

Hermeneutics

The Science of Interpretation

Hermes was the Greek god who served as the messenger for the gods.

Hermes was responsible for interpreting the will of the gods.

Hermeneuein is the Greek verb that means “to express, to explain, to translate, to interpret.”

Purpose for Hermeneutics

The purpose of hermeneutics is to establish guidelines and rules for interpretation of written documents.

The goal of Hermeneutics is to discover the thoughts and meaning of the writers when they communicated through the medium of the written document.

Any written document is subject to misinterpretation. This includes the Bible.

The written documents we base our faith on present a special problem for us because they were written between 2,000-3,500 years ago because they were communicated to people in societies, cultures and languages very different from ours.

Hermeneutics' Considerations

Hermeneutics in any field should consider:

word definitions

contextual analysis – or, the analysis of the context of the writing

literary types and forms – poetry, parable, historical narrative, dialogue, prophecy, etc.

historical analogy – the comparing of points of recorded history

syntactical distinctives – considering meaning arrangement of the words in a sentence

Hermeneutics in the area of scriptural interpretation also must consider:

the doctrine of inspiration

the theological significance of scripture that comes by revelation of God and is found in no other written document.

The books of the Bible are recorded in human speech and so they must be handled in regard to interpretation as any other book.

In 1860 Benjamin Jowett wrote in his “Essays and Reviews” that we should interpret the Bible like any other book. His point was towards word meanings, correct text readings, etc. but not meaning there was nothing special about the Holy Scriptures.

The Grammatico-Historical Method

In the United States there is a supreme board of hermeneutics called the Supreme Court. They are to interpret the Constitution following the grammatico-historical method. The grammatico-historical method means to interpret the words in light of what the words meant when they were used at the formation of the document.

History of Biblical Interpretation

Ezra (450 BC) made an early attempt to establish a systematic interpretation of the law.

Ezra emphasized observance of the law that ultimately led away from the meaning of the law. Ezra founded a Jewish class called the scribes who were devoted to the exposition of the scriptures.

Definition: Exposition – a setting forth of facts, ideas, etc; detailed explanation; writing or speaking that sets forth or explains. Exposition is not the same and is distinguished from these: description, narration, and argumentation.

Ezra's scribes developed a systematic way of reducing the law to a formula that was both legalistic and fanciful (imaginative). The scribe's system of interpretation made it impossible to correctly interpret the Old Testament. By the time Jesus came the Jewish understanding of the scriptures had been clouded by a faulty system of hermeneutics practiced by the scribes.

Jewish Literalism

In Jewish literalism the Old Testament was dissected into separate words and phrases, which were given meanings completely void of history, spirit and the context of the material. There were three very influential rabbis from the first century BC that each developed rules or guidelines for their system of interpretation:

Hillel

Born in Babylon and came to Jerusalem for training.

Hillel founded the Talmudic system to organize the mass of regulations that made up the oral law. (SEE TALMUD HERE)

He had seven laws of interpretation;

The rule of light and heavy or from the lesser to the greater taken from Numbers 12:14.

Inferred relation between two subjects from identical expressions. Example: the daily sacrifice must be offered on a Sabbath; this means then that the Passover sacrifice may also be offered on a Sabbath.

The extension from the special to the general. Example: Necessary work on a Sabbath accepted also on a holy day.

The explanation of two passages by a third.

Drew guidance from a general situation that was applied to a special situation

The explanation of a passage from the analogy of other passages (Matt. 12:5)

An application of inferences from passages that were self-evident.

These rules allowed the scribes that came after Hillel to make a multitude of false interpretations.

Shammai

Shammai was a rival of Hillel and a formalist in the extreme school of Jewish legalism

Shammai and the school of Jewish legalism disregarded the purpose of the law and led people into a blind slavery of pointless obedience.

Shammai made his infant grandson fast nearly to death on the Day of Atonement.

Shammai had a booth (for the Feast of Tabernacles) built over his daughter who was in the house in a bed in labor during the feast.

Gamaliel

Gamaliel was the grandson of Hillel

Gamaliel was the apostle Paul's teacher when he was a young man training to be a Pharisee and known as Saul.

Gamaliel was broadminded in his interpretation

He studied and taught Greek literature

He advocated the rights and privileges of the Gentiles

There were two other notable scribes in the school of Jewish Literalism

Ishmael (150 AD) who set forth 13 rules of interpretation

Eliezerben Yose (150 AD) had 32 rules for interpretation

Jewish Allegorism

Definition: Allegory – A story in which people, things, and happenings have another meaning than what is in the context as in a fable or parable.

