



UNDERSTANDING SCRIPTURE

How to Read and Interpret the Bible

3 - CONTEXT

CONTEXTUALIZING THE GOSPEL

We can easily forget that Scripture is a “foreign land” and that reading the Bible is a cross-cultural experience. To open the Word of God is to step into a strange world where things are very unlike our own. Because we believe that the Bible is God’s Word to us we tend to read Scripture in our own way that makes sense to us. (Adapted from “Misreading Scripture With Western Eyes” by Richards and O’Brien)

An illustration from the life of Hudson Taylor — Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) was an English missionary to China and recognized the need to immerse himself in the Chinese culture in order to relate the gospel to the people in ways that made sense to them. He learned their language and lived as close to their lifestyle as possible. (1 Corinthians 9:19-23) According to some of his European colleagues, this was extremely inappropriate. Because the Bible had been in the European culture for centuries, they believed that *their* cultural values and norms were the true expressions of Christian life and universal for all cultures. Hudson Taylor disagreed and brought Christ to the Chinese people in their “context.” He later founded the China Inland Mission which included 205 mission stations with over 800 missionaries, and 125,000 Chinese Christians!



The Bible was written to the first hearers or readers with a specific intent on God’s heart. God wanted them to understand what He was saying and therefore needed to put it into the language and life situations they would be able to understand.

THE BIBLE WAS WRITTEN IN THREE LANGUAGES

1. _____ The language in which most of the Old Testament was written which died as a spoken language about 300 BC.
2. _____ A kind of “first-cousin” to Hebrew. This was the everyday language of the Jewish people in Palestine from 350 BC up to the time of Christ.
3. _____ The language in which the New Testament was written.

TWO CATEGORIES OF BIBLE TEACHINGS

1. The Bible's _____ and standards. These are uncompromising Biblical principles that have top priority in all we do such as the 10 Commandments in Exodus 20.
2. Cultural _____ for people of that first culture were not necessarily meant to apply to all people under all circumstances. An example is found in Leviticus 19:19 where Israel is told not to sow two kinds of seed nor wear a garment made of two kinds of cloth. Can you find God's standards and the cultural regulations in Leviticus 19?

TWO MAJOR TYPES OF BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

1. _____ translations are done by groups of scholars, specialists in Hebrew, Greek or Aramaic, who work together on certain books or sections of the Bible. They usually are also extremely knowledgeable about the history, culture and the book they are translating. Examples are the King James Version, The New King James Version, New International Version, New American Standard, Revised Standard Version, etc.
2. _____ translations are basically produced by one person who is skilled in a literary style and often have scholars advising them. These translations are paraphrased and are easier to read but often reflect the doctrinal framework of the translator. Examples are The Living Bible, Good News for Modern Man, J.B. Philips' New Testament in Modern English, etc.

ACCURATE BIBLE HELPS

1. A good translation of the Bible is key because not all translations are equally accurate. Good study Bibles include the Spirit Filled Life Bible; Thompson Chain Reference; Life Application Bible in the New King James, New International, and New American Standard versions. Other books include:
 - A. Bible Handbooks: Halley's Bible Handbook; Hayford's Bible Handbook; Eerdman's Handbook.
 - B. Concordances and word study books: Strong's Concordance; The Complete Word Study of the Old and New Testaments (Zodhiates); Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words.
 - C. Bible dictionaries and atlas: The New Unger's Bible Dictionary; Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary. Eerdman's Handbook to the Bible is useful for studying Bible times and cultures.
 - D. All of these are available online or in the form of apps. Go to our Discipleship Institute blog at discipleshipdevelopment.org and click the resources tab for more information.

