



HERMENEUTICS

Studying The Principles And Methods Of Interpreting The Bible

1. We begin our study of the Bible with what we call our first principle: στοιχείον stoicheion
2. All reasoning begins from a starting point, a first assumption. Our first principle is, of course, God.
3. We do not start with the Bible. We start with God.
4. We do not believe in God because the Bible teaches there is a God.
5. God revealed Himself to Adam before there was a Bible. We believe in the Bible because God reveals Himself in it, not vice versa.
6. The Bible is God's self-revelation. As we see God reveal Himself, His nature, and His character in the Bible, the Holy Spirit convinces us that this is truly an inspired book and that we worship a unique God unlike any other "gods" supposed by man.
7. Each Biblical doctrine descends directly from the person and character of God. When one mocks the biblical fundamentals, he mocks the person and character of the God from whom they descend.
8. We cannot reject the truth of God without rejecting the person of God because truth is merely a synonym for God's self-revelation.
9. Things are true because God is true. There is no truth outside of God. Jesus Christ is *THE* truth (John 14:6).
10. When we study the Bible, we must begin with God. Why?
11. All right thinking is right thinking about God.
12. All wrong thinking is wrong thinking about God.
13. Wrong thinking about God eventually leads to wrong behavior.
14. Wrong behavior leads to negative consequences. In the same way, right thinking about God leads to right behavior and positive outcomes.
15. The Bible is God's self-revelation, and ultimately shapes our entire world view.
16. Get it wrong, and you get God WRONG!
17. God created language in order to communicate with His creation and authored the Bible to that end.
18. Hermeneutics is applying principles (or tools) consistently to arrive at what God wants us to know.
19. Failure to apply the tools consistently leads to being "*tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine...*": Ephesians 4:14
20. One of my seminary professor's favorite expressions (that I've come to live by) was, "Don't tell me what you *THINK* it means, just tell me what it *MEANS*".

Principles of Proper Bible Interpretation

1. Can't we just read the Bible?
 - a. Yes, but remember, even Peter said some of Paul's stuff was hard to understand:
Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation – as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures. 2 Peter 3:14-16

2. Can't we just listen to you?
 - a. NO!
 - b. I may have four Master's degrees, and 2 Doctorates, but...
 - c. You be good Bereans: Acts 17:11 *These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.*
 - d. WHY?
 - e. 2 Peter 2:1 *But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.*
 - f. Matthew 7:15 *Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.*
 - g. Acts 20:29 *For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.*
 - h. So, how do we protect the flock?
 - i. By arming you with tools to interpret the Bible on your own so that when the wolves come, you're prepared! (sheep tank)

Principle #1: The Bible and the Bible Only

- a. Not Tradition
 - i. *He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God" – then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'" Matthew 15:3-9*
- b. Not Philosophy
 - i. *Colossians 2:8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles (στοιχεῖον stoicheion) of the world, and not according to Christ.*
- c. Not Wisdom of Men (human reason, experience, knowledge, or science).
 - i. *1 Timothy 6:20-21 O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge – by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith.*
 - ii. *Genesis 3:1-6 Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"
 And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'"
 Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."
 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.*

- iii. 2 Timothy 4:3-4 *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.*
- iv. 1 Corinthians 1:19-21 *For it is written:
"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."
Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.*
- d. The Bible and only the Bible is the final authority for truth.
 - i. 2 Timothy 3:15-17 *and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.
All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*
 - ii. Psalms 119:105 *Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path. ;*
 - iii. Proverbs 30:5-6 *Every word of God is pure;
He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him.
Do not add to His words,
Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar.*
 - iv. John 17:17 *Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.*
 - v. 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 soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

Principle #2: The Totality of Scripture

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Principle #3: The Harmony of Scripture

- a. Christological: Luke 24:27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. **Acts 10:43; 2 Cor. 1:20; John 5:39; Romans 15:8**
- b. Scripture cannot/ does not contradict Scripture. Bible was written by approximately 40 men of diverse backgrounds over the course of 1500 years, and yet is in perfect harmony.

Principle #4: Context Is King

- a. A text without a context is a pretext for a proof text." The abuse of a single verse or phrase taken out of context to "prove" a particular view.
- b. Consider the verses immediately before, after, and around the passage. We must consider the book of the Bible and the section of the Bible in which the passage occurs. The Bible must be interpreted within the framework of the Bible.

Interpretation: in Context

No verse of scripture should be interpreted by itself!