Alexandria, Egypt was the center of Jewish allegorical interpretation.

Aristobulus, the earliest allegorical teacher, taught that the Greek philosophers and poets derived their ideas from an early Greek translation of the Old Testament.

Philo made the major contribution to harmonize the institutions and ideas of Judaism with Greek culture and philosophy. He taught that all Scripture contained twofold meaning.

The literal meaning

The allegorical meaning

These were like the body and soul..

Philo used Psalm 62:11 as his text verse to defend this type of interpretation: "One thing God has spoken; two things have I heard."

Just like the soul is more important than the body, the allegorical meaning was more important than the actual literal meaning.

An example of this is: The four rivers of Genesis 2:10 (Pishon, Gihon, Tigris, Euphrates) were symbols for the four virtues: prudence, temperance, courage, and justice.

Jesus as an Interpreter

Never had any criticism of the Old Testament as the divine record

Jesus was not a rabbi, nor trained in their schools, but he was familiar with their methods.

Jesus often described the scribes and interpreters of the law as, “ever hearing but never understanding, . . . ever seeing but never perceiving.” (Matthew 13:14)

Jesus credited David’s words to the Holy Spirit (Mark 12:36)

Jesus accepted the historical reliability of the scriptures citing stories about Adam, Noah, Abraham, David, Solomon, Jonah, Isaiah, etc. as true and accurate.

Jesus’ interest was in the spiritual values of the Old Testament. He could see God’s purpose in the scriptures for the human race.

There are 36 direct quotes by Jesus of the Old Testament. He often used Old Testament terminology.

When Jesus did use the Old Testament, it was to reinforce his own teaching.

Jesus appealed to no higher authority when he taught. He was the source of his own teaching.

“He taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.” (Mark 1:22)

Jesus’ interpretation method was completely new as he explained the meaning of the Old Testament.

Jesus did not give a new intellectual approach, such as literal or allegorical, but instead was coming of God into the world to explain his written word.

A change occurred with the coming of Christ because the question was not the true meaning of the text but the relationship of the text with Jesus and his purpose.

“He interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.” (Luke 24:27)

Apostles as Interpreters

Even though Jesus stood independent of the rabbi’s approach to scripture and did not use the methods of interpretation used in his day, the writers of the New Testament did follow their Jewish heritage many times. The apostles used the methods of their culture but they used these methods to reinterpret the Old Testament through the views they learned from their Lord and teacher.

As always, inspiration did not separate the writers of the New Testament from their own personal culture, background, vocabulary or education.

Extreme liberalism of the rabbis appears in Galatians 3:16 and Hebrews 2:11-13 where the New Testament writers use the rabbi’s technique of interpretation to prove their own views.

Rabbinic disregard of context and historical background appears in Romans 9:25. Although Paul disregards the context and historical background here, he did not abuse the intent of the passage to reveal God’s character.

The coming of the Messiah had shed light on these words and opened a new door of application.

An example of rabbinic allegorical interpretation is found in Galatians 4:21-32. Paul does not deny the historical accuracy but does find a parallel in his own life.

The apostles looked for Christ in every passage of the Old Testament. This practice is seen in Matthew’s use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15

We cannot expect to find 21st century methods of interpretation used in the 1st century, but neither can we justify the radical use of 1st century rabbinical methods of interpretation in modern times.

Peter and Hermeneutics

Problems with interpretation were arising even at the point of Peter’s death as is seen in 2 Peter:

3:15 – “(Paul’s) letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures.”

3:4 – “They will say, ‘Where is this coming, he promised? Ever since our fathers died everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.’ ”

1:20 – “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation.”

Early Church Fathers Method of Interpretation

The Epistle of Barnabas

The Epistle of Barnabas is not considered part of the canon of scripture

The author quotes the Old Testament 119 times, the Apocrypha 5 times and the New Testament 21 times.

In this book history is meaningless. For example, God’s covenant had always been with Christians according to the author.

The Old Testament only has meaning if understood in terms of the Gospel. So here we have an extreme method of interpreting Christ into everything for it to have any value.

Typology was the authors basic principle of interpretation. For example: Abraham’s 318 servants represent the numerical value of the Greek letters TIH. The “T” stood for the cross and the “IH” (the first two Greek letters for Jesus’ name) stood for Jesus. This was the mystery of Abraham’s servants.

The author was the first to base the age of the world on the six days of creation and Psalms 90:4.

