

Chapter 1 : The Eight Rules of Bible Interpretation

Only the believer's union with Christ gives him possession of Christ's Spirit, and enables him properly to interpret Scripture. This is only to say that he who inspired the Bible can best explain its meaning. Let us grant at once that there is a wisdom higher than the wisdom of this world, a.

This study is never finished; each age must in its own way newly seek to understand the sacred books. In the history of interpretation the rise of the historical-critical method opened a new era. With it, new possibilities for understanding the biblical word in its originality opened up. Just as with all human endeavor, though, so also this method contained hidden dangers along with its positive possibilities. The search for the original can lead to putting the word back into the past completely so that it is no longer taken in its actuality. It can result that only the human dimension of the word appears as real, while the genuine author, God, is removed from the reach of a method which was established for understanding human reality. The application of a "profane" method to the Bible necessarily led to discussion. Everything that helps us better to understand the truth and to appropriate its representations is helpful and worthwhile for theology. It is in this sense that we must seek how to use this method in theological research. Everything that shrinks our horizon and hinders us from seeing and hearing beyond that which is merely human must be opened up. Thus the emergence of the historical-critical method set in motion at the same time a struggle over its scope and its proper configuration which is by no means finished as yet. In this struggle the teaching office of the Catholic Church has taken up positions several times. At a time when liberalism was extremely sure of itself and much too intrusively dogmatic, Leo XIII was forced to express himself in a rather critical way, even though he did not exclude that which was positive from the new possibilities. It provided us with a synthesis, which substantially remains, between the lasting insights of patristic theology and the new methodological understanding of the moderns. In the meantime, this methodological spectrum of exegetical work has broadened in a way which could not have been envisioned 30 years ago. New methods and new approaches have appeared, from structuralism to materialistic, psychoanalytic and liberation exegesis. On the other hand, there are also new attempts to recover patristic exegesis and to include renewed forms of a spiritual interpretation of Scripture. Thus the Pontifical Biblical Commission took as its task an attempt to take the bearings of Catholic exegesis in the present situation years after "Providentissimus Deus" and 50 years after "Divino Afflante Spiritu. Thus the present document was established. It contains a well-grounded overview of the panorama of present-day methods and in this way offers to the inquirer an orientation to the possibilities and limits of these approaches. The biblical word comes from a real past. I believe that this document is very helpful for the important questions about the right way of understanding Holy Scripture and that it also helps us to go further. It takes up the paths of the encyclicals of and and advances them in a fruitful way. I would like to thank the members of the biblical commission for the patient and frequently laborious struggle in which this text grew little by little. I hope that the document will have a wide circulation so that it becomes a genuine contribution to the search for a deeper assimilation of the word of God in holy Scripture. Rome, on the feast of St. Matthew the evangelist Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger

Introduction The interpretation of biblical texts continues in our own day to be a matter of lively interest and significant debate. In recent years the discussions involved have taken on some new dimensions. Granted the fundamental importance of the Bible for Christian faith, for the life of the church and for relations between Christians and the faithful of other religions, the Pontifical Biblical Commission has been asked to make a statement on this subject. The State of the Question Today The problem of the interpretation of the Bible is hardly a modern phenomenon, even if at times that is what some would have us believe. The Bible itself bears witness that its interpretation can be a difficult matter. Alongside texts that are perfectly clear, it contains passages of some obscurity. When reading certain prophecies of Jeremiah, Daniel pondered at length over their meaning Dn. According to the Acts of the Apostles, an Ethiopian of the first century found himself in the same situation with respect to a passage from the Book of Isaiah Is. The Second Letter of Peter insists that "no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of private interpretation" 2 Pt. The problem is therefore quite old. But it has been accentuated with the passage of time. Furthermore, because of the progress made in the human sciences,

questions of interpretation have become more complex in modern times. Scientific methods have been adopted for the study of the texts of the ancient world. To what extent can these methods be considered appropriate for the interpretation of holy Scripture? For a long period the church in her pastoral prudence showed herself very reticent in responding to this question, for often the methods, despite their positive elements, have shown themselves to be wedded to positions hostile to the Christian faith. But a more positive attitude has also evolved, signaled by a whole series of pontifical documents, ranging from the encyclical "Providentissimus Deus" of Leo XIII Nov. That this more constructive attitude has borne fruit cannot be denied. Biblical studies have made great progress in the Catholic Church, and the academic value of these studies has been acknowledged more and more in the scholarly world and among the faithful. This has greatly smoothed the path of ecumenical dialogue. Interest in the Bible has grown among Catholics, with resultant progress in the Christian life. All those who have acquired a solid formation in this area consider it quite impossible to return to a pre-critical level of interpretation, a level which they now rightly judge to be quite inadequate. To some extent, this has come about in the scholarly world itself through the rise of alternative methods and approaches. But it has also arisen through the criticisms of many members of the faithful, who judge the method deficient from the point of view of faith. Some value this plurality of methods and approaches as an indication of richness, but to others it gives the impression of much confusion. Whether real or apparent, this confusion has brought fresh fuel to the arguments of those opposed to scientific exegesis. The diversity of interpretations only serves to show, they say, that nothing is gained by submitting biblical texts to the demands of scientific method; on the contrary, they allege, much is lost thereby. They insist that the result of scientific exegesis is only to provoke perplexity and doubt upon numerous points which hitherto had been accepted without difficulty. They add that it impels some exegetes to adopt positions contrary to the faith of the church on matters of great importance such as the virginal conception of Jesus and his miracles, and even his resurrection and divinity. Even when it does not end up in such negative positions, scientific exegesis, they claim, is notable for its sterility in what concerns progress in the Christian life. Interpretation may always have been something of a problem, but now it requires such technical refinements as to render it a domain reserved for a few specialists alone. To the latter some apply the phrase of the Gospel: "You have taken away the key of knowledge; you have not entered in yourselves and you have hindered those who sought to enter" Lk. As a result, in place of the patient toil of scientific exegesis, they think it necessary to substitute simpler approaches such as one or other of the various forms of synchronic reading which may be considered appropriate. Some seek above all to find in the Bible the Christ of their own personal vision and, along with it, the satisfaction of their own spontaneous religious feelings. Others claim to find there immediate answers to all kinds of questions touching both their own lives and that of the community. There are, moreover, numerous sects which propose as the only way of interpretation one that has been revealed to them alone. Such is the purpose of this document. The Pontifical Biblical Commission desires to indicate the paths most appropriate for arriving at an interpretation of the Bible as faithful as possible to its character both human and divine. The commission does not aim to adopt a position on all the questions which arise with respect to the Bible such as, for example, the theology of inspiration. What it has in mind is to examine all the methods likely to contribute effectively to the task of making more available the riches contained in the biblical texts. To accomplish this goal, the present document: Will examine certain questions of a hermeneutical nature. Will reflect upon the aspects which may be considered characteristic of a Catholic interpretation of the Bible and upon its relationship with other theological disciplines. Will consider, finally, the place interpretation of the Bible has in the life of the church.

