



Ten Rules for Bible Interpretation

1. The Bible must be interpreted with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
2. The larger context of the passage should always be allowed to influence and limit the interpretation of the passage.
3. The definition of words is best determined by how those words are used in other parts of Scripture.
4. Bible interpretation should involve some elbow grease.
5. Interpretation must come before application.
6. The verse cannot mean what it did not mean.
7. Allow the whole counsel of Scripture to explain and expand on individual passages.
8. Interpretation must be sensitive to the **genre of literature** being studied.

A. Old Testament Law

B. Wisdom Literature (Proverbs)

- Just as we learned in our study of the present-day interpretation/application of Old Testament law, while the Bible is completely true, the application of its truth is influenced by the literary genre or the Scripture category of the passage we are studying.
- What kind of literature are proverbs?
 - Proverbs are not laws.

Examples of biblical laws...

Ephesians 4:29 | *No foul language should come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear.* (CSB)

Ephesians 4:30 | *And don't grieve God's Holy Spirit. You were sealed by him for the day of redemption.* (CSB)

Ephesians 4:31 | *Let all bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander be removed from you, along with all malice.* (CSB)

Ephesians 4:32 | *And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ.* (CSB)

- Proverbs are not promises.

Examples of biblical promises...

Romans 8:11 | *And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, then he who raised Christ from the dead will also bring your mortal bodies to life through his Spirit who lives in you.* (CSB)

1 Corinthians 15:51–52 | *Listen, I am telling you a mystery: We will not all fall asleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed.* (CSB)

Galatians 5:16 | *I say then, walk by the Spirit and you will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh.* (CSB)

James 4:8 | *Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.* (CSB)

- A biblical proverb is a short, pithy saying that expresses a wise, general truth concerning life from a divine perspective.
 - Found most notably in the book of Proverbs, but also in Ecclesiastes, Psalms, and Job.

Proverbs 22:6 | *Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.* (ESV)

- Are biblical proverbs always true in the sense that a law or promise is always true?
 - Logic says “no.”

Proverbs 15:1 | *A gentle answer turns away anger, but a harsh word stirs up wrath.* (CSB)

Proverbs 1:33 | *Whoever listens to me will live securely and be undisturbed by the dread of danger.* (CSB)

Proverbs 10:3–4 | *The LORD will not let the righteous go hungry, but he denies the wicked what they crave. Idle hands make one poor, but diligent hands bring riches.* (CSB)

Proverbs 17:2 | *A prudent servant will rule over a disgraceful son and share an inheritance among brothers.* (CSB)

Proverbs 22:16 | *Oppressing the poor to enrich oneself, and giving to the rich—both lead only to poverty.* (CSB)

- The situation of Job says “no.”

Job 4:7–9 | *Consider: Who has perished when he was innocent? Where have the honest been destroyed? In my experience, those who plow injustice and those who sow trouble reap the same. They perish at a single blast from God and come to an end by the breath of his nostrils.* (CSB)

An allusion to...

Proverbs 12:21 | *No disaster overcomes the righteous, but the wicked are full of misery.* (CSB)

Job 8:6 | *If you are pure and upright, then he will move even now on your behalf and restore the home where your righteousness dwells.* (CSB)

An allusion to...

Proverbs 3:33 | *The LORD’s curse is on the household of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous;* (CSB)

- If biblical proverbs are not always true in the same sense as laws or promises, then what value do they have?
 - They have a divine origin.
 - They teach a lesson God desires his children to learn.
 - They point to a general truth.
- How should we interpret and apply a proverb?

- Don't base a Bible doctrine on a proverb.
- Identify the practical instruction contained within the proverb.
- Allow the exception to prove the rule.

Sandbox

Proverbs 22:6 | *Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.* (ESV)

Proverbs 26:13 | *The slacker says, "There's a lion in the road— a lion in the public square!"* (CSB)

Proverbs 3:9–10 | *Honor the LORD with your possessions and with the first produce of your entire harvest; then your barns will be completely filled, and your vats will overflow with new wine.* (CSB)

B. Poetry

Three rules to keep in mind when reading poetic passages of Scripture...

1. The use of poetry in ancient times indicates that the writer is less concerned with precise description or scientific accuracy than with evoking emotions and creating certain impressions.
 - *So, the reader must be careful to find the message the writer is communicating and not misinterpret by ignoring the emotive purpose.*

These two passages describe the same event...