Irenaeus

Bishop in Gaul 177-197

Irenaeus established Christian thought for the next several centuries.

He approached scripture exclusively by exposition (a setting forth of facts, ideas, etc; detailed explanation) of the Bible.

He did not use philosophy

He was the first to quote almost the entire New Testament and extensively from the Old Testament.

It has been said of Irenaeus concerning hermeneutics that he preserved the best that came before him and anticipated nearly all that would follow him including Origen, Augustine, Luther and Calvin.

The principle of inspiration governed his method of interpretation.

Because Irenaeus believed that God inspired both the Old and New Testaments he believed in the unity of scripture and concluded that scripture must be used to interpret scripture.

He insisted that obscure passages that were harder to understand must be clarified by being compared with passages that were clear and well understood.

Christ was the center of scripture and the Old Testament can only be understood when Christ and his coming are understood.

He believed every part of scripture had its own place and purpose.

Read Irenaeus' writings [HERE](#)

Origen

Origen was a teacher in Alexandria, Egypt. He lived 185-254.

He was the first systematic theologian because he employed the entire Bible as the basis for his teaching.

His interest in exegesis grew out of his concern for the text. He did more exegetical work than anyone before the reformation.

Read the writings of Origen [HERE](#)

Definition: Exegesis – an explanation or interpretation of what the text of a document says.

His Greek philosophical background led him to express orthodox doctrines in extreme allegories. (The Greeks had to develop a system of philosophical reasoning to draw the divine truth out of Homer's writings. They did this by allegorizing Homer's works.)

Origen was a student and then the successor to Clement in the Alexandrian Bible School. From Clement he acquired the theory of the threefold meaning of scripture.

The body = the literal meaning

The soul = the moral teaching

The spirit = the spiritual meaning

Origen desired to draw out the more important meaning of scripture by developing the allegorical meaning.

His influence on the future interpretation was great, but this influence had some major negative affects.

Medieval allegorists who followed centuries later were influenced by him and the Greek Church Basil the Great and Gregory continued his views.

The exegetical school at Antioch attacked him as did Jerome and Augustine.

School of Antioch

This school paid close attention to the historical sense of the text.

Men like Jerome attached supreme importance to the grammatical sense.

Augustine

Augustine lived in northern Africa from 354-430.

Augustine dominated Western Christian theology for a millennium.

Augustine was more of a theologian like Irenaeus and not like Origen.

Augustine said, "The Bible was a narrative of the past, a prophecy of the future and a description of the present."

Augustine's contribution to hermeneutics was his emphasis upon faith as a necessity for understanding. Understanding and insight into scripture came as a result of faith. He embraced the teaching that the traditions of the Church were used to interpret the scripture.

The scriptures provided a foundation for the creed of the Church.

Read the writings of Augustine [HERE](#)

Read details of Augustine [HERE](#)

Medieval Interpretation (from Augustine 400 AD until the Reformation 1500 AD)

Bible study was restricted almost entirely to monasteries and consisted of recitation of texts and copying manuscripts.

Illiteracy was rampant

The Roman Church claimed the right to interpret scripture.

Any devilmint of hermeneutics had only one purpose – to strengthen and advance the teachings of the Roman Church.

Medieval Hermeneutics Styles

Bondage to the Writings of the Church Fathers in Medieval Times

All interpretation had to conform to tradition.

Tradition included the writings of the church fathers.

The main writings they used were the Latin.

The interpreter's job was to harmonize all the writings of the Latin-writing Fathers to form a foundation under the Roman Church's traditions.

Like the rabbis of the New Testament times these interpreters were confined to collecting and organizing already written teachings.

The literal meaning of the Bible was completely insignificant and was not studied.

Scholasticism in Medieval Times

Around 1000 AD an intellectual awakening in the church occurred.

The movement depended upon the principles of Greek philosophy produced a deductive religious philosophy within the confines of the traditional teachings of the Roman Church.

Definition: Deductive – the act of reasoning from a known principle to an unknown, from the general to the specific or from a premise to a logical conclusion.

Scholasticism depended almost exclusively upon the allegorical method of interpretation, which further perverted the truth of scripture.

There was no regard for the original languages of Biblical texts

The interpreter's job was to support the teachings of the Roman Church

Thomas Aquinas was a leader in this movement

Mysticism in Medieval Times

In reaction to the bondage to the church fathers and to scholasticism of the day a hunger for a relationship with God surfaced.

Since the written revelation, the scriptures, were not available to feed and guide these people in their pursuit of God extreme mysticism developed.

