

## Lesson 2: Proper Bible Interpretation

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### Key Verse: 2 Timothy 2:15

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.”

### Why study the Bible?

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. What does this verse tell us about the Bible? \_\_\_\_\_

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What is the purpose of the Bible? \_\_\_\_\_

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Read 1 Peter 2:2. What does Peter tell us the Word of God will do? \_\_\_\_\_

Read John 17:17. What does Jesus say the truth will do? \_\_\_\_\_

Read 1 Peter 3:15. What will God’s Word help you to always do? \_\_\_\_\_

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**“Nobody ever outgrows the Scripture; the book widens and deepens with our years.”**

**—Charles Spurgeon**

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### What is hermeneutics?

The Greek verb *hermēneuō* came to refer to bringing someone to an understanding of something in his language (thus explanation) or in another language (thus translation).

Hermeneutics is the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of interpreting the Bible. Another way to define hermeneutics is this: It is the science (principles) and art (task) by which the meaning of the biblical text is determined.<sup>1</sup>

### Why is hermeneutics important?

As believers, we want to know what God has said to us in His Word. The way we come to that conclusion is through proper hermeneutics.

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<sup>1</sup> Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 1991), 19.

## Dual Authorship

We need to remember that the Bible was written in a language that we can understand. This means God chose to use men to write the Bible.

What we mean by dual authorship:

1. God is the Ultimate Author: The Bible is God-breathed. (2 Timothy 3:16)
2. Men are the Immediate Authors: They wrote exactly what God wanted them to write.

## What is the goal of hermeneutics?

The goal is to discover the \_\_\_\_\_, divinely intended \_\_\_\_\_ of the author who wrote the text.

Ask the question: “What did the original author intend for his original audience to understand?”

## What is the best method of interpreting the Bible?

The best method of Bible interpretation is the literal, grammatical, historical interpretation. This approach seeks to study the language, culture, and historical background of the biblical text in an effort to discern the fixed meaning intended by the original author.

In setting forth the special revelation of His Word, God chose to reveal truth through existing human languages. As Roy Zuck notes, “Each biblical writing—that is, each word, sentence, and book—was recorded in a written language and followed normal, grammatical meanings, including figurative language . . . Since it was written in the languages of the people (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek), it did not have to be decoded, deciphered, or translated. Those who read the Bible did not need to read into, beyond, or between words for some ‘deeper’ or other-than-normal meaning.”<sup>2</sup>

## The Result of Bad Hermeneutics

Read Philippians 4:13. What does this verse mean? Does it mean a bodybuilder can lift 500 pounds because Christ gives him the strength? Does it mean I can do whatever my own heart dreams up?

Read Jeremiah 29:11. Does this mean God’s plan for you is to live the American Dream? What if a Christian doesn’t live a “prosperous” life? Did God’s promise fail?

Read Matthew 18:20. Is Jesus with me when I am not with one or two other people?

- Proper hermeneutics will lead us to a proper understanding of God’s Word.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 61-62.

## Learning from the Past

Many in the early church, leading up to the Reformation, used a type of interpretation called allegory.

What is allegory? It is searching for a hidden or secret meaning underlying the more obvious meaning of a text.

**Example:** Genesis 1:16, “God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night; *He made* the stars also.”

C.I. Scofield interprets this verse literally, but also finds a deeper meaning to the verse. He says this, “The ‘greater light’ is a type of Christ, the ‘Sun of righteousness’ (Mal. 4:2) . . . Dispensationally the Church is in place as the ‘lesser light,’ the moon, reflecting the light of the unseen sun.”<sup>3</sup>

While there were early church fathers who used a literal interpretation, it wasn’t until around the 14<sup>th</sup> Century that the literal interpretation became more prevalent among pastors and theologians.

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**“The Scriptures are to be retained in their simplest meaning ever possible, and to be understood in their grammatical and literal sense unless the context plainly forbids.”**

**—Martin Luther**

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## Eisegesis vs. Exegesis

Defining the terms:

1. **Eisegesis** (Greek “to lead into”) is the interpretation of a text by reading into it one’s own idea.

This is reading your own thoughts and ideas into what you think the authors should be saying. We often see this in a Bible study where someone will ask, “What does this mean to you?” This is the **wrong** way to interpret Scripture.

2. **Exegesis** (Greek “to lead out of, to seek out”) is the determination of the meaning of a biblical text in its historical and literary contexts.<sup>4</sup>

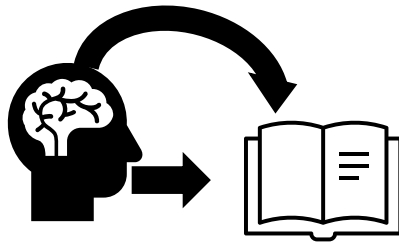
This involves pulling out from the text what the original authors were communicating to their original audience. We want to know what the original meaning is and be able to explain what it means, rather than what we think it should mean. This is the **correct** way to interpret Scripture.

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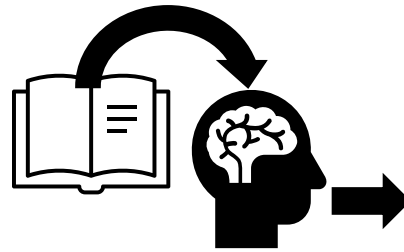
<sup>3</sup> Scofield Reference Notes, <https://www.biblehub.com/commentaries/sco/genesis/1.htm/>. Accessed December 22, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretations*, 19.

## Illustration of Eisegesis vs. Exegesis



**Eisegesis**



**Exegesis**

## Understanding Our Hermeneutic

Our hermeneutic is not biblical in the sense that it has a book, chapter, verse that says, “You shall use a literal, grammatical, historical interpretation as you exegete this word.” However, it is biblical in the sense that it is derived from the nature of Scripture itself.

God has communicated clearly in His Word to His people. The goal for believers is to understand exactly what it is that God has communicated to us.

## Application

1. What will a proper hermeneutic do for believers?
2. Why is it good to continue to read the Bible over and over?
3. Are you practicing a proper hermeneutic when studying the Bible?