

Hermeneutics: The process, discipline, and theory of interpreting the biblical text. There are some objective rules and core principles that we base our method of interpretation (coming soon).

Exegesis: This is a Greek word that basically means “to lead out of.” So, to exegete a text is to pull out its intended meaning. To put it simply, in exegesis, we study the Bible in context.

Four Primary Hermeneutic Methods Used in Biblical Interpretation:

- **Literal (Grammatical-Historical) Method:** This approach interprets the Bible according to the plain, ordinary meaning of the text, considering grammar, syntax, and historical context. It seeks to understand the original intent of the author for the original audience.
- **Redemptive-Historical Method:** This method views the Bible as a unified story of God's redemptive plan through history, especially centered on Jesus Christ. It interprets individual texts in light of the whole biblical narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation.
- **Moral Interpretation:** This method focuses on extracting ethical principles and lessons that apply to the reader's life today from the biblical text, often going beyond the literal meaning to find spiritual or moral significance.
- **Allegorical Interpretation:** This method seeks a deeper, often symbolic or typological meaning beyond the literal sense, interpreting biblical events and characters as foreshadowing or representing spiritual realities or future fulfillments.

The Purpose of Biblical Interpretation

To glorify God, to know God, to love God, to worship God, and to grow in Christ-like character.

2 Timothy 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Hebrews 4:12-13 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³ And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

“Rightly handling” is a compound Greek word, basically meaning “to cut straight.”

To guide along a straight path. To rightly divide. To rightly interpret. To rightly communicate it.

Important Foundational Theological Points to State Up Front and Dig into Later:

- When it comes to meaning, **context** is king.
- The author controls the meaning, not the reader. Our job is to discover the intended meaning, and not to create our own meaning.
- **Genre** in biblical hermeneutics is critically important because it guides how a passage should be read and interpreted. Different genres, such as historical narrative, poetry, prophecy, law, gospel,

or apocalyptic literature, each have their own rules for interpretation. Recognizing the genre helps avoid misreading the text, such as taking poetic or symbolic language literally or misunderstanding the purpose of a narrative.

- There are not multiple layers of meaning. There is **one** meaning in the text that is tied to the literary meaning in the text. In other words, the text can't mean to us what it never meant to the original audience.
- While the text has one meaning, it may have **multiple** valid applications. It is important to distinguish between these two.
- The Holy Spirit plays an essential role in our relationship with the Word of God. When it comes to biblical interpretation, the Spirit first works in our rational understanding of God's Word, then even more in the area of discerning truth, and then most in the area of application. In other words, the Spirit helps us to respond in faith and obedience to the truth of God's Word, which is part of true understanding as God would define it.
- **Prayer** is an essential part of faithful study of Scripture. We need to ask for the Spirit's help in interpreting and responding in faith and obedience to the Word of God, and we need to ask that He would change us as we study the Bible.

The Interpretive Journey

The process of interpreting and grasping the Bible is similar to embarking on a journey.

On the journey you will quickly notice that we are separated from the original audience by culture, customs, language, situation, and time. These differences form a "river" (obstacle) that separates us from the text and can prohibit us from grasping the meaning of the text for ourselves. Often the river is too deep and wide to wade cross.

Any attempt to interpret and to apply the Bible involves trying to cross the river. While often unconscious of their interpretive method, many Christians employ an intuitive or feels right or spiritualizing approach to interpretation. A spiritualizing approach is to make it an allegory which ignores the biblical context.

Our goal is to grasp the meaning that God intended. We do not **create** meaning; we seek to find the meaning that is already there. The goal is to get from the world of the biblical audience to a valid understanding and application of the text for Christians today without drowning in the river or getting stuck with no bridge.

Step 1: Grasping the Text in their Town - What did the text mean to the original audience?

- Pray and read the text carefully, observe it. Look, look, look and look again. Scrutinize the grammar and look for significant words. Study the historical and literary contexts.
- How does your passage relate to those passages that precede it and those that follow it?
- Write out what the passage meant for the biblical audience.
 - God commanded the Israelites in Joshua...
 - Paul exhorted the Ephesians to...
 - Jesus encouraged His disciples by...

Step 2: Measuring the Width of the River to Cross - What are the differences and similarities between the original audience and us?

- These differences form a river that hinders us from moving straight from meaning in their context to meaning in ours.
- The width of the river varies from passage to passage.
- Look for significant differences and similarities between our situation today and the situation of the biblical audience.

Step 3: Crossing the Principlizing Bridge - What is the theological principle in this text?

- This is usually the most challenging step. In it you are looking for the **theological** principle or principles that are reflected in the meaning of the text you identified in step one.
- Remember that the theological principle is part of the meaning.
- Your task is not to create the meaning but to discover the meaning intended by the author.
- As God gives specific expressions to specific biblical audiences, He is also giving universal theological teachings for all His people through the same text.
- Try to identify any similarities between the situation of the biblical audience and our situation.
- The theological principle is most likely the same as the theological message or the main theological point of the passage.
- We will use this theological principle as the principlizing bridge by which we can cross over the different the river of differences.
 - The principle should be reflected in the text.
 - The principle should be timeless and not tied to a specific situation.
 - The principle should not be culturally bound.
 - The principle should correspond with the rest of the teaching of Scripture.
 - The principle should be relevant to both the biblical and the contemporary audience (us).

Step 4: Consult the Biblical Map - How does our theological principle fit with the rest of the Bible?

- Reflect back and forth between the text and teachings of the rest of Scripture.
- Is your principle **consistent** to the rest of Scripture?
- Do other portions of Scripture add insight or qualification to the principle?
- If your principle is valid then it should “fit” or “correlate” with the rest of the Bible.
- If studying the Old Testament, in what way(s) does the fact that we live in the church age (New Testament) impact the theological principle?
- We affirm that we are New Testament Christians and we will interpret the Old Testament from that vantage point.

Step 5: Grasping the Text in our Town - How should individual Christians today apply the theological principle in their lives?

- Apply the **theological** principle to the specific situation of individual Christians in church today.
- Do not leave the meaning of the text stranded in an abstract theological principle.
- How does this apply in real-life situations today?
- While for each passage there will usually be only a few (and often only one) theological principles relevant for all Christians today, there will be **numerous** applicational possibilities.
- Each of us will grasp and apply the same theological principle in slightly different ways depending upon our current life situation and where we are in our relationship with God.

Exercise: Joshua 1:1-9

1. What did the text mean to the original audience?
2. What are the differences and similarities between the original audience and us?
3. What is the theological principle in this text?
4. How does our theological principle fit with the rest of the Bible?
5. How should individual Christians today apply the theological principle in their lives?

Exercise: Psalm 3

1. What did the text mean to the original audience?
2. What are the differences and similarities between the original audience and us?
3. What is the theological principle in this text?
4. How does our theological principle fit with the rest of the Bible?
5. How should individual Christians today apply the theological principle in their lives?

Exercise: Matthew 9:1-8

1. What did the text mean to the original audience?
2. What are the differences and similarities between the original audience and us?
3. What is the theological principle in this text?
4. How does our theological principle fit with the rest of the Bible?
5. How should individual Christians today apply the theological principle in their lives?

Exercise: 1 John 3:11-18

1. What did the text mean to the original audience?
2. What are the differences and similarities between the original audience and us?
3. What is the theological principle in this text?
4. How does our theological principle fit with the rest of the Bible?
5. How should individual Christians today apply the theological principle in their lives?