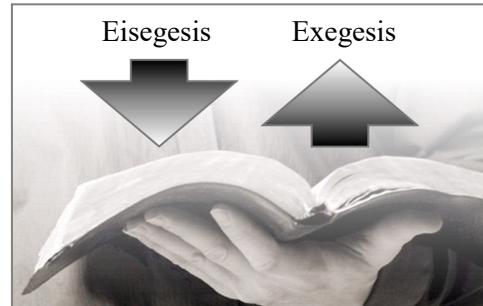


INCORRECT BIBLE INTERPRETATION

1. Reading the New Testament seems to be deceptively simple in that the text appears to be self explanatory. After all, who needs help in understanding Romans 3:23, "all have sinned," or "the wages of sin is death" in Romans 6:23?
 - A. Not all passages are quite that obvious as a reading through 1 Corinthians would prove. How do chapters 12–14 relate when churches do not believe that spiritual gifts are valid for today? What do we do with 1 Corinthians 14:33–35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12 about women being silent in the church?

2. _____ is the practice of reading our own preconceived notions, biases, and understanding *into* Bible text. (Graphic) This is widely accepted and used today. It allows our own interpretation to dictate how we read and interpret God's Word, the Bible. This personal interpretation can be so strong that, even when opposing viewpoints are presented, we will choose our preferred interpretation.

A. 2 Timothy 2:15 commands us to correctly handles the word of truth. An honest student of the Bible will allow the text to speak for itself. Eisegesis always leads to error as the reader attempts to align the text with his or her own preconceived ideas and forces the Bible to agree with our own interpretation.



3. Here are a few examples of eisegesis...

A. Distortion of original meaning.

- A classic example is how Augustine (an early church historian, 354-430 AD) interpreted the parable of the "Good Samaritan" in Luke 10:30-37. Mankind started down the road of life but fell into sin which beat him and left him helpless in the ditch. The law of Moses came and passed him by. Finally, the good Samaritan, Jesus, bound up his wounds and brought him into the inn of safety, the church.
- Simple exegesis, understanding Jesus' intended meaning and to whom this parable was directed, results in a completely different interpretation of this parable!

B. Wrongly established beliefs.

- In John 5:31-47, the Jewish leaders had a pre-determined notion about Jesus that did not allow them to see Christ for who He was: the Promised Messiah!

C. Exaggerated interpretation.

- In John 13:1-17 John records the washing of the disciples feet. However, people have interpreted this to be a religious act of worship. What was Jesus really attempting to demonstrate by washing their feet?

D. Satan is a master in the practice of eisegesis! Read Matthew 4:3-11 and in your own words describe how Satan twisted Scripture to suit his own purposes.

CORRECT INTERPRETATION AND APPLICATION

1. _____ is the careful, systematic study of God's Word to discover the writer's original and intended meaning, taking into consideration the historical and literary contents and the social/cultural issues of the time of writing — to whom was it written and why?

A. Exegesis literally means "to lead out of." The explanation of a text proceeds *from* and is based on an objective analysis of its context. (Graphic)

B. Correct application of a text must _____ begin with an understanding of the original intent. Otherwise the text can be made to mean whatever it means to any given reader!

C. Key thought: A text can never mean what it never meant to the original authors and readers of that message. A simple example is found in 1 Corinthians 13:8-10. Some believe that the

“perfect” is the New Testament and imperfect is tongues, prophecy and knowledge. However, people in Paul’s day could not have known about the New Testament because there was no New Testament.

2. _____ is bringing contemporary relevance to ancient texts, the Bible’s meaning for today. Obviously this requires an understanding of basic interpretation and the use of key Bible references. (Accurate Bible Helps on page 2)

DIFFERENT TYPES OF CONTEXT

1. In a very basic sense, the exact meaning of a specific passage of Scripture (context) is normally controlled by what precedes and follows it. There are three basic types of context:
 - A. _____ context.
 - Determining what was going on in the history of the readers whose thinking was deeply influenced by the circumstances of their day.
 - Is there war going on? Against whom? Is there economic depression or drought? Etc.
 - B. _____ context.
 - The culture of Biblical times was very different from ours, and its writings must always be considered in light of its culture.
 - Cultural behavior is usually never explained because the readers were knowledgeable of their particular social customs.
 - C. _____ context.
 - Ask questions such as: What was the basic purpose of this writing? What is the flow of thought? What comes before it and what follows it? What type of writing is it?
2. Basic context is the _____
 - Why was it written? What is its basic message? When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians he did so to answer a call for help because of serious problems. When he wrote 1 Timothy he was dealing with false teaching in the church at Ephesus.
3. In studying the book of James, directed to Jewish believers scattered among the nations, we might sense the apparent “contradiction” with Paul’s teaching on Grace in Romans 4. Paul’s focus was on our justification (salvation) while James focuses on works that flow from our salvation.
4. Similar words may not always have the same meaning.
 - A. The word “mystery” in Ephesians 3:3-6 refers to the relationship of Jew and Gentile as “one new man,” while “mystery” in Colossians 1:25-27 refers to “Christ in you.”
 - B. What is difference between the word “flesh” in Romans 8:12-13 and Philippians 1:22-24?
5. Using the previous rules of interpretation, how would you interpret Hebrews 6:4-6, commonly used to validate the teaching that we can lose our salvation?

