

What is biblical hermeneutics?

Source: <https://www.gotquestions.org/Biblical-hermeneutics.html>

Question: "What is biblical hermeneutics?"

Answer: Biblical hermeneutics is the study of the principles and methods of interpreting the text of the Bible. Second Timothy 2:15 commands believers to be involved in hermeneutics: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who . . . correctly handles the word of truth." The purpose of biblical hermeneutics is to help us to know how to properly interpret, understand, and apply the Bible.

The most important law of biblical hermeneutics is that the Bible should be interpreted literally. We are to understand the Bible in its normal or plain meaning, unless the passage is obviously intended to be symbolic or if figures of speech are employed. The Bible says what it means and means what it says. For example, when Jesus speaks of having fed "the five thousand" in Mark 8:19, the law of hermeneutics says we should understand *five thousand* literally—there was a crowd of hungry people that numbered five thousand who were fed with real bread and fish by a miracle-working Savior. Any attempt to "spiritualize" the number or to deny a literal miracle is to do injustice to the text and ignore the purpose of language, which is to communicate. Some interpreters make the mistake of trying to read between the lines of Scripture to come up with esoteric meanings that are not truly in the text, as if every passage has a hidden spiritual truth that we should seek to decrypt. Biblical hermeneutics keeps us faithful to the intended meaning of Scripture and away from allegorizing Bible verses that should be understood literally.

A second crucial law of biblical hermeneutics is that passages must be interpreted historically, grammatically, and contextually. Interpreting a passage historically means we must seek to understand the culture, background, and situation that prompted the text. For example, in order to fully understand Jonah's flight in Jonah 1:1–3, we should research the history of the Assyrians as related to Israel. Interpreting a passage grammatically requires one to follow the rules of grammar and recognize the nuances of Hebrew and Greek. For example, when Paul writes of "our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" in Titus 2:13, the rules of grammar state that *God* and *Savior* are parallel terms and they are both in apposition to *Jesus Christ*—in other words, Paul clearly calls Jesus "our great God." Interpreting a passage contextually involves considering the context of a verse or passage when trying to determine the meaning. The context includes the verses immediately preceding and following, the chapter, the book, and, most broadly, the entire Bible. For example, many puzzling statements in Ecclesiastes become clearer when kept in context—the book of Ecclesiastes is written from the earthly perspective "under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:3). In fact, the phrase *under the sun* is repeated about thirty times in the book, establishing the context for all that is "vanity" in this world.

A third law of biblical hermeneutics is that Scripture is always the best interpreter of Scripture. For this reason, we always compare Scripture with Scripture when trying to determine the meaning of a

passage. For example, Isaiah's condemnation of Judah's desire to seek Egypt's help and their reliance on a strong cavalry ([Isaiah 31:1](#)) was motivated, in part, by God's explicit command that His people not go to Egypt to seek horses ([Deuteronomy 17:16](#)).

Some people avoid studying biblical hermeneutics because they mistakenly believe it will limit their ability to learn new truths from God's Word or stifle the Holy Spirit's illumination of Scripture. But their fears are unfounded. Biblical hermeneutics is all about finding the correct interpretation of the inspired text. The purpose of biblical hermeneutics is to protect us from misapplying Scripture or allowing bias to color our understanding of truth. God's Word is truth ([John 17:17](#)). We want to see the truth, know the truth, and live the truth as best we can, and that's why biblical hermeneutics is vital.

Recommended Resource: [Basic Bible Interpretation by Roy Zuck](#)

What is good Biblical Exegesis?

Source: <https://www.gotquestions.org/Biblical-exegesis.html>

Question: "What is good biblical exegesis?"

Answer: *Exegesis* means "exposition or explanation." Biblical exegesis involves the examination of a particular text of scripture in order to properly interpret it. Exegesis is a part of the process of hermeneutics, the science of interpretation. A person who practices exegesis is called an exegete.

Good biblical exegesis is actually commanded in scripture. "Study [be diligent] to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). According to this verse, we must handle the Word of God properly, through diligent study. If we don't, we have reason to be ashamed.