Historical-Critical Method

The historical-critical method is the indispensable method for the scientific study of the meaning of ancient texts. Holy Scripture, inasmuch as it is the "word of God in human language," has been composed by human authors in all its various parts and in all the sources that lie behind them. Because of this, its proper understanding not only admits the use of this method but actually requires it.

History of the Method

For a correct understanding of this method as currently employed, a glance over its history will be of assistance. Certain elements of this method of interpretation are very ancient. They were used in antiquity by Greek commentators of classical literature and, much later, in the course of the patristic period by authors such as Origen, Jerome and Augustine. The method at that time was much less

developed. In the 18th century, Jean Astruc was still satisfied that the matter could be explained on the basis that Moses had made use of various sources especially two principal ones to compose the Book of Genesis. But as time passed biblical critics contested the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch with ever growing confidence. Literary criticism for a long time came to be identified with the attempt to distinguish in texts different sources. Thus it was that there developed in the 19th century the "documentary hypothesis," which sought to give an explanation of the editing of the Pentateuch. According to this hypothesis, four documents, to some extent parallel with each other, had been woven together: In similar fashion, to explain both the agreements and disagreements between the three synoptic Gospels, scholars had recourse to the "two source" hypothesis. According to this, the Gospels of Matthew and Luke were composed out of two principal sources: In the desire to establish the chronology of the biblical texts, this kind of literary criticism restricted itself to the task of dissecting and dismantling the text in order to identify the various sources. It did not pay sufficient attention to the final form of the biblical text and to the message which it conveyed in the state in which it actually exists the contribution of editors was not held in high regard. This meant that historical-critical exegesis could often seem to be something which simply dissolved and destroyed the text. This was all the more the case when, under the influence of the comparative history of religions, such as it then was, or on the basis of certain philosophical ideas, some exegetes expressed highly negative judgments against the Bible. It was Hermann Gunkel who brought the method out of the ghetto of literary criticism understood in this way. Although he continued to regard the books of the Pentateuch as compilations, he attended to the particular texture of the different elements of the text. He sought to define the genre of each piece e. Bultmann combined form-critical studies with a biblical hermeneutic inspired by the existentialist philosophy of Martin Heidegger. But one of the results of this method has been to demonstrate more clearly that the tradition recorded in the New Testament had its origin and found its basic shape within Christian community or early church, passing from the preaching of Jesus himself to that which proclaimed that Jesus is the Christ. When this last method was brought into play, the whole series of different stages characteristic of the historical-critical method became complete: From textual criticism one progresses to literary criticism, with its work of dissection in the quest for sources; then one moves to a critical study of forms and, finally, to an analysis of the editorial process, which aims to be particularly attentive to the text as it has been put together. All this has made it possible to understand far more accurately the intention of the authors and editors of the Bible as well as the message which they addressed to their first readers. The achievement of these results has lent the historical-critical method an importance of the highest order. Principles The fundamental principles of the historical-critical method in its classic form are the following:

The Interpretation of Scripture by James I. Packer. from 'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God (Inter-Varsity Press,), pp. The Word of God is an exceedingly complex unity.

He sees his task as bringing the text close to the faith and ministry of the church. The commentary then moves in a straightforward manner to review issues of faith and history, the critical and theological tasks of a commentary, and other leading theological concerns. This volume highlights, in a unique way, the theology of creation in Exodus. It contains a variety of materials relating to this transition from the old generation of Israel to the new, including stories and laws, census lists, instructions for worship, reports of military battles, and accounts of legal disputes. Numbers chronicles a community faced with many competing interests, groups, and issues, endeavoring to define itself and its mission in the world. Dennis Olson offers readers a comprehensive interpretation of this often overlooked book. He provides a thoroughly contemporary reading of Numbers that enlightens the modern church as it navigates the contemporary wilderness of pluralism, competing voices, and shifting foundations in the journey toward the twenty-first century. He discusses the nature and character of the law as revealed in Deuteronomy, as well as the nature of the moral life under God. Both the historical and theological meanings of the book are presented throughout this most helpful commentary. The book shows that when we do not worship and serve God, the results are destructive and ultimately deadly. The painful lessons of this unfaithfulness were destruction, time and time again. Yet McCann contends that the book of Judges provides a warning grounded in hope. While Israel experienced the destructive results of its disloyalty and disobedience, it also experienced a God who is utterly faithful—even to a faithless people. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld has written a commentary of unusual sensibility and discernment that makes very clear why this book has such great importance as literature and as scripture. Ruth is a very human book; its subject matter is the stuff of everyday life: The narrative is a drama of ordinary human affairs, but the drama unfolds against a background of the providence and purposes of God. In this excellent commentary Sakenfeld does justice to both the human and divine dimensions of the text. Her interpretation is both sociological and theological, a synthesis reflective of the simple profundity of the story itself. First and Second Samuel Publisher: He carefully opens the literature of the books, sketching a narrative filled with historical realism but also bursting with an awareness that more than human action is being presented. First and Second Kings Publisher: Nelson recognizes Kings as a useful though uncritical source of historical information, its purpose to transform the beliefs of its first readers, to get them to re-evaluate their identity before God. First and Second Chronicles Publisher: When did Ezra make his journey to Jerusalem, how many trips did he make, and which route did he take? In this commentary, the author undertakes a theological reading which emphasizes its character as narrative and story. He avoids rearranging the text and, with the exception of chapter five of Nehemiah, he seeks to understand the narrative as it was received. In general, Mark Throntveit avoids an overly historical approach to the text and presents a clear picture of Ezra and Nehemiah. While Esther is often neglected by Christian preachers and teachers, its message continues to be of importance in the present day. The drama of the book is clearly captured in this superb commentary where Bechtel expertly explores the historical setting, literary structures, and theological themes that emerge in the book of Esther. Theologically, the book shows us the importance of proportion or balance in life, the challenge of living a faithful life in the midst of an unfaithful culture, and the power of the written Word. Gerald Janzen examines the text of the Book of Job as a literary text, within the context of the history of the religion of Israel and within the broader context of the universal human condition. He approaches the basic character of the book from a literary perspective which enables him to identify human existence as exemplified in Job and to expound on the mystery of good and evil, which gives human existence its experiential texture and which together drive humans to ask the same kind of questions asked by Job. Now, one of the foremost interpreters of the Psalms explores how they can still claim that place today. In this commentary, James L. Mays sets forth what the Psalms say about God, creation, humanity, and the life of faith. Mays proceeds with an awareness that the Psalms were originally composed for worship, and so he

