

Biblical Interpretation Guidelines

Hermeneutical Guidelines

1. OBSERVATION	MULTIPLE	Ask as many questions of the text as possible. Who is speaking/writing? Where are they? Who is the original audience? Where are they? What are the historic and cultural considerations? How would the original audience understand the message and intent? What controversies may have been going on that needed to be addressed? What other passages address similar issues that might shed light on the passage? Are there any congruent narratives elsewhere in scripture? What is the genre? What does the passage say? What does it not say? What historic, doctrinal, or prophetic transition comes before, after, or during this? What is the desired end-state of the human author? ...divine author? What commands are in the text? Are any commands abrogated by future events or circumstances? Identify and emphasize key words. Identify and emphasize key verbs in a different way. Are there any key words or ideas that show up repeatedly or frequently? Are there any words or ideas that appear in the given passage/book more than elsewhere in scripture?
2. INTERPRETATION	ONLY ONE CORRECT	The interpretation is comprised of the correct answers to all the observation questions. The focus is the intent of the original author to the original audience. The fact that the Holy Spirit is also present in the text illuminating believing readers across all centuries should result in meanings that are congruent with the original intent, not contrary to it. To check for correctness, see section on the CIT.
3. APPLICATION	POSSIBLY MULTIPLE	So What? What is the contemporary reader supposed to do and/or believe as a result of understanding the meaning of the passage? Calls to action must delineate between specific requirements versus cultural conventions to achieve a desired end. Consider ways that an original audience may employ different conventions to achieve a similar goal.

Principles:

Move from General to Specific. CITs and visual charts are great ways to show the general scope of a book or section.

Prophecy is Pattern.

Things different are not the same.

If the plane sense makes sense, seek no other sense.

Perspicuity.

Conventions versus absolute requirements.

Non-contradiction.

Avoid Single-verse theology, or "private interpretation" – 2 Peter 1:21.

Avoid trust in men / credentials: Gen. 40:8; Dan. 2:19-22; Luke 24:25.

Identify and eliminate doctrinal biases & presuppositions. Confirmation Bias is often the catalyst behind many Bible-study efforts.

Repetition. Word frequency.

Indicators of figurative speech:

There is a figurative indicator, such as a given interpretation for symbolic language or a comparison.

Known figures of speech are employed.

Language cannot be taken literally (and has not been by any other biblical author).

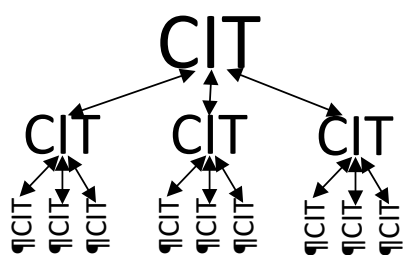
Pitfalls:

ANY SYSTEM OF INTERPRETATION WHICH FORCES VERSES TO CONTRADICT, OR CREATES A SYSTEM THAT FAILS TO MEET THE DEMANDS OF NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIANITY, AS FOUND IN ACTS 15, ACTS 20, ROMANS 5-10, 1 TIMOTHY 3, EPHESIANS 2, COLOSSIANS 2, AND 1 THESSALONIANS IS NOT THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT: IT IS "PRIVATE INTERPRETATION" (2 PETER 1:20, 3:16).

1. **ADDING** TO THE SCRIPTURE (FOR EXAMPLE: TRADITIONS OF CHURCH FATHERS, APOCRYPHA, THE TALMUD, ETC.) EVE ADDS TO THE WORD OF GOD IN **GENESIS 3:3**.
2. **SUBTRACTING** FROM THE SCRIPTURE (FOR EXAMPLE: TAKING OUT OR NULLIFYING ALL VERSES THAT OFFEND OR UPSET YOU OR YOUR RELATIVES: SEE **MARK 7:6, 7, 9, 13**)
3. **REMOVING** A VERSE FROM ITS CONTEXT (FOR EXAMPLE: PRETENDING THAT ACTS 2 IS THE "PLAN OF SALVATION" FOR GENTILES. LOOK AT **ACTS 2:1, 5, 14, 22, AND 36**)
4. TRYING TO INTERPRET A **COMPLETE STATEMENT** IN THE LIGHT OF AN INCOMPLETE STATEMENT (FOR EXAMPLE: TRYING TO MAKE PETER THE ROCK (**MATT. 16:18**) WHEN CHRIST CALLS HIM "SATAN" (**MATT. 16:23**))
5. FAILURE TO TAKE A PASSAGE **LITERAL** WHEN IT IS LITERAL (SEE **MATTHEW 15:15-20**)
6. FAILURE TO TAKE A PASSAGE **FIGURATIVELY** WHEN IT IS (SEE **JOHN 6:54-56** AND NOTICE HOW JESUS HIMSELF TOLD YOU THE VERSES WERE NOT LITERAL, RIGHT IN THE SAME CONTEXT: **JOHN 6:57, 53**)
7. **FAILURE TO GO BY THE LIGHT YOU HAVE** (**ROMANS 1:21-31**) AND PUT INTO PRACTICE (**JAMES 1:22**) WHAT GOD SHOWS YOU IN THE SCRIPTURE (MARK 4:16-19)

Central Idea of the Text (CIT):

Divide the text into paragraphs. After key words are identified, reduce each paragraph down to a CIT: A 13-18-word sentence that correctly conveys the central idea of the text. Ultimately, a single central CIT should be produced for an entire book. There may be intermediate CITs for groups of paragraphs. Compare orbiting CITs with Central CITs. If they match and flow together well, this indicates that interpretation is likely correct. If comparisons show contrast of meaning, this indicates that an error may have been made in the interpretation process.



CIT of Book or Section

SELF CHECK OF INTERPRETATION AND UNDERSTANDING

CITs of groups of Paragraphs

CITs of Individual Paragraphs

Are all CITs Complementary and Congruent from top to bottom?

Check results with others following same principles.