

EXPLORE

2

the Bible



OBSERVE

What does
the text say?



INTERPRET

What does
the text mean?



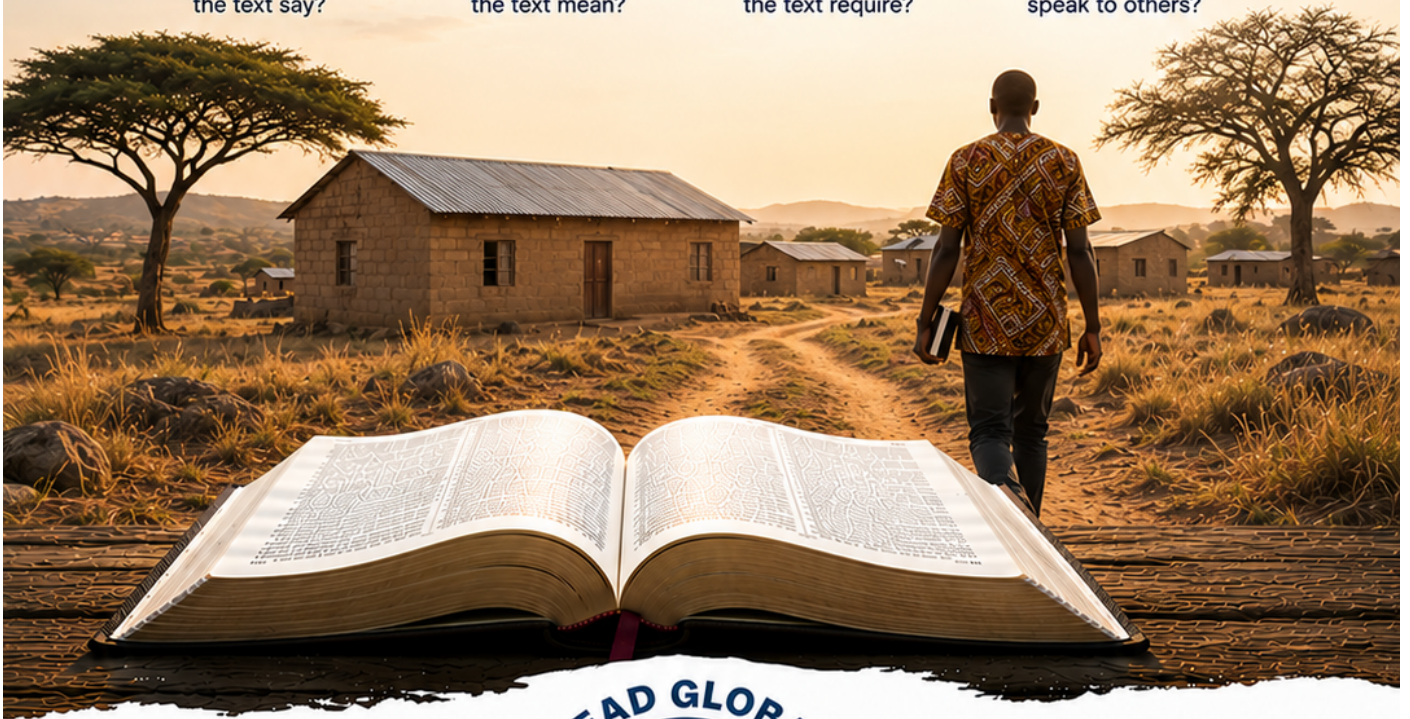
APPLY

What does
the text require?