provides an understanding of the Psalms as praise and prayer. Individual psalms are treated in one of two ways: Those receiving fuller treatment consist of Psalms that are prominent in the practice of worship, those that are used in the New Testament, those that are most important to the theology of the church, and those that shed the most light on the Psalter as a whole. One of the few single-volume commentaries on the Book of Psalms, this commentary should remain a standard reference for pastors and teachers for years to come. It comprises an unusual blend of autobiographical references, theological reflections, philosophical musings, and proverbial instructions, all probing the seeming pointlessness of human striving. Song of Songs Publisher: Jenson focuses on the overt sense of the book as an erotic love poem in order to discover how this evocative poetry solicits a theological reading. Jenson finds a story of human love for God in this complex poetic book and offers a commentary that elucidates and inspires. Chapters 1 through 39 Author: It focuses on the theological aspects of Isaiah, giving special attention to the role of literary context. Christopher Seitz explores structural and organizational concerns as clues to the editorial intention of the final form of the material, which he argues is both intelligible and an intended result of the efforts of those who gave shape to the present form of the book. He speaks of the "presentation" of Isaiah the way in which the prophet and his message have been shaped for posterity, and shows how many structural indications provide clues to interpretation. Seitz casts light upon the larger shape of the entire book of Isaiah. As a response to a growing despair over life in servitude and exile, Isaiah 40â€”66 was written. Paul Hanson examines the writings of Second Isaiah. This commentary provides a wealth of insight into the world and worldview of Second Isaiah. The picture that emerges of such a prophet is an intensely moving one, often at variance with the conventional image of earlier popular reconstructions. Having witnessed the loss of most of the treasured and revered religious support of his day, Jeremiah discovered that the only secure foundation of hope is in God. This sophisticated yet accessible commentary makes the message of Lamentations come alive. All who preach and teach will benefit from this rich resource. An introduction explains what is involved in reading a prophetic book, and how the book of Ezekiel was put together and structured.

Chapter 3 : Interpretation Definition and Meaning - Bible Dictionary

Interpretation of scripture is for a purpose: To understand God's word more accurately. With a better understanding of His word, we can then more accurately apply it to the area that it addresses. In this case, the passage deals with an area of the future and area of judgment.

Talmudical hermeneutics Talmudical hermeneutics Hebrew: One well-known summary of these principles appears in the Baraita of Rabbi Ishmael. They considered this oral tradition to set forth the precise, original meanings of the words, revealed at the same time and by the same means as the original scriptures themselves. Interpretive methods listed above such as word play and letter counting were never used as logical proof of the meaning or teaching of a scripture. Instead they were considered to be an *asmakhta*, a validation of a meaning that was already set by tradition or a homiletic backing for rabbinic rulings. Christian[edit] Until the Enlightenment , biblical hermeneutics was usually seen as a form of special hermeneutics like legal hermeneutics ; the status of scripture was thought to necessitate a particular form of understanding and interpretation. In the nineteenth century it became increasingly common to read scripture just like any other writing, although the different interpretations were often disputed. Friedrich Schleiermacher argued against a distinction between "general" and "special" hermeneutics, and for a general theory of hermeneutics applicable to all texts , including the Bible. Various methods of higher criticism sought to understand the Bible purely as a human, historical document. The concept of hermeneutics has acquired at least two different but related meanings which are in use today. The question is posed: In this second sense, all aspects of philosophical and linguistic hermeneutics are considered to be applicable to the biblical texts, as well. There are obvious examples of this in the links between 20th-century philosophy and Christian theology. In his forward to R. Packer observes that Protestant theologians are in conflict about biblical interpretation. If the canon of Scripture is considered as an organic whole, rather than an accumulation of disparate individual texts written and edited in the course of history, then any interpretation that contradicts any other part of scripture is not considered to be sound. Biblical hermeneutics differs from hermeneutics and within traditional Protestant theology , there are a variety of interpretive formulae. Such formulae are generally not mutually exclusive, and interpreters may adhere to several of these approaches at once. The Dispensational model or The Chronometrical Principle: The Ethnic Division Principle: Jews, Gentiles and the Church. Interpretation of a certain verse or passage in Scripture is aided by a consideration of certain breaches, either breaches of promise or breaches of time. All angelic thought and ministry are centered in Christ. All Satanic hatred and subtlety are centered at Christ. All human hopes are, and human occupations should be, centered in Christ. The whole material universe in creation is centered in Christ. The entire written word is centered in Christ. The First Mention Principle: One such process is taught by Henry A Virkler, in *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* This step looks at the words used and the way the words are used. Different order of the sentence, the punctuation, the tense of the verse are all aspects that are looked at in the lexical syntactical method. Here, lexicons and grammar aids can help in extracting meaning from the text. The history and culture surrounding the authors is important to understand to aid in interpretation. For instance, understanding the Jewish sects of the Palestine and the government that ruled Palestine in New Testament times increases understanding of Scripture. And, understanding the connotations of positions such as the High Priest and that of the tax collector helps us know what others thought of the people holding these positions. A verse out of context can often be taken to mean something completely different from the intention. This method focuses on the importance of looking at the context of a verse in its chapter, book and even biblical context. This is because Scripture often touches on issues in several books. For instance, gifts of the Spirit are spoken about in Romans, Ephesians and 1 Corinthians. To take a verse from Corinthians without taking into account other passages that deal with the same topic can cause a poor interpretation. There are several special literary aspects to look at, but the overarching theme is that each genre of Scripture has a different set of rules that applies to it. Of the genres found in Scripture, there are: In these, there are differing levels of allegory, figurative language, metaphors, similes and literal language. For instance, the apocalyptic writings and poetry

