



How To Read Your Bible

1. Basic Bible Interpretation
2. The Historical Setting
3. The Grammatical Setting
4. **The Scriptural Setting**

What Sets Lutheran Interpretation Apart?

The Final Say On What a Passage Means . . .

Roman Catholic	The final judge of what a passage means is the church. An interpreter's decisions must agree with the traditions of the church as set forth by church councils and the pope.	<u>Comments:</u> The church is not the final judge of what God means. Popes or church councils do not have the authority to change the meaning of God's word. In the Catholic church, ultimately the word of a man (the Pope) is more important than the word of God. See also 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4
Reformed Churches (e.g. Presbyterian, and others)	Human reason is the final judge of what a passage means.	<u>Comments:</u> The dangers in this method of interpreting the Bible are obvious. Men like John Calvin and other early reformed leaders disregarded clear doctrines of Scripture because they did not see "reasonable" to them. Reformed churches typically do not teach correctly on Baptism, the Lord's Supper, Creation, Conversion, election, and other things that they cannot "figure out" for themselves.
Lutheran Churches (conservative)	The Bible is the best interpreter. God Himself makes the final judgment about what a passage means.	<u>Comments:</u> Since the Bible is written by God and God cannot make mistakes, we can use one passage in the Bible to help us interpret another.

Scripture Interprets Scripture!

The Bible forms a perfect unit (no errors, no contradictions) because it was authored by the One God. God does not say something in one book that will be contradicted in another. He does not give us one doctrine in one passage and then turn around and give us the opposite doctrine in another passage. He doesn't say, for example, in one place that it is sinful to commit adultery and in another place announce that it is good and pleasing.

Therefore Scripture teaches about itself. We can read the words of Jesus about forgiveness to help us understand Paul's words about it. We can read what the book of Hebrews tells us about faith to help us understand what the Old Testament prophets meant by it.

*If you are having a hard time understanding a passage,
a doctrine, or the meaning of a section of Scripture,
there is nothing wrong with looking
elsewhere in the Bible for help in understanding it!*

I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles.

- 2 Peter 3:2

See the Bible passage from Second Peter? The apostles themselves taught this principle that Scripture interprets Scripture.

Martin Luther summarized it this way:

1. The meaning of a passage is determined by comparing what it says with all the other passages of Scripture which address the same subject in the same or similar words; and
2. By letting what God said in all those other passages explain what God means by the words in the passage under study.

This way, God Himself becomes the judge of what He means, and not people or human reason!

Unity Between the Old and New Testaments

Very often, the New Testament calls on passages from the Old Testament to clarify its meaning. We've already seen how Matthew frequently quoted from the Old Testament. Whenever the New Testament quotes the Old, it is an example of Scripture interpreting itself – a passage from one place being used to confirm the meaning in another place.

- An example of how Scripture uses its own unity to prove a doctrine:

Romans 3:10-19 (Psalms, Isaiah, and Ecclesiastes)

- An example of how Scripture uses its unity to illustrate a point:

1 Corinthians 10:7 (Exodus 32:6)

- Examples of how Scripture uses its unity to note the fulfillment of prophecy:

Acts 2:26-32 (Psalm 16:9-11)

Matthew 27:46 (Psalm 22:1)

Matthew 1:22-23 (Isaiah 7:14)

The New Testament often helps us to understand the meaning of prophecies in the Old Testament that we might have trouble understanding otherwise.

The Holy Spirit led the writers of the New Testament to quote, paraphrase, or use passages and teachings from the Old Testament. This is significant, because it reminds us that God's word can be used to interpret itself.

Yes, Context Is Still Important

"Since God is the author of all of Scripture, no passage can be understood in a way that would make it conflict with or contradict another passage or portion of Scripture" (Kuske, 125).

For example, those who teach that the millennium in Revelation 20:6 means that Christ will return and rule for 1000 years here on earth ignore the fact that this interpretation contradicts other clear passages of the Bible like John 18:36, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, Hebrews 9:27, and Matthew 25:1-13. In short, the one thousand years in Revelation 20:6 *cannot* mean a 1000 year earthly rule of Christ. Scripture itself denies this interpretation. God must mean something else by those words than their idea of the millennium.

- In working with passages that are difficult to understand, use passages that are clearer to understand to help you interpret the difficult.
- **Important:** When you do this, make sure both passages are talking about the same topic (true "parallel" passages)!

Reason and Faith

God gives us a mind, and we should use it. We use our reason to read the words that are on the page of the Bible. We use our reason to know which words are subjects and which are verbs. We use our minds to grasp the concepts that God communicates to us through His word.

We should *never*, however, use our reason to tell God "No, that can't be" or "No, you can't really mean that." There are miracles and truths taught in the Bible that are so beyond us that we can't figure them out (e.g. the doctrine of the Trinity or the virgin birth of Christ). Yet we must still believe what God says, even if we cannot always understand how it can be. This is part of faith.



Activity

- Many Bibles have a cross-reference system printed in the margin. Find a cross-reference Bible and see how the references given for particular passages can help you understand the meaning of that passage.
- Find a Bible passage that you have had a hard time understanding in the past. See if you can find other sections of the Bible that are talking about the same topic (using a topical Bible might help). Use the parts of the Bible that are easier to understand to help you grasp the more difficult sections.
- Study the Bible regularly. The Holy Spirit works through the word and He Himself will help you to see the meaning of Scripture.