BIBLE STUDY SHEETS

1. Below is a basic sample of steps to use in correct Bible interpretation and application. The first step is to identify the type of literature it is (history, poetry, prophecy) and describe the historical and cultural setting. Then answer the following questions...
 - A. _____ — What does it SAY?
 - Describe what is happening or what the writer is plainly saying.
 - Outline the story plot, narrative, etc. What is the key verse or thought?
 - B. _____ — What does it MEAN?
 - What is the writer saying to the original hearers?
 - C. CORRELATION — How does it RELATE to other Scriptures?
 - Link the message of the passage to major themes and teachings of Scripture.
 - D. _____ — How does it APPLY to me today?
 - What are the important applicable truths for us today?
 - What does this passage suggest I should be or do as a believer in Christ?

On the following pages are study sheets for Parables, Proverbs, Minor Prophets and an epistle (New Testament letter). These will be used for homework assignments.

ASSIGNMENT	ANSWERS
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Weekly Time Sheet<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meet with your accountability partner• Daily devotions• Read the lesson• Memorize 2 Timothy 2:15• Journal	<p>Hebrew Aramaic Greek</p> <p>highest ideals regulations Committee One person</p> <p>Eisegesis Exegesis first</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">2. The Parables Worksheet<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37• Follow the worksheet and answer the questions	<p>Hermeneutics Historical Cultural Literary entire book, chapter or narrative</p> <p>Observation Interpretation Application</p>

PARABLES WORKSHEET | *Luke 10:25-37*

1. Read the parable of the Good Samaritan.
2. What events surround the parable?

3. What prompted Christ to speak the parable and to whom was the parable spoken?

4. What are the facts of the parable itself?

5. What would Jesus have wanted the original hearers to “catch” from this?

6. What is the message for us, today?

7. How would you share the applicable truths from this parable to someone today?

PROVERBS WORKSHEET | *Proverbs 26:13-28*

1. Read the Proverb
2. Summarize the intent in the following verses:

13-16

17

18-19

20-22

23-26

27

28

3. What “old fashioned basic values” can we learn from these?
4. What good advice is taught to encourage responsible living?
5. What attitudes and behaviors are warned against?
6. What is the proverbial intent (application for us today)?

MINOR PROPHETS WORKSHEET | *The Book of Haggai*

1. Read the book of Haggai
2. Describe the life situation, the history and the problems of the people during the time this was written?
3. What is the faith situation, the relationship the people and the nation had with God?
4. What do we have in common with the situation of the first readers?
5. In what ways do we differ?
6. What lessons can be seen from Haggai that are applicable to us today?

EPISTLE WORKSHEET | *Paul's letter to Philemon*

With another person in the class, read the letter and use the questions to exegete Paul's short letter to Philemon.

1. Read the entire letter and pay attention to “small” details throughout.
2. What kind of writing is it? (Narrative, psalm, prophecy, letter, etc.)
3. Who is the author and who are all the recipients? (Verses 1b-2)
4. How does the writer begin the letter? (Verses 4-7)
5. Describe the purpose of the letter. (Verses 8-16)
6. Describe the author's attitude. (Verses 17-22) What is Paul really saying? In what way does Paul behave as Christ?
7. Summarize in your own words what this letter is all about.
8. What points can we apply to ourselves today?

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)

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							