have more figurative and allegorical language than does the narrative or historical writing. These must be addressed, and the genre recognized to gain a full understanding of the intended meaning. Howard Hendricks , longtime professor of hermeneutics at Dallas Theological Seminary , set out the method of observing the text, interpreting the text, applying the text in his book, *Living By the Book*. Other major Christian teachers, such as Charles R. Chuck Swindoll , who wrote the foreword, Kay Arthur and David Jeremiah have based their hermeneutics on the principles Hendricks teaches. In his book *God Centered Biblical Interpretation* , Vern Poythress , Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, presented a hermeneutical technique based on the pattern of "speaker, discourse, and hearer". God as the speaker, the Bible as His speech, and the people to whom He speaks. He lists three general concepts to understand about any passage of Scripture: Original time and context: This includes the personal perspective of the writer, the normative perspective of the text itself, and the situational perspective of the original audience. Transmission and its context: Poythress calls interpreters to understand Scripture as "what God is saying now" to the individual as well as to the modern church. Barr states there are three obstacles that stand in the way of correctly interpreting the biblical writings: We speak a different language, we live approximately two millennia later, and we bring different expectations to the text. Roman Catholic theology of Scripture The Catholic Encyclopedia lists a number of principles guiding Roman Catholic hermeneutics in the article on Exegesis note: Historico-grammatical interpretation - The meaning of the literary expression of the Bible is best learned by a thorough knowledge of the languages in which the original text of Scripture was written, and by acquaintance with the Scriptural way of speaking, including the various customs, laws, habits and national prejudices which influenced the inspired writers as they composed their respective books. John Paul II said that: The Bible, in effect, does not present itself as a direct revelation of timeless truths but as the written testimony to a series of interventions in which God reveals himself in human history. In a way that differs from tenets of other religions [such as Islam, for instance], the message of the Bible is solidly grounded in history. The Catholic commentator is bound to adhere to the interpretation of texts which the Church has defined either expressly or implicitly. Inerrancy - Since God is the principal Author of Sacred Scripture, it can be claimed to contain no error, no self-contradiction, nothing contrary to scientific or historical truth when the original authors intended historical or scientific truth to be portrayed. Minor contradictions are due to copyist errors in the codex or the translation. According to Pope John Paul II, "Addressing men and women, from the beginnings of the Old Testament onward, God made use of all the possibilities of human language, while at the same time accepting that his word be subject to the constraints caused by the limitations of this language. Proper respect for inspired Scripture requires undertaking all the labors necessary to gain a thorough grasp of its meaning. It "seeks to discover the living meaning of the Sacred Scriptures for the lives of believers today while not ignoring the human mediation of the inspired text and its literary genres". Everything pertaining to the Scriptures must be understood Christologically. Jesus Christ , the incarnate Second Person of the Holy Trinity , is the center of all that we as Christians do, and being Himself the very Truth, He is the only gate through which we may enter into understanding of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments though not all that is contained in the Old Testament is directly relevant for Christians. The Bible ultimately is about Christ and assists us in our union with Him. Only the pure in heart "shall see God. Athanasius said, "One cannot possibly understand the teaching of the saints unless one has a pure mind and is trying to imitate their life. Clearly, prayer and spiritual discipline are necessary in order to understand Scripture properly. Understanding of the Scripture comes with living its contents. As the quote from St. That is, our purpose in attempting to understand the Bible must not be merely for academic inquiry but rather must be in order to become fully divinized human beings, soaked with the life of God, participating in His divine energies , growing to the fullness of the stature of Christ. We interpret Scripture in order to become by grace what Christ is by nature, to "become god. It was written by the Church, in the Church and for the Church. Thus, it is a "family document" which is the highest point of Holy Tradition , taken with faith alongside the writings of the Fathers , the Liturgy , the Icons , the Lives of the Saints , and so on. The Scripture is a witness to the truth, not an exhaustive tome on Christian living. Nowhere in the words of Scripture itself can we find the teaching that it is all-sufficient for Christian life. What we as Orthodox Christians do must always be consonant with the

Scriptures, but explicit mention of a practice or teaching in the Scripture is not a requirement for its inclusion in the life of the Church. The Apostle Paul himself mentions the reality of unwritten sources of Church Tradition being equally in force for the believer in II Thessalonians 2: Basil the Great even says that without maintaining the unwritten traditions of the Church, we "mutilate the Gospel" On the Spirit Searches for other texts written by apostles or prophets may be interesting and of scholarly merit, but they are not part of the hermeneutical project within the Church. If we were to find a verifiable "new" work by St. Paul or to discover that Moses did not in fact write Genesis , neither finding would have any bearing on the canon. It is what it is. We must use every resource at our disposal in interpreting the Scripture to bring ourselves and others to the knowledge of the truth. Certainly, there must be spiritual discernment in knowing how to use those resources, but at least theoretically, anything can be used to come to know the truth better as it is revealed in Holy Writ. We must have humility when approaching Scripture. We must therefore be prepared to admit that our interpretations may be wrong, submitting them to the judgment of the Church. We may make use in a secondary fashion of the resources of academic scholarship, whether logic, archaeology, linguistics, et cetera. These resources can be helpful in terms of illuminating our understanding of Scripture, but they must always be given only secondary prominence in the project and always only in conjunction with all these other hermeneutic principles. Primary must always be our life in the Church, living, studying and knowing the Bible within that vivified and salvific Holy Tradition. The contemporary reader of Scripture is in some way envisaged by the Biblical text as standing in continuity with a developing theme therein. The reader, then, is left to discern this trajectory and appropriate it accordingly.

Chapter 4 : Biblical hermeneutics - Wikipedia

Bible-believing Christians generally follow a method of interpretation known as the historical-grammatical approach. That is, we try to find the plain (literal) meaning of the words based on an understanding of the historical and cultural settings in which the book was written.

Print Article The modern reader of the Bible might easily assume that people have always read the Bible in the same way that we do today. That is not at all the case. It seems natural to us to assume that the Bible, while a divinely inspired book, is also like any other piece of literature, with one message to convey from the mind of the writer to the mind of the reader. The fact is that in some periods of Christian history people actually found as many as seven entirely different meanings in a given passage of Scripture. Read this way, the Bible can be made to say anything that you want to imagine! The interpretation of the Bible or any piece of literature, for that matter, is called hermeneutics. Biblical interpretation, or hermeneutics, has had a long and checkered history. The way in which almost all Christians today read and interpret the Bible only gradually developed. It was not until the era of the Renaissance and Reformation that the science of biblical interpretation was clarified. Today we follow what is generally known as the literary historical method of interpretation. Origen who died in A. In addition to the obvious, simple, literal meaning of a passage, which Origen believed was only for the simple believer, Origen found a hidden or deeper meaning embedded in the words of Scripture. This hidden meaning was the pure word of God to the mature Christian, and much to be preferred over the simple, literal meaning. Origen made extensive use of allegorical interpretation to derive this deeper, preferred meaning of Scripture. This allowed Origen to import his underlying philosophical position into the Scriptures, as though this was the message of God to us. The School of Antioch was the bright spot in the ancient world, so far as biblical interpretation was concerned. The biblical interpreters associated with this school insisted that the Bible be interpreted in the light of the literary form and historical situation of a particular passage. They carefully avoided reading philosophical and speculative preconceptions into the text in the fashion of Origen and his followers. Today, this would seem to be the obvious way that Scripture should be interpreted, but that was not the general opinion in the ancient world. Not until the time of the Reformation did this kind of biblical interpretation become the dominant approach to the Scripture. A fourfold meaning was usually sought in Scripture: Various terms were used to denote these four different levels of meaning. With biblical interpretation so complicated, it is no wonder that the Roman Catholic Church took the Bible out of the hands of the lay people and left biblical interpretation to the clergy. The ordinary person could not possibly know how to derive from four to seven different levels of meaning out of a given passage. Biblical interpretation as we know it today began in the period of the Renaissance and Reformation. In the age of the Renaissance, people began to realize the true literary character of the Bible. Luther learned anew the important place of the Bible and made a determined effort to put the Bible back in the hands of the people. Luther and other Reformers insisted on the perspicuity of Scripture—“Scripture is clear enough that the ordinary believer can read and understand it by observing the grammatical and historical elements of the text. The science of textual criticism was developed. This was the analysis of all of the available biblical manuscripts, comparing the variant readings, and making an informed judgment as to what the original text of the Scriptures really was. Bengel was of major importance in the movement to determine an accurate text. Bengel was also influential in insisting on accurate, literary-historical interpretation, letting the Bible speak its own message, rather than reading a preconceived interpretation into it. The practice of scientific exegesis, or accurate biblical interpretation, had its beginnings in the years following the Reformation. In the development of the modern practice of hermeneutics, great emphasis was placed on grammatical and historical elements. Much effort was expended on determining who the original writer of a portion of Scripture was and learning what the historical-cultural conditions of his setting were. Great effort was made to analyze the grammatical constructions employed by the writer, as well as the choice of words. Careful attention was given to the literary style employed by the author: In the earnest search for accurate, faithful interpretation of the Bible, the historical-critical method of interpretation was developed. With this type of interpretation, more attention is

