

# History of Interpretation

# Interpretation

My purpose here is to give you the big picture of the history of interpretation. **Why?** Because history has a tendency to repeat itself. Not that our purpose is to stop the future movement of the church, but that we do not become a part of the movement away from truth.

## —2500BC — Moses

And Moses commanded them, saying: “At the end of every seven years, at the appointed time in the year of release, at the Feast of Tabernacles, 11 when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, **you shall read this law** before all Israel in their hearing. 12 Gather the people together, **men and women and little ones, and the stranger** who is within your gates, **that** they may **hear** and that **they may learn** to fear the LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this law, 13 **and that their children**, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess.” **Deut 31:10-13**

*In other words, “what I’ve written here is law of God...its meant to be read, understood and obeyed...even by those not versed in the ‘deeper Spiritual things’, like strangers and children.”*

## —2499 BC — Joshua

**Josh 1:7-8** Only be strong and very courageous, that you may **observe to do according to all the law** which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. 8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, **but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it.** For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

*So, in order to properly observe the law, you must meditate in it day and night. This surely speaks of the mystic type of interpretation...you meditate on it. Question is, **what does it mean to meditate?***

## —520 BC — Ezra

Returns from the exile with the specific purpose of teaching the law. According to Jewish tradition, the synagogue was established by Ezra and he is associated with literal interpretation.

## —0 BC — The time of Christ

**The Jews:** History shows that during the time of Christ the Jews held to a strict, literal interpretation of Scripture. Not until the Platonic Jews of the 1st century, who were taking after the Greeks, did the allegorical method of interpretation come into play.

**The Disciples:** Of all the quotes and use of the OT in the New, there is only one mention of allegorization in the NT (Gal. 4:24). But even this passage only seeks to explain an allegory, and does not suggest the use of allegorical interpretation.

## —100AD - 500AD The Rise of the Allegorical Method

During the early formation of the church, there arose 2 schools of interpretation. The one mixed Greek philosophy with Biblical spirituality, resulting in the allegorical method. This quickly became a popular method.

In Acts 13, Barnabas went to Antioch then left to retrieve Paul from Tarsus. The two returned together. Interestingly, Antioch became an established sending school for young preachers. Two such men Chrysostom (ca. 347-407) and Theodore of Mopsuestia (ca. 350-428) are outstanding examples of graduates of this school, founded on the principles of literal interpretation.

This battle would continue through 500AD.

## —500AD - 1500 AD Roman Catholic Domination with Allegorical Reasoning

The Catholic church dominated this period of church history. There always remained small pockets of resistance, such as the Albigenses and Waldenses — two groups declared heretical by the Catholic church for their belief in the Bible. However, there were, for these 1000 years, very few literal interpreters of the Bible.

## —1500 The Protestant Reformation

We are called Protestant because we protested the Catholic church. Two men stand out (although many more were involved) as vanguards of the Protestant Reformation: Martin Luther and Calvin.

The reformation was about reform in three areas, described by the same number of phrases: *sola fides* (faith alone), *sola gratia* (grace alone) and *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone).

Martin Luther said:

“Every word should be allowed to stand in its natural meaning and that should not be abandoned unless faith forces us to it. It is the attribute of Holy Scripture that it interprets itself by passages and places which belong together, and can only be understood by the rule of faith.”

Unfortunately, the maxim, “all good things must end” seems to hold true for the church as well. Eventually, the Lutheran church began to accept allegorization as well, which caused a spin-off into the Missouri Senate, a movement to get back to Scripture.

The Methodist church, once a strong proponent of literal interpretation too slid down the slope. Thus, the Independent Methodists arose, in an attempt to get back to the Scriptures. Likewise, the Baptist movement breaks off, in an attempt to get back to the Scriptures.

***No church is isolated from a liberalization of the Word. It is imperative that we take extreme caution in allowing any movement from the literal, even in our own circles.***

## Figures of Speech

Literal interpretation seeks to understand the text in its plainest sense, taking into account the historical, cultural **and grammatical** context. A part of the grammar of every language is the use of figures of speech. A figure of speech is a word or phrase used to communicate something other than its literal, natural meaning.