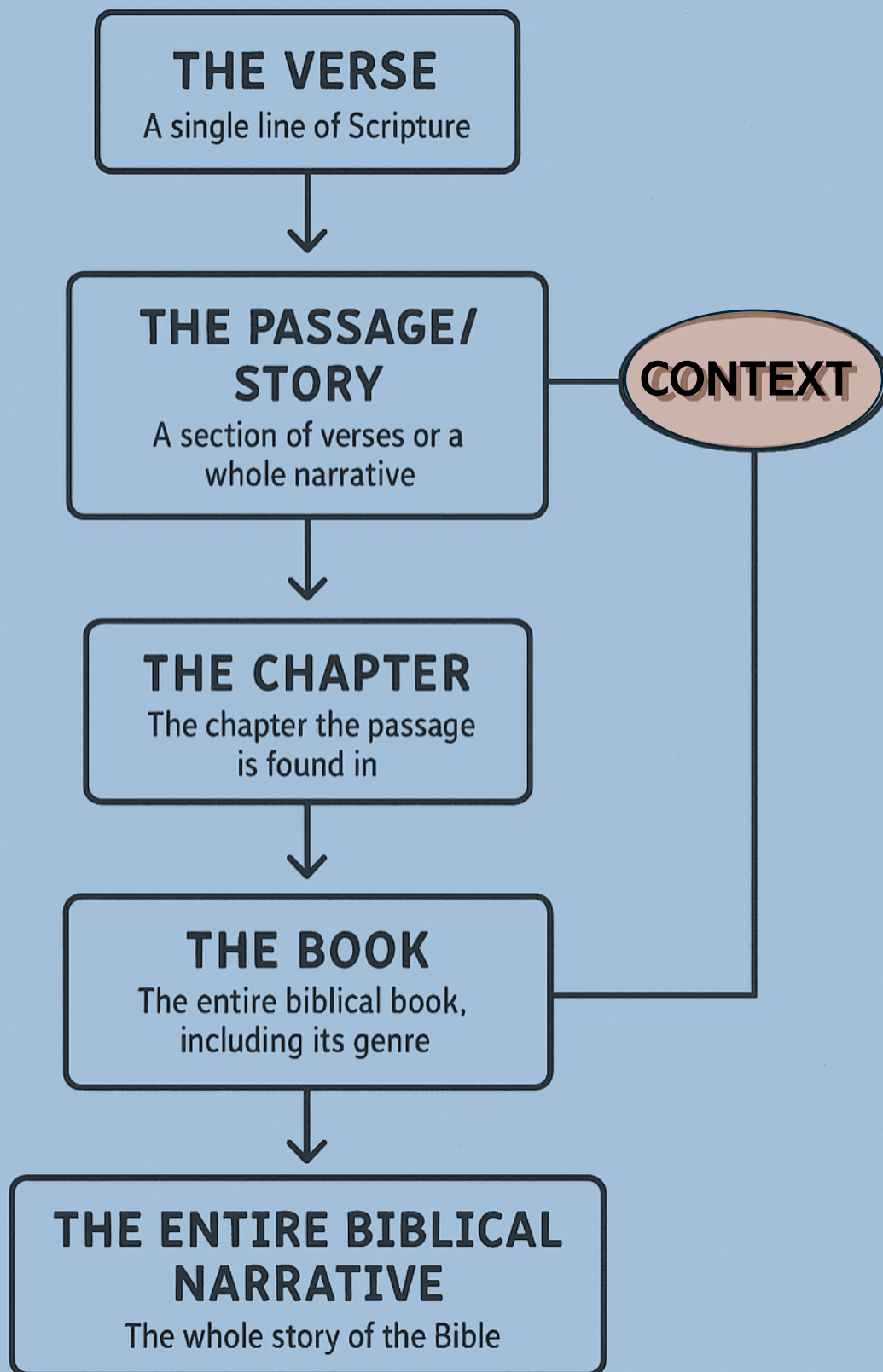


COMMUNICATE

How does the text
speak to others?



AFRICAN CHURCHES SENDING
AFRICAN MISSIONARIES
TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH



The Doctrine of Scriptural Authority → the foundation for hermeneutics.

Before asking, “**What does this text mean?**” we must first ask, “**Why should I trust this text?**” Hermeneutics presupposes authority. Method is only meaningful if the text is worth interpreting rightly.