given to historical considerations than merely clarifying the historical context in which a passage of Scripture is set. Some developers of this method saw history as a closed system. They thought everything must be explained on the basis of forces and causes that are resident within the normal historical experience of humans. Thus, by definition, miracles could not be explained on the basis of an act of God who reaches into history; some natural explanation had to be found for what appears in the Scripture record as a miracle. What is at fault here is not the method of interpretation as such, but the presupposition that miracles are impossible. This hermeneutical approach is often confused with the literary-historical interpretation practiced by more conservative interpreters. The two are very similar, differing primarily in the presupposition of the interpreter rather than in method as such. They employ very sophisticated and technical methods to analyze the factors that lie behind the text as we have it: Another approach to biblical interpretation is in the form of the history of religions hermeneutic. In this type of biblical interpretation, parallels are sought between what is found in Scripture and what is found in the development of other systems of religion. This shows what biblical writers shared with their culture, what they adopted and adapted from the culture, and what they had in unique distinction from their culture. An extreme position here can expect biblical teaching to be little different from what is found in other religions. A more conservative position recognizes that God used the culture to teach His people but also that He pointed the way to be a holy people distinct from the culture. As a reaction to the radical insistence on history being closed to outside influences, another approach to biblical interpretation has developed. It is called the new hermeneutic and is often based upon the philosophy of existentialism. According to this approach, the message of the Bible is not to tell me what happened hundreds or thousands of years ago. It is to create in me new spiritual experiences, or encounters with God; or, at least, it is to show me the possibilities that are open to me when I place my faith in Christ. The dominant type of biblical interpretation used by conservative Christians today is the literary-historical method. Bibliography Information Butler, Trent C.

Chapter 5 : Bible Interpretation | Unity

"The interpretation of sacred Scripture requires the full participation on the part of exegetes in the life and faith of the believing community of their own time," since "the primary setting for scriptural interpretation is the life of the Church."

Is of any private interpretation. The word rendered "interpretation" occurs nowhere else in the New Testament; but the cognate verb occurs in Mark 4: There can be little doubt that "interpretation," or "solution," is the right rendering here, although others have been suggested. The main question however, is the meaning of the word rendered "private," which may also mean "its own. The term may refer 1 to the recipients of the prophecies--that we may not expound prophecy according to our own fancy; or 2 to the utterers of the prophecies--that the prophets had not the power of expounding their own prophecies; or 3 to the prophecies themselves--that no prophecy comes to be of its own interpretation, i. The guide to the right explanation is 2Peter 1: This consideration excludes 3 ; for 2Peter 1: Either of the other two explanations may be right. But it did not so come; consequently the interpretation must be sought elsewhere--viz. But they spoke under divine influence, and therefore need not know the import of their own words. Prophecy must be explained by prophecy and by history, not by the individual prophet. The whole body of prophecy, "the prophetic word" 2Peter 1: In modern phraseology, interpretation must be comparative and scientific. This view is strengthened by comparing 1Peter 1: Possibly this passage is meant to refer to 1Peter 1: If the coincidence is accidental, this also points in the same direction; in any case, the coincidence is worth noting. Pulpit Commentary Verse The literal translation of the following clause is, "that all prophecy of Scripture [there is no article] is not; all This view of the passage is also supported by the remarkable parallel in the First Epistle 1 Peter 1: The prophets searched diligently into the meaning of the revelation vouchsafed to them; they did not always comprehend it in all its details; they could not interpret it to themselves; the written prophecy arose out of the interpretation of the revelation supplied by the same Spirit from whom the revelation itself proceeded. Other views of this difficult passage are: Prophecy is not its own interpreter; the guidance of the Spirit is necessary. Or, prophecy is not a matter for the private interpretation of the readers; only the Holy Spirit can explain it. But the explanation adopted seems most accordant with the Greek words and with the general sense of the context compare St. The gifts of the Spirit are divided as he will; to one man are given "divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues. Tongues and the interpretation of tongues were two distinct gifts. It may be so with prophecy and the interpretation of prophecy. Matthew Henry Commentary 1: The law sets before us our wretched state by sin, but there it leaves us. It discovers our disease, but does not make known the cure. It is the sight of Jesus crucified, in the gospel, that heals the soul. Try to dissuade the covetous worldling from his greediness, one ounce of gold weighs down all reasons. Offer to stay a furious man from anger by arguments, he has not patience to hear them. Try to detain the licentious, one smile is stronger with him than all reason. But come with the gospel, and urge them with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, shed to save their souls from hell, and to satisfy for their sins, and this is that powerful pleading which makes good men confess that their hearts burn within them, and bad men, even an Agrippa, to say they are almost persuaded to be Christians, Ac God is well pleased with Christ, and with us in him. This is the Messiah who was promised, through whom all who believe in him shall be accepted and saved. The truth and reality of the gospel also are foretold by the prophets and penmen of the Old Testament, who spake and wrote under influence, and according to the direction of the Spirit of God. How firm and sure should our faith be, who have such a firm and sure word to rest upon! When the light of the Scripture is darted into the blind mind and dark understanding, by the Holy Spirit of God, it is like the day-break that advances, and diffuses itself through the whole soul, till it makes perfect day. As the Scripture is the revelation of the mind and will of God, every man ought to search it, to understand the sense and meaning. The Christian knows that book to be the word of God, in which he tastes a sweetness, and feels a power, and sees a glory, truly divine. And the prophecies already fulfilled in the person and salvation of Christ, and in the great concerns of the church and the world, form an unanswerable proof of the truth of Christianity. The Holy Ghost inspired holy men to speak and write. He so assisted and directed them in delivering what they had received from him, that they clearly expressed what

they made known. So that the Scriptures are to be accounted the words of the Holy Ghost, and all the plainness and simplicity, all the power and all the propriety of the words and expressions, come from God. Mix faith with what you find in the Scriptures, and esteem and reverence the Bible as a book written by holy men, taught by the Holy Ghost.

Chapter 6 : Scriptural interpretation - Crossword Clue Answer | Crossword Heaven

Have you ever wondered how a specific Bible verse might be interpreted metaphysically? Interpret This provides greater insight into the hidden meanings of the calendrierdelascience.com the search features below to find a verse.