Prose

Judges 4:12–16 | *It was reported to Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up Mount Tabor. Sisera summoned all his*

nine hundred iron chariots and all the troops who were with him from Harosheth of the Nations to the Wadi Kishon. Then Deborah said to Barak, "Go! This is the day the LORD has handed Sisera over to you. Hasn't the LORD gone before you?" So Barak came down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him. The LORD threw Sisera, all his charioteers, and all his army into a panic before Barak's assault. Sisera left his chariot and fled on foot. Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth of the Nations, and the whole army of Sisera fell by the sword; not a single man was left. (CSB)

Poetry

Judges 5:4–5 | *LORD, when you came from Seir, when you marched from the fields of Edom, the earth trembled, the skies poured rain, and the clouds poured water. The mountains melted before the LORD, even Sinai, before the LORD, the God of Israel. (CSB)*

Judges 5:19–20 | *Kings came and fought. Then the kings of Canaan fought at Taanach by the Waters of Megiddo, but they did not plunder the silver. The stars fought from the heavens; the stars fought with Sisera from their paths. (CSB)*

These two passages also describe the same event...

Prose

Exodus 14:21–22 | *Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The LORD drove the sea back with a powerful east wind all that night and turned the sea into dry land. So the waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with the waters like a wall to them on their right and their left. (CSB)*

Poetry

Exodus 15:8 | *The water heaped up at the blast from your nostrils; the currents stood firm like a dam. The watery depths congealed in the heart of the sea. (CSB)*

2. Poetry often uses symbolic language.
- *So, the reader must be careful not to read all language as literal.*

Psalm 18:6–17 (CSB)

6 I called to the LORD in my distress, and I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears.

7 Then the earth shook and quaked; the foundations of the mountains trembled; they shook because he burned with anger.

8 Smoke rose from his nostrils, and consuming fire came from his mouth; coals were set ablaze by it.

9 He bent the heavens and came down, total darkness beneath his feet.

10 He rode on a cherub and flew, soaring on the wings of the wind.

11 He made darkness his hiding place, dark storm clouds his canopy around him.

12 From the radiance of his presence, his clouds swept onward with hail and blazing coals.

13 The LORD thundered from heaven; the Most High made his voice heard.

14 He shot his arrows and scattered them; he hurled lightning bolts and routed them.

15 The depths of the sea became visible, the foundations of the world were exposed, at your rebuke, LORD, at the blast of the breath of your nostrils.

16 He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he pulled me out of deep water.

17 He rescued me from my powerful enemy and from those who hated me, for they were too strong for me.

3. Poetry often repeats the same thought with different words for style and emphasis.
- *So, the reader must be careful not to interpret parallel expressions together and not seek to find distinct interpretations or applications.*

Psalm 19:1-2 (CSB)

1 The heavens declare the glory of God, and the expanse proclaims the work of his hands.

2 Day after day they pour out speech; night after night they communicate knowledge.

Psalm 19:7-10 (CSB)

7 The instruction of the LORD is perfect, renewing one's life; the testimony of the LORD is trustworthy, making the inexperienced wise.

8 The precepts of the LORD are right, making the heart glad; the command of the LORD is radiant, making the eyes light up.

9 The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the LORD are reliable and altogether righteous.

10 They are more desirable than gold— than an abundance of pure gold; and sweeter than honey dripping from a honeycomb.

Luke 6:27-28 (CSB)

27 “But I say to you who listen: Love your enemies, do what is good to those who hate you,

28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

Sandbox

Psalm 119:1-3 (CSB)

1 How happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk according to the LORD's instruction!

2 Happy are those who keep his decrees and seek him with all their heart.

3 They do nothing wrong; they walk in his ways.

Psalm 139:1-24 (CSB)

