

# Bible 101

## How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth

The Need to Interpret and a Good Translation

# The Need to Interpret

- “In fact we are convinced that the single most serious problem people have with the Bible is not with a lack of understanding but with the fact that they understand many things too well! [ ] the problem is not understanding [Phil. 2:14] but obeying it — putting it into practice” (pg. 21)
- “the aim of good interpretation is not uniqueness; one is not trying to discover what no one else has ever discovered before.” (pg. 21)

- “The aim of good interpretation is simple: to get at the “plain meaning of the text,” the author’s intended meaning.” (pg. 22)
- “But if the plain meaning is what interpretation is all about, then why interpret? Why not just read?” (pg. 22)
- “Sometimes what we bring to the text, unintentionally to be sure, leads us astray, or else causes us to read all kinds of foreign ideas into the text.” (pg. 22)

- “Translators are regularly called upon to make choices regarding meanings, and *their* choices are going to affect how *you* understand.” (pg. 23)
- “The antidote to *bad* interpretation is not *no* interpretation but *good* interpretation, based on commonsense guidelines.” (pg. 25)

“What we hope to achieve is to heighten the reader’s sensitivity to specific problems inherent in each genre, to help the reader know *why* different options exist and how to make commonsense judgments, and especially, to enable the reader to discern between good and not-so-good interpretations — and to know what makes them one or the other.” (pg. 25)

- “It is this dual nature of the Bible [same time both human and divine] that demands of us the task of interpretation.” (pg. 25)
- “Interpretation of the Bible is demanded by the “tension” that exists between its *eternal relevance* [God’s word speaks to all humankind, in every age and in every culture] and its *historical particularity* [each document is conditioned by the language, time, and culture in which it was originally written].
- “[God] chose to speak his eternal truths within the particular circumstances and events of human history.” (pg. 26)

- “To interpret properly the “then and there” of the biblical texts, one must not only know some general rules that apply to all the words of the Bible, but one also needs to learn the special rules that apply to each literary forms (genres).” (pg. 27)
- “Our problem is that we are so far removed from them in time, and sometimes in thought. This is the major reason one needs to learn to *interpret* the Bible.” (pg. 27)

“Thus the task of interpreting involves the student/reader at two levels. First, one has to hear the word they heard; we must try to understand what was said to them back *then and there* (exegesis). Second, we must learn to hear the same word in the *here and now* (hermeneutics).” (pg. 27)



- “[Exegesis] involves the careful, systematic study of the Scripture to discover the original, intended meaning.” (pg. 27)
- “Whereas [exegesis] must indeed be employed for such texts [problem], we insist that it is *the first step in reading EVERY text.*” (pg. 28)
- “The real problem with “selective” exegesis is that one will often read one’s own, completely foreign, ideas into a text and thereby make God’s word something other than what God really said.” (pg. 28)

- “The key to good exegesis, and therefore to a more intelligent reading of the Bible, is to learn to read the text carefully and to ask the right questions of the text.” (pg. 30)
- “There are two basic kinds of questions one should ask of every biblical passage: those that relate to *context* and those that relate to *content*.” (pg. 30)

“The historical context, which will differ from book to book, has to do with several matters: the time and culture of the author and audience, that is geographical, topographical, and political factors that are relevant to the author’s setting; and the historical occasion of the book, letter, psalm, prophetic oracle, or other genre.” (pg. 30)

- “The more important question of historical context, however, has to do with the *occasion* and *purpose* of each biblical book and/or its various parts. [ ] The answer to this question is usually found — when it can be found — within the book itself.” (pg. 31)
- “Essentially, literary context means first that words only have meaning in sentences, and second that biblical sentences for the most part have full and clear meaning only in relation to preceding sentences.” (pg. 31)

- “The most important contextual question you will ever ask — and it must be asked over and over of every sentence and every paragraph — is: What is the point?” (pg. 31-32)
- ““Content” has to do with the meaning of words, their grammatical relationships in sentences, and the choice of the original text where the manuscripts (handwritten copies) differ from one another.” (pg. 32)

“We have mentioned three such tools [aids for exegesis]: a good translation, a good bible dictionary, and good commentaries.” (pg. 33)

- “But devotional reading is not the only kind one should do. One must also read for learning and understanding.” (pg. 33)
- “The reason you must *not begin* with the here and now [hermeneutics] is that the only proper control for hermeneutics is to be found *in the original intent of the biblical text.*” (pg. 33-34)
- “Therefore, the Spirit’s help for us will come in our discovering that original intent and in guiding us as we try faithfully to apply that meaning to our own situations.” (pg. 34)

# A Good Translation

- “What this means [only reading english translation] further, however, is that, in a certain sense, the person who reads the Bible only in English is at the mercy of the translator(s), and translators have often had to make choices as to what in fact the original Hebrew or Greek author was really intending to express.” (pg. 36)



- “For the study of the Bible, you should use *several* well-chosen translations. The best option is to use translations that *one knows in advance will tend to differ.*” (pg. 37)
- “The first concern of translators is to be sure that the Hebrew or Greek text they are using is as close as possible to the original wording as it left the author’s hands.” (pg. 38)
- “There are two kinds of evidence that translators consider in making textual choices: external evidence (the character and quality of the manuscripts) and the internal evidence (the kinds of mistakes to which copyists were susceptible).” (pg. 39)

- “This is why for study *you should use almost any modern translation other than the KJV or the NKJV.*” (pg. 43)

- *Original language*: the language that one is translating *from*
- *Receptor language*: the language that one is translating *into*
- *Historical distance*: has to do with the differences that exist between the original language and the receptor language, both in matters of words, grammar, and idioms as well as in matters of culture and history.

- *Formal equivalence*: the attempt to keep as close to the “form” of the Hebrew or Greek, both words and grammar, as can be conveniently put into understandable English.
- *Functional equivalence*: the attempt to keep the meaning of the Hebrew or Greek but to put their words and idioms into what would be the normal way of saying the same thing in English.
- *Free translation*: the attempt to translate the *ideas* from one language to another, with less concern about using exact words as the original.

- *Theory of translation*: has basically to do with whether one puts primary emphasis on formal or on functional equivalency, that is, the degree to which one is willing to go in order to bridge the gap between the two languages, either in use of words and grammar or in bridging the historical distance by offering a modern equivalent.

““Our view is that the best theory of translation is the one that remains as faithful as possible to both the original and receptor languages, but that when something has to “give,” it should be in favor of the receptor language — without losing the meaning of the original language, of course — since the very reason for translation is to make these ancient texts accessible to the English-speaking person who does not know the original languages.” (pg. 45)

- “Which translation, then, should one read? We would venture to suggest that the current NIV (2011), a committee translation by the best scholarship in the evangelical tradition is as good a translation as you can get.” (pg. 56)