The Bible is all around us. People hear Scripture readings in church. Some biblical passages have become popular maxims, such as "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you Matthew 7: Listed here are 10 points for fruitful Scripture reading. Bible reading is for Catholics. The Church encourages Catholics to make reading the Bible part of their daily prayer lives. Reading these inspired words, people grow deeper in their relationship with God and come to understand their place in the community God has called them to in himself. Prayer is the beginning and the end. Reading the Bible is not like reading a novel or a history book. It should begin with a prayer asking the Holy Spirit to open our hearts and minds to the Word of God. Scripture reading should end with a prayer that this Word will bear fruit in our lives, helping us to become holier and more faithful people. Get the whole story! When selecting a Bible, look for a Catholic edition. A Catholic edition will have an imprimatur notice on the back of the title page. An imprimatur indicates that the book is free of errors in Catholic doctrine. The Bible is a collection of 73 books written over the course of many centuries. Knowing the genre of the book you are reading will help you understand the literary tools the author is using and the meaning the author is trying to convey. It is not intended to be read as history text, a science book, or a political manifesto. In the Bible, God teaches us the truths that we need for the sake of our salvation. The sum is greater than the parts. Read the Bible in context. What happens before and after " even in other books " helps us to understand the true meaning of the text. The Old relates to the New. The Old Testament and the New Testament shed light on each other. While we read the Old Testament in light of the death and resurrection of Jesus, it has its own value as well. You do not read alone. We read the Bible within the tradition of the Church to benefit from the holiness and wisdom of all the faithful. What is God saying to me? The Bible is not addressed only to long-dead people in a faraway land. It is addressed to each of us in our own unique situations. When we read, we need to understand what the text says and how the faithful have understood its meaning in the past. In light of this understanding, we then ask: If Scripture remains just words on a page, our work is not done. We need to meditate on the message and put it into action in our lives. Only then can the word be "living and effective.

Chapter 7 : Catholic Interpretation of Scripture | St. Paul Center

Biblical hermeneutics is the study of the principles of interpretation concerning the books of the Bible. It is part of the broader field of hermeneutics which involves the study of principles of interpretation for all forms of communication, nonverbal and verbal.

Almost all denominations share the foundational truths about God, man, sin, and salvation what C. When interpretive disagreement occurs, it is usually because of faulty or inconsistent methods of interpretation hermeneutics. Some people, for instance, impose their own preconceived notions upon the pages of Scripture instead of allowing Scripture to speak for itself. But when the basic principles of interpretation are put into practice, most difficulties disappear. Here are fifteen principles along with specific exercises that will sharpen your skills in interpreting the Bible: The Principle of Biblical Authority Do not regard the Bible as a textbook; it is not merely an object to be observed but an oracle to be obeyed. Approach it with a proper attitude of reverence, care, and receptivity. It is alive with the Spirit of God, and it has the power to change the lives of those who respond to it. It is trustworthy and inexhaustible. There are always fresh truths within its pages, and the more deeply we mine, the more insight we will gain. It can transform our thinking and gradually move us from a human to a divine perspective. Read the following passages and briefly describe how each aids your understanding of inspiration: The Extent of Biblical Authority The authority of Scripture is not limited merely to matters of religious faith; it extends to all that it affirms, including historical events, geography, chronology, and the miracles of the Old and New Testaments. The Bible has been challenged in many ways--for instance, Daniel did not write the prophecies in the book of Daniel; Jesus did not feed the multitudes but inspired them to share their lunches. But if the Bible is not trustworthy in matters like these, how can we be sure that it is reliable in other areas? Either we place ourselves under the authority of Scripture or we do not. To fully understand its message, we must submit to it. According to John 7: Scripture, Tradition, and Experience The Word of God should be our final court of appeal for authority. As valuable as tradition and experience are, we must interpret them in light of Scripture. The church does not decide what Scripture teaches; Scripture determines what the church teaches. Tradition is an important authority, but it is not the ultimate authority. Many traditions, true and false, have surfaced throughout the history of the church. If a tradition or personal experience is clearly contrary to the teaching of Scripture, it is not of the Lord. On the other hand, experience supports the validity of biblical truth; if Christianity is true, it should be practical enough to change lives. A person decides to increase his giving over a period of several years and discovers that he is better off financially than when he began. Is he justified in teaching that the same thing will happen to others when they increase their giving? Why or why not? Scripture and Human Reason Like tradition, reason is a significant authority. But it, too, must be placed under the dominion of Scripture. The Bible affirms a number of truths that seem impossible to resolve. How can Jesus Christ be fully God and fully man? How can the three Persons in the one Godhead be fully and completely God and not each other? These matters are not ultimately contradictory, but they do go beyond the limits of human comprehension. There are only two choices: The Bible teaches that God is sovereign over all, but man is responsible for his decisions. What do you do with the tension between these passages? The Principle of Biblical Unity This principle counsels us to treat the Bible as a complete book, since it is a unity in diversity. We should seek to relate each book we study to the central theme of Scripture: The better we grasp the big picture, the better we will be able to see the details in proper perspective. The New Testament builds upon the Old, and requires a familiarity with the history and imagery of the Old Testament. Without this, many New Testament passages would be extremely difficult to understand. Hebrews 9, for example, assumes a knowledge of the structure and function of the tabernacle. How would you answer the charge that the God of the Old Testament is wrathful and judgmental, whereas the God of the New Testament is loving and merciful? The Principle of Progressive Revelation The Bible is a unified book, but as we study its pages, we should also remember that it is a progressive revelation. Over the fifteen or more centuries during which it was written, its portrait of God and His redemptive program was gradually enriched and clarified. Rather, it means that the revelation of the person and character of God has

