

# Unlocking the Mystery: Introduction to Bible Study Interpretation

## Opening

2 Peter 1:20-21

Bible interpretation should start with what is *plain* and *clear*.

Bible revelation should be understood as *progressive*.

Example: Genesis 2:9, 16-17; 9:3

Bible language is *phenomenal* (from the Greek word for appearance).

Bible reading should be done with both *Attention* and *Intention*.

## Prescriptive / Descriptive

Which parts do you interpret as a *description* of how things were back then, and which parts are a *prescription* for how we should do things today?

The Renewed Mind - Romans 12:2, Philippians 2:5, Philippians 2:7-8

Prescription for Puritan Justice? - Exodus 22:18, Deuteronomy 17:6, Leviticus 19:15, Romans 2:11

"Walk / Don't Walk; Pray / Don't Pray" - compare Psalm 46:10 with 1 Thessalonians 5:17

Example from Weekly Readings - Job 11 and Job 42:7

## Symbolic

Example: Revelation 12

## Scripture is interpreted by Scripture

"Through this approach, what the Spirit is trying to tell us through Scripture is unlocked by, tested by, qualified by, and balanced by, the whole of Scripture. No part of the Bible is slighted or ignored -- but no part of the Bible stands on its own, apart from the meaning of the whole and apart from other specific parts which deal with related matters. Since the Bible is the way the Spirit reaches us, the rest of the Bible is the most reliable resource for finding what the Spirit is saying in any one section of the Bible."<sup>1</sup>

Example: Numbers 21:8-9 interpreted in light of John 3:14, John 12:32, and John 19:17-19)

Luke 24:27

Example mentioned above: Job 11 and Job 42:7

## Context

Examples in which context has been ignored: John 14:2-3, Matthew 7:14, Genesis 31:49, Isaiah 45:9-12

Hebrews 1:1-3

## Audience

When we study the Bible which was written down in another language, time and geography from that which is part of our own worldview, we are wise to consider the character of the audience for which it was first written.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Longman, Jr. ©1996, 2001 (<http://www.spirithome.com/scrip4.html>)

Jeremiah 10:13, Luke 8:24, 1 Corinthians 1:26-27, Matthew 13:10-17, Luke 3:7, Matthew 12:34

### **Three simple rules for accurate interpretation**

1. INTERPRET THE PART BY THE WHOLE. *Scripture interprets Scripture so the whole remains consistent; the clear interprets the unclear; the primary interprets the secondary; that which is stated multiple times interprets that which is said only once or rarely.*
2. FOLLOW THE LITERAL SENSE. *Attempt to go with the obvious meaning rather than some hidden message; simple sense is better than contrived; follow the rules of literature (don't force poetry to follow the rules of narrative, or apocalyptic material to follow the rules of historical material etc).*
3. USE THE GRAMMATICO-HISTORICAL METHOD. *The grammar and historic setting of the passage dictates its meaning; any elaborate or multilevel interpretive schemes are suspect.*<sup>2</sup>

Deuteronomy 18:14, Isaiah 2:6, Matthew 16:4, John 6:26-27

Perhaps the best single guideline for interpretation would be: How would a loving Father write to His beloved children? If His intent is to draw us closer to His Son, He will communicate in ways we may understand. Other so-called holy books are only for the highly-educated, or the priestly class, or the "enlightened ones." While the depth of the Father's mind cannot be fully known by finite humans, the depth of His love can! The Bible is for all people. Let us interpret it in simplicity and humility. Let us interpret it in faith, so that we may not stumble – nor cause others to stumble.

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<sup>2</sup> R.C. Sproul, credited in Judson Poling, *Interpretation: Discovering the Bible for Yourself* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, ©2000 Willow Creek Association), pp 12-13.