→ Scripture's authority is not granted by the church, tradition, or the interpreter. Its authority is intrinsic because it comes from God Himself. We interpret Scripture because it is authoritative; we do not interpret it to make it authoritative.

- **Isaiah 55:11** says, “So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose.”
- **Hebrews 4:12** declares that “the Word of God is living and active”.

Therefore, before we learn how to interpret Scripture, we must understand why Scripture deserves our submission.

Inspiration — *Theopneustos*

- **2 Timothy 3:16** states, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”
- The Greek word translated “breathed out by God” is *theopneustos*. Scripture is not merely inspiring; it is inspired by God. It originates from God's own breath and speech.
- Notice the four purposes: teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness. Each assumes that Scripture has authority over the reader.
- At the same time, God used real human authors. Their personalities, vocabulary, experiences, and circumstances are visible in the text. Yet according to **2 Peter 1:21**, men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.
- The prophets were not dictation machines. **1 Peter 1:10–12** tells us that they searched and inquired carefully about the things they were writing. God superintended the process so that what they wrote was exactly what He intended.

Application: When we open the Bible, we are hearing the voice of God through human authors.

Verbal and Plenary Inspiration

- Verbal inspiration means inspiration extends to the very words of Scripture, not merely the general ideas.
 - Jesus said in **Matthew 5:18** that not an iota or dot would pass from the Law until all is accomplished.
 - Paul's argument in **Galatians 3:16** depends on the singular word “seed” rather than the plural “seeds.”

- Plenary inspiration means all Scripture is inspired. No portion is more inspired than another. The Old Testament and New Testament alike are God's Word.
 - Jesus said in **John 10:35**, “Scripture cannot be broken.” Therefore, every part of Scripture deserves careful attention.

Inerrancy

- Inerrancy flows from the character of God.
- **Numbers 23:19** says God is not a man that He should lie.
- **Titus 1:2** describes God as One who never lies. If Scripture is truly God's Word, then Scripture cannot err in what it intends to affirm.
- Jesus prayed in **John 17:17**, “Your word is truth.” Christ and the apostles treated Scripture as completely trustworthy.

* Important clarifications: Inerrancy applies to the original writings. It concerns what Scripture intends to affirm. It recognizes different literary genres such as poetry, narrative, wisdom literature, and apocalyptic literature.

* Inerrancy does not mean every quotation follows modern standards of precision. It does not eliminate approximations or round numbers. Difficult passages do not automatically equal errors.

The existence of a difficult text should move us toward careful study rather than skepticism.

Authority and Sola Scriptura

- Tradition, reason, and experience all have value. However, Scripture stands above them as the final court of appeal.
- **Isaiah 8:20** says, “To the teaching and to the testimony.”
- **Acts 17:11** praises the Bereans because they tested even apostolic teaching against Scripture.
- **Galatians 1:8** warns that even if an angel preaches a different gospel, that message must be rejected. Jesus repeatedly answered temptation with the words, “It is written.”

Sola Scriptura does not mean Scripture is the only authority in any sense. It means Scripture is the highest authority and the final standard by which all other authorities are measured.

Authority and Sufficiency

- Scripture's authority is practically useful because Scripture is also sufficient.
- **2 Timothy 3:17** teaches that the man of God may be complete and equipped for every good work.
- **2 Peter 1:3** says God has granted everything necessary for life and godliness.
- Scripture is the norming norm. It stands above all other norms. The warnings of **Deuteronomy 4:2** and **Revelation 22:18–19** against adding to or subtracting from God's Word reinforce its completeness.

God has given His people everything necessary for salvation and faithful Christian living.

Clarity of Scripture

- The doctrine of clarity teaches that Scripture is sufficiently clear in matters necessary for salvation and godly living.
- **Psalms 119** says God's Word is a lamp to our feet and gives understanding to the simple.
- **Deuteronomy 30** teaches that God's commands are not beyond the reach of ordinary people.
- However, clarity does not mean every passage is equally easy to understand. The Holy Spirit illuminates the text. Illumination is different from inspiration. Inspiration produced Scripture; illumination helps believers understand Scripture.
- **1 Corinthians 2:14** teaches that the natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God.
- **Luke 24:45** records that Jesus opened the minds of His disciples to understand the Scriptures.