Mysticism taught that an individual could get all they needed from God by direct communion with him.

Mystics did not think they needed traditions nor the historical revelation of the scriptures to guide them.

Devotional study of scripture was emphasized with allegory as the main method of interpretation.

Bernard of Clairvaux was a leader in this

Quadrige in Medieval Times

Up until the days of Martin Luther the method of interpretation through the medieval times was the Quadrige

The Quadrige was a fourfold method of interpretation that had begun in the early church under Clement of Alexandria and his student Origen. In the medieval times it was taken to a new extreme

This method examined the text for four meanings:

The literal meaning – which was the plain and evident meaning. For example, Jerusalem was the capital of Judea and the location of the temple.

The moral meaning – instructed people on how to behave. For example, Jerusalem is the soul of man, his sanctuary.

The allegorical meaning – this revealed the doctrinal content. For example, Jerusalem is a picture of the church throughout the Old Testament.

The anagogical meaning – this expressed a future hope. For example, Jerusalem is heaven, the future hope. With the Quadriga method of interpretation the city of Jerusalem could mean four different things. Someone who was said to “go to Jerusalem” could be going to:

The earthly city Jerusalem

Their own soul

The church

Heaven

With this method of biblical hermeneutics, a scholar can develop all types of strange teachings and new discoveries in scripture.

Literal Interpretation in Medieval Times

Western Europe cultivated literal interpretation in several cities and monasteries.

This often occurred under the influence of the Rabbis who studied Hebrew in the tradition of Jerome

Nicolas of Lyra (1100 AD) was a great Christian Hebrew scholar who stressed the primacy of the literal sense.

Martin Luther was highly influenced by Nicolas and called him “a fine soul, a good Hebraist and a true Christian.”

Reformation Hermeneutics Styles

The reformation was a rebellion against the Roman Church’s method of interpretation.

The reformation was a movement to enthrone the Scriptures in the thought and life of every Christian. Three men established the pattern of hermeneutics that continue up until today:

Martin Luther

Philip Melancthon

John Calvin

Martin Luther

Luther broke with Roman traditionalism but remained under the influence of the early church fathers like Augustine.

Luther did not establish the significance of the historical setting of the text for interpretation but he moved interpretation in that direction.

The literal sense of Scripture was important to Luther and he did escape the trap of the allegory.

Luther rejected the Quadriga, but this did not restrict his application of scripture to many levels. He said there is one interpretation but many applications.

Melancthon

Melancthon was a student of Luther.

He failed, as did Luther, to distinguish the doctrinal distinction of the Old Testament from the New Testament and freely used Old Testament material as support for his Christian doctrine.

He did say that the New Testament revelation was complete and final and went beyond the Old Testament revelation.

Humanism’s view of reason was placed alongside revelation in his study of scriptural interpretation.

Calvin

John Calvin influence Protestantism more than any other reformer.

He left the allegorical method completely

He used extreme literalism

He escaped completely the writings of the early church fathers

The importance of history was obvious to Calvin although his resources were limited.

He was too dogmatic and disregarded all other interpreters and so limited his own insight and progress.

He gave no place for progressive revelation (even from the Old Testament to the New Testament)

Calvin tried to find a complete systematic theology in the teachings of the apostles.

Modern Interpretation

Protestantism developed its own traditionalism based on the principle of verbal inspiration of scripture and the original confessions of faith of the reformers.

Historical Criticism of Modern Interpretation

Historical criticism challenges the inspiration of the Bible

This began in England with deism and in Germany with the Enlightenment in the 1700's

Historical Criticism taught the gospels contained only a hint of the original Jesus

Albert Schweitzer was a leader in this movement.

Karl Barth

Challenged historical criticism and used a purely scientific approach to scripture.

Barth said historical criticism was simply useful in establishing the facts to be interpreted, not to give the final explanation

He returned to the reformers idea of scripture interpreting scripture.

He said historical criticism had the first word for the interpreter but revelation had the last word.

Principles of Hermeneutics

The Reformers Primary Rules for Hermeneutics:

Scripture is to interpret Scripture

"Sacra Scriptura sui interpret" (Sacred Scripture is its own interpreter.)

No point of Scripture can be interpreted to bring it in conflict with any other part of scripture.

If there are two possible interpretations for a scripture and one of those conflicts with other scriptures, the conflicting scripture has proven itself to be the wrong interpretation.

The presupposition for this rule is that the Bible is inspired and God is the author.