become clearer through the course of biblical history see Heb. At the same time, we should avoid the opposite pitfall of projecting Old Testament civil or ceremonial laws into our own time e. The Principle of Clarity This principle tells us to let the Bible speak for itself. We should allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, since it is its own best interpreter and commentator. Move from the known to the unknown by interpreting unclear passages in the light of those which are clear. When wrestling with a difficult passage, consult other verses which deal with the same subject in a simpler way. Then bring the unclear into conformity with the clear. Everything that is necessary to salvation and sanctification is clearly revealed in Scripture. It is also wise to gain familiarity with the gospels and epistles before tackling more difficult books like Ezekiel and Revelation. Which passage is clearer? The Principle of Correlation To be truly biblical, a specific doctrine must incorporate everything the Word has to say about it. We build up our understanding of theology by comparing Scripture with Scripture. It is unwise to base any doctrine on one or two miscellaneous verses or on controversial, obscure passages. This principle tells us to correlate the teachings of Scripture by using cross references. Verbal cross references compare the use of a word or expression in several passages. Conceptual cross references compare similar ideas or doctrines like the resurrection or redemption. Parallel cross references compare passages that recount the same incident like the feeding of the 5, or the life of Hezekiah in 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, and Isaiah. Correlation involves both inductive reasoning specific passages to general conclusions and deductive reasoning general premises to specific applications. Here are some difficult verses that have been used as proof texts for unbiblical doctrines: What is the problem in each case? Mormons use 1 Corinthians How do you respond? The Principle of Context Interpret every passage in light of its immediate context preceding and following verses, paragraph, chapter and broad context book, testament, Bible. A verse lifted out of its context can become a pretext. It is not as easy to twist the meaning of a verse when it is observed in its setting. The first level of context is the material that surrounds the passage you are interpreting. For example, to interpret the three parables in Luke 15, it is important to notice that Jesus was addressing them to the Pharisees and scribes Luke The second level of context is the book in which your passage appears. Your approach should be appropriate to the Testament, whether Old or New, and it should also be consistent with the theme, purpose, and style of the book. The third level of context is the Bible as a whole. Relate the passage you are considering to the broad context of scriptural teaching. The fourth level of context is the culture and historical background in which the passage was written. Do not interpret it in a symbolic or allegorical way unless the context tells you that parables, symbols, or other figures of speech are being used. It is always better to identify the plain and natural sense of a passage instead of looking for hidden meaning. It cannot be literal and figurative at the same time. Only when the literal meaning does not fit the context, as in poetic or parabolic language, should we interpret a passage figuratively. How do you approach the story of Balaam and his donkey in Numbers Should you understand it literally or figuratively? The Principle of Application A passage normally has only one interpretation, though it may lead to a number of applications. This principle tells us to distinguish the single interpretation from the multiple applications. The New Testament tells us that the events of the Old Testament have moral and spiritual applications for us today see Rom. It is true that the New Testament sometimes tells us that specific Old Testament events are symbolic of spiritual truths. For instance, Paul tells us that the rock that provided the Israelites with water in the wilderness is symbolic of Christ 1 Cor. In Galatians, he uses the story of Sarah and Hagar as an allegory of the old and new covenants Gal. But this symbolic use of historical facts was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and as interpreters of Scripture, we cannot lay claim to the same authority. If we try to impose more than one sense on a passage without biblical warrant, we will fall into the trap of spiritualizing, symbolizing, and allegorizing. Therefore, we should normally look for a single meaning and prefer the clearest and most obvious interpretation when there is more than one possibility. Any applications we draw from a passage should be consistent with its meaning. We may, for example, observe the way Jesus used the simple analogy of water in talking with the woman at the well and decide to look for effective analogies when we have opportunities to share the gospel with others. But it would be wrong to apply the passage by concluding that we must use the analogy of water when we tell others about Christ. Some people interpret the Song of Solomon as a portrait of Christ and His bride, the church. Is this a valid interpretation? Is it a valid application?

Chapter 8 : Benjamin Jowett, On the Interpretation of Scripture

In interpreting the Bible, then, we should ask ourselves if a particular interpretation of a passage will cause harm to an essential doctrine such as the deity of Christ, the resurrection, the atonement and so forth.

As a Protestant I cherish the NT teaching on the priesthood of believers—that each Christian has the right to his own interpretation, but also that each Christian has the responsibility to get it right. It is full of contradictions. Welcome to our postmodern world. How does divine inspiration and human authorship affect biblical interpretation? What does a text mean? What are some general principles of interpretation? How do we interpret the Old Testament? How do we interpret the New Testament? What Does a Text Mean? The last lesson looked at the topic of inspiration and found that the Bible is both a human book and a divine book. There are certain implications of this for biblical interpretation. The first is that the human authors had a specific historical audience, context and purpose. These authors used their own language, writing methods, style of writing and literary form of writing. The divine authorship of the Bible gives it its unity and the ultimate source of all interpretation is from God. The answer to this question is that a text means what the author intended it to mean. If there is only one thing you learn from this lesson this is it. For a simple example, if you wrote a letter with some statements in it that are a little ambiguous, then what does the letter mean? Does it mean what you intended it to mean or how the readers interpret it? Of course it means what you intended it to mean. The true meaning of a text resides in the authorial intent of the text. This leads us to the first primary and fundamental principle of interpreting the Bible. General Principles of Biblical Interpretation Principle 1: To be able to do this some good Bible study tools are needed since we are years or more removed from the biblical authors and their context is very different than ours. The first tool that any one should get is a good study Bible with notes that explain historical and cultural background information. Most major Bible translations come in editions with these types of notes but by far the NET Bible with its over 60, notes surpasses them all. Get the most extensive Study Bible that goes with the translation you use. After this, good evangelical commentaries are essential tools to study the Bible but make sure to look at a couple to get a variety of perspectives. When someone in a Bible study states what the verse means to him, we need to redirect and clarify that the meaning is what the author intended. After that the question then is how that historical meaning applies to us today. The second principle of biblical interpretation should also be considered foundational. Interpretations must be done in the context of the passage. What does the following mean? Consider the following sentences: Therefore, context determines meaning! The nearest context must given the most weight in interpretation. First, there is the near context of the sentence, then the paragraph, then the section and then the book and even author. The interpreter should look at all these circles of context to be able to correctly assess the meaning. Far too often people try to interpret a verse by itself in isolation without looking at the context itself. For example, consider the verse Revelation 3: Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me Rev 3: But the context in the preceding verse v. Also, in looking at the larger paragraph the passage is to a church Rev 3: The verse is really addressed to believers who need to repent from their sin and return to fellowship with God. Interpret the Bible literally or normally allowing for normal use of figurative language. Take the plain meaning of the text at face value. When the literal does not make sense you probably have a figure of speech. For example, Isaiah Since trees do not have hands or clap this must be a figure of speech. Figures of speech and illustrations give the Bible a powerful and colorful means of expression. They are an important part of the normal expression of language. Use the Bible to help interpret itself. Interpret difficult passages with clear ones. This is sometimes called the law of non-contradiction. For example, there are clear passages that teach the doctrine of eternal security, that once a person is truly saved he or she cannot lose salvation John 5; Rom 8. Some passages in the Bible are very hard to interpret like Hebrews 6: Also, use the New Testament to help interpret the Old Testament. This recognizes the progressive nature of revelation, that is the Bible is giving more revelation on topics over time. But one must start by interpreting the Old Testament text in its context before a New Testament consideration is made. Interpretation must be distinguished from

