

Rethinking Scripture

Bring The Text Into Context

The Seven Hermeneutical Principles: A Christocentric Approach to Scripture

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE: Start with Jesus, Not Doctrine Every passage must be understood in light of Christ and the overarching story of God's relationship with humanity. Trust the Story – the meta-narrative of scripture.

The Hermeneutical Funnel: Think of interpretation as a funnel that moves from broad view to a more specific understanding:

1. View Scripture with an Eastern Mindset

2. View Scripture in Light of its Judeo Roots

3. Choose "Literature" Over "Literal"

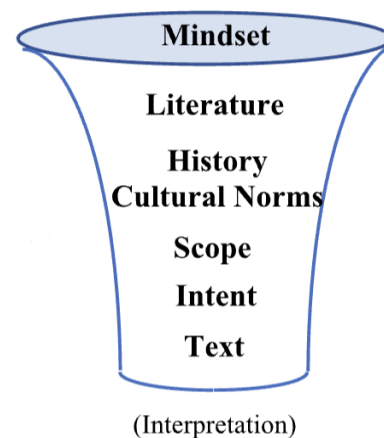
4. The Text Wasn't Written in a Vacuum - Read scripture in light of the unique situation it was written in. What was the historical background? Are there relevant cultural norms? What is the specific situation? Why did the author feel a need to write it?

5. Don't Put Answers on the Text That the Text Isn't Trying to

Answer - Stay within the scope of the author's understanding and intention when applying. Assuming our questions and answers are in a text is how you can make scripture say anything. What did the original author understand and care about? What did the original author intend? How did the original audience understand it? What question is the author intending to ask and answer?

6. Scripture Was Written FOR You, Not TO You - Don't assume universal application. Just because God worked with people in a certain way at one point, doesn't mean He intended to apply it to all people for all time, in the same way.

7. Words Matter - Understanding the original languages spoken and written, as well as the processes of translating scripture through other languages is critical to having a healthy understanding of what we read today.



The Text Wasn't Written in a Vacuum

Understanding Historical and Cultural Context

Historical Background Questions:

1. What was the general historical background?
2. What were the cultural norms?
3. What was the specific situation?

One of the most difficult things scholars face when translating is when there's a cultural norm so embedded and strong that it's naturally assumed, so the writer doesn't explain it. The problem is that 1000+ years later, that cultural norm isn't in place, so those assumptions that aren't in the text are hard to find.

Practical Example: 1 Timothy Case Study

After reading 1 Timothy 2 what is the weird struggle they are dealing with? Using the 3 questions above, let's break this down together.¹

1. Historically what can we find? Ephesus was a center of worship for a particular god...who was it and what were they a god of?
2. At surface level reading, it seems a strict passage about women's roles
3. _____ cult featured female-dominated religious leaders.

Contextual Interpretation Toolkit

1. Research historical background
2. Understand political landscape
3. Investigate social structures
4. Examine economic conditions
5. Consider religious influences

¹ Cheat sheet on page 8

Don't Put Answers on the Text That the Text Isn't Trying to Answer

Understanding Scope and Authorial Intent

The Problem: This is how you can make scripture say anything. We often go to scripture looking for answers and find answers to questions never asked.

Stay within the scope of the author's understanding and intention when applying.

Four Hermeneutical Questions for Scope:

1. **What did the original author understand and care about?**
2. **What did the original author intend?**
3. **How did the original audience understand it?**
4. **What question is the author asking and answering?**

Examples of Going Beyond Scope:

Capital Punishment Example: Someone used Jesus' words "Those who live by the sword will die by the sword" as a defense of capital punishment. Regardless of what you believe about capital punishment, that was NOT in the scope of what Jesus was talking about.

Job Example: If you go to Job asking "Why do bad things happen to good people?" you've gone past the scope. Job isn't trying to answer that question, so you'll get bad answers because it's answering a different question.

Scripture Was Written FOR You, Not TO You

Don't Assume Universal Application

Just because God worked with people in a certain way at one point doesn't mean He intended to apply it to all people for all time in the same way.

Key Principle: Don't assume universal application.

Practical Example: 1 Timothy Case Study²

Four Christocentric Principles for Application:

1. From a Christocentric approach, we're not seeking to expand doctrine, but to know Christ.

Doctrine has its place if it has a purpose within Christ. We should be slow to turn everything into doctrine because we create blocks that close us off to things.

