

For It Is Written

Simple Steps Every Believer Can Learn
To Find Truth, Debunk False Doctrine, And Outsmart The Heretic

By Christy Anderson

For It Is Written: Simple Steps Every Believer Can Learn To Find Truth, Debunk False Doctrine,
And Outsmart The Heretic

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May The Lord be glorified in this work.

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“An honest, but mistaken man, once shown the truth,
either ceases to be mistaken or ceases to be honest.”
– Jewish Proverb

Introduction

Introduction

When it comes to interpreting the Bible, most people dismiss their own abilities and forget that they are called by Yahweh to look “up” and not “out” for the answers to life’s questions, problems and difficulties. While many believers are sincere and have good intentions, the system of “church” itself is simply not set up to empower them to understand the rules of interpretation nor study the Scriptures in depth for themselves in order to verify the teachings they receive. But even for those who are truly motivated to learn, most resources available for the average believer are simply “prescriptive,” i.e. they only focus on teaching one man’s understanding of their church’s doctrine. Instead, this book is about teaching believers the “process,” i.e. how to apply the same “hermeneutic” or rules to the process of interpretation from Genesis to Revelation so that the believer is able to develop their individual knowledge of God and grow in their relationship with the Creator as a self studied and approved disciple of the Master, “accurately handling the Word of Truth,” (2 Timothy 2:15).

Most books available today that teach some of the foundational principles of interpretation, such as seminary level hermeneutics textbooks, are not exactly appealing or readable for the average believer. However, in this book I will, with the Lord’s help, teach you the basic principles of hermeneutics (i.e. the study and discipline that deals with principles of interpretation)¹ in a way that anyone can understand and apply. We will tackle all the major critical interpretive elements, but without bogging down in unnecessary ancillary issues so that our approach remains easy to grasp and understandable for everyone. I will also try to footnote the definitions of any difficult or questionable words as well as provide Scripture references throughout in order to make the learning process as simple as possible for the reader.

For some, you may desire to go further with your study of hermeneutics and in that case I would recommend Tim Hegg’s teachings listed in the Bibliography.

Throughout this study I hope to empower you to understand the reality that “exegesis” (or the critical explanation of a text considering its historic and cultural background and context) is not just a fancy word designed for the “professionals,” but is something that you yourself can and MUST engage in. And in fact, the process itself is something you already engage in everyday without realizing it when you communicate and “interpret” words and sentences etc. in modern 21st Century American English. The difference is we are simply going to take those “interpretive skills” and apply them to the biblical text.

After completing this study, you will have a solid understanding of the “process” involved in properly dividing the Word of God, and more importantly today, you will begin to develop the tools and education necessary to apply the **same** exegesis or interpretive process to the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation such that you can begin to hear clearly and with confidence the true Voice of our Master, and thus, be able to understand and apply the Scriptures in the manner God intended for your life.

¹ Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moises Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, (Michigan: Zondervan, 2007), 17.

In the end, the only valid reason for studying hermeneutics in the first place is to find the true meaning of the words of Scripture in order that we may know with certainty we have understood the heart of God, expressing itself in loving instructions to us in the text, so that we can apply the specific directions **He** has given us to our lives today. While we cannot walk in something we do not yet know; so also we cannot truly know the things of our Lord until we learn how to find the right path to walk. Ultimately, our goal is to know and understand the truth in order to walk in that truth, and in so doing, proclaim the Gospel of Messiah through every area and aspect of our lives today.

Respected Bible scholar and teacher Tim Hegg in his audio teaching from his book *Interpreting the Bible: An Introduction to Heremneutics*,² said with regard to the search for biblical meaning that,

“Meaning comes through *study*, proper *application* comes through the *gift of the Spirit*.”

Of all that you will learn in this book, this statement is the most important point students of the Bible need to grasp. Hegg goes on to explain that,

“words do not have meaning; meaning has words.”