Some modern liberal interpreters go out of their way to interpret scripture against scripture in hopes of proving it to be un-inspired.

Use the clearly understood passages of scripture to shed light on the less obvious scriptures.

The Bible should be interpreted according to its literal sense

"sensus literalis" ("literal sense")

Even though the Bible is inspired and written by the Holy Spirit it is still literature.

The natural meaning of a passage is to be interpreted according to the normal rules of grammar, speech, syntax and context.

The letters, words and sentences do not take on a new meaning just because they are inspired. They are the vehicles used by the Holy Spirit to communicate.

Nouns remain nouns; verbs are still verbs; questions do not become exclamations; historical narratives do not become allegories.

Literal interpretation then calls for detailed literary scrutiny of the text

The interpreter must know the rules of grammar

Genre Analysis is Very Important

“Genre” means “kind, sort, species.”

Genre analysis is the study of the style of writing, literary form, or the figure of speech.

For example we know there is a difference between a newspaper article, a legal document, an elementary reading book, a restaurant menu, an owner’s manual, the president’s state of the union address, and the lyrics to a pop song.

Below are four examples:

Is the book of Jonah historical? This question is a matter of genre analysis. Chapter 2 of Jonah is clearly poetry. If this is the genre that speaks throughout the whole book there is no need to hold to a historical swallowing of Jonah by a fish. Genre analysis can address this issue. But, if someone rejects the book of Jonah as a historical document because they do not believe in miracles, this becomes a philosophical question and genre analysis cannot directly help resolve the issue. The book of Jonah is a historical narrative that includes poetry.

Is the mustard seed a hyperbole or a mistake? The etymology of hyperbole shows it to mean “an overshooting.” The dictionary meaning for hyperbole is “exaggeration for effect, not meant to be taken literally.” Newspapers, verbal communication, and historical reports all use hyperboles to make their point without violating the historical accuracy of the reporter. Comments that we may hear that are hyperboles: “The story is as old as time.” “Everyone has heard what happened yesterday.” The Bible uses this type of hyperbole in Matthew 9:35 in reference to Jesus going to “all the cities.” Jesus also calls the mustard seed the smallest of seeds when there are actually smaller seeds. The use of hyperboles is not inconsistent with inspiration nor should it be taken literally in your teaching.

Is Balaam’s donkey a personification or a miracle? A personification is a poetic device which inanimate objects or animals are given human characteristics. The Bible describes hills dancing and trees clapping. But, what about Balaam’s donkey talking? Was that a personification or a miracle? To analyze this objectively means we must ask what literary style is being used. Is there room for a personification in the narrative? To call something personification that is literally historical because it does not agree with what we believe is not exegesis (where the interpreter takes the meaning out of what is in the literature) but is eisogesis (this occurs when the interpreter is putting meaning into the literature). Is the creation account historical or is it symbolic literature? Adam is placed in a real geographical location with a real genealogy that is inappropriate for a mythical character. But, there is reference to the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. What kind of tree is this and what do these leaves look like? Is it a real tree that we have never seen in our time? Before you begin to teach this you have to decide what form of literature you are teaching. Is it historical or symbolic?

Which ones are metaphors? A) "I am the door." B) "This is my body." A metaphor is a word or a phrase that uses one kind of object or idea in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them. John 10:9, "I am the door: if anyone enters through Me, He shall be saved" is clearly a metaphor. Jesus did not really swing on hinges and have a door knob. Difficulty begins with verses like Luke 22:19. Jesus took the bread and said, "This is My body." Was this a metaphor? Was the bread representing Jesus' body or did it become his body in a real fashion? The modern Catholic and Protestant views of this scripture are based on this hermeneutic issue. The two great reformers, Luther and Calvin, never could agree on the proper interpretation of this verse. They agreed on inspiration and the authority of this scriptures. But, they could not agree on the interpretation of this verse. When Calvin sent representatives to negotiate with Luther, Luther simply kept repeating the words, "This is my body . . . this is my body. . ."

Rules of Hermeneutics

Tim LaHaye' Five Rules of Hermeneutics

Take the Bible Literally. Do not spiritualize the Bible.

Keep it in Context. Do not lift a verse out of context to use it as a proof-text because text out of context is a pretext.

Watch out for Idioms. Idioms change from generation to generation even in their own language; imagine how they change after 2,000 years from an ancient language from a different hemisphere.

Be Alert to the Figurative use of Language. Authors use figures of speech that cannot be taken literally. The context is the key; it will tell you when to take a word literally or to find the figurative meaning.