1. **Simile** a comparison using like or as.  
“Jesus face shown like the sun.” (Matthew 17:2)
2. **Metaphor** an implied comparison (no like or as) between things basically alike.  
“I am the vine...” (John 15)
3. **Metonymy** substituting one word for another which it suggests.  
“House of David” (2 Sam. 7) ; “they have Moses and the prophets” (Luke 16:29)
4. **Synecdoche** substituting the whole for the part, or the part for the whole.  
Caesar Augustus took a census of “all the world”. (Luke 2:1)  
“their feet rush into sin” (Prov. 1:16)
5. **Apostrophe** directly addressing persons or things absent or imaginary.  
“What ails you, oh sea?” (Ps. 114)
6. **Personification** speaking about non-personal things as though personal.  
“Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things” (Matt. 6:34).
7. **Hyperbole** deliberate exaggeration for the sake of emphasis.  
The whole world couldn’t contain all the books needed to record all the works of Jesus (Jn. 21:25).
8. **Meiosis** understatement, conveying more than it seems on the surface.  
I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16).
9. **Interrogation** rhetorical questions with obvious answers.  
“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the world?” (Job 38:41)
10. **Irony** saying the opposite of what is meant for emphasis.  
“Hail, the King of the Jews!” (Matt. 27:29)
11. **Litotes** stating something by denying its opposite.  
“A broken and contrite heart you will not despise” (Ps. 51:17)
12. **Euphemism** a more agreeable expression for something unpleasant.  
“He (Stephen) fell asleep” (Acts. 7:60)
13. **Pleonasm** use of superfluous words (full language).  
“We have heard with our ears” (2 Sam. 7:22).
14. **Symbol** that which suggests a meaning in addition to its ordinary one. The broadest kind of figure of speech.
15. **Type** a divinely purposed OT foreshadowing of a NT spiritual reality.

## QA Asking the Questions, and Finding the Problems

The job of the exegete (one who gets the meaning out—ex of the text) is to work with the text enough that you begin to see the problems, or possibilities in a passage. Virtually every passage, if not every sentence, has questions that need to be asked of it. You've probably experienced this when you've talked to someone about a passage and they have a completely different understanding of what's being said than you do. That's not because the Bible is mystical/magical and difficult to understand, but because its such an important subject that we want to be as certain as possible that we have the right understanding, that at times we will massage the text more than we would, say, the newspaper.

### Take this classic example:

The interpretation of what single word in Ephesians 3:5 can significantly alter the meaning of this entire passage? \_\_\_\_\_

What are the 2 meanings of this word as used here, and how will if altar the passage?

1)

2)

---

### Here's another sticky-wicket:

In 1 Peter 2:13 (NKJ), what 2 things could *through the Spirit* refer to:

1)

2)

Given option 1 above, what would this mean?

Given option 2 above, what would this mean?

What other passages, or concepts from other passages, could help you make a determination?

## QA Asking the Questions, and Finding the Problems

The question is, how do you know what questions to ask? That's where we need to practice **interrogation**—the process of probing the text with questions, with the intention of making us aware of alternate possibilities. To do this we ask, of each word and clause of each verse, 3 types of questions: **Definitive**, **Relative** and **Implicational**.

### **Definitive:**

Asks what does this word, phrase, clause, etc... mean?  
Seeks to define the word in its given context.

#### **Questions to ask:**

What does this mean? What is the significance of this word? To whom is this referring to?  
What is the object of this phrase? **Etc...**

### **Relative:**

Asks why.

#### **Questions to ask:**

Why am I told this? Why does the author use this word? Why is this word in this tense?  
Why is it plural? **Etc...**

### **Implication:**

Asks what is this word, phrase, clause (etc...) implying?

#### **Questions to ask:**

What is the implication of this?

## QA Asking the Questions, and Finding the Problems

We don't want to just ask the questions though...we also want to begin giving answers. That is, after all, the concept of interpretation. So, along with the 3 categories of questions, D, R and I, we want to come up with possible solutions, and begin to attempt an assessment of the right one. Let's look at an example.

**Ephesians 2:10** For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Word/Phrase	Questions/Answers (assessments bold and underlined)	DRI
For	<p>Q. What does "f or" mean? Assigning a reason, used in the sense of either "that", "since", or "<b>because</b>".</p>	D
	<p>Q. What is the significance of "for" in this sentence? It ties the preceding passage to the following text, as in a continuation of the theme. <b>It gives the purpose for the preceding text.</b></p>	D
	<p>Q. What is the object behind the purpose of "for" in the context? "that no one should boast" (v.9), "for by grace you have been saved..." (v.8), "He might show the surpassing riches of His grace..." (v.7).</p>	D
	<p>Q. Why does the author use "for"? We should not boast because we are not our own workmanship, but His workmanship. He wants to emphasize the significance of the preceding passage. He wants us to realize why we have been saved (v.8).. He wants us to see how it is that God is demonstrating His grace (v. 7).</p>	R
we	<p>Q. Who does the we apply to? All people, Paul and the Ephesians, Paul and his disciples, all believers.</p>	D
	<p>Q. Why does the author use "we"? To distinguish between who is and is not His workmanship, i.e., "WE are his workmanship and no one else"; To emphasize that those who are saved are currently His workmanship, i.e., "we ARE his workmanship"; to emphasize that those who are saved are saved as a result of, and are now new creatures by, HIS workings, i.e., "we are HIS workmanship."</p>	R
are his workmanship	Q.	