With these two ice-breaking ideas in mind let’s begin our study. But remember, until we can agree on and understand the proper meaning of the text, we will never be able to make proper application. Thankfully for us God’s Word “is clothed in common language that anyone can understand.”³ Consequently, the only difference between interpreting 21st Century modern American English and the Bible is the context in which “exegesis” is applied. Exegesis itself is really just a fancy word for interpretation and it “implies that the explanation of the text has involved careful, detailed analysis.”⁴ Teaching you how to do careful, detailed analysis is what this book is all about. So let’s get started.

² Tim Hegg, *Interpreting the Bible: An Introduction to Heremneutics*, (Washington: TorahResource.com, 2000), 2-3 (audio). See Tim Hegg’s webstore for this teaching at www.torahresource.com.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moises Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Heremneutics: The Search for Meaning*, (Michigan: Zondervan, 2007), 21.

Chapter One:
Interpreting The Bible and The Many
Aspects of Meaning

I. Chapter One: Interpreting The Bible and The Many Aspects of Meaning

We often run into pitfalls when it comes to discovering meaning because most of us have a hard time thinking outside of our own boxes, cultures, and times that we live in today. When we read a daily newspaper we do not have a hard time understanding the context and words used, nor do we struggle to interpret the different sections from the headlines to the funnies, because we already know how to apply a proper hermeneutic to the various texts we are reading.

For example, we know how to distinguish the different genres among different sections of the paper and we interpret the words used in each accordingly. In other words, we do not read and interpret the political cartoons in the same way we read the front news headline, nor do we have trouble interpreting the difference in language and idioms used in the sports section as opposed to the short hand used in the want ads.

The same system of hermeneutics that we use to read the newspaper is the same system we will use to read the Bible, the only difference is that we will have to also account for differences in time and culture. While this will at times be challenging, it is not impossible. However, the point is that you, the reader, already understand the system of interpretation we call hermeneutics. The information in this book will simply teach you what the principles are that you are already using, and how to apply them successfully in order to interpret the Scriptures.

To begin we will discuss the concept of “meaning” itself. What do we mean when we say “meaning?” Believe it or not there are several aspects to the term meaning. To understand what someone really means when they say “meaning” is an important skill to learn, particularly when it comes to finding the meaning and significance of a given text.

Sadly, history has produced some frightening ideas about how to find meaning. For example, the Gnostics opted to make every word have a “deeper” mystical meaning that only some “elite” could discover. Many of the church fathers, on the other hand, fell into a habit of “hyper-allegory” in which they began interpreting everything according to its supposed allegorical meaning. Such nonsense resulted in a total distortion of the real Gospel message that has only been partially recovered during the period of the Reformation. As history progressed Christianity became just as much a manmade religious system as that which the Messiah criticized the Pharisees for, and it is only in our day that the Lord is restoring a sense of sanity to the interpretive process and allowing His children to experience a full Restoration of the Gospel of Messiah to its appropriate historical and biblical context.

As we look at the concept of meaning in this first lesson we will consider several of its different aspects including its referent, its sense, its intention, and its significance. While these different aspects are somewhat arbitrary and overlapping, they will help us fully analyze the different ways people today use the term “meaning” and it will lay the groundwork that will help us begin to clearly distinguish the important differences between a text’s meaning and its proper application.

A. Meaning as a Referent

The first and most important step to discover the meaning of a biblical text is to make sure we find and understand the REFERENT. The problem is that it is possible to know the meaning of the words and even understand every single individual word used in a sentence and still not have a clue

about what is being said. For example, consider the following line from Shakespeare's *Othello*. In this scene the duke of Venice and some senators are discussing recent news regarding a Turkish fleet, but there is considerable discrepancy regarding the number of galleys involved.⁵ The duke then says:

I do not so secure me in the error,

But the main article I do approve

In fearful sense. (1.3.10-12)⁶

“What may baffle us about a passage such as this one is that all the words are familiar to us—indeed, even the meanings of those words approximate modern usage—yet the total meaning seems to escape us. Unless we are familiar with Shakespearean literature, it may take us a while to interpret this statement correctly; in modern prose it would mean, “The fact that there is a discrepancy in the accounts gives me no sense of security; it is with alarm that I must give credence to the main point of the story.”⁷ If you are still scratching your head, do not worry; in my opinion Shakespeare is much harder to interpret than the Bible!