1 LORD, you have searched me and known me.

2 You know when I sit down and when I stand up; you understand my thoughts from far away.

3 You observe my travels and my rest; you are aware of all my ways.

4 Before a word is on my tongue, you know all about it, LORD.

- 5** You have encircled me; you have placed your hand on me.
- 6** This wondrous knowledge is beyond me. It is lofty; I am unable to reach it.
- 7** Where can I go to escape your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?
- 8** If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
- 9** If I live at the eastern horizon or settle at the western limits,
- 10** even there your hand will lead me; your right hand will hold on to me.
- 11** If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me, and the light around me will be night”—
- 12** even the darkness is not dark to you. The night shines like the day; darkness and light are alike to you.
- 13** For it was you who created my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.
- 14** I will praise you because I have been remarkably and wondrously made. Your works are wondrous, and I know this very well.
- 15** My bones were not hidden from you when I was made in secret, when I was formed in the depths of the earth.
- 16** Your eyes saw me when I was formless; all my days were written in your book and planned before a single one of them began.
- 17** God, how precious your thoughts are to me; how vast their sum is!
- 18** If I counted them, they would outnumber the grains of sand; when I wake up, I am still with you.
- 19** God, if only you would kill the wicked— you bloodthirsty men, stay away from me—
- 20** who invoke you deceitfully. Your enemies swear by you falsely.
- 21** LORD, don’t I hate those who hate you, and detest those who rebel against you?
- 22** I hate them with extreme hatred; I consider them my enemies.
- 23** Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my concerns.
- 24** See if there is any offensive way in me; lead me in the everlasting way.

Psalm 23:1–6 (CSB)

- 1** The LORD is my shepherd; I have what I need.
- 2** He lets me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside quiet waters.
- 3** He renews my life; he leads me along the right paths for his name’s sake.

4 Even when I go through the darkest valley, I fear no danger, for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

6 Only goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD as long as I live.

D. Imprecatory Psalms

- An imprecatory Psalm is a Psalm or other prayer that contains an invocation of judgment, calamity, or curse uttered against one's enemies or the enemies of God.
- Depending on how they are counted/categorized, there are between eighteen and thirty-nine imprecatory Psalms in the Bible.

Psalm 109:1–10 (CSB)

1 God of my praise, do not be silent.

2 For wicked and deceitful mouths open against me; they speak against me with lying tongues.

3 They surround me with hateful words and attack me without cause.

4 In return for my love they accuse me, but I continue to pray.

5 They repay me evil for good, and hatred for my love.

6 Set a wicked person over him; let an accuser stand at his right hand.

7 When he is judged, let him be found guilty, and let his prayer be counted as sin.

8 Let his days be few; let another take over his position.

9 Let his children be fatherless and his wife a widow.

10 Let his children wander as beggars, searching for food far from their demolished homes.

Psalm 139:19–24 (CSB)

19 God, if only you would kill the wicked— you bloodthirsty men, stay away from me—

20 who invoke you deceitfully. Your enemies swear by you falsely.

21 LORD, don't I hate those who hate you, and detest those who rebel against you?

22 I hate them with extreme hatred; I consider them my enemies.

23 Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my concerns.

24 See if there is any offensive way in me; lead me in the everlasting way.

Psalm 10:15 (CSB)

15 Break the arm of the wicked, evil person, until you look for his wickedness, but it can't be found.

- Questions about the imprecatory Psalms
 - Why are they in the Bible?
 - Are they inspired?
 - How do they serve as a guide to our personal or corporate prayers?

- Principles
 - It is always wrong to cherish anger in your heart.
 - The best way to deal with anger is to speak honestly of your emotions to the Lord.
 - The enemies David prays about are not his personal enemies, they are the enemies of God.
 - We must not downplay the seriousness of sin or the glory of God.

Psalm 9:19-20 | *Rise up, LORD! Do not let mere humans prevail; let the nations be judged in your presence. Put*

terror in them, LORD; let the nations know they are only humans. Selah (CSB)

Psalm 83:16–18 | *Cover their faces with shame so that they will seek your name, LORD. Let them be put to shame and terrified forever; let them perish in disgrace. May they know that you alone— whose name is the LORD— are the Most High over the whole earth. (CSB)*

- The most common use of the imprecatory Psalms today is to give voice to one's anger at sin as the true enemy.

Sandbox

Psalm 17:6–15 (CSB)

6 I call on you, God, because you will answer me; listen closely to me; hear what I say.

7 Display the wonders of your faithful love, Savior of all who seek refuge from those who rebel against your right hand.

8 Protect me as the pupil of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings

9 from the wicked who treat me violently, my deadly enemies who surround me.

10 They are uncaring; their mouths speak arrogantly.

11 They advance against me; now they surround me. They are determined to throw me to the ground.

12 They are like a lion eager to tear, like a young lion lurking in ambush.

13 Rise up, LORD! Confront him; bring him down. With your sword, save me from the wicked.

14 With your hand, LORD, save me from men, from men of the world whose portion is in this life: You fill their bellies with what you have in store; their sons are satisfied, and they leave their surplus to their children.

15 But I will see your face in righteousness; when I awake, I will be satisfied with your presence.