

My Bible Study Tool Bag

#3 Interpretation: What does it mean?

Ps. 119:34 "Give me understanding and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart."

Introduction

Observation: What does it say?

Interpretation: What does it mean?

Take a look at Acts 8: 26-39. "Do you understand what you are reading? How can I unless someone explains it to me."

Remember Nehemiah 8 and how the Levites stood among the crowd and "instructed the people in the Law..."

There are many perspectives (applications) to a passage of scripture, but we are first looking for the one interpretation that the original writer intended for the original audience. Bible study is the effort to "think God's thoughts after Him. He has a mind, and He has revealed it in His Word." (*Living By the Book* p. 197)

Look at Genesis 3:1-7. Consider how many ways that passage might be interpreted:

From the perspective of the heavenly Father witnessing the first sin of His children

From Satan's perspective as he tempts God's children

From the perspective of Adam and Eve as they are sinning. What was going through their minds?

From a believer's perspective, how does this event affect our understanding of what Jesus did on the cross?

From the perspective of an unbeliever who is reading this for the first time.

** God intended to dwell in peace and joy with men (and women) forever. The garden experience before the fall is what God intended for us to enjoy. But He wanted mankind to love Him out of their free will, so He gave one commandment. They didn't keep His law, so sin entered the world. Mankind was removed from the garden (out of God's presence) and would need a sacrifice on their behalf in order to satisfy a holy and righteous God. Through the cross our redemption came.

The Big Idea: God's Plan dashed by man's sin.

Barriers between us and the biblical writers

Barriers	Type of Resource	Description
Geographic Barriers.	Atlases	Collection of maps showing places in the text, and some description of their significance.
Language Barriers	Bible Dictionaries	Explain the origin, meaning, and use of the key words in the text
Cultural Barriers	Bible Handbooks	Helpful information on subjects
Language, cultural And literary barriers	Commentaries	A biblical scholar's study of the text
Language Barriers	Interlinear	Translations with the Greek and Hebrew text positioned in between the lines for comparison.

Hazards to Avoid

1. Misreading the text

Examples: I Timothy 6:10, John 14:6, Psalm 37:4

2. Distorting the text

Example: Ecc.10:2

3. Contradicting the text

Example: Gen. 3:1-4 vs. Gen. 2:16-17

This is one of Satan's favorite tools. He twists the texts to fit his agenda (remember: He is a liar-John 8:44). Scripture is used (out of context) to argue for all manner of things.

4. Subjectivism

Remember, we are to love the Lord with our heart, soul and MIND (Mark 12:30-31). Use it! Stop looking for an emotional response to the Word. Stop "wandering around the scriptures waiting for a liver-quiver to tell you that you have struck pay dirt."
(Hendricks)

5. Relativism

The Bible does not change meaning over time, it is not relative to our point in history or our culture. Of course, that passage “relates” to different time periods in history and to different cultures. A passage can have any number of practical applications but only one proper interpretation. What did the author want to say?

Interpretation means that we reconstruct his message with as much accuracy as we possibly can. Sometimes, Bible students disagree about the interpretation of a given passage. Our conflict reflects our limited understanding of a passage, but God wasn’t confused when He “breathed” it into existence (II Peter 1:20-21 and II Tim. 3:15-16).

Different kinds of Literature

1. Exposition-a reasoned argument or explanation. Usually “the big idea” is easy to grasp, the principles flow from one statement to another. They are easy to outline.
Examples: Paul’s letters in the NT
2. Narrative (Biography)- stories that are easy to read but not necessarily easy to interpret.
Examples: Genesis, the gospels
Pay attention to the plot and the characters. How is this story true to life? How do they solve problems? What lessons do they learn? What do they discover about God?
3. Parables-a tale that teaches moral principles.
Examples: Matthew 13
4. Poetry- a means to express emotions; the human heart expressed with feelings, pain and longings.
Examples: Psalms (but remember these were originally songs. They are meant to be sung with instruments. Proverbs are nuggets of truth (spiritual vitamins).
 - A. Watch for parallelism: “Two lines that work of each other to communicate meaning.”
 1. They may reinforce understanding by repeating a thought.
Example: Ps. 103:15
 2. They may oppose the first thought with an alternative or opposite thought.
Example: Ps. 40:4 and Proverb 20:3
 - B. Recognize hyperboles: exaggerating or overkill language.
Example Ps. 139:19
5. Prophecy-forth telling and fore telling.
 - A. Forth telling: warning the nation of Israel of the consequences of disobedience
Examples: Major and Minor prophets** Make sure to ask key context questions when studying the writings of a prophet: What is the historical

setting? Who is he talking to? What is the problem he is addressing? How did the people respond? And lastly, what can I learn from the message and the response of the people?

