Bible Interpretation

What does the Bible Mean

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Bible Interpretation Study
Part I

• Lesson One: Taking the Bible Literally
• Lesson Two: Interpreting Figurative Language
• Lesson Three: Prescriptive versus Descriptive Passages
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• Lesson Five: Interpreting in the light of Context
Bible Interpretation

What does the Bible Mean

Why Study the Bible?

Because

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”
II Timothy 3:16
Warning

“If an individual can make the Bible say what he wants it to say, then the Bible cannot guide him. It is merely a weapon in his hands to support his own ideas.”

[Layman’s Guide to Interpreting the Bible, by Walter A. Henrichsen]
To be guided correctly by the word of God, we must assume “the Bible contains its own laws of interpretation, which, when properly understood and applied, will yield the correct meaning to a given passage.”

[Layman’s Guide to Interpreting the Bible, by Walter A. Henrichsen]
Prescriptive versus Descriptive Bible Passages

What’s the difference and the impact on interpreting the Bible
Bob was running well in the Iowa marathon.
Prescriptive Elements

- Exact rule or method
- Laws
- Facts
- Instructions
- Doctrine
- Remedy
- Commands

Bob should eat lots of carbs before running the marathon.
Which one is which?

28 And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Matthew 10:28

1 And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. Matthew 10:1
Which one is which?

**PREScriptive**

**Describe**

**Descriptive**

Matthew 10:1

And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.

Matthew 10:28

And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

DESCRIPTIVE

PREScriptive
Which one is which?

11 But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. 12 For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. Galatians 2:11-12

16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. Galatians 2:16
Which one is which?

DESCRIPTIVE

PRESCRIPTIVE
And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. 

Acts 2:1-4

During Pentecost -- The Lord’s disciples wait and suddenly receive the Holy Spirit.

DESCRIPTIVE - NOT BIBLE DOCTRINE
14 Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: 15 Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: 16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) 17 Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

Acts 8:14-17

The Samaritans receive the Holy Spirit after Peter and John prayed and laid hands on them.
Receiving the Holy Spirit

44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. 45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. 46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Acts 10:44-47

Cornelius and his friends receive the Holy Spirit after Peter speaks.

DESCRIPTIVE - NOT BIBLE DOCTRINE
4 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. 5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. Acts 19:4-6

The disciples at Ephesus receive the Holy Spirit after they’re baptized and Paul lays hands on them.

DESCRIPTIVE - NOT BIBLE DOCTRINE
Summary

Received the Holy Spirit

- While waiting during Pentecost
- After Peter and John prayed and laid hands on the Samaritans
- After Peter shares the gospel with Cornelius
- After Ephesian disciples are baptized and Paul lays hands on them

DESCRIPTIVE - NOT BIBLE DOCTRINE
Prescriptive
When Holy Spirit Received

13 In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,

14 Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory. Ephesians 1:13-14

Heard – Believed - Sealed

YES - BIBLE DOCTRINE
Jacob and His Wives

Can I follow the example of Jacob and marry more than one wife?

41 Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle: and thou hast changed my wages ten times.

42 Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty.

God hath seen mine affliction and the labour of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight. Genesis 31:41-42

Descriptive or Prescriptive?

DESCRIPTIVE

Leah’s maid was named Zilpah and Rachel’s was named Bilhah.
Jacob and His Wives

2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;
1 Timothy 3:2

31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. Ephesians 5:31

Descriptive or Prescriptive?

PRESCRIPTIVE
Jacob and His Wives

Can I follow the example of Jacob and marry more than one wife? **NO**

Because the Bible commands men to be married to only one woman.

**Examples (Descriptive) should not be followed if the Bible prohibits (Prescriptive).**
Jesus’ Baptism

Do I have to be baptized in the Jordan because Jesus was baptized in the Jordan?

13 Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. Matthew 3:13

Descriptive or Prescriptive?

DESCRIPTIVE
Jesus’ Baptism

Do I have to be baptized in the Jordan because Jesus was baptized in the Jordan?  NO

Biblical examples (Descriptive) are authoritative only when supported by a command (Prescriptive).

However, a biblical example may be used of God as an application in your life. For example, God may use Jesus’ baptism to impress on you to be baptized as a believer in obedience to scripture.
Jesus’ Baptism

Should I be baptized? **YES**

19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, *baptizing them* in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:
20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen.
Matthew 28:19-20

**Biblical examples (Descriptive) are authoritative only when supported by a command (Prescriptive).**
Prophetic

- Narrative is **Descriptive** – Describes future events
  - Fulfilled already in history
  - Still to be fulfilled
- Supports end-times doctrine (eschatology)
- Supports salvation doctrine (God’s redemption plan)
Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:

Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD:

But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.
Prophetic

6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6

16 For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. Psalm 22:16

DESCRIPITIVE

Lord’s First Coming
Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle.

And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south. Zechariah 14:3-4
Now these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem unto the residue of the elders which were carried away captives, and to the priests, and to the prophets, and to all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon; Jeremiah 29:1
5 Build ye houses, and dwell *in them*; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them;
6 Take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished

*Jeremiah 29:5-6*
Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths. For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her.

Proverbs 7:25-26
Drill

8 Passing through the street near her corner; and he went the way to her house,
9 In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night:
10 And, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot, and subtil of heart.
Proverbs 7:8-10
For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's. I Corinthians 6:20
For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you.  
I Corinthians 1:11
But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things *which happened* unto me have fallen out rather unto the *furtherance of the gospel*; *Philippians 1:12*
3 *Let nothing be done* through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

4 *Look* not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. **Philippians 2:3-4**
6 I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: DESCRIPTIVE

PRESCRIPTIVE       DESCRIPTIVE
7 Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. Galatians 1:6-7
1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Revelation 21:1-2
Drill

I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.
Revelation 22:13

PRESSCRIPTIVE
Historical - Descriptive

17 Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.  

Jonah 1:17

Teaching – Prescriptive

40 For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.  

Matthew 12:40
Descriptive & Prescriptive Linkage

Historical - Descriptive
9 And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived. **Numbers 21:9**

Teaching – Prescriptive
14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up. **John 3:14**
Descriptive & Prescriptive Linkage

**Historical - Descriptive**

5 And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.
6 He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. *Matthew 28:5-6*

**Teaching – Prescriptive**

20 But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.
21 For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.
22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. *I Corinthians 15:20-22*
Prescriptive versus Descriptive Bible Passages

Understanding the distinction is critical to interpreting the Bible correctly.
Questions