

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE



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Some Basic Beginnings for Interpretation – Study #3

1. Biblical Interpretation is known as the discipline of “Hermeneutics.”
 - It is defined as the art and science of interpretation.
 - Comes from the Greek ‘to translate, interpret’
2. We do ‘hermeneutics’ instinctively and naturally. For instance, how do we “interpret..?”
 - a. Newspaper articles
 - b. Poems
 - c. “Lord of the Rings” versus a science journal
 - d. History books
3. There are two foundational factors to consider when doing Biblical Interpretation
 - a. God’s Word to us was first God’s Word to them
 1. Authorial intent - What was the author’s intent in writing?
 2. Audience reception and response
 - a. What did they hear/feel?
 - b. What were they to learn?
 - c. How were they to respond?
 3. Present audience message
 - a. The message should be evident in the text, timeless, not culturally limited or bound, be consistent with other Scriptural teachings, and be applicable to both biblical and contemporary audiences.
 - b. What is the message to us?

4. God's Word comes in a variety of literary genres and styles

Narrative history	Genealogies
Chronicles	Laws
Poetry	Proverbs
Prophetic oracles	Riddles
Drama	Biographical
Parables	Letters
Sermons	Apocalypses
Romance/love poetry	Songs/hymns
Gospels	

There are 8 basic levels that an interpreter must consider to carefully interpret a text.

1. The Linguistic level - understanding the meaning of the words in the passage.
 - a. This includes Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, English.
 - b. Trust your English translation - but remember, it's a translation!
2. The Historical/Geographical level - understanding as best as possible the historical and geographical setting.
 - a. Place names (Mt. Sinai, Dead Sea).
 - b. Historical events and names (Sennacherib, the Babylonians, the Philistines).
3. The Textual level - understanding the story, event, and basic content of the passage.
 - a. Also known as "exegesis"
 - b. Comes from the Greek word to "come out of", "to guide", "interpret", "lead."
4. The Higher Critical level - understanding things like authorship and date.
 - a. The Bible is true and fully God's Word. However, the recording of events and the way that a story is told is done with a purpose/polemic in mind.
 - b. More on this when we look at narratives.
5. The Literary level - understanding the literary setting in which a text is found.
 - a. What is the genre?

- b. What is its place in the flow of the story or discourse?
 - i. What comes immediately before or after?
 - ii. Is there contrast or comparison?
 - iii. Are there literary structures like inclusio, chiasm, repetition...?

6. The Canonical level - understanding how the passage fits the context and teaching of the entire Bible.

- a. Are there parallel accounts or teachings? (e.g. Gospels, Timothy/Titus on church life).
- b. Is it quoted elsewhere? (e.g. Isa 7:14 and Matt 1:23; Ps. 110:4 and Heb 5:6; 7:21).

Isaiah 7:14
Matthew 1:23

All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us'). Isaiah 7:14

"Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.'" Matt 1:23

Psalm 110:4
Hebrews 5:6, 7:21

The LORD has taken an oath and will not break his vow: "You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek." Psalm 110:4

And in another passage God said to him, "You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek." Heb 5:6

... but there was an oath regarding Jesus. For God said to him, "The LORD has taken an oath and will not break his vow: 'You are a priest forever.'" Heb 7:21

- c. Is there a common imagery? (e.g. Second exodus, rest, anti-Christ).
- d. Is there common teaching but different contexts? (e.g. Discipleship, forgiveness, servanthood) (See Luke 7:36-50 and Ps. 32 on the topic of forgiveness).

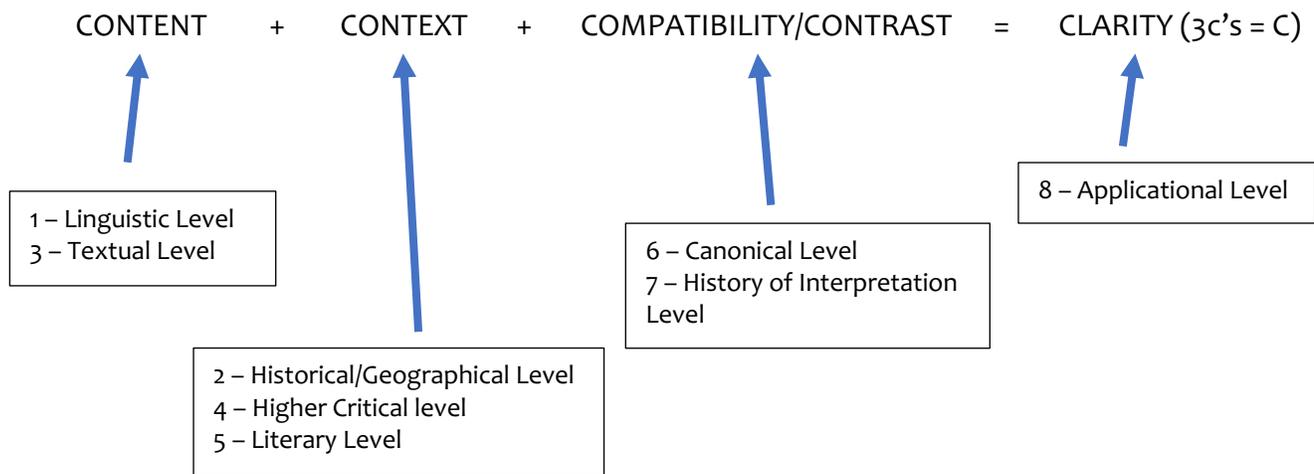
7. The History of Interpretation level - understanding how the passage has been interpreted over time by others.

- a. If our interpretation is unique and unusual to the standard commentaries and understanding of the text, we need to be careful.
- b. What also need to be very careful not to assume that a specific interpretation is the meaning of the text (e.g. Premillennial interpretations of prophecy).

8. The Applicational level - understanding the present significance of the passage.

- a. Meaning and significance have a very thin line between them. If we are not doing level 8, we are probably not doing level 3 thoroughly enough.
- b. We need to bring the text into interface with our world, culture, society, community, employment, leisure and entertainment, and personal lives.

The Simple Formula Revisited.



Finding the Key Principle(s).

Every attempt at interpreting a Biblical text is for the purpose of understanding the principle that is being taught. Two principles can be gleaned from every text.

1. A theological principle. What does it teach us about God? (The vertical dimension).
2. An applicational principle. What does this mean for me? (The horizontal dimension).

The Journey of Interpretive Discovery!