Therefore, we approach the Bible prayerfully and dependently.

From Authority to Interpretation

- If Scripture is authoritative and inerrant, then misinterpreting Scripture is not merely an academic mistake. It is a stewardship issue.
- **2 Timothy 2:15** commands us to rightly handle the Word of truth. Second Peter 3:16 warns that unstable people twist the Scriptures to their own destruction.
- **Isaiah 66:2** says God looks favorably upon the one who trembles at His Word.
- As we move into hermeneutics, we do not seek to control the text. We seek to submit to it. We do not stand over Scripture as judges. Scripture stands over us as God's authoritative Word.

John 17:17 summarizes the entire lesson: "Your word is truth."

What Is Hermeneutics?

Hermeneutics is the art and science of interpretation. In biblical studies, it refers to the principles and methods used to interpret the Bible faithfully and responsibly. It is a tool to help us to allow God’s Word to speak for itself. It helps us to maintain God’s Word as our authority and not a tool of religion.

The term comes from the Greek **ἑρμηνεύω** (hermeneuo), meaning “to interpret” or “to translate.” It is like a toolkit that helps us bridge the gap between ancient texts and modern understanding. It helps us to not only read God’s Word but to also understand its meaning and apply it to our lives and to our churches.

Why Is Hermeneutics Important?

- Without proper hermeneutics, we risk:
 1. Misinterpreting Scripture by ignoring context.
 2. Reading our own biases into the text (called eisegesis).
 3. Missing the richness of literary genres, historical settings, and theological depth.
- Hermeneutics helps us:
 1. Discover the intended meaning of biblical authors.
 2. Apply Scripture wisely and accurately today.
 3. Navigate difficult or controversial passages with clarity.

Key Hermeneutical Tools & Concepts

Concept	Description
Hermeneutics	The art and science of interpreting Scripture.
Exegesis	Drawing out the original meaning of a biblical text based on context and content. Meaning comes from the text itself.
Eisegesis	Reading personal ideas or biases into the text (a hermeneutical no-no).
Narcigesis	A form of eisegesis where the interpreter reads themselves into the text, making it about them (a hermeneutical no-no). Not all promises or commands in Scripture are for every individual.
Empathy Choice	To feel or understand what a character in Scripture is/has gone through (not inserting self), which can lead us to empathize with them or to respond in rejecting their choices to avoid their situation (example – put yourself into a situation that will lead to sinful behavior)
Historical Context	Understanding the culture, politics, and customs of the time.

Concept	Description
Literary Genre	Recognizing whether the text is poetry, narrative, law, prophecy/apocalyptic, or epistle.
Theological Themes	Identifying core doctrines and divine truths.
Canonical Context	Interpreting a passage considering the whole Bible.
Descriptive	Narrates what happened – records, events, behaviors, or practices without commanding them.
Prescriptive	Commands or instructs – sets forth principles or actions believers are meant to follow.
Cross Reference	Another passage or verse that agrees or helps build context or understanding for the verse being studied. Letting Scripture interpret Scripture.

The Goal of Hermeneutics

Ultimately, biblical hermeneutics aims to:

Discover the truths and values expressed in the Bible and discern what God wants us to understand and live out.

It's not just about knowledge – it's about life application.

It's not just about knowledge - it's about transformation.

Types of Biblical Hermeneutics

There are several interpretive approaches, each with strengths and risks:

Literal: Focuses on the plain meaning of the text.