application. While there is one interpretation that is historical, there are many applications that can be carried over to our modern context. Build an application bridge from the interpretation to the timeless principle and then to the application now. For example in John 12, Mary anoints Jesus with very expensive oil. The historical context records a historical event. The interpretation relates only to what Mary did to Jesus. What about us today? Promises made to Israel in the Old Testament cannot automatically be transferred to the church in which we are a part. For example, the land promises were given to Abraham and his descendants Gen Christians are not under the requirements of the Mosaic law Rom 6: For example, in Lev It is true that certain Old Testament commands repeated in the New Testament are still binding, but this is made clear by their repetition in the New Testament. The church was formed in Acts 2 with the descent of the Holy Spirit and most direct statements to and about the church occur after that. Also, there is a future for national Israel cf. Be sensitive to the type of literature you are in. The Bible contains many different types of literature: Each of these types of literature has specific features that must be considered when interpreting a text. Some of these will be examined in the next section. For now we need to understand that where we are in the Bible makes a big difference on how we interpret and apply it. Interpreting the Old Testament Narrative Literature: Much of the Old Testament contains narrative literature. First, the passage needs to be interpreted in its historical context and then applications can be drawn from the characters and events. In the book of Judges, only one verse is given to the judge Shamgar. Why did God include this passage? Yes, it records an historical event. Realize that Christians are not under the law as a legal system Rom 6: Sometimes the teaching is carried directly into the New Testament e. Other times, the New Testament takes a text and applies a principle from it. Paul takes this verse, which refers to feeding a work animal and applies the principle of the Christian worker being worthy of tangible support. In general, if the Old Testament command in the law is not repeated in the New Testament, look for the principle behind the statement in the law and then try to apply that. Realize that much of the proverbial type of wisdom in the Old Testament is general truth based on observations but not absolute truths or promises. Two good examples are seen in the following: Christians should not take these types of proverbial statements as promises of what will always happen but rather patterns that are generally true outcomes based on observation. A gentle answer will not always prevent an angry outburst but it is much more likely to than a harsh one. Christian parents who have a child who has gone astray from the faith may have done their best to train the child the right way but the child did not take it. Realize that poetry often has a greater use of figurate language than narrative or law. For he set its foundation upon the seas, and established it upon the ocean currents. Who is allowed to ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may go up to his holy dwelling place? Here we have three sets of pairs in side by side fashion with the second reference restating the basic idea of the first. Interpreting the New Testament Gospels:

Chapter 9 : Understanding the Bible

The scripture is God's Word. But some of the interpretations derived from it are not. There are many cults and Christian groups that claim their interpretations are correct. Too often, however, the interpretations not only differ dramatically but are clearly contradictory. This does not mean that.

But some of the interpretations derived from it are not. There are many cults and Christian groups that use the Bible - claiming their interpretations are correct. Too often, however, the interpretations not only differ dramatically but are clearly contradictory. This does not mean that the Bible is a confusing document. Rather, the problem lies in those who interpret and the methods they use. But it does mean that we need to approach His word with care, humility, and reason. After all, the Bible is inspired by God and is addressed to His people. On the human level, to lessen the errors that come in our interpretations, we need to look at some basic biblical interpretive methods. I offer the following principles as guidelines for examining a passage. They are not exhaustive nor are they set in concrete. What does the passage say? Are there any words or phrases in the passage that need to be examined? What is the immediate context? What is the broader context in the chapter and book? What is the historical and cultural background? What do I conclude about the passage? Do my conclusions agree or disagree with related areas of Scripture and others who have studied the passage? What have I learned and what must I apply to my life? In order to teach you how these questions can affect your interpretation of a passage, I have chosen one which, when examined closely, may lead you into a very different interpretation than what is commonly held. I leave it to you to determine if my interpretation is accurate. Jesus spoke the words, and they were recorded by Matthew. Jesus spoke them to His disciples in response to a question, which we will get to later. The passage simply says that one out of two men in a field will be taken. It just says one will be taken. Are there any words in the passage that need to be examined? No particular word in this verse really stands out as needing to be examined; but to follow this exercise, I will use the word "taken. The word in Greek is paralambano. However, by examining how a word is used in multiple contexts, the meaning of the word can take on a new dimension. For example, the word for "love" in Greek is "agapao. However, the same word is used in Luke Jesus says, Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the chief seats in the synagogues and the respectful greetings in the market places. The first green means "new and inexperienced. Would we want to impose the contextual meaning of one into the other? This is where this particular verse will come alive. The immediate context is as follows, Matt. That is, the "being taken" are of the same kind. A further question needs to be asked. Who was taken in verse 39? Was it Noah and his family, or was it the people who were eating and drinking? The answer to that question might help us understand the original passage better. Therefore, the next interpretive step will help us greatly. A passage should always be looked at in context--not only in its immediate context of the verses directly before and after it but also in the context of the chapter it is in and the book in which it is written. Jesus had just left the temple, and in verse 2 told His disciples that ". He speaks of false Christs, of tribulation, of the sun being darkened, of His return, and of two men in a field where one will be taken and the other left. The context, then, is eschatological. Many people think that this verse in Matt. But it is interesting to note that the context of the verse seems to suggest that the wicked are taken - not the good. After all, the "one taken, one left" verse is obviously about the rapture. You see, we all come to the Bible with preconceived ideas. Sometimes they are right - sometimes wrong. We should always be ready to have our understanding of the Bible challenged by what it says. If we are not willing, then we are prideful. And God is distant from the proud Psalm It just so happens that there are related verses, in fact, a parallel passage found in Luke It is clear from this passage in Luke that the ones taken by the flood are those who were eating and drinking and being given in marriage. As you can see, this has a profound impact on how we understand our passage in Matt. Does the context suggest that the one in the field who is taken is the one who is wicked? Also, how does this context affect my preconceived ideas about this verse? Is the one taken the good or the bad? Also, does this verse refer to the rapture or not? Of related interest is a passage in Matt. The servants asked if they should go immediately and gather up the wheat. But, in verse 30, Jesus says, "Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First

collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn. This is most interesting since Jesus explains the parable in Matt. Additionally, when we turn to Luke 17, which is the parallel passage of Matt. This is a more difficult question to answer. It requires a bit more research. A commentary is worth examining here since they usually provide the historic and cultural backgrounds that help to unravel the text. In this context, Israel was under Roman rule. They had been denied the right of capital punishment, of self-rule, and the ability to wage war. Rome had dominated the small nation. Judaism was tolerated among the Roman leadership. After all, Israel was a small far-away country with a people that were fanatical about their religion. So, Rome allowed Israel to be ruled by Jewish political puppets. The Temple was the place of worship for the Israelite community. It was there that the blood sacrifices were made by the high priest for the atonement of the nation. It had taken 46 years to build John 2: Jesus said the temple would be destroyed, which prompted the question which lead to His discourse which contains the passage we are examining. Culturally, the Jewish people were dedicated to the Old Testament. Within those pages were prophecies of the Messiah, of the end of the age, and of the delivery from bondage. The Jewish people knew that and were in a state of expectation. Along comes Jesus with miracles and words of great power. Naturally, they would look to him as a possible deliverer. Since the context of the passage suggests that it is the wicked that are taken, I am going to conclude that the one taken in the field is not the good but the bad. I also am tempted to conclude that the wicked are taken to a place of judgment. Do my conclusions agree or disagree with related areas of scripture and others who have studied the passage? At this point I would need to present my conclusion to others to see what they think. Just because I studied the Word and arrived at a conclusion does not mean that it is correct. By consulting with others, by examining the word again, and by seeking God and his illumination I can only hope to arrive at the best possible conclusion about a passage. Interpretation of scripture is for a purpose: With a better understanding of His word, we can then more accurately apply it to the area that it addresses. In this case, the passage deals with an area of the future and area of judgment. It is information that Jesus has revealed, and that He wants us to know about. The application then would be that God will execute judgment upon the unrighteous at the end of the age. Concluding remarks This article is only an illustration. It is basic and does not cover all the points of biblical interpretation.