

JOSH BANKS

Five Helpful Tips For

Bible Interpretation



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Five Helpful Tips For Bible Interpretation

1. Pay attention to context.

It is key to note that no verse of Scripture has a life of its own. You must draw the life of same from what came before (the antecedent text) and what came after (the succedent text). In understanding a verse of the Bible, read the verses that preceded it and those that followed. Remember, the Bible was originally written scriptio continua i.e without spaces, punctuations, distinguished letter cases, chapters and verses (except the Book of Psalms). Chapters and verses were introduced around the 13th and 14th century respectively. This implies that the books of the Bible were meant to be read AS A WHOLE.

Hence, New Testament quotations from the Old Testament were referred to thus, "For the Scripture says" (see the following: Rom. 10:11, Rom. 11:12, 1 Tim. 5:18, Rom. 9:17, John 7:38, John 7:42, 1 Peter 2:6, Matthew 21:42, Gal. 3:8, Luke 4:21). No chapter nor verse in particular could be cited as they were not readily available at the time but were introduced much later. So, the original users of the Holy Scriptures read them as a composite whole in order to make complete sense of them. This way, the error of isolated interpretations was avoided. We must take precedence from this style of reading as well if we are to be sound exegetes of the Bible.

b) Contextual usage of words is key.

For example, "spirit" does not refer to the Spirit of God (the Holy Spirit) EVERYWHERE in the Bible. Such presumption could be ghastly as sometimes, the word "spirit" in Bible referred to man's spirit, sometimes demons, sometimes angels, sometimes utterance, depending on their individual contexts. Learn to observe how words were used in a particular portion and don't fall into the trap of overgeneralization. "Agape" is not the love of God, neither is "zoe" referring to the life of God EVERYWHERE in the Bible. Also, the usage of words (especially verbs) change based on the morphology in which they appear in various passages. It is always key to pay attention to the tenses, moods, voices, numbers and genders in which they are used.

A very good example of this is seen in 2 Timothy 3:13

2 Timothy 3:13

13 But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.

The SAME Greek verb is used for both "deceiving" and "being deceived" in the original text. It is the word "planaó" which means "to lead astray, into error or sin." This is in reference to heretic teachers in context.

Now, the same word is used but with COMPLETELY different tenses. The first occurrence ("deceiving") is in the present active participle. The active voice denotes that the subject (evil men) are performing the action, hence, it is translated "deceiving" (referring to what they do to other men).

The second occurrence ("being deceived") appears morphologically in the present passive participle. The passive voice means that deceit is being done ON them. They are the recipients in this case, being deceived of the devil (see 2 Corin. 4:3-4, Ephesians 2:1-3 & 1 John 5:19). Now, observe this: same word "planaó" ("deceive") used TWICE in the same verse but both times bearing two completely opposite meanings! Hence, paying attention to how words are used individually in different passages of the Bible is very key.

2 Avoid proof-texting.

Making scriptures say what they are not saying in order to suit your own preconceived notions and ideologies. The Bible ALREADY has its own thoughts, our job is simply to RECEIVE same.

Two manners of reading exist. The first is known as eisegesis. It literally means "to draw in," denoting the reader or commentator imputing his own presuppositions, agendas, or biases into and onto the text being examined. It is reading into the text & making it say what it isn't. The second is known as exegesis which literally means "to lead out." This refers to a critical exposition, interpretation and explanation of a text. In this case, you let the text speak for itself. You receive its information being presented to you. This is painstaking as so many factors (such as the historical, literary or grammatical analysis of the text) are put together to ensure accuracy in interpretation and understanding. The Bible must ALWAYS be exegeted. An eisegesis always robs Biblical texts of their purity.

3. Beware of building doctrine on figurative expressions.

Not EVERY statement or sentence in the Bible is to be taken literally. Some are metaphoric & must be understood connotatively. For example, "water" in John 7:37-39 was used figuratively for the Spirit, Jesus calling his disciples the "salt and light of the world" (Matthew 5:13-16) etc. Watch out for metaphorical indicators in Biblical texts (e.g as, like, as unto, such as, like as of, looked like, likened to, was as etc). They help you know when a figure of speech is about to be used.

4. Law of double mention/Corroborative evidence.

Bible doctrine CANNOT be built on just one verse of Scripture. It must have its foundation in AT LEAST two other Scriptures which are well explained within their own individual contexts. This is very key as it affords the opportunity to have the FULL idea of what the Bible says on various subjects in a systematic manner (Matthew 18:16, Deuteronomy 17:6, Deuteronomy 19:15, 2 Corinthians 13:1, 1 Timothy 5:19, Hebrews 10:28).

b) Emphatic mention.

Biblical subjects can also be understood within a singular text ONLY IF they are EXHAUSTIVELY explained there. For example, the subject of tongues in 1 Corinthians 14.

5. Audience relevance.

Not EVERYTHING in the Bible was written with the believer in mind. Some were written to Israel, some made references to unbelievers. Know which is written TO you and don't adopt EVERYTHING in Scripture as referring to you today. Remember, the Bible was written FOR you, but not EVERYTHING therein was written TO you.

b) A huge historical, linguistic & cultural gap exists between the initial encoders (writers) of Scripture, the direct decoders (readers) in that day and age & the modern day decoders today. While Truth remains consistent regardless of contemporary changes and evolution, specialized terminologies must be understood as they were by the original users. For example, the Hebraistic terminology "flowing with milk and honey" used in reference to the Promised Land (Exodus 3:8) must never be viewed literally. It is an idiomatic expression denoting abundance. It is not literal.

"Dazzle" (verb) or "dazzling" (adjective) is a property of very bright and overwhelming light – the sort that takes your attention off everything else and has you gazing with awe. For us, Christ Jesus is that Light (John 8:12, 2 Corin. 4:3-6, Rev. 21:23) & it is all about Him! In a world full of so much darkness, we live to reveal the knowledge of Christ to all men & light them up with His revelation.

We do so by getting them saved, filled with the Holy Ghost, meeting their needs via the power of God & getting them to grow in the Gospel of His Grace. This is the Dazzle mission. This is what God called us to do & we are convinced about the same. We envision ignorance and spiritual blindness dispelled and men in every part of the world full of the glorious light found in the knowledge of Christ.

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