2. How does this passage help me understand the heart of God? And how does that help my heart with God?

3. Does this passage hold a universal understanding of how to relate with others, myself, or God?

4. Is there an application of the passage that is relevant to our current context, and remains honest to the heart of the passage?

² Cheat sheet on pages 10 & 11

Reflection & Discussion Questions

Processing the Hermeneutical Principles

1. The Ezra 10 Challenge: How would you respond to someone using Ezra 10 to argue against interracial marriage today? What hermeneutical principles would guide your response? How does a Christocentric reading help us understand this passage?

Your thoughts:

2. Personal Hermeneutical Blind Spots: What are some ways you might be reading the Bible that actually misses the author's intent and obscures Christ's character and kingdom?

Your thoughts:

Historical and Cultural Context

5. Artemis and Timothy: How does understanding the Artemis culture change your reading of 1 Timothy 2:15? What does this teach us about the importance of historical context in interpretation?

Your thoughts:

6. Herodians and Jesus: How does knowing about Antipas's failed battle help us understand Jesus' teaching in Luke 14:31? What is Jesus challenging the Herodians (and us) to consider?

Your thoughts:

Scope and Authorial Intent

7. Predestination in Ephesians: How does reading Ephesians 1-2 as addressing Jewish-Gentile unity rather than individual election change your understanding of God's character and Christ's work?

Your thoughts:

8. Questions Scripture Isn't Answering: Can you think of other examples where people use biblical passages to answer questions the text isn't trying to address? How can we avoid this trap?

Your thoughts:

Universal vs. Specific Application

9. Acceptance Over Agreement: How does the principle "Scripture was written FOR you, not TO you" help us navigate divisive issues while maintaining unity in Christ?

Your thoughts:

Personal Application & Action Steps

This Week's Challenge

What will I do differently this week based on understanding these hermeneutical principles?

Practical Exercises

☐ **Hermeneutical Principle Practice:** Choose a difficult biblical passage and work through all seven principles. How does this change your understanding?

Passage chosen: _____ New insights: _____

☐ **Genre Identification Exercise:** Choose three biblical books you've never considered the genre of. Research and identify their literary type and original audience. How does this change your approach?

Books: _____, _____, _____ Insights: _____

☐ **Historical Context Research:** Pick a New Testament passage and research its historical background. What cultural or political situations influenced the writing?

Passage: _____ Historical discoveries: _____

☐ **Scope Analysis:** Find a passage that's commonly used to support a doctrine. Ask: What question was the author actually trying to answer? Does the doctrine fit within that scope?

Passage: _____ Author's actual question: _____

Footnotes:

The Text Wasn't Written in a Vacuum

Exercise: 1 Timothy 2:15 and the Artemis Culture

Read 1 Timothy 2:15: *"But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety."*

The Weird Struggle: What's strange about this verse to us?

Historical Context: The City of Ephesus

- Very cosmopolitan city filled with Greeks, Romans, and Jews
- Known for the Temple to Artemis - massive following
- Artemis had a world-renowned temple in Ephesus

Google Exercise: Research Artemis What was Artemis the goddess of?

Key Discovery: Artemis was the goddess of hunting, agriculture, outdoors, AND **childbirth**

Cultural Practices with Artemis:

- Women would make offerings to Artemis when pregnant
- They would take clothing worn during birth and dedicate it to Artemis
- Artemis was seen as the protector during childbirth
- High mortality rates made this incredibly important
- The sanctuary probably had birthing classes and support from experienced mothers

Reinterpreting 1 Timothy 2:15: With this context, Paul probably isn't talking about heaven/hell salvation (soteriology). He's likely saying: "If you're a follower of Christ, I know culturally there's this tendency to put faith and trust in Artemis, but you have Jesus - trust Jesus the way you would want to trust Artemis."

Christocentric Application: Paul is redirecting trust from a false goddess to the true God revealed in Jesus Christ. This shows how Christ meets us in our deepest fears and concerns.

Specific Historical Situations: Luke 14:31 and the Herodians

Questions specific to the background:

1. Was there a specific issue or event involving the original readers?
2. Does the text reference something specific?

The Passage: Luke 14:31 - Jesus tells a story about two kings going into battle, one with 10,000 against one with 20,000. "Wouldn't he think about whether he should go into battle?"

Historical Background: The Herodians

- Jews who were very aligned with Rome (different from Sadducees)
- Like "Christian nationalists" - wanted to marry government and religion
- Believed in the "Roman dream" - very supportive of Rome
- Felt threatened by Jesus because He could upset Roman order

Google Exercise: Who ruled after Herod the Great?

