

BIBLIOLOGY (72)

QUESTION #16 - What are the interpretive principles that must be applied if we are to ascertain a true meaning of a passage?

Interpretive #1 - We must keep in mind the primary purpose of the Bible.

The primary purpose of the Bible **is not** to emotionally move the heart of man, the primary purpose **is** to instructively reveal the absolute truth about God.

God primarily gave His written word to reveal specific truths that pertain to Him and His work. Certainly there will be much that will move or should move man's heart, but the primary objective of God giving His written word was that sinful, finite man may know truth about an Infinite, Holy God.

If we keep this interpretive principle in mind, we will be much less likely to launch off into some legitimate or illegitimate interpretation and application of a text and will be careful to understand precisely what God is saying and why He is saying it.

Interpretive Principle #2 - We must keep in mind that each Book of the Bible makes some type of contribution to the whole.

The sixty six books of the Bible reveals **everything** God wants man to know about Him. Each book then is essential to a complete understanding of God. Each book is vital and each contains certain truths that other books do not contain. The serious student of God's word will give diligent study to the whole Bible and then give serious study to each book so that he might determine the particular significance of each book in God's revelation. Each book has its own particular purpose in and of itself and each book has its own particular purpose as it relates to the whole Bible. The wise interpreter studies to determine these things.

In order to properly interpret and apply any passage, it is imperative that we identify the person or persons to whom the passage was written. One of the major interpretive mistakes is to assume the passage was primarily written to us, when in fact it wasn't. Dr. Chafer made a profound point on this when he said: "All Scripture" is **for** the Christian in the sense that it is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness (II Tim. 3:16); but not all Scripture is **about** him." (Vol. p.116) Until we actually identify the specific recipients of a particular passage, we cannot and will not be able to make a proper application to our own lives. Some passages are specifically aimed at the nation Israel. Some are aimed at angels. Some are aimed at lost Gentiles. Some are aimed at N.T. believers. We must know the specific audience or intent or we will not ever make a proper application to our own lives.

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For example, the book of Matthew is a book specifically designed to present Jesus Christ as King of the Jews, who came specifically to the Jews to present the Kingdom and Himself to Israel. The book opens with Christ's Kingly lineage, clearly establishing Him as having Davidic royalty demanded of the Messiah (Matt. 1ff.). The entire book is about Jesus Christ presenting Himself and Kingdom to Israel, both messages of which Israel rejected. The message of Matthew is not "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved," it is "repent, the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." At the end of Matthew 23, Christ informs Israel that God's program will temporarily depart Israel until the entire nation rejoices over Christ's return (Matt. 23 :37-39). Shortly after Christ informed the nation that this would happen, the disciples were wondering when Christ would return and what the signs would be when He would come back and all of Israel would rejoice (Matt. 24:1-3). Christ gives several signs that will immediately precede Him coming as King of Israel to establish His Kingdom (Matt. 24:4-28). We learn from Matt. 24:29, that these are the signs that occur during the Tribulation period. It is amazing that several well meaning believers have never stopped to ask, "To whom was this text given?" Many automatically assume that this is a passage written to Christians that sets forth signs of the rapture. Neither the rapture, nor the N.T. Christian is any where in this passage and if a N.T. believer is looking for these signs, he is looking for the wrong things.

The student of the Bible is commanded to "study" to "rightly divide" God's word. In order to give an accurate interpretation of any passage, we must answer the basic question- "to whom was this passage originally written?"

Interpretive Principle #4 - We must keep in mind that each passage was written in a specific context.

A passage must be interpreted according to its context. It has been well said that "a text without a context is nothing but a pretext." In other words, any passage not interpreted in light of its context is done so out of false motives and false reasons. Cults are very skilled at taking verses out of context in order to promote their false interpretations. A good example is the 144,000 found in Revelation 7:4.

However, God's people must be very careful not to do the same kind of thing. For example, in the context we have just examined from Matthew, there are two verses which have often times been used to support the rapture of the Church (Matt. 24:40-41). If, however, we examine the context which promotes an endurance until the end (Matt. 24:13) and the preservation of Noah (Matt. 24:37-39), we must conclude that when these events happen the people who are right with God will be left and not taken. This text, in its context, is aimed at the nation Israel, and is designed to encourage her to stay faithful to God during the Tribulation (Matt. 24:29). After the Tribulation, Jesus Christ will return and remove the godless and will leave behind Israel so that she might enter her kingdom.

Those who disregard context, are those who neglect a true interpretation of the passage. Every passage must be interpreted in its context.