



The way we study and interpret the Bible

We study the Scripture through a normative/literal, grammatical, historical, historical, contextual, and dispensational method of interpretation, or hermeneutic, in order to accurately understand the text and discern the intent of each passage.

Normative/Literal—

- God spoke through the human writers so that the very words of Scripture are what God intended to say.
- We do not seek a mystical meaning, but understand the most normal, literal, common reading unless there is a Scriptural reason we should not.
- We take the text literally unless God uses figurative language, such as metaphors or similes.
- We believe in six literal days of creation and a world-wide catastrophic flood in Noah's day because God used precise words and not figurative language in describing those events. Additionally, Jesus spoke of Noah as a real person and of creation and the flood as actual historical events.

Grammatical—

- It is written in sentences that you read like a book.
- You look for subjects and objects, nouns and verbs; the structure of the text helps you discern and understand the appropriate interpretation.
- It is not a mystical book, but a knowable and well-written expression of God's plan and purpose.

Historical—

- What did this mean when it was written; what is the authorial intent?

- How did the people who read it the first time understand it?
- How can I apply that to my life today?
- The Bible was not written **TO** you, but it was written **FOR** you. Even though they were not written directly to you, you can learn something from every passage.

Contextual—

- Scripture helps us interpret Scripture; we ask, how does it relate to the preceding and following verses within the immediate context?
- How does it add to the overall teaching of Scripture on that subject or theme?
- How does it fit into the overall theme of Scripture?
- No Scripture is of any private interpretation (2 Peter 1:20).
- There is a difference between what the Bible **says** and what it **teaches**. Any verse can tell you something the Bible **says**, but only when we put it together within its immediate context and alongside the overall teaching of Scripture can we truly know what the Bible **teaches**. For example, Ecclesiastes 8:15 **says**, “a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry,” but that is certainly NOT what the Bible **teaches**. You have to read Ecclesiastes in the genre of wisdom literature and you have to consider that for most of the book, Solomon was writing from the perspective of life under the sun, without the knowledge of God. Without the last two verses of Ecclesiastes, much of what is written can be taken out of context, grossly distorting what the Bible actually teaches on those various subjects.

Dispensational—

- Although God has not changed, He has chosen to work with people in different ways during different dispensations of time. He revealed more of Himself and more of His will over time.

- In most of the Old Testament, Israel is the focus of God's work; in the New Testament, it is the church.
- In the gospels we have the life of Christ and the foundation of the church. In the letters from Paul, James, Peter, John, Jude, and the writer of Hebrews, we have instruction for the church. The book of Acts is the transition from the gospels to the epistles.
- Some Christian writers and leaders do not view Scripture from a dispensational perspective, therefore they interpret the Bible much differently. Often, they take some of the promises and requirements unique to Israel and seek to apply them to the church today or read the church into the Old Testament, rather than understanding how God was working through Israel at that time. They often also have a preterist view of eschatology, believing that the prophesies of Revelation have already been fulfilled, rather than understanding them to be prophetic descriptions of yet future events.
- The classic dispensations include;
 - **Innocence**—unknown length of time in the Garden of Eden, Genesis 1 & 2.
 - **Conscience**—from the fall to the flood, Genesis 3-8.
 - **Human Government**—from the flood to Abraham, Genesis 9-11.
 - **Promise**—from Abraham to Moses, Genesis 12-50.
 - **Law [or Age of Israel]**—from Moses to Christ, Exodus to the Gospels.
 - **Age of Grace [or Church Age]**—from the resurrection of Christ to the rapture of the church, the New Testament from the Gospels through Revelation 3. The great tribulation is a seven year period recorded in Revelation 4 through 19 falling between the Age of Grace and the Millennial Reign.
 - **Millennial Reign**—Christ's 1000 year rule on earth between the tribulation and the final judgment, Revelation 20. After this final dispensation, we will be in the eternal kingdom, Revelation 21-22.

Hermeneutic—

- Your hermeneutic is the method of Biblical interpretation you use to look at and learn from Scripture.
- A different method of interpretation leads to a significantly different and incorrect understanding of what the Bible teaches. Many people do not even try to accurately interpret the Scripture; they pull verses and phrases out of context and decide their own interpretation, which actually violates the Scripture itself because “no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation” (2 Peter 1:20).
- Using our method of Biblical interpretation, we can more easily discern between what is **descriptive**—describing something that took place at that time in Biblical history, and what is **prescriptive**—something God wants us to act upon today. Everything in Scripture was included for our learning (Romans 15:4), but not everything was intended as a rule or pattern for us today. For example, when Jesus told one rich man to sell everything he had and give it to the poor (Matthew 19:21), He was dealing with that particular man’s situation; He did not require that of everyone nor does He require it today. Elsewhere in Scripture, many of the believers used their money to support missions and used their houses to help plant and build churches rather than selling them and giving all the money to the poor.



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