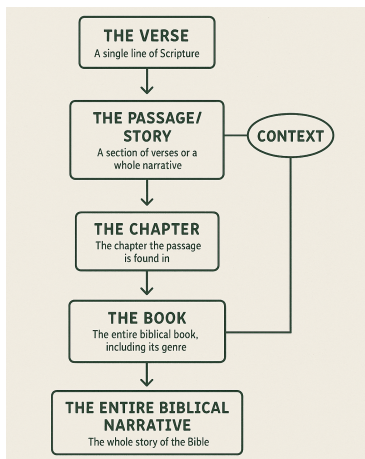
Allegorical: Seeks deeper, symbolic meanings (used heavily in early church history).

Moral: Applies ethical lessons.

Anagogical: Points to eternal or eschatological truths.

→ Modern scholars often use a **Historical-Grammatical** method, which emphasizes grammar, syntax, and historical context to uncover the author's intent.

The Process of Biblical Hermeneutics



Every **Verse** is part of a **Passage** or **Story**.

Every **Passage** or **Story** is part of a **Chapter**.

Every **Chapter** is part of a **Book**.

Every **Book** is part of the **Canon** (Biblical Library).

There is an **Overarching Biblical Narrative** to the Bible

Following this process is a simple tool to keep what we are studying in its **intended context** and helps us avoid removing and using it in isolation to create a different meaning (Eisegesis)

It is important to note that the entire process of hermeneutics should begin and end with prayer. Pray that you can understand the text. Pray that distractions will not keep you from understanding or lead you to add meaning the text that is not there. Pray that as you write down what you are learning that you would be able to properly communicate the truth of God's Word to others.

Understanding Descriptive vs Prescriptive Text

When examining a text, there are four markers that we need to look at to help us determine whether the text is describing an event or is instructing us to do something.

- **Audience and Genre** – Epistles often have prescriptive teaching, but historical narrative are mostly descriptive.
- **Language Cues** – Imperative words like “do,” “go,” or “love” can help us to see prescriptiveness.
- **Theological Consistency** – Prescriptive text will align with the broader biblical teaching and are usually reaffirmed across genres.
- **Cultural vs Universal** – Descriptive text may reflect cultural practices like foot washing or head covering that are not universally binding.

Why This Matters

If we misapply descriptive text as commands (universal), it can lead us to **legalism**. Also, if we dismiss prescriptive texts as simply cultural, we can **undermine biblical authority**. This helps us to differentiate between commands and observation. **Just because something happens in the Bible doesn't automatically make it prescriptive.** Using context and similar passages, we can better differentiate.

Questions to Ask

1. **What is happening in the story or passage?** (Who, What, Where, When)
2. **Why did what happen matter to the people at that time?** (Context. May require a little investigation)
3. **What does this mean for me today?** (Application)

There are several tools that can be used to assist in this process.

- a. **SOT** (What does the passage **SAY**? What must I **OBEY**? Who do I need to **TELL**?)
- b. **SPECKA / SPECTA** (Is there a **SIN** to avoid? Is there a **PROMISE** to keep? Is there an **EXAMPLE** to follow? Is there a **COMMAND** to obey? Is there **KNOWLEDGE/TEACHING** about God or man that I must learn? What must I **APPLY** to my life?)
- c. **SOAP** (Examine the **SCRIPTURE. OBSERVE** what it is saying/teaching. What **APPLICATION** should I make? **PRAY** and commit this truth to your life.)
- d. **GROW (GO** in prayer. **READ** the Scripture. What do I **OBSERVE**? **WRITE** down what you learn/observe)

These tools or methods help us to allow the Bible to speak for itself and to help keep us from making the Bible say something it does not.

Examples of Hermeneutics

1. Narrative: Genesis 22 (Abraham and Isaac)

Hermeneutical Approach:

Historical-Grammatical Method: Focus on the literal meaning within its historical context.

Character and Plot Analysis: Observe development, tension, and resolution.

Theological Themes: Covenant, obedience, faith, and divine provision.

Example:

In Genesis 22, God commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. A proper hermeneutic recognizes this as a **historical narrative** with theological depth.

The interpreter should: Understand the cultural context of ancient Near Eastern sacrifice.