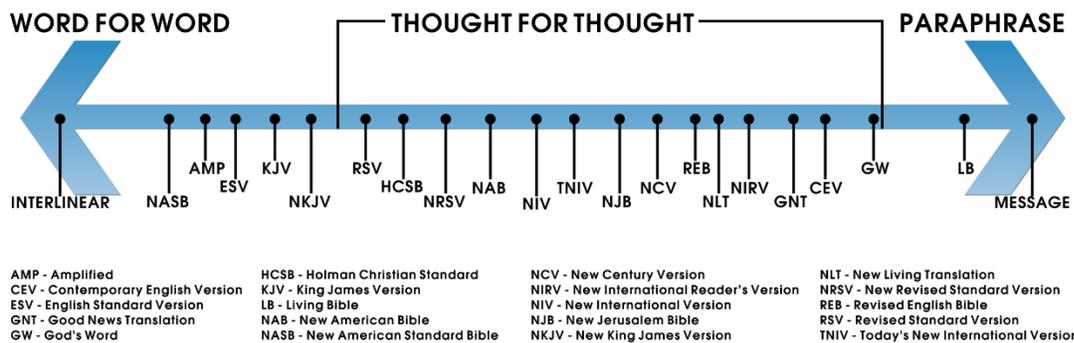
Rule of Context: "A Text, Out of Context, Becomes a Pretext, for a Proof Text !"



Principle #5: Text, Transmission, Translation

- a. Get as close to the autographs as possible. Oldest: Hebrews 7th century BC – Greek AD 125-170
- b. The New Testament has been preserved in more manuscripts than any other ancient work of literature, with over 5,800 complete or fragmented Greek manuscripts catalogued, 10,000 Latin manuscripts and 9,300 manuscripts in various other ancient languages including Syriac, Slavic, Gothic, Ethiopic, Coptic and Armenian.

The Dead Sea Scrolls attest to the accuracy of transmission of the Hebrew texts.



Principle #6:

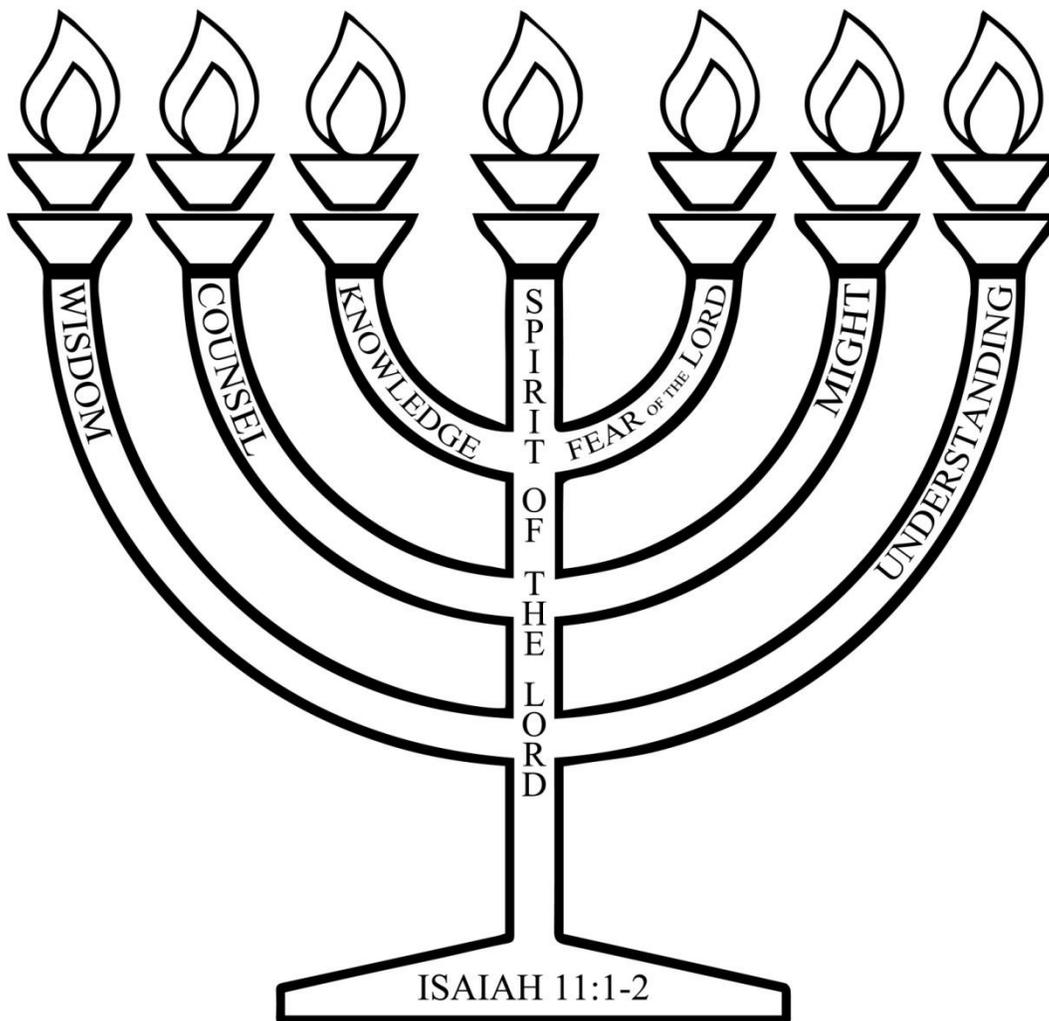
Interpretation and Application

- a. There is ONE interpretation.
- b. There are many applications of THAT interpretation.
- c. When we try to apply everything Jesus said to the Church we run into trouble. Here's why:
- d. But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Matthew 15:24
- e. These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand." Matthew 10:5-7
- f. Who did Jesus come for? Israel.
 - a. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. John 1:11 (came to His own)
 - b. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Acts 1:8 - Starts in Jerusalem
 - c. You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities." Acts 3:25-26
 - d. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. Acts 13:45-46
 - e. Paul went first to the Jews in cities he ministered in: Acts 17:1-4
- g. Whom did Jesus minister to? Israel.
- h. What did Jesus preach? The Gospel of the KINGDOM!
 - i. Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, Mark 1:14
- i. Did Jesus come for the Church? Yes, but not at first.
- j. Jesus came to Israel until they rejected Him:
 - a. "Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation" – because they said, "He has an unclean spirit." Mark 3:28-30; see also Matthew 12:22-24
- k. Jesus turns to the Gentiles:
 - a. And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Mark 16:15
 - b. Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Luke 24:46-48
 - c. Notice it starts in Jerusalem? Israel is not forgotten (see INTERPRETATION).
 - i. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. Romans 1:16
- l. How can we further apply this interpretation?

- a. The separation of Israel and the Church.
 - i. Romans 9-11
 - ii. For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins." Romans 11:25-27

Principle #7: Analogy of Faith: Let Scripture interpret Scripture.

- a. We may rest assured that God did not reveal an important doctrine in a single, ambiguous passage. All essential doctrines are fully and clearly explained - either in the immediate context, or somewhere else in the Bible. (Cross References)
- b. Parable of the Sower: Luke 8:4-8 (9-10); 11-15
- c. Parable of the Wheat and Tares - Matthew 13
- d. Revelation 3:1 (Seven Spirits) is from the seven-fold ministries of the Spirit mentioned in Isaiah 11:2-5.



Principle #8: The Progressive Revelation Principle

The Word of God is to be understood from the Old Testament to the New Testament as an unfolding revelation. God initiated revelation, but He did not reveal His truths all at one time. It was a long and progressive process. Progressive revelation refers to the fact that later Scripture (New Testament) provides a greater or fuller understanding of God's truth than previously revealed Scripture (Old Testament). Later revelation complements and supplements earlier revelation, but does not contradict it.

- a. The Church: Ephesians 3:1-6; Romans 16:25-26.
- b. Daniel's 70th Week OT, more fully revealed in Revelation.
- c. Matthew 13:17, "For truly I say to you, that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it; and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."
- d. Psalms 78:1-4 Give ear, O my people, to my law;
Incline your ears to the words of my mouth.
I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will utter dark sayings of old,
Which we have heard and known,
And our fathers have told us.
We will not hide them from their children,
Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD,
And His strength and His wonderful works that He has done.
- e. Matthew 13:34-35 All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without a parable He did not speak to them, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: "I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world."
- f. John 5:39, You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.
- g. Romans 16:25-26, Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith
- h. 1 Corinthians 2:7-8, But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.
- i. Hebrews 1:1-2, God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;
- j. 1 Peter 1:10-12, Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven – things which angels desire to look into.

Principle #9: Spiritually Discerned

- a. 1 Corinthians 2:14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Principle #10: Literal Interpretation

LITERAL HERMENEUTIC

Literal - Normal - Historical - Grammatical - Plain - Ordinary - Primary - Usual - Common Sense Meaning

Principle #1 - God created language in order to communicate with His creation and authored the Bible to that end.

