

THE ISSUE OF HERMENEUTICS

Scripture Reference: 2 Timothy 4:2-5

QUESTION?	What is your process of interpreting Scriptures?

The process of interpreting Scriptures is very critical. One reason there is great disagreement among Christians today over different passages pertains to the process of interpreting Scripture.

Read **2 Timothy 2:15**. What does Paul command young Timothy to do? _____

What did Paul say was the importance or purpose of preaching or “rightly dividing” the Word in 2 Timothy 4:2-5?

What was Paul’s command to Timothy as to how to do this?

Hermeneutics or the process of interpreting Scripture is the “careful” part of the instruction of the Word.

One of the greatest mistakes Christians make today when doing a Bible study is asking the question, “What does this mean to me?” This is not the only goal of Bible study. So what is the goal? Let’s look at the rules of rightly interpreting the Scripture.

I. GENRE

The first step in hermeneutics is identifying the genre. There are several types. They are:

- a. Narrative
- b. Wisdom
- c. Poetry
- d. Prophecy / Apocalyptic
- e. Epistles / Letters

Different genres have inherent to them different principles of interpretation. The reason this is important is that the Bible is not American or even Western. It is primarily Hebrew and Greek. Their cultures were very different. They weren't as nearly analytical as we are. That is why there is no "Systematic Theology" book in the Bible (although Romans is Paul's most extensive treatise on his theology of God's salvation of Israel and how that pertains to the us as Gentiles). So we must seek to understand how their literature reflected their teaching. For example, the poetry books (Psalms, Song of Solomon, etc.) reflect how the Hebrew people taught and learned. They learned through songs and stories. That is one reason Jesus taught in parables. His audience learned through stories.

For the purpose of our study, we are looking at the prophetic. So let's examine the rules pertaining to interpreting the prophetic literature.

II. Prophetic Literature Goals

A. Goal # 1 – Face Value

This simply means you want to look at Scripture at its most normal, natural, and customary sense. Don't try to make a text say something it doesn't say. This is called "reading into the text" or "eisegesis."

Our goal is to read the text and pull the true meaning out of the text. This is called "exegesis." In order to get the exegesis, ask the following questions:

- Who
 - a. Who is talking / writing?
 - b. Who is the audience?
- What
 - a. What is the author saying?
 - b. How would the original audience understand the author?
- When
 - a. Does the timing of this message or statement impact the meaning?
 - b. Does the passage have time attached to it?
- Where
 - a. Where are they located?
 - b. Does their location impact the message? Customs?
- Why
 - a. Why is the author writing this to this audience?
 - b. Why does the audience need to hear this?
- How

The first goal of hermeneutics is not, "What does this mean to me?" but "What did the author mean to the original audience?"

a. Scripture Interprets Scripture

There is no better interpreter of Scripture than other Scripture. Many times you will (or have) encounter passages that are very difficult to interpret. When that happens, begin looking “out from the text.”

- i. Begin with the preceding and succeeding paragraphs.
- ii. Preceding and succeeding chapters. Does the author speak to the same thing again?
- iii. Then go to other books by the author looking for the same subject.
- iv. Finally move to other books of the Bible that discuss the same subject.

b. Scripture Test

Does your interpretation of what the author meant to the original audience comply with other Scripture? In other words, does your interpretation have other contradictions?

If there are Scriptural contradictions, then you have yet to reach the truth.

c. Near / Far Prophecies

In prophecy, there are many passages that have a “near / far” application. These are prophecies that will be fulfilled immediately and long term. An example comes in **Isaiah 7:13-14**.

What is the famous prophecy in this passage?

To Whom does this prophecy apply? _____

Now look in Isaiah 8. Here we see this prophecy partially fulfilled in the prophetess (pure in God’s sight) having a child.

As we journey through the prophetic studies, we must keep these rules in mind. Also refer to the more in depth rules provided.

B. Goal #2: Original Audience

As important as it is that we understand what the story, letter, song, etc. meant to the original hearer, it is equally important (even more important for certain reasons) that we now can answer the question, “How does this apply to me?”

Read **James 1:22**. What is James’ stern command here? _____

QUESTION	How can the study of prophecy benefit you?

APPLICATION?	What did you learn today?