Note the literary structure: rising tension, climax (God's intervention), and resolution.

Highlight the typology: Isaac as a foreshadowing of Christ, the beloved son offered but spared.

Apply the theological message: God provides (Jehovah Jireh), and faith is tested through obedience.

2. Poetry: Psalm 23

Hermeneutical Approach:

Genre Sensitivity: Recognize metaphor, parallelism, and emotional tone.

Theological Reflection: Explore attributes of God and human experience.

Literary Devices: Imagery, repetition, and rhythm.

Example:

Psalm 23 opens with "The Lord is my shepherd."

A poetic hermeneutic: Interprets "shepherd" metaphorically, not literally.

Understands parallelism: "He makes me lie down... He leads me..." as reinforcing divine care.

Reflects on emotional resonance: comfort in suffering ("valley of the shadow of death").

Avoids over-literalizing poetic expressions (e.g., "anointing my head with oil" as symbolic of blessing).

3. Prophecy: Isaiah 7:14

Hermeneutical Approach:

Dual Fulfillment: Immediate historical context and messianic future.

Forth telling vs. Foretelling: Addressing present issues and future hope.

Typology and Symbolism: Recognizing patterns and divine promises.

Example:

Isaiah 7:14 says, “A virgin will conceive and bear a son...”

Understands the historical context: King Ahaz’s crisis and the sign of Immanuel.

Recognizes immediate fulfillment in Isaiah’s time (possibly a young woman bearing a child as a sign).

Sees **typological fulfillment** in Christ’s birth (Matthew 1:23).

Balances literal and symbolic meanings without collapsing one into the other.

4. Epistle: Romans 12:1–2

Hermeneutical Approach:

Occasional Nature: Written to address specific issues in early churches.

Logical Flow: Track argumentation and theological development.

Application-Oriented: Ethical and doctrinal implications.

Example:

Romans 12:1–2 urges believers to be “living sacrifices.”

A sound hermeneutic:

Considers Paul’s audience: Roman Christians navigating pagan culture.

Understands figurative language: “living sacrifice” as spiritual devotion, not physical death.

Traces logical progression: from theology (Romans 1–11) to ethics (Romans 12–16).

Applies the transformational message: renewing the mind leads to discerning God’s will.

Why This Matters

Each genre demands a **different interpretive lens**, but all share the **goal of uncovering the intended meaning of the text** in its original context and applying it faithfully today.

Can Be Taught as Needed: Exegesis vs Eisegesis (20 minutes)

1. Example 1: Jeremiah 29:11

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord...

✓ Exegesis:

Context: This was written to Israelites in exile in Babylon.

Interpretation: God is reassuring them of His long-term plan to restore them after 70 years.

Application: God is faithful even in suffering, but this promise was specific to Israel’s situation.

✗ Eisegesis:

Interpretation: “God promises me personal success and prosperity.”

Problem: Ignores historical context and assumes a universal guarantee of comfort.

2. Example 2: Philippians 4:13

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

✓ Exegesis:

Context: Paul is speaking about enduring hardship and being content in all circumstances.

Interpretation: Christ empowers believers to persevere through trials.

✗ Eisegesis:

Interpretation: “I can win any competition or achieve any goal because of Jesus.”

Problem: Turns a message about endurance into a motivational slogan.

3. Example 3: Matthew 7:1

“Judge not, that you be not judged.”

✓ Exegesis:

Context: Jesus is warning against hypocritical judgment.

Interpretation: We should examine ourselves before correcting others.

✗ Eisegesis:

Interpretation: “No one should ever judge anyone for anything.”

Problem: Ignores the rest of the passage, which encourages discernment and accountability.

Why This Matters

Exegesis leads to **faithful interpretation**, grounded in truth. Eisegesis leads to **distorted theology**, shaped by personal desires or cultural trends.