Treat Parables Differently. An earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Parables have one central truth. Every illustration can be distorted when every detail of a parable is forced to take on an unintended meaning.

R.C. Sproul's Ten Rules of Hermeneutics

The Bible is to be Read Like Any Other Book. The Bible is special, but it communicates through the medium of literature.

Read the Bible Existentially. In other words, put yourself in the story. What were the characters hearing? What were they thinking when they heard or saw this event? Why did Abraham get up early in the morning to leave to sacrifice Isaac? And, why does the Bible record this bit of information?

Historical Narratives are to be Interpreted by the Didactic Literature. "Didactic" comes from the Greek word that means to teach or to instruct. Much of Paul's writing is didactic literature. For example, the gospels are often historical narratives (even recording some didactic messages of Jesus in their historical settings), but the Epistles are more concerned with interpreting the significance of those events recorded in the Gospels. So, the Didactic style of the Epistles gives us doctrine, exhortation and application that is interpreted from the historical narratives in the Gospels.

The Implicit is to Be Interpreted by the Explicit. Explicit means "clearly stated." Implicit means "to indicate without saying openly or to hint at or to suggest." Example: 1 Corinthians 14:4-5 says that the one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless it is interpreted. Both sides of the tongues debate skip the explicit to grab at the implicit. One side says prophecy is good and so, tongues are bad. The

other side says tongues and interpretation make you greater. If the student focused on the explicit then neither of these two implied "truths" would stand the test of hermeneutics. In fact, the explicit eliminates the possibility of either of these implications being true.

Determine Carefully the Meaning of Words

Defining Words

Etymology - the science of word origins. The word "Hippopotamus" comes from two Greek words: "hippos" meaning "horse" and "potamos" meaning "river". The Hebrew word for "Glory" originally meant "heavy" or "weighty".

Customary Usage - Words must be studied in the context of its usage from the time the document was written. Words undergo changes in meaning. The meaning of a word in a dictionary is written to identify the way people have started using the word. "Cute" in Elizabethan period meant "bowlegged." The word "scan" defined in an English dictionary meant "to read carefully, to read in close detail." These are examples of words that have had their meanings changed.

Words with Multiple Meanings

There are many words in the original languages that have two or more meaning. For example, the "will of God." There are six different ways to use this word "will". Below are three of the ways:

Will - the precepts God has revealed to his people

Will - God's sovereign action by which God brings to pass what he wants.

Will - that which is pleasing to God, that which he delights in

Apply one of the above three meanings of the word "will" to this verse: "God is not willing that any should perish." (2 Peter 3:9 KJ). Does the word "willing" mean:

God has legislated a precept that no one is allowed to perish. It is against the law to perish.

God has decreed and he will make it happen that no one will ever perish.

God is not pleased and is not delighted when people perish.

To resolve these potential multiple meanings, you must allow scripture to interpret scripture.

The NIV does this when it makes the translation into English. But, are they right in their choice of meanings?

The NIV translates 2 Peter 3:9 as, "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish."

Another example is the word "Justify".

"a man is justified by faith apart from works." (Romans 3:28)

"a man is justified by works." (James 2:24)

This is reinforced when Paul and James go on to use these examples:

Abraham was justified by faith when he believed God before circumcision (Romans 4)

Abraham was justified by works when he offered Isaac.

The answer to this apparent contradiction is found in "justified" having two meanings:

To restore to a state of reconciliation with God those who stand under the judgment of his law.
to demonstrate or to vindicate.

Jesus said, "Wisdom is justified by all her children." (Luke 7:35) Does Jesus mean wisdom was restored to fellowship or does he mean that a decision is demonstrated to be wise by what the results that decision produces.

Words Whose Meanings Have Become Doctrinal Concepts

The word "save" and "salvation" are examples of this. The ultimate salvation is the escape from God's wrath. This theological concept is captured in the doctrine of salvation.. The problem comes when we do not realize

that this was a word used to express the deliverance from any kind of trouble or calamity including military defeat, bodily injury, disease, and defamation of character. But, we tend to extrapolate the full theological meaning back into the word every time we read it in the Bible including First Timothy 2:15 where it says the women will be "saved in childbearing." Here the word "saved" does not carry our doctrine of salvation in its meaning or intent.