Principle #2 - When interpreting the words God used to communicate with us, read every word in the same Literal - Normal - Historical - Grammatical - Plain - Ordinary - Primary - Usual - Common Sense meaning it would have in its normal usage (i.e. take each word literally).

Principle #3 - Literal Interpretation means to

- a. **EXEGESIS:** Drawing the meaning out of the text, not
- b. **EISEGESES:** Superimposing a meaning onto the text.

2. **Normal:** Take the normal approach to understanding what words mean, or were intended to mean when originally written. Authors use words to communicate meaning, not to obscure meaning. Do not go beyond what is written...beyond the normal, everyday meaning. (e.g. the four rivers of Gen. 2 represent mind, body, soul, and spirit - this goes beyond the normal meaning of the word river). Take words literally unless there's a reason not to:
3. **Literal:** Doesn't rule out Types - Symbols - Figures of Speech - Genre Distinctions, yet each still has a literal, non-mysterious, understanding behind it:
 - **Types:** A figure, representation, or symbol of something yet to come: an event in the Old Testament that foreshadows another in the New Testament. The correspondence between two historical figures like Adam and Christ (Rom 5:14); the correspondence between the heavenly pattern and its earthly counterpart, e.g., the divine original behind the earthly tent/tabernacle (Acts 7:44; Heb 8:5; 9:24). There are several categories – persons (Adam, Melchizedek), events (flood, brazen serpent), institutions (feasts), places (Jerusalem, Zion), objects (altar of burnt offering, incense), offices (prophet, priest, king).
 - **Symbols:** It is important to distinguish types from symbol and allegory. A symbol is an object or act that stands for something else; usually a visible image which represents a concept: David, recognizing that man is vulnerable to the attack of sin, sees God as a “fortress of defense” (Ps 31:2, 71).
 - **Figures of Speech:** An intentional departure from straight-forward, literal use of language for the purpose of clarity, emphasis, or to convey vivid imagery in the reader's mind.

- **Simile**: A figure of speech that compares things using “like” or “as.” Matthew 10:16 “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.”
- **Metaphor**: A figure of speech that declares a thing **IS** another thing (no like or as): John 6:35 And Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life.”
- **Hyperbole**: A figure of speech of exaggeration or extravagant words. John 21:25 “And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even *the world itself could not contain the books* that would be written.”
- **Irony**: A figure of speech using words to mean the opposite! 1 Kings 18:27 “And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, ‘Cry aloud, *for he is a god*; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened’.”
- **Euphemism**: A figure of speech using vague or mild words in place of words that may be considered too blunt or harsh. Adam *knew* Eve in Genesis 4:1.
- **Genre Distinctions**: Law, History/Narrative, Wisdom, Poetry, Epistles, Prophecy and Apocalyptic Literature.
 - **Law**: This includes the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. The purpose of law is to express God’s sovereign will concerning government, priestly duties, social responsibilities, etc. Knowledge of Hebrew manners and customs of the time, as well as knowledge of the covenants, will complement a reading of this genre. Knowing also that Christ completely fulfilled the Law aids in interpretation and application for the Believer.
 - **History/Narrative**: Stories and epics from the Bible are included in this genre. Almost every book in the Bible contains some history, but Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Acts are predominately history. Knowing that Acts, for example, is a history, and not necessarily a model, helps with Ecclesiology. A narrative is a story told for the purpose of conveying a message through people and their problems and situations. The word “narrative” is preferred over the term “story” because “story” often carries the idea of something being fictional or not based in reality. The Gospels are an example of biographical narratives about Jesus. Other narratives include the books of Ruth, Esther, and Jonah. A reader may find bits of other genres within the Gospels, such as parable (Luke 8:1-15) and discourse (Matthew 24).
 - **Wisdom**: This is the genre of aphorisms/sayings that teach the meaning of life and how to live. Some of the language used in wisdom literature is metaphorical and poetic, and this should be taken into account during analysis. Included are the books of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes.
 - **Poetry**: These include books of rhythmic prose, parallelism, and metaphor, such as Song of Solomon, Lamentations, and Psalms. Since poetry uses figurative language rather than the accurate descriptions of the message, caution should be taken to understand the literal

nature behind the metaphor. With proper understanding, poetry is just as comprehensible as prose.

