

Hermeneutics 101:

What Are the Steps Needed to Interpret the Bible?

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Tim 2:15)

ILLUS: Picking up a letter and reading it and interpreting directly to oneself.

- Not looking to see who wrote the letter.
- Not looking to see who the letter was written to.
- Not looking at the date of the letter.
- Not paying attention to details in the letter, such as the meaning of house (whose house?).

STEP #1: _____: What Does the Text Actually ____?

A. Read the _____

- 1) The Entire Book
- 2) The Entire Chapter

B. Answer Basic _____

- 1) Who wrote it?
- 2) To whom was it written?
- 3) When was it written?
- 4) Why was it written?

C. Bridge the Necessary _____

- 1) _____ **Gap:** The Bible was written in Hebrew and Aramaic (OT) and Greek, not English.
 - Look up words in a Strong's Concordance at a minimum to find the actual words used.
 - Consult textual commentaries or grammars to study the way the words are used together.
- 2) _____ **Gap:** This is necessary to understand how the recipients would view the writing, rather than imposing our present worldview on the text. (Warning: Don't be tempted to explain away hard passages as "cultural.") Jewish, Greek, and Roman cultures are involved in the Bible.
 - Consult Bible Handbooks, Bible archeology and culture references.
- 3) _____ **Gap:** Locations, paths, and terrain are all part of the Bible narrative. The details are there for a reason, and give us a more complete account of details.
 - Consult Bible atlases and Bible handbooks.

- 4) _____ **Gap:** Understanding the historical setting of events is often helpful in accurately understanding the Bible text, allowing people and events to be put in their historical context.

- Bible dictionaries, handbooks, and encyclopedias can help.

STEP #2: _____: What Does the Text _____?

A. Interpret the Bible _____

Understand it in its normal, natural sense. Do not allegorize or spiritualize. Approach the text to mean what it says. Figures of speech and symbols are present in the Bible, and these are apparent in the text.

B. Interpret the Bible _____

Interpret the text in its historical context. What did it mean to those to whom it was written?

C. Interpret the Bible _____

Interpret it using the basic rules of grammar for the language in which it was written. Use normal language rules, identifying subjects, objects, verbs, and other parts of speech. Passages will often times interpret themselves when rightly viewed in their grammatical setting.

D. Interpret the Bible _____

It is clear that the Bible was given over time. People earlier did not know what was in the NT or even later books of the OT. Those in Jesus' time did not have the Epistles. We can and should use the later books to better understand the former books. However, we should not "read into" the text our understanding (from having the entire Bible) into what they would have understood without the entire Bible.

E. Interpret the Bible _____

Interpret it in the larger context of the Bible. Let the Bible interpret the Bible. It will not contradict itself. Arriving at a conclusion that contradicts other clear passages of the Bible indicates that we have come to a wrong conclusion.

STEP #3: _____: What Does the Text Mean to _____?