Practicum (40 minutes)

Choose from the following passages:

1. Philippians 2:1-11
2. Acts 2:1-11
3. Matthew 13:44-52
4. Zechariah 3:1-10
5. Psalm 113:1-8
6. Exodus 32:1-35

- A. Pray** that God would assist you to understand the text and resist inserting your biases into the reading of the text
- B.** Consider the genre and the **historical/cultural context**.
- C.** It is helpful to determine the **author's intent**. Read the passage **before** and **after**.
- D.** Would you say that the passage is **Prescriptive** or **Descriptive**?
- E.** On first reading (you will do several), **What are key words/terms that stick out to you?**
- F.** Are you aware of any passages like this text or may refer to this text (or that this text refers to)?
- G.** Apply the **sound theological principles** (not worldly principles) to begin interpretation
- H. Let the text speak for itself**, not you for the passage.
- I.** Write an **outline** of the passage with the key terms or key points that arise from your reading (you should have read at least 4 times by this point)
- J. Write down what you think that the passage is communicating.** Include all notes and observations. Follow the **tools** given in the previous session to bring out sins, examples, characteristics of God or Man, or anything else seen.
- K.** After completion of writing, then you may go to Bible Hub or another commentary to see what others have said. **How does your interpretation agree or disagree with the other writings?**
- L.** Share with the group.

HERMENEUTICS GUIDE

Hermeneutical Checklist

- ☐ Pray as you begin
- ☐ Identify the genre of the biblical passage
- ☐ Consider the historical and cultural context
- ☐ Examine the original language and key terms
- ☐ Determine the author's intent
(Read the Context - Verses Before and After)
*Remember: The text cannot mean now what it did not mean then
- ☐ Is the passage Descriptive or Prescriptive?
- ☐ Compare with other relevant Scripture
(Cross Reference)
- ☐ Apply sound theological principles.
(Avoid Worldly or Cultural principles)
- ☐ Avoid personal bias or assumptions.
Remember that the Word of God is a double-edged sword. Are we using it to apply to other things and ignoring how it is supposed to be changing us?
- ☐ After writing down what you have learned or are preparing to teach, check commentaries to check that what you have crafted is confirmed with others that have done the same (you have not created a new interpretation)

Key Definitions

- **Hermeneutics:** The art and science of interpreting Scripture.
- **Exegesis:** Drawing out the original meaning of a biblical text based on context and content.
- **Eisegesis:** Reading one's own ideas or biases into the text.
- **Narcigesis:** Interpreting Scripture in a self-centered way, making oneself the hero of the story.
- **Empathy Choice:** The reality that we can identify with a character in a passage/story, empathizing with their struggle or choosing to avoid the path they have taken.
- **Descriptive:** Narrates what happened—records events, behaviors, or practices without commanding them
- **Prescriptive:** Commands or instructs—sets forth principles or actions believers are meant to follow
- **Cross Reference:** another passage or verse that agrees or helps build context for the verse you are studying

Reflection Questions

- What assumptions do I bring to this passage?
- How does the historical context shape its meaning?
- What theological principles are evident here?
- How does understanding genre change your interpretation?
- What biases might you bring to this passage?

Mistakes to Avoid

- Ignoring genre distinctions
- Overlooking cultural context
- Reading personal bias into the text
- Projecting personal views onto the text

Hermeneutical Process Flowchart



"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness." 2 Timothy 2:15–18

"And how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." 2 Timothy 3:15–16