- **Epistles:** An epistle is a letter, usually in a formal style. There are 21 letters in the New Testament from the Apostles to various churches or individuals. These letters have a style very similar to modern letters, with an opening, a greeting, a body, and a closing. The content of the Epistles involves clarification of prior teaching, rebuke, explanation, correction of false teaching, and a deeper delving into doctrine. The reader would do well to understand the cultural, historical, and social situation of the original recipients in order to get the most out of an analysis of these books.
 - **Prophecy and Apocalyptic Literature:** The Prophetic writings are the Old Testament books of Isaiah through Malachi, and the New Testament book of Revelation. They include predictions of future events, warnings of coming judgment, and an overview of God's plan for Israel. Apocalyptic literature is a specific form of prophecy, largely involving symbols and imagery and predicting disaster and destruction. We find this type of language in Daniel (the beasts of chapter 7), Ezekiel (the scroll of chapter 3), Zechariah (the golden lampstand of chapter 4), and Revelation (the four horsemen of chapter 6). The Prophetic and Apocalyptic books are the ones most often subjected to faulty eisegesis and personal interpretation based on emotion or preconceived bias. However, Amos 3:7 tells us, "Surely the Lord God does nothing, Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets." Therefore, we know that the truth has been told, and it can be known via careful exegesis, a familiarity with the rest of the Bible, and prayerful consideration. Some things will not be made clear to us except in the fullness of time, so it is best not to assume to know everything when it comes to prophetic literature.
4. **Grammatical:** Every word of the Bible is important and though some words will hold more importance than others, all the words and sentences are a part of God's communication to us. (1 Timothy 3:16) Grammatical relationships are vital to sound interpretation because thoughts are expressed in words which stand in relationship to each other to express complete thoughts. Grammatical interpretation observes the impact that grammar plays in any given text. Thus, Bible interpreters must correctly analyze the relationship that words, phrases, or sentences have toward one another. Such an analysis entails the study of the original Biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek, lexicology (meaning of words), morphology (form of words), parts of speech (function of words), and syntax (relationship of words).
 5. **Historical:** Historical interpretation means that we take into account, as much as possible, the historical background of the author and the recipients. The Bible was written to ordinary people, and is understandable to anyone. However, it was written thousands of years ago to different cultures. It is incumbent upon the reader to uncover how the original hearers/readers would have understood the text, including word definitions, figures of speech, geographical location, time period, and culture. This guideline safeguards against inappropriate "eisegesis."

- * We believe that God created language in order to communicate with His creation, and that He gave us the Bible, His written Word, to accomplish that goal. (John 1:1; 14; Hebrews 1:1-2) We believe in using the principles of literally interpreting the Bible in order to understand what God meant to communicate to us. This means assigning to every word the same normal - historical - grammatical - plain - ordinary - primary - usual - common sense meaning it would have in its normal usage; Exegeting (drawing the meaning out of the text), not Eisogeting (superimposing a meaning onto the text). We believe literal interpretation includes the use of Types - Symbols - Figures of Speech - Genre Distinctions, as each has a literal, non-mysterious, understanding behind it. We believe that the meaning of each word of Scripture, in the original languages of Hebrew and Greek, must be determined by its historical and grammatical context, seeking to ascertain the author's original intended meaning, and not enlisting deconstructionism to assign meaning.

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF BIBLE STUDY

1. Always accept the Bible as your only authority.
2. Interpret the Bible literally whenever possible.
3. Obey *all* the truth God has shown you in His Word.
4. Submit your wisdom to God's Wisdom.
5. Let the Bible interpret itself.
6. Let the Bible explain your experience; never vice versa.
7. A Bible passage has only one interpretation.
8. Behind every Bible symbol there is a literal reality.
9. Symbols and metaphors are used only to illuminate existing Bible truth.
10. Bible study should always lead us back to the Gospel:

1. **Jesus Christ is the Son of God. (John 10:36-38)**
2. **He shed His blood and died on the cross to take away our sins. (Romans 3:25)**
3. **We cannot make up for the bad we have done by being good. (Ephesians 2:8-10)**
4. **We can have the righteousness (goodness) of Jesus Christ given to us. (Romans 5:1)**
5. **Agree with God that you are sinful (repent) and, by faith, receive God's forgiveness! (Acts 17:30, Romans 10:9-10)**

SALVATION

- To be saved you must be born again. (John 3:7)
- The reason is because we're separated from God because of sin. (Romans 3:23)
- God said that the sin leads to death, and since all have sinned, all die. (Romans 6:23)
- Thankfully, Christ died for the sins of the world. (John 3:16; 1 John 2:2)
- The only requirement for salvation is to believe in Jesus! (see #5 - Acts 16:30-31; Romans 10:13)