What we learn from this example is simply this, that to understand **meaning with regard to referent is to understand the object, event or process in the world that a word or a whole expression is directed.**⁸

A biblical example of this process can be seen in the case of the Ethiopian in Acts 8:34 who sought to understand the **referent** of the passage in Isaiah 53 when he asks, “**Who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?**” Clearly, the Ethiopian is trying to determine the referent of the passage.

Another example might include finding the referent when Yeshua states in John 6:53 that His disciples must “eat His flesh and drink His blood.” If we were reading the book of John for the first time having no prior knowledge of the “Last Supper” then we would have to do more work to find the ultimate referent to understand what Yeshua was referring to with regard to eating His flesh and drinking His blood. At the time Yeshua first spoke these words, the “Last Supper” itself had not occurred yet. Therefore, in our search for the referent in this case both the original audience and those of us reading the text today must search for the referent based on the greater context of the situation and the Lord’s teachings as a whole. For us, the “Bread of Life Discourse” that follows the feeding of the 5,000 earlier in chapter six, would inform us as to the specific referent Yeshua intended, and this further enlightens us regarding the nature and context of the “Last Supper.”

⁵ Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moises Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, (Michigan: Zondervan, 2007), 20.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 35.

Key Point: The first step in our search for meaning is to ensure that we find and understand the original referent of the passage, i.e. what is the passage referring to?

B. Meaning as Sense

Another aspect we must consider with regard to meaning is the **sense**. “Meaning as the *referent* tells what is being spoken about, but meaning as *sense* tells **what is being said about the referent.**”⁹ In other words, once we know who is being talked about we can move toward discovering what the author is saying about that subject or object.

Here is where we have to take into consideration more than just the base meaning of terms. While the meaning of terms is necessary to get the sense of the passage, we also have to consider the presuppositions of the author and how the author is putting the text together to form a message that he wishes to convey. Context is critical here, because it will show how the author’s choices of words and phrases function within a given context to convey his message. However, the problem with finding **sense** is that our predispositions to certain contemporary “church doctrines,” our own cultural blinders, and our personal presuppositions¹⁰ and pre-understandings will have a tendency to cloud our judgment if we are not careful.

This is in part due to the fact that most people upon hearing something new or outside their own spiritual box or grid will often do one of two things. Either they will dismiss or reject the idea outright, or they will distort the evidence to make it fit their own spiritual box. In the first case, when the meaning of a text challenges our previously held assumptions, what most often happens is that our flesh would rather not have to change or ever admit that we might have been wrong in our understanding. In these situations some people will immediately reject anything that even appears to contradict or fall outside their spiritual box. Their external response appears to scream, “my mind is made up, don’t bother them with the facts.”

Others react by choosing the second option and simply adjust and manipulate the meaning until they can force it to fit into their spiritual box. Sadly, most do not realize this is what they are doing, but when you analyze some of the interpretations (and explanations for their interpretations) on certain texts, it becomes quickly evident that they have not applied a consistent hermeneutic (i.e. they have not applied consistent principles of interpretation) to those texts. In other words they have not applied the basic rules of language interpretation to those texts in the same way they do in other texts where they actually find the authentic meaning. In many cases, for example, the referent is manipulated, or the text is “limited” unnecessarily, or the semantic range of words is manipulated in order to justify their change of the meaning. We will get into these details in greater depth later in the book. But suffice it to say, only when we apply the same rules of language to ALL aspects of the text can we confidently claim that we have found the true meaning of the text.

⁹ Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moises Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, (Michigan: Zondervan, 2007), 36-37.

¹⁰ A presupposition requires something as a prior condition, i.e. to make something necessary if a particular thing is to be shown to be true or false. The sentence, “Fred loves his daughter” presupposes Fred has a daughter. It is also defined as assuming something in advance, i.e. to believe that a particular thing is true before there is any proof of it, for example, the tendency to presuppose that everybody will understand English. Encarta Dictionary: English (North America) from WORD Research function.