

Principles Of Bible Interpretation

By John Durr

God Is Love

The Bible contains history, laws, instruction and prophecy. Much of the history and prophecy of the Bible is both graphic and violent. It is important to always remember that **“God is love.”** (1 John 4:8) It is sometimes hard to see God's love in events in the Bible. We must remember to look at the bigger picture. A loving father disciplines his children; he also protects them. As our loving Father, God disciplines us and protects us. Jesus states: “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.” (Revelation 3:19)

In order to protect us, God must sometimes destroy those who seek to destroy us. God also brings judgment on people and nations because of His love. His judgment is intended as an example so that others might repent and be saved.

God Doesn't Change

The God of the Old Testament is the same God of the New Testament; He hasn't changed. God states: “For I am the LORD, I change not;” (Malachi 3:6). Since God does not change, He will not contradict Himself. Therefore, the Bible will not contradict itself.

The prophet Isaiah writes: “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.” (Isaiah 40:8) The psalmist writes: “Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.” (Psalm 119:160) The Apostle Peter writes: “But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.” (1 Peter 1:25) And in the book of Revelation, Jesus states: “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.” (Revelation 22:13)

Use The Whole Bible

The Apostle Paul instructs us: “And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto 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 perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Timothy 3:15-17) Paul was a scholar of the Old Testament and he frequently quotes it. He is telling us to use the all the Bible for our “ instruction in righteousness.”

Jesus used all the scripture to teach His disciples about Himself. Luke writes: “Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.” (Luke 24:25-27)

Further, the Bible was written in such a way that it must be studied if you want to know the truth. You don't need to be a scholar because the author will lead you through His Holy Spirit but you must be willing to search and study. The prophet Isaiah writes: “Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little” (Isaiah 28:9-10). Bible study requires searching the scriptures and building one

text upon another. No text in an Island; every text and every textual interpretation must be in harmony with the rest of scripture. Jesus said: "by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established." (Matthew 18:16; see also 2 Corinthians 13:1) This equally applies to God's word; by two or three verses shall a doctrine be established.

Context

The Bible was written over thousands of years and was finished approximately 1,900 years ago. When studying and interpreting the Bible we must take into consideration the context. During the historical period in which the Bible was written the customs were much different than today. When appropriate, it is important to look at texts in their historical context.

When reading we can ask ourselves who, what why, when and where. Asking these questions will help us keep what we are reading in proper prospective and in proper context.

The Bible contains history, laws, instruction and prophecy. The history and laws are usually literal but the instruction and prophecy can be either literal or allegorical. An allegory is a symbolic fictional expression. God uses allegory in parables and in dreams and visions. Allegory is used to illustrate a point. The point being illustrated is to be taken literally but the fictional expression used to illustrate the point is not. Not all dreams and visions are allegorical; some are literal.

The parables and allegorical dreams and visions in the Bible are usually obvious. When we read these parable, we must remember that the illustrations used were significant to the people at the time they were written. Also, when prophets describe dreams concerning the last-days, we must consider the possibility that they saw technological advances but had difficulty describing them. Their language had no words for the technology of today. For this reason, sometimes it is difficult to tell whether a prophecy is literal or allegorical.

Concerning the source of Bible prophecy, the Apostle Peter wrote: "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." (2 Peter 1:19-21)

Since prophetic dreams and visions are from God, only God can interpret them. Therefore, the guidance of the Holy Spirit is essential in interpreting not only Bible prophecy but all scripture. Because we need the Holy Spirit to guide us into truth, prayer is probably the most important element in interpreting the Bible.

Intent

What is your intent in studying the Bible, the word of God? The Lord says: "And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." (Jeremiah 29:13) If you are searching for God and for truth, you will find it! If you are reading or studying for some other reason, it is quite possible you won't find truth. The Apostle Paul writes: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Corinthians 2:14)

Prayer

Concerning the Holy Spirit, Jesus instructed His disciples: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to

your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.... But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:" (John 14:26 and 15:26) In John 16:13, Jesus says: "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come."

Jesus will send the Holy Spirit to guide you into all truth and to give you understanding. All you have to do is ask. Jesus made the following promise to His disciple which applies to us as well: "And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Luke 11:9-13)

The following is an example of a prayer that you might say: *Holy, loving and merciful Father, I come to You in faith that You will fulfill your promise in me. You promised to send Your Holy Spirit if I asked. I ask that You send Your Holy Spirit to guide me into all truth and I thank You for hearing and answering my prayer. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.*

Word Studies

The Bible is perfect in its original language. English is not the original language of the Bible. The Bible was written in Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek. Generally, the Old Testament was written in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek. The King James Version of the Bible is the most accurate English translation. It can sometimes be hard to understand but the more you read it, the easier it is to understand. The modern English versions may be easier to understand but their translations are far less accurate. They are less accurate because they have been edited by their translators. Thousands of words have been removed. You certainly can't understand something that isn't there. For this reason I highly recommend the King James Bible. All you need is a dictionary to look up words you don't understand. None the less, you can get all the basic teachings in the modern versions. But some of the advanced teachings you will not find.

When a person gets into advanced studies, a Hebrew and Greek dictionary are very helpful. Within Hebrew and Greek are words for which English has no direct equivalent. Further, Hebrew and Greek words can have different meanings depending on the context in which they are used. Therefore, it is often possible to gain additional insight into what God is saying by looking at the original language and using a Hebrew or Greek dictionary.

God is an awesome and dynamic communicator. His words are alive and multidimensional. You can study them over and over and continue to get deeper and deeper understanding. Let the author of the word guide you through His Holy Spirit. He will not fail you nor disappoint you!