

# How to Interpret Scripture

## **A. Introduction**

\*Simply put, Literary Analysis is the process of discovering the meaning of a text. You could also use the word, interpretation, or exegesis.

\*Blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord (1), I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you (11), My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times (20), I run in the path of your commands (32), I will walk in freedom for I have sought out your precepts (45), My soul faints with longing for your salvation, but I have put my hope in your word (81), Your word, Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens (89), and Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long (97).

\*What scripture did this writer have? Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and possibly Joshua, Samuel, Ruth, and Judges.

## **B. Basic Assumptions:**

**About Language** (a chain):

1. Language is an adequate means of communication
2. Communication is symbolic.
3. Symbols have conventionally-assigned meaning.
4. Meaning is propositional.
5. Every proposition has an author.
6. The author determines the meaning of a statement.

\*This is perhaps one of the most important ideas we can come away with: The text means what the author intended it to mean.

\*The meaning of a statement is single, definite, and fixed.

**About the Bible:**

1. The Bible uses common linguistic conventions (parts of speech, grammar, syntax, interpretive rules, definitions, etc.).
2. The Bible is inspired by God (which implies that the Bible is true in all it affirms). I am not trying to talk you into believing the Bible is the word of God. We are assuming that.
3. What we are after: how to discover the intended meaning of the text.

## **C. Our objectives:**

Technical objective: to discover the intended meaning of the text. That is, the meaning intended by the author, not introduced by the interpreter (the reader).

\*To discover the assertion of the text, not its significance (what it suggests, application, consequences).

\*To discover what can be communicated by observed symbols, not subjective impressions.

Working objective: To discover the subject and complement of the text, along with related elements.

\*Subject: what the author is talking about.

\*Complement: what the author is saying about what he is talking about

Practical objective: to recognize the significance and implications of the concepts.

#### **D. Principles of Interpretation:**

**One: The object of interpretation is the Autographa or an accurate representation of it. The interpreter must discover the correct reading and boundary of the text.**

\*Autographa is the original copies of the writings that form the Bible.

\*There are none.

\*What we do have is over 15,000 extant Greek and Latin manuscripts. The earliest copies are the standards to which we appeal.

\*The extant manuscript of Aristotle's writing is 1,400 years after he wrote the original. Plato's is 1,200 years.

\*We have many extant portions of the New Testament that are copied less than 100 years after the composition of the original documents.

\*A word about translations. In order to discover the correct reading, you have to understand what you are reading; thus the many translations.

\*One way to categorize is by their philosophy: Formal Correspondence versus Dynamic Equivalence.

**Formal Correspondence**: concerned with the form of the language. Verbs correspond with verbs, nouns with nouns. For them, accuracy to the original text also means accuracy to form. Because our English form is a bit different, what you run into might be awkward wording and some parts of language are not directly translatable.

\*Example: Aorist tense: to do and keep on doing. We don't have that tense in English, so it takes more than one phrase to express it.

\*Formal Correspondence is also known as Word-for-Word translation.

\*The other style of translation is called **Dynamic Equivalence**, or thought-for-thought translation.

\*This style is not concerned as much the form but conveys the meaning in a readable and accessible style. The drawback is it can be too artistic and lose meaning.

\*The translations we know are on a scale between word-for-word and thought-for-thought.

\*What explains some of the differences? Single translator vs team approaches (the Message, or JB Phillips versus KJV or NIV). In a single translator version, the voice is heard more clearly.

\*NKJV: This principle of complete (or formal) equivalence seeks to preserve all of the information in the text, while presenting it in good literary form. Dynamic equivalence, a recent procedure in Bible translations, commonly results in paraphrasing where a more literal rendering is needed to reflect a specific and vital sense.

\*NLT: The goal of this translation is to be both reliable and eminently readable. Thus, as a thought-for-thought translation, the NLT seeks to be both exegetically accurate and idiomatically powerful.

\*The Message: The goal is not to render a word-for-word conversion of Greek into English but rather to convert the tone, the rhythm, the events, the ideas, into the way we actually think and speak.

\*NIV: ...meaning is found not in individual words, as vital as they are, but in larger clusters: phrases, clauses, sentences, discourses.

\*I highly recommend finding the translation that suits your ear and style, but to read in multiple translations in your quest to “discover the correct reading of the text.”

\*An example of how it can impact: Ephesians 5:18-20

**Two: The Literary Context limits the meaning of statements within the text; therefore, the interpreter must discover the semantic limitations set by the context.**

This is the idea that the scripture is going to speak to us; we are not going to speak to the scripture. We don't want our life to bear on the scripture (that's deconstructionism); we want the scripture to bear on our life.

Context example: letter

Dear Mark,

-----

-----It was a whopper

-----

Love, Joel

Another letter example:

Dear Galatians,

-----

-----

You are observing special days

And months and seasons and years!

-----

Love, Paul

\*What does that mean? How do you know? Without the context of the letter you don't know if Paul is stating a fact, commending them or offering a criticism.

Definitions:

Literary Context: Passages that come before and/or after the interpreted text; the natural context in which the statement is found.

Natural context: the boundaries that make sense.

Guidelines to finding the natural context:

- a. Place only a little weight on chapter and verse enumerations.
- b. Connecting words like therefore, then, so, in light of, etc. (Hebrews 12:1-2 is a great example. You shouldn't read Hebrews 12 without reading Hebrews 11).
- c. Connecting ideas.
- d. Headings put in by the translation committee.

Matthew 18:18-20

Joel 2: 6-11

Revelations 3:20

Luke 11:9-13

## **E. Conclusion**