MWONGOZO WA KUFASIRI MAANDIKO

Orodha ya Kukagua Kufasiri Maandiko

- ☐ **Omba** kabla ya kuanza
- ☐ Tambua **aina** ya kifungu cha Biblia
- ☐ Fikiria **muktadha** wa kihistoria na kitamaduni
- ☐ Chunguza lugha asili na maneno muhimu
- ☐ Amua **nia ya mwandishi**
(Soma Muktadha - Mistari Kabla na Baada)
***Kumbuka:** Maandishi hayawezi kumaanisha sasa kile ambacho hakikumaanisha wakati huo
- ☐ Je, kifungu hicho **kinaelezea** au **kinaagiza**?
- ☐ Linganisha na Maandiko mengine husika (**Marejeleo ya Mtambuka**)
- ☐ Tumia **kanuni nzuri za kitheolojia**.
Epuka kanuni za Kidunia au Kitamaduni
- ☐ Epuka upendeleo wa kibinafsi au mawazo.
Kumbuka kwamba Neno la Mungu ni upanga wenye makali kuwili. Je, tunaitumia kutumia kwa mambo mengine na kupuuza jinsi inavyopaswa kutubadilisha?
- ☐ **Baada ya kuandika kile ulichojifunza au unajiandaa kufundisha, angalia maoni ili kuangalia kuwa kile ulichounda kimethibitishwa na wengine ambao wamefanya vivyo hivyo (haujaunda tafsiri mpya)**

Ufafanuzi Muhimu

- **Kufasiri Maandiko (Hermeneutics):** Sanaa na sayansi ya kutafsiri Maandiko.
- **Ufafanuzi (Exegesis):** Kuchora maana ya asili ya maandishi ya Biblia kulingana na muktadha na yaliyomo.
- **Uingizaji (Eisegesis):** Kusoma maoni ya mtu mwenyewe au upendeleo kwenye maandishi.
- **Ujiingizaji (Narcigesis):** Kutafsiri Maandiko kwa njia ya ubinafsi, kujifanya shujaa wa hadithi.
- **Chaguo la Uelewa (Empathy Choice):** Ukweli kwamba tunaweza kujitambulisha na mhusika katika kifungu / hadithi, kuhurumia mapambano yao au kuchagua kuepuka njia ambayo wamechukua.
- **Maelezo (Descriptive):** Inasimulia kile kilichotokea-hurekodi matukio, tabia, au mazoea bila kuyaamuru
- **Maagizo (Prescriptive):** Amri au maagizo—huweka kanuni au matendo ambayo waumini wanakusudiwa kufuata
- **Marejeleo Mtambuka (Cross Reference):** kifungu kingine au aya ambayo inakubali au kusaidia kujenga muktadha wa aya unayosoma

Maswali ya Tafakari

- Ni mawazo gani ninayoleta kwenye kifungu hiki?
- Muktadha wa kihistoria unaundaje maana yake?
- Ni kanuni gani za kitheolojia zinazoonekana hapa?
- Kuelewa aina kunabadilishaje aina yako tafsiri?
- Ni upendeleo gani unaweza kuleta kwenye kifungu hiki?

Makosa ya Kuepuka

- Kupuuza tofauti za aina
- Kupuuza muktadha wa kitamaduni
- Kusoma upendeleo wa kibinafsi katika maandishi
- Kuonyesha maoni ya kibinafsi kwenye maandishi



Mchoro wa Mchakato wa Kufasiri Maandiko

"Jitahidi kupata kibali kamili mbele ya Mungu kama mfanyakazi ambaye haoni haya juu ya kazi yake, na ambaye hufundisha sawa ule ujumbe wa kweli. Jiepushe na majadiliano ya kidunia na ya kipumbavu; kwani hayo huzidi kuwatenga watu mbali na Mungu. Mafundisho ya aina hiyo ni kama donda linalokula mwili. Miongoni mwa hao waliofundisha hayo ni Humenayo na Fileto. Hawa wamepotoka kabisa mbali na ukweli, na wanatia imani ya watu wengine katika wasiwasi kwa kusema ati ufufuo wetu umekwisha fanyika." *2 Timotheo 2: 15-18*

"Unakumbuka kwamba tangu utoto wako umeyajua Maandiko Matakatiifu ambayo yaweza kukupatia hekima iletayo wokovu kwa njia ya imani kwa Kristo Yesu. Maandiko yote Matakatiifu yameandikwa kwa uongozi wa Mungu, na yanafaa katika kufundishia ukweli, kuonya, kusahihisha makosa, na kuwaongoza watu waishi maisha adili." *2 Timotheo 3:15-1*

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