Note the Presence of Parallelisms in the Bible

Hebrew poetry is often structured with a particular meter. A rhythm of words and vowels. This meter is lost in translation. Parallelism is not so easily lost because it is a rhythm of thoughts. Three types:

Synonymous Parallelism occurs when different lines or parts of a passage present the same thought in a altered manner: "A false witness will not go unpunished and he who pours out lies will not go free." (Proverbs 19:5)

Antithetic Parallelism occurs when the two parts are set in contrast to each other: "A wise son heeds his father's instruction, but a mocker does not listen to rebuke." (Proverbs 13:1)

Synthetic Parallelism is more complex. The first part of a passage creates a sense of expectation, which is completed by the second part. It can then move in a progressive, staircase movement to a conclusion in a third line: "For surely your enemies, O Lord, surely your enemies will perish; all evildoers will be scattered." (Psalm 92:9)

Note the Difference between Proverb and Law

A proverb is not an absolute but an application of wisdom. Which proverb to use will be dictated by the circumstance. "Look before you leap." or "He who hesitates is lost." Both are true, but they are not always the absolute law of action.

Matthew 12:30, "He who is not with Me is against Me."

Luke 9:50, "He who is not against you is for you."

-both are true depending on the situation

Proverbs 26: 4-5- another example of when to answer a fool and when not to.

There are also two types of Law

a) The apodictic law expresses absolutes: "Thou shalt . . ." or "Thou shalt not. . ."

b) The casuistic law expresses case law and begins with "if. . .then. . ."

Example: Exodus 23:4, "If you meet your enemy's ox or donkey. . .you shall return them."

This is explicit for an ox and a donkey, but it is an example of many other things implicitly.

Casuistic law gives the principle of the law by example. In other words, you should also return

your enemies chicken, dog, car, snowmobile, etc.

Observe the Difference between the Spirit and the Letter of the Law

A Sabbath day journey was established from the point of residence. But, if a “legalist” wanted to establish a residence at different location he could then according to the letter of the law travel from one residence to another during the entire Sabbath. You could establish a residence by placing a personal item such as a comb, mirror, or coat at the location. This was not the spirit of the law.

Be Careful with Parables

Be Careful with Predictive Prophecy

Drew Freeman’s Four Rules and Fifteen Principles of Hermeneutics

Rule One: Seek to Acquire Facts About God and Christ Jesus By Searching All of Scripture

Principle One: Study the Essence of God -sovereignty, righteousness, justice, love, eternal life, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, immutable (unchanging), truthful

Principle Two: Seek the Way Christ is Revealed -Realize that all of history is focused around Jesus. He is the creator, the alpha and omega, the only true God who became man. The OT was a shadow of the reality found in Christ.

Rule Two: Seek to Understand the Facts by Using the Clear Passage as Your Guide

-look for the scriptures that are easiest to understand and let those passages guide our understanding of the less clear scriptures.

Principle Three: Realize that Revelation is Progressive -God reveals information over a period of time. Revelation are introduced, even in the garden, and then expanded on over time. It is important to study the first occurrence of a subject in the scriptures to begin your understanding on the right course.

Principle Four: Interpret Literally -God says what he means and means what he says

Principle Five: Consider the Specific -We must ask, “Who said this?” “Who did they say it to?” “What circumstances?” “Who was given the promise or the prophecy?”

Principle Six: Study the Primary Passages -Certain passages are to be read as the primary declaration of God’s attitude on a subject

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 15

The Human Tongue. James 3

The Restoration of Israel.	Romans 11
Triumphs of the Faith.	Hebrews 11
God's Discipline of His Children	Hebrews 12
The Church	Ephesians 1-3
Righteousness by Faith	Romans 3:10-21
Full Armor of God	Ephesians 6:10-17
Love	1 Corinthians 13

Principle Seven: Recognize Human Volition -Consider the freedom that God gave mankind to make decisions and the responsibility that goes along with it. The Bible records both good and bad decisions made by men. God did not cause all of the results of these decisions.

Principle Eight: Remember the Covenants -Recognize the agreements (or contracts) made between God and a man or a group. There are conditional covenants that depend upon man's obedience and there are unconditional covenants that depend solely upon the truthfulness of God's promise in the covenant.

The Edenic Covenant
The Adamic Covenant
The Noahic Covenant
The Abrahamic Covenant
The Mosaic Covenant
The Davidic Covenant
The Palestinian Covenant
The New Covenant to Israel
The New Covenant to the Church

Rule Three: Seek to be Wise by Comparing Scripture with Scripture

Any confusion comes from our inability or lack of study. God intended to communicate.

Principle Nine: Look for the Differences -There are different concepts that work together: faith – works: salvation – sin: law - grace.

