutics  
unconverted  
secular mindset  
meditate

prayer  
literally  
progressive  
contradicts  
context  
interpret

Faith      works  
singular   plural  
magic

scientific method  
paradox  
easy answers  
Selective literalism

# WEEKLY TIME SHEET - UNDERSTANDING SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 5:16 ...*redeeming the time...*

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

2. My accountability partners \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Scripture memory verse (Write it from memory below before class)

4. Journaling (Briefly write the main thoughts and continue on other side if necessary)

Check  each box below as you do the activity for that day

ACTIVITIES	SAT	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI
Personal prayer time							
Bible reading & journaling							
Lesson reading							
Fasting							
Scripture memorization							
Sunday AM & Wednesday PM							
Accountability meeting/connection							
Volunteer service (specify below)							
I've invited a new person to church							