Three sons divided the territory:

- **Herod Archelaus:** Judea and Samaria
- **Herod Antipas:** Galilee and Perea (where Jesus lived)
- **Herod Philip:** Batanea (up north)

Google Exercise: Battles with Herod Antipas The King Aretas Conflict:

- Antipas divorces Phasaelis (daughter of King Aretas of Nabatea)
- Antipas marries Herodias (wife of his brother Philip)
- This is the same Herodias whose daughter danced and asked for John the Baptist's head
- King Aretas was furious about the divorce of his daughter

The Disastrous Battle:

- King Aretas attacked Antipas
- Antipas lost so badly he had to go back to Rome for help
- Rome had to send orders to the king of Syria to force Aretas to withdraw
- Antipas lost face completely - his worst nightmare

Jesus' Point in Luke 14:31: When Jesus tells this story, everyone listening (especially Herodians) would immediately think: "Oh, we know about the king who went into battle and didn't count the cost - that's Antipas, our guy!"

The Deeper Message: "Are you really considering the cost of sticking with your guy, your religion? This was your leader - are you not counting the cost of what you're betting your life on?"

Additional Context: Antipas was the one who killed John the Baptist (Jesus' cousin). Jesus is also pointing out that Antipas didn't have the strength to stand up for what he knew was right.

Homework Exercise: Luke 14:28-29 mentions building a tower. Research building projects by these three rulers in Jesus' day to see if Jesus was referencing a specific contemporary situation.

Christocentric Application: This shows how Jesus meets people where they are politically and socially, challenging them to consider whether their ultimate allegiance is to earthly kingdoms or to God's kingdom through Christ.

Scripture Was Written FOR you, Not to YOU

Another Example: 1 Timothy 2:9

"I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God."

Common Application: Some churches don't allow women to wear makeup or jewelry based on this verse.

The Problem: We hold onto some verses as universal rules while making "cultural arguments" for others we think don't make sense. This is inconsistent hermeneutics.

Applying These Principles:

Jonah: Am I holding back from loving someone that God loves and wants me to love or help?

Job: Is there something I'm blind to in my own hubris? What am I not seeing about God or my own heart?

1 Timothy 2:15 (childbearing): What/who am I trusting in? Is there something where I'm putting my trust in something else that really belongs to God?

1 Timothy 2:9 (women's dress):

- **Historical Context:** Greek women were getting new social freedom in church that they couldn't have in Greek society
- **The Problem:** They were probably showing up with dress and jewelry that inadvertently belittled other women - it was unkind and degrading
- **Paul's Point:** Put kindness and compassion in front of your own image
- **Universal Principle:** When Jesus taught about love, there are universals about making concessions within community because it's the kind thing to do

Modern Example: Drinking Alcohol Personal journey from "beer touching your lips = flames of hell" to understanding freedom in Christ, while recognizing there are times when freedom should be limited out of consideration for others' spiritual journey or struggles.

The Universal: There are times when I need to think about the community I'm with and not make it about me and my rights all the time.

Ephesians Predestination: Unity. Jesus is our authority. We hold the deep value of acceptance over agreement.

Christocentric Application: These universals usually flow from starting with Jesus and understanding how He taught us to treat and love people, rather than from isolated texts.

Our Church Value: Acceptance Over Agreement

We will ask people not to wreck relationship over explosive cultural issues because we believe unity and acceptance is more important than agreement on secondary issues. This value comes from our hermeneutic of reading scripture through Christ's lens of love and unity.

Book Recommendation - From Glenn

Kenneth E. Bailey (2008) *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes*. IVP Academic

Kenneth E. Bailey (2011) *Paul through Mediterranean Eyes*. IVP Academic

BEMA Discipleship Podcast Episode Recommendation:

Episode 18: "The Tail of Two Kingdoms" - Contrasting this world's kingdom (Empire) and God's.

Episode 35: "Crossroads of the Earth" - Where geographically was Israel...and why?

Episode 52: "Jonah – Potential" - Jonah, the story and the genre of the story.

Episode 47-71: A look at the strong character during the reign of the North and South Kingdom.

Episode 74-81, 83: The people, the political climate, the text, and the Messiah. What was Jesus coming into when He came from Heaven to Earth?

Episode 84-87: The Gospels and who they were written to and for.

Episode 90: "A Gospel of Two Kingdoms" - The birth of Christ and juxtaposition of two kingdoms.

Final Thought

"Interpretation is not about proving a point, but about encountering the living God through His story."