Principle Ten: Consider the Context -Consider types of context to consider for every passage: Near Context – compare it to the verses within the same paragraph

The slavery of Gal.5:1 is then clearly “spiritual slavery.”

Intermediate Context – the verses within the same book.

Matthew 24:40 must be compared to Matthew 13:49 before it is compared to 1 Thessalonians 4:17

Remote Context – recognize the internal consistency of the Word of God

This is used when studying selected words such as “grace” or “faith.” Also used in advanced principles such as interpretation of prophecy or understanding types and symbols.

Principle Eleven: Interpret Comparatively -Focuses on the internal consistency of the Word of God

Principle Twelve: Seek the Harmony -There are no real contradictions in the Bible. Disagreements are in the human scope. Contradictory verses will actually complement one another and we gain understanding

Principle Thirteen: Consider the Dispensation -Dispensations are periods of history in which God establishes different responsibilities for his people. Hebrew 7:12 refers to the change of priesthood and a change of law. This is in reference to a change in dispensations

Principle Fourteen: Be Careful with Prophecy -There is no room for unique attempts at interpretation of prophecy. The interpreter of prophecy actually puts together a large picture that has been cut into many thousands of pieces (some 10,000 verses of prophecy.)

Determine if the Prophet makes the interpretation

Determine if the Prophecy has been historically fulfilled

Recognize the Language of Prophecy

Rule Four: Seek to Live the Christian Life by Properly Applying God’s Word

There are many applications but only one interpretation of all scripture.

Principle Fifteen: Proper Application is Built on Proper Interpretation

Step One: Pray for understanding, recollection, and proper application or spiritual principles

James 1:5

Step Two: Seek to correctly and fully understand the passage: Study

2 Timothy 2:15

Step Three: Determine the spiritual principle

Romans 13:8-10

Step Four: Examine your life to see if you are in violation of scripture and submit God

1 John 1:9

Step Five: Walk in grace and faith. We began in grace and faith now we produce it.

Colossians 2:6, Ephesians 2:8-10

Six Hindrances to Proper Interpretation:

1) Carnality

Living in sin will have a tendency to distort scriptural interpretation.

Since the Holy Spirit reveals truth we must be in fellowship with him.

2) Vanity

Vanity is the quest for fame or recognition. This can lead to improper interpretation.

“Handling” the Word “accurately” (2 Timothy 2:15) includes being guided by the right motivation.

3) Partiality

Partiality is a prejudice based on individual preferences and it basically distorts the text by thinking:

“I don’t want something to be this way.”

4) Lack of Consistency

a) Practice of Consistent Self-Evaluation and Confession of Sin

b) The Practice of Consistent Prayer

c) The Practice of consistent Study

5) Faulty Methodology

Our method of interpretation can hinder of accuracy. There are some who believe that only certain Christians have been given the gift of interpreting God’s Word. We have all been given the word and are all priests.

6) Faulty Reasoning

We cannot rely solely on our ability to reason out the scriptures. We must be empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation.

Proper interpretations considers: word meaning, context, genre, history and syntax.

Exposition is the setting forth of facts and ideas to present a detailed explanation.

An allegory is a story where people, things and events have a different meaning than they do in the context.

Exegesis is an explanation of what the text in a document says.

Deductive means to reason from the known to the unknown or from the general to the specific.

Jesus read, quoted and taught the Old Testament as if it were true and historical.

Four problems of medieval interpretation were: bondage to previously written documents, scholasticism, mysticism, the quadriga.

Historical criticism is a modern method of interpretation that challenges the inspiration of scripture.

Knowing Scripture by R. C. Sproul

Introduction to Biblical Interpretation by William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, Robert L. Hubbard

An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics by Walter C. Kaiser and Moises Silva

Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation by Henry A. Virkler

Foundations: Building in the Faith by Drue Freeman

QUESTIONS ([back to the top](#))

What is the goal of applying hermeneutics to a written document?

Ezra was a great scribe but his efforts led to what two faulty forms of hermeneutics for the Jews?

Who was the great Jewish teacher before the time of Christ who combined Greek culture/philosophy into Judaism?

Quote or name a verse by Peter that indicates hermeneutics were an issue in the days of the early church.

Who do you agree with more as an interpreter? Irenaeus or Origin

Which school do you agree with more? Alexandria or Antioch

Who established the interpretation method that dominated Christian thinking from 400 AD until the Reformation in the 1500's?

Name three great reformers who affected hermeneutics.

What are the reformers two rulers for hermeneutics?