B. Fore telling: Explaining the future.

Example: The book of Revelation, parts of Daniel

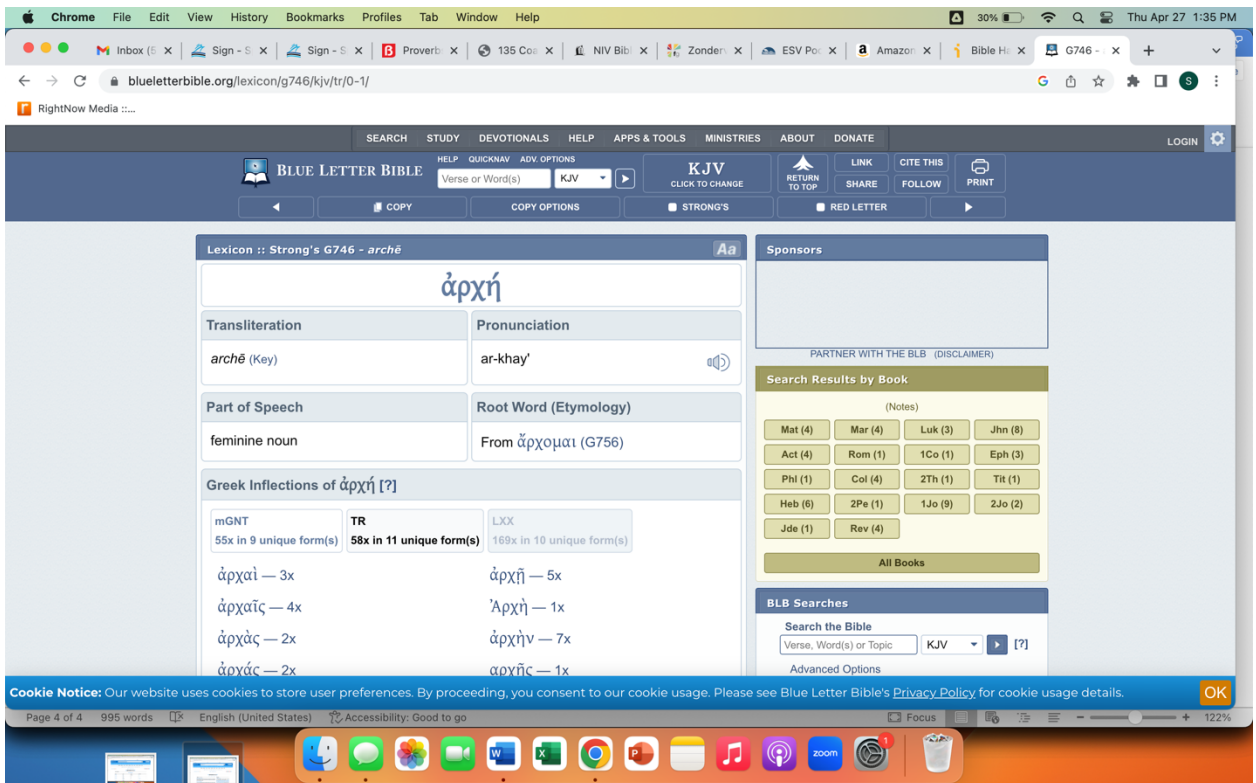
This kind of writing uses many symbols and deals with events related to the end of the world. Remember that God had John pen those words in order to REVEAL things, not hide them.

Watch for Different Figures of Speech

1. Anthropomorphism-attributing human features or actions to God.
Example: Isa. 59:1
2. Paradox- statements that are self-contradicting.
Example: Matt. 16:25
3. Personification-ascribing human characteristics to inanimate objects
Example: Isa. 24:23

Some suggestions for your own Bible Study Tools

6. Bible Handbook: Holman Bible Handbook, Halley's Bible Handbook
7. Online-Consult Blue Letter Bible



Group Discussion/ Personal Practice

1. Speaking of misreading or distorting the text, discuss what the Bible actually says about the following phrases (choose your answers from among this list: Isa. 44:8, Acts 4:12, I Thess. 4:11-12, John 21:31, Col. 3:23-24):

We are all gods or part of god.
Jesus was just a great moral teacher.
The Bible says that Christians should give away their possessions.
The Bible says that work is a curse.
All religions lead to the same end.

2. Using an atlas or Bible map, figure out the approximate size of each “section” of Israel: Judea, Samaria and Galilee (approximate miles). Compare those figures with the state of California (approx. 900-1040 miles long and 560 miles wide). Would Biblical Israel fit into California?

3. Fill in this chart describing Jacob’s Blessing on his sons in Genesis 49.

Son’s Name	Description	Blessing

4. Visit the Blue Letter Bible site and do a study on the three terms found in Ephesians 6:12 (rulers, authorities and powers). Compare that study to the same study using the Bible Hub site.