

How to interpret the Bible

Other words used for interpretation include exegesis.

Why study the bible?

2 Timothy 2:15

Be diligent (Study) to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Revelations 1:3

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.

Hebrews 4:12

For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of the soul and the spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Proverbs 4:21-22

My son, give attention to my words;

Incline your ear to my sayings.

Do not let them depart from your eyes;

Keep them in the midst of your heart;

For they are life to those who find them,

And health to all their flesh.

Paul told Timothy that the scriptures make him wiser.

So if the word of God is so important then we need to study it. Thus at times we will need to interpret its contents.

One foundation that today needs to be laid because of the proliferation of the prophetic in the body of Christ, the church.

The written word of God is above the prophetic word.

Principles for Interpretation

1. Always interpret in context:

The first man to translate the entire bible into English in the early 1500's was Miles Cloverdale.

He wrote

"It shall greatly help you to understand the Scriptures if you mark not only what is spoken or written, but of whom, and to whom, with what words, and what time, where, to what intent, with what circumstances, considering what goes before and what follows after."

Context simply means 'with text'.

Let's look at an example:

"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." (1 Cor 2:9)

Most of us are conditioned to think of Heaven immediately when we hear this verse, because we're listening to what people have said, instead of reading the text.

If we apply the "text" to the "context", we see that the promise has nothing to do with Heaven. The revelation that Paul is referring to comes with the hearing of the gospel. (Read from verse one.)

We don't have to wait until we get to Heaven for this glorious revelation. The Kingdom of Heaven is upon you! This verse is saying (implicitly) that the gospel is even more wonderful than any of us could have imagined, or even now, can imagine. Raise your expectations of the gospel.

Matthew 25:1-13 - The parable of the wise and Foolish virgins.

"Then the Kingdom of Heaven shall be likened to ten virgins"

Some people believe the ten virgins are the church. This does not make sense because then half the church goes with Jesus and half is left behind when the rapture occurs. This then leads to the thought "Well am I worthy?" It leads to the conclusion I haven't done enough to go with Jesus. Let me say if this is your belief, then you will be riddled with fear and condemnation, never knowing whether or not you are acceptable to God. You will be stuck in a never-ending rut of trying to get God's approval through doing something. This is a works related gospel.

If you read the preceding chapter you will understand that Matthew was writing to the Jewish nation from a Jewish perspective. Please note this is the only gospel that this story appears in. Why would it only appear here? Matthew was writing to the Jewish nation. It was a warning to them about Jesus. Whenever a warning is given to the Jews we can take note from it. But it is a warning to the Jewish nation, not to us, and as such we should not come under condemnation because of it. Romans 8:1 clearly shows us we should not be under condemnation as Christians.

A better interpretation would be to say that the five virgins taken were the church and the five left behind were the Jewish nation.

Always remember that.

Who is this written too? Under what circumstances was it written?

Here is a good little principle for you. If I write a letter to someone with lots of general encouragement in it and one paragraph of correction on a specific issue, then that person will read it. Others can read it but the correction wasn't for them it was for the intended person. Now, we can take note of it and learn from the principle.

Sometimes context throws us some interesting little uses of words. For instance

In the book of Matthew, he uses the words Kingdom of Heaven. See 25:1; 25:14; 22:2; 20:1. While in the other gospels the authors use the term Kingdom of God. Mark 4:26; Mark 10:23; Luke 4:43; John 3:3; Acts 1:3

Why would this be the case? Remembering that Matthew wrote to the Jews we need to understand they did not write the name of God in completeness. They usually left out the vowels.

God = G'd
Yahweh = YHWH

So Matthew in writing to the Jewish nation would have chosen to write the Kingdom of Heaven rather than the Kingdom of God because he would not have wanted to offend their beliefs about the name of God. This would make his writing a little more palatable without changing the value or principles inherent.

2. Let the bible interpret the bible.

2 Corinthians 12:7

And lest I should be exalted about measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.

What is the thorn in the flesh? Many over the years have debated this. Some have said that it was personal character trait that Paul couldn't control. Some have said it was a permanent sickness that Paul had to endure.

Following our bible interpretations principles let's look at scripture.

Numbers 33:55

“But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain shall be irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land where you dwell.”

If we compare these two scriptures we quickly realise that the thorn in the flesh is people - people who constantly harass and attempt to interrupt the plans of God in your life.

It should not be a sickness for Christ died for our sickness. Paul's problem was that Satan sent people to torment him.

Acts 15:1-2

And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.

If you were to look at the book of Acts you will quickly discover that Paul's main problem came from the Jews.

God doesn't say one thing to one person or group and another thing to another person or group.

**3. In the mouth of two or three witnesses let everything be established.
2 Corinthians 13:1**

Going back to Matthew 25, let's look at some other scriptures.

Jeremiah 18:13

Therefore thus says the Lord,
Ask now among the Gentiles,
Who has heard such things?
The virgin of Israel has done a very horrible thing.

Jeremiah 31:4

Again I will build you, and you shall be rebuilt,
O virgin of Israel!
You shall again be adorned with your tambourines,
And shall go forth in the dances of those who rejoice.

From this we can see that Israel, the Jewish nation was referred to as a virgin. This brings Matthew 25 into a clearer light.

Let me explain about Matthew 25 a bit more.

Matthew 25:2-3

Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them.

And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out'.

The five who did not go into Bridegroom = Israel.

They rejected Jesus Christ. They did not have enough oil. They had the Holy Spirit on them but not the Holy Spirit in them.

The five who went into the Holy Spirit are the church who accepted Jesus Christ. They have the Holy Spirit on them and in them.

4. Redemption is a key teaching that pervades the entire bible from cover to cover.

Understanding this, when we read something we can see and hear the truth of the gospel. Before we look at Acts 5 let me share with you some key points about redemption.

- Literally means a 'buying back'. Jesus brought us back from the place we put ourselves.
- Everyone needs redemption because all have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God.
- It's only through Jesus Christ and his work on Calvary.
- His work was complete.
- His work results in life for all who receive Him.
- His work always is based on grace
- His work only condemns those who refuse to accept it

Now let's look at Acts chapter 5, the story of Ananias and Sapphira.

Let's read the first 11 verses together.