There are some basic principles of good exegesis which serious students of the Bible will follow:

1. The Grammatical Principle. The Bible was written in human language, and language has a certain structure and follows certain rules. Therefore, we must interpret the Bible in a manner consistent with the basic rules of language.

Usually, the exegete starts his examination of a passage by defining the words in it. Definitions are basic to understanding the passage as a whole, and it is important that the words be defined according to their original intent and not according to modern usage. To ensure accuracy, the exegete uses a precise English translation and Greek and Hebrew dictionaries.

Next, the exegete examines the syntax, or the grammatical relationships of the words in the passage. He finds parallels, he determines which ideas are primary and which are subordinate, and he discovers actions, subjects, and their modifiers. He may even diagram a verse or two.

2. The Literal Principle. We assume that each word in a passage has a normal, literal meaning, unless there is good reason to view it as a figure of speech. The exegete does not go out of his way to spiritualize or allegorize. Words mean what words mean.

So, if the Bible mentions a "horse," it means "a horse." When the Bible speaks of the Promised Land, it means a literal land given to Israel and should not be interpreted as a reference to heaven.

3. The Historical Principle. As time passes, culture changes, points of view change, language changes. We must guard against interpreting scripture according to how our culture views things; we must always place scripture in its historical context.

The diligent Bible student will consider the geography, the customs, the current events, and even the politics of the time when a passage was written. An understanding of ancient Jewish culture can greatly aid an understanding of scripture. To do his research, the exegete will use Bible dictionaries, commentaries, and books on history.

4. The Synthesis Principle. The best interpreter of scripture is scripture itself. We must examine a passage in relation to its immediate context (the verses surrounding it), its wider context (the book it's found in), and its complete context (the Bible as a whole). The Bible does not contradict itself. Any theological statement in one verse can and should be harmonized with theological statements in other parts of scripture. Good Bible interpretation relates any one passage to the total content of scripture.

5. The Practical Principle. Once we've properly examined the passage to understand its meaning, we have the responsibility to apply it to our own lives. To "rightly divide the word of truth" is more than an intellectual exercise; it is a life-changing event.

Recommended Resource: [Basic Bible Interpretation by Roy Zuck](#)

What is homiletics?

Source: <https://www.gotquestions.org/homiletics.html>

Question: "What is homiletics?"

Answer: The term *homiletics* comes from the word *homily*, which basically means “a sermon.” Homiletics is the art of preparing sermons and preaching. Those who study homiletics seek to improve their skill at communicating the gospel and other biblical topics. The discipline of homiletics falls under the umbrella of pastoral or practical theology.

Preaching and, therefore, homiletics have always been associated with the pastor of a church. A pastor is sometimes referred to as the “preaching elder,” based on 1 Timothy 5:17. However, a study of homiletics can be beneficial to anyone who teaches the Word of God.

Historically, homiletics has integrated biblical teaching and rhetoric (the art of speaking persuasively or for effect). However, theologian Karl Barth insisted that preaching has a different purpose from rhetoric; preaching does not rely on stylistic devices or tools of persuasion, so homiletic and rhetorical studies must be separate. Paul described his preaching as “not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power” (1 Corinthians 2:4). Many take this to be Paul’s preference for plain, non-rhetorical discourse.

However, there is no command against rhetoric in preaching. Paul himself waxed eloquent when it seemed the best way to communicate the truth, especially when he spoke at the Areopagus, the center of intellectual discussion in Athens, Greece (Acts 17). And Paul used rhetorical questions, asking, “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” (Romans 10:14). Apollos was known for his excellence in speaking and persuasive words (Acts 18:24, 28).

Applying the tools of rhetoric and a deep knowledge of the Bible are helpful to biblical preaching. Someone called to preach would do well “to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you” (2 Timothy 1:6), and homiletics is useful in that pursuit. It is a worthy study, but, at the same time, we must not forget that God can work through anyone, with or without formal training, to communicate Christ in everyday situations.

Recommended Resource: Biblical Preaching by Haddon Robinson