# QA Asking the Questions, and Finding the Problems

## How do you come up with the various answers?

Some of the answers I come up with I know ahead of time are not going to be right. But, I list them anyhow, because I want to have all the options at my disposal. Its very easy to have a preconceived notion about this verse, because of a preconceived notion about another verse, because of a preconceived notion about a third verse that's a wrong notion. So, to help avoid that, I'll list as many possible answers as seem even remotely reasonable. There are limits.

The key is, probe the text. Sometimes the obvious is not so obvious. At other times what we think is difficult, impossible to resolve, is right there in black and white (or red if they are the words of Jesus).

## How do you come up with the right answer?

This is where I part paths with many modern day "scholars". The *thing* today is grammar. I mean if you can't figure it out from the Greek then you're in the wrong business, or so they say. Or, if the Greek doesn't give you the answer, then you've got to figure out what the author's purpose is, and that will determine the correct answer—again, so they say. The last thing you want to do, according to the experts, is to compare other passages of Scripture, because then you are imposing the right answer on the text...which is partly true.

We have to be careful when comparing Scripture with Scripture, no doubt. But, to abandon the practice all together...I greatly fear what Christendom will look like in 20 years! For as good, and solid a school as mine was, and for all the good things I learned...I can tell you that there is very little, if any emphasis, being placed on the comparison of Scripture with Scripture. What's going to happen when today's graduates are tomorrows Pastors, authors and lecturers?

## We must compare Scripture with Scripture.

Next week we'll focus on just that. There are several methods we can use to compare Scripture with itself. **One of them is the Topical Study.** Begin to think about the following topic, presented to me as a question I received in the form of an E-mail:

Hi! I'm Kristen and from Macon, Georgia....In this class we are working on all kinds of projects and I would like to get your opinion about my topic I was assigned. My project is, "Is AIDS God's judgement on Man?".... A few years ago I lost a dear friend to AIDS and I know a lot about it, but I need some help on whether or not Diseases is a way God puts judgement on man. In my opinion it is not God's judgement but I really don't know how to support my opinion. As I am doing this project I am not only doing it for my teacher but I am doing it for myself....If you know of places in the Bible I could use for my project, I would really appreciate it.

## Homework

### Translation Exercise

This is your chance to get a small taste of the translation process.

Translate this single verse of the Bible. Provided are the Greek words with their Strong's numbers and definitions; also you will also find a listing of each place any important words are used in the Bible. Your job is to pick the best English word to use, and arrange the words in their plainest English sense.

Greek	Strong's	Definition/Possible Xlations	Word Use
Kaí	2532	X and, also, both, but, even, for, if, or, so, that, then, therefore, when, yet	
humeís	5210	plural "you"	
chrísma	5545	an unguent or smearing. X anointing, unction. Used here as a direct object noun	1 John 2:27
échete	2192	a verb; to hold (used in very various applications, literally or figuratively, direct or remote; such as possessions; ability, contiuity, relation, or condition X be (able, possessed with), accompany, can conceive, count, diseased, eat, enjoy, fear, following, have, hold, keep, lack, go to law, lie, must needs, of necessity, need, next, recover, reign, rest, return, sick, take for, tremble, uncircumcised, use Here in the 2rd person plural (you ...)	
apó	575	preposition: X from, away from, because of since, with.	
toú	3588	the	
hagíou	40	Noun; sacred (physically, pure, morally blameless or religious, ceremonially, consecrated): X (most) holy (one, thing), saint. Here this is an indirect object	
kaí	2532	see above	
oídate	1492	verb; to see (literally or figuratively); to know: X-be aware, behold, can tell, consider, know (-ledge), look (on), perceive, see, be sure, tell, understand, wish, wot. Here 2nd person plural.	Titus 1:6, Heb. 10:30 Rev 5:1
pántes	3956	all, or all things	

**Context:** some false-believers have left the group of true believers, thereby demonstrating the fact that they are not true believers.