

GENERAL LAWS OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION
PART 2–THE FOUNDATIONAL RULES
THE BIBLE MUST BE INTERPRETED GRAMMATICALLY!

Following the “*SUPREME RULE*” are two essential “*FOUNDATIONAL RULES*” which must be consistently observed in all Bible interpretation.

The first of these is this:

THE BIBLE MUST BE INTERPRETED GRAMMATICALLY!

By this we mean that Scripture is to be interpreted according to the usual meaning of its words and the normal rules of grammar. There are three “**Laws**” which must be applied.

I. THE LAW OF “DIRECT STATEMENT.”

A. The Law Stated.

Every passage of Scripture is to be understood literally and taken to mean exactly what it says unless it is patently obvious from its immediate context or employment of obvious figures of speech that it bears another meaning. (*i.e. “If the plain sense makes common sense, seek no other sense or it will all become nonsense.”*)

B. Examples.

1. Israel Is Israel.

2. Canaan Is Canaan.

3. Zion Is Zion.

4. One Thousand Is One Thousand.

Although numbers may have symbolic meaning, unless this is clearly evident all numbers must be taken at their face value.

We should take every word in its primary, ordinary, usual meaning unless the facts of the *context* indicate clearly otherwise.

II. THE LAW OF “CONTEXT.”

A. The Law Of CONTEXT Stated.

Every passage of Scripture must be studied in the light of its context. (*i.e. “A text taken from its context becomes a pretext.”*)

In studying the *context* of a passage of Scripture it is necessary to consider the following:

1. Consider The IMMEDIATE CONTEXT.

That is, the chapter in which the passage is located.

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2. Consider The SECONDARY CONTEXT.
That is, the Book in which the passage is located.

3. Consider The BROAD CONTEXT.
That is, the Testament in which the passage is located.
Consideration of the text’s location within the whole Bible may bring to bear historical, dispensational, and prophetic factors.

4. Consider The TOPICAL CONTEXT.
That is, the parallel passages in other sections of the Bible.
A text dealing with a particular subject should also be compared with other Bible passages dealing with the same theme.

This may be done through:

- a. Word cross-referencing (use a Concordance)**
- b. Subject cross-referencing (use a Topical Index)**

5. Consider The DOCTRINAL CONTEXT.
That is, the relative DOCTRINAL passages of the Word of God. Texts which are doctrinal in nature should never be isolated from other passages which deal with the same teaching.
Remember this!!!--No fundamental doctrine of the Bible rests upon one or two “*proof texts*.”

B. Examples Of The Law Of CONTEXT.

1. Jehovah’s Witnesses will take *Job 7:9* to prove their doctrine of annihilation. In so doing, they have wrested this verse from its *context*.

2. Several cults use *Ecclesiastes 3:18-22* and *9:5, 10* to teach soul sleep and annihilation.

3. The end of *Philippians 2:12* taken out of its immediate *context* would teach salvation by works.

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4. The judgment described in *Matthew 25:31-46* does not refer to the separation of saved and lost at the “*Great White Throne*” judgment prior to the beginning of the eternal state.
5. The Mormons take *1 Corinthians 15:29* out of context as the basis of their practice of “*being baptized for the dead*”– i.e. proxy baptism for salvation. The *context* is extremely important to the understanding of this verse.
6. Determining the *context* often solves Bible “difficulties.” *Joel 3:10* speaks of beating plowshares into swords, etc., but *Isaiah 2:4* speaks of beating swords into plowshares.
7. Many times a word or phrase is modified or limited by the connection in which it appears, and requires a study of the *context* to determine its meaning.
e.g. The word “law” in the book of Romans has a number of meanings, which are determined by the context, or setting.
 - a. Mosaic Law–*Romans 2:14* (first 3 mentions);
Romans 2:20, 23.
 - b. Natural Law–*Romans 2:14* (last mention)
 - c. Intuitive Law–*Romans 2:15*
 - d. Rule–*Romans 3:27f*
 - e. Principle–*Romans 7:21*

e.g. The word “for” in Acts 2:38 is the key to understanding this verse on the purpose of baptism.
Those who believe in baptismal regeneration interpret “*for*” to mean “*in order to*” to support their doctrine.

However, the word “*for*” can also mean “*because of.*” If we say that a man was imprisoned *for* theft, we do not mean that he was put in prison *in order to* commit theft, but *because of* theft.

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In *Luke 5:14* both usages of the word “*for*” are found. Interpreting *Acts 2:38* as “*...be baptized ever one of you [because of] the remission of sins...*” is totally consistent with the many other Scriptures which clearly refute any notion of baptismal regeneration.

III. THE LAW OF LANGUAGE.

A. The Law Of Language Stated.

Words should be understood in a *literal sense*, unless such an interpretation involves a clear contradiction or absurdity. All *non-literal language* must be based upon *literal words* for it to make sense.

B. Examples Of Non-Literal Language.

Some of the Bible is written in ways other than by direct statement–in types, parables, symbols, and figurative (non-literal) language. Recognizing this fact requires each of these to be subject to the rules of interpretation applicable.

1. Simile.

A *simile* is a *figure of speech which shows comparison*. The purpose of using *similes* is to represent truth in a graphic form. The “*key*” to identifying *similes* is the word “*like*” or “*as*.”

Examples of *simile* in the Bible:

Exodus 24:17–“...was like a devouring fire.”
Psalms 2:9–“...like a potter’s vessel.”
Psalms 11:1–“Flee as a bird to your mountain.”
Psalms 68:13–“...as the wings of a dove. . .”
Psalms 102:6–“...like a pelican. . . like an owl. . .”
Song of Solomon 2:9–“My beloved is like a roe”
Isaiah 1:8–“... left as a cottage in a vineyard. . .”
Isaiah 1:18–“...sins be as scarlet. . .”
Matthew 18:3–“...become as little children. . .”
1 Peter 5:8–“...the devil, as a roaring lion. . .”

Look at *Revelation 9:5-10* and note the several uses of “as” and “like” in this passage.