

GENERAL LAWS OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION
PART 2-THE FOUNDATIONAL RULES
THE BIBLE MUST BE INTERPRETED GRAMMATICALLY!

Introduction

We began last week by looking at **THE SUPREME RULE OF BIBLE INTERPRETATION**– **“INTERPRET SCRIPTURE WITH SCRIPTURE.”** Scripture is its own best interpreter! A passage of the Bible should be interpreted by comparing it with other parts of the Bible.

Now let’s look at **THE FOUNDATIONAL RULES OF BIBLE INTERPRETATION.**

Following the **SUPREME RULE** are two **ESSENTIAL RULES** which must be consistently observed in all Bible interpretation.

THE BIBLE MUST BE INTERPRETED GRAMMATICALLY!
THE BIBLE MUST BE INTERPRETED HISTORICALLY!

THE BIBLE MUST BE INTERPRETED GRAMMATICALLY!

By this we mean that **SCRIPTURE** is to be **INTERPRETED** according to the **USUAL MEANING OF ITS WORDS** and the **NORMAL RULES OF GRAMMAR.**

There is no more **BASIC PRINCIPLE OF INTERPRETATION** than this –the violation of which can only result in literary anarchy.

In this regard, there are three “**LAWS**” which must be applied.

I. THE LAW OF “DIRECT STATEMENT.”

A. The Law Stated.

Every passage of **SCRIPTURE** is to be understood **LITERALLY** and taken to mean exactly what it says unless it is **PATENTLY OBVIOUS** from its **IMMEDIATE CONTEXT** or **EMPLOYMENT OF OBVIOUS FIGURES OF SPEECH** that it bears another meaning. (*i.e. If the plain sense makes common sense, seek no other sense or it will all become nonsense.*)

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B. Examples Of This Law.

1. Israel Is Israel.

There is absolutely no warrant for making **ISRAEL** of the **Old Testament** to be the **CHURCH** of the **New Testament.**

2. Canaan Is Canaan.

Despite the popularity of a number of hymns, the **Believer** is not bound for the **“Promised Land”** or **“Canaan’s happy shore.”** **Heaven** is the final destination of the **Child of God!**

Canaan always refers to the literal land forming part of the **STATE OF ISRAEL.** According to **Zephaniah 2:5**, *Canaan* (but certainly not *Heaven*) will face terrible desolations in the **DAY OF THE LORD.**

Even when making a spiritual *application* (not *interpretation*) of **ISRAEL’S** crossing over *Jordan* into *Canaan*, the parallel is not *Heaven.* Rather, *Canaan* would represent the *place of victory, blessing and rest* (i.e. the *abundant life*) that the **victorious Believer** enjoys **now** in **CHRIST.** (*Heb. 3:11-4:11*)

3. Zion Is Zion.

Zion is the hill upon which *Jerusalem* is built. (*2 Samuel 5:7*)

It is often used interchangeably with **“Jerusalem.”** (*Psalms 147:12*)

It is used in a heavenly sense with the *New Jerusalem.* (*Hebrews 12:22*)

However, it is **not** the *Church* and it is **not** *Heaven!*

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4. **One Thousand Is One Thousand.**

Although numbers may have symbolic meaning, unless this is clearly evident all numbers must be taken at their face value.

In *Revelation 20:2-5*, the “... *thousand years...*” means a **literal 1000 years**, not some indefinite period of time or eternity.

We should take every word in its **primary, ordinary, usual meaning** unless the **facts of the CONTEXT** indicate clearly otherwise.

II. **THE LAW OF CONTEXT.**

A. **The Law Of CONTEXT Stated.**

Every passage of SCRIPTURE must be studied in the light of its CONTEXT.

Any **TEXT** taken from its **CONTEXT** becomes a **PRETEXT**. In studying the **CONTEXT** of a passage of Scripture it is necessary to consider the following:

1. **Consider The IMMEDIATE CONTEXT.**

That is, the CHAPTER in which the passage is located.

Every verse in the Bible has something which either precedes it and/or follows it. This is the **IMMEDIATE CONTEXT** and it is of the utmost importance when properly interpreting a **TEXT**.

An oft-repeated story is told of a discouraged businessman who finally turned to the Bible for guidance.

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He randomly opened the Book and placed his finger on Matthew 27:5– “And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.”

Thinking this “advice” to be not very helpful, he tried again, this time landing on Luke 10:37 “...Go, and do thou likewise.”

Becoming frustrated, the man tried once more. This time he turned to John 13:27– “...That thou doest, do quickly.”

We find that humorous but it illustrates the serious error of taking a verse completely out of its **CONTEXT** and ending up with the wrong message or doctrine.

That is one of the “*methods*” employed by the cults.

2. **Consider The SECONDARY CONTEXT.**

That is, the Book in which the passage is located.

Each Book in the Word of God has at least **one** major theme. This theme should be kept in mind when interpreting a particular text.

For Example:

1 Corinthians deals with Church order.

Galatians deals with correcting the *Judaizers* (*i.e. Those wanting to mix law with grace.*)

1 Timothy is a Pastoral epistle.

Deuteronomy is the second giving of the Law

Malachi is the preaching of a *post-exilic prophet*.

Ecclesiastes deals with a search for the meaning of life from a human standpoint.

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PART 2-THE FOUNDATIONAL RULES
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3. **Consider The BROAD CONTEXT.**
That is, the Testament in which the passage is located.

Consideration of the text's location within the whole Bible may bring to bear **historical, dispensational, and prophetic factors.**

4. **Consider The TOPICAL CONTEXT.**
That is, the parallel passages in other sections of the Bible.

A text dealing with a particular subject should also be compared with other Bible passages dealing with the same theme. **This may be done through:**

- a. **Word cross-referencing**
(by use of a *Concordance*)
- b. **Subject cross-referencing**
(by use of a *Topical Index*)

5. **Consider The DOCTRINAL CONTEXT.**
That is, the relative DOCTRINAL passages of the WORD OF GOD.

Texts which are **DOCTRINAL** in nature should never be isolated from other passages which deal with the same teaching. It is also important to remember that no fundamental doctrine of the Bible rests upon one or two "*proof texts*," rather, they are based upon many passages (some central and some peripheral) which fit together to make a harmonious whole.

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- B. **Examples Of The Law Of CONTEXT.**

1. Jehovah's Witnesses will take **Job 7:9** to prove their doctrine of annihilation. In so doing, they have wrested this verse from:
Its IMMEDIATE CONTEXT—Which relates Job's experience from an earthly perspective—see **verses 10 and 21.**

Its SECONDARY CONTEXT—Because Job believed in a life after death—see **14:12-15; 19:25-27.**

Its BROAD CONTEXT—Because Old Testament saints who died did not enter into the presence of the Lord until after the resurrection of Christ—see **Ephesians 4:8-10.**

Its DOCTRINAL CONTEXT—Because the Bible teaches a conscious life after death. **Luke 16:19-28.**