

How to Study the BIBLE



Gaps

We are all
Bible
interpreters

We must bridge the gap in our understanding

- **Time gap**
- **Geographical gap**
- **Historical/Cultural gap**
- **Language gap**
- **Literary gap**
- **Supernatural gap**

Zuck, R. B. (1991). *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth* (C. Bubeck Sr., Ed.). David C. Cook.

Bible Interpretation

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Historic arc of hermeneutics

1. **Literal** – simple, normal, contextual meaning
2. **Allegorical** – replaces literal meaning with hidden or secret meaning
3. **Traditional** – church experts determine the meaning
4. **Rationalistic** – rejects supernatural elements
5. **Subjective** – replaces objective understanding with personal experiences

Axiom #1, the Bible is a human book

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Six corollaries

1. The Bible is written in language that follows the normal rules of grammar and syntax.
2. Each book of the Bible was written by someone — to specific people — in a specific historical, geographical situation — for a specific purpose.
3. The Bible is affected and influenced by the historical /cultural environment experienced by each human writer
4. Each biblical writing was accepted or understood within its context.
5. Each biblical writing was done in the style of a specific literary form, just like any other writing.
6. Each biblical writing was understood by its original readers by using basic principles of logic and communication.

Axiom #2, the Bible is a divine book

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The Bible is unique because it came to us from God himself.

1. The Bible itself makes that claim. “All scripture is God breathed.” 2 Tim. 3:16
2. Inspiration = the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, as he guided & superintended the writers of scripture so that they wrote the Word of God.
3. The writers “were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” 2 Pt. 1:21
4. The writers of the Bible knew that they were writing divine scripture. Mt. 1:22; 2:15; Mk. 12:36; 2 Pt. 3:16; 1 Cor. 14:37

Axiom #2, the Bible is a divine book

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Four corollaries

1. The Bible is **inerrant**.
2. The Bible is **authoritative**.

Axiom #2, the Bible is a divine book

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Four corollaries

3. The Bible has **unity**.
 - a. The Bible will not contradict itself.
 - b. Obscure & secondary passages should be interpreted in the context of its clear & primary passages.
 - c. The Bible often interprets itself.
 - d. Acknowledge the progress of revelation.

Axiom #2, the Bible is a divine book

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Four corollaries

4. The Bible has **mystery**.
 - a. Prophecy
 - b. Miracles
 - c. Doctrine

Accepting the divine nature of the Bible means we acknowledge its inerrancy, authority, unity, & mystery.

Bridging the Historical / Cultural Gap

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**“I don't know what you mean...”
— Alice**

**“Of course you don't—till I tell you.” ... “When I
use a word, it means just what I choose it to
mean—neither more nor less.”
— Humpty Dumpty**

Bridging the Historical / Cultural Gap

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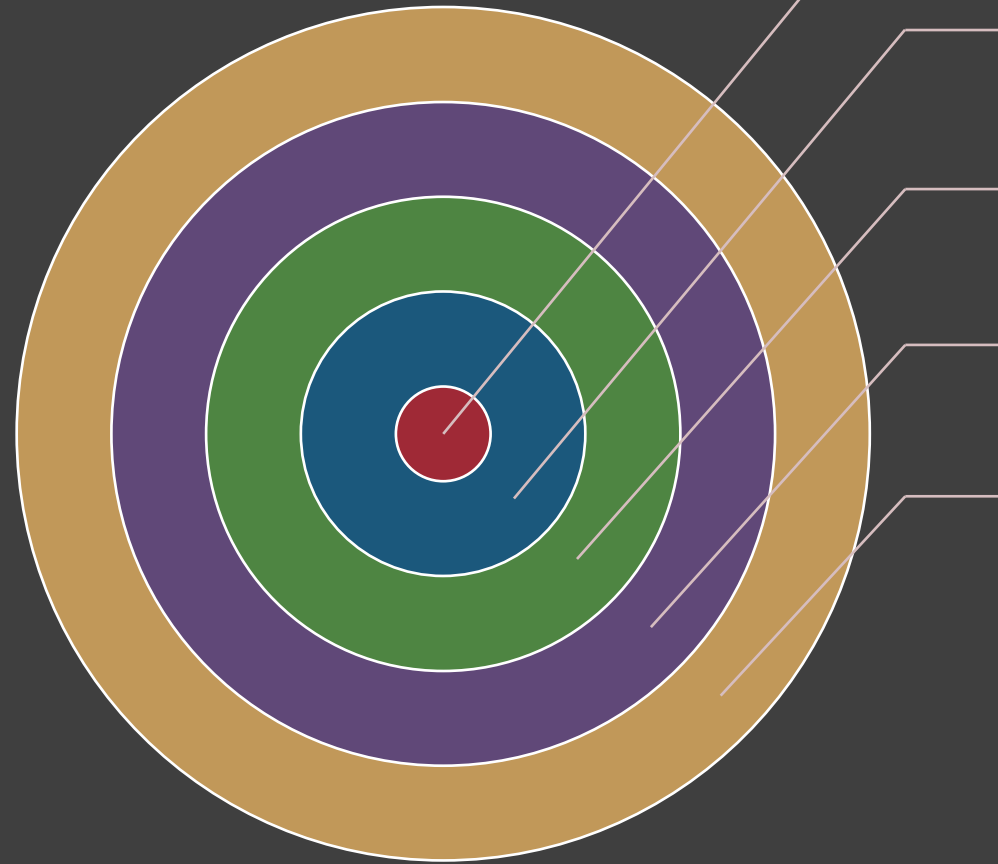
“Understanding the Bible properly requires that we clear our minds of all ideas, opinions, and systems of our own day and attempt to put ourselves into the times and surroundings of the Apostles and Prophets who wrote.”

— John Johnson

Bridging the Historical / Cultural Gap

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Context includes



Verse

Verse before & after

Paragraph & Book

Dispensation & entire Bible

Historical / Cultural Setting

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Circumstances of the Writing

Who wrote it?

To whom was it written?

When was it written?

What is the book about?

What was the motivation?



Bridging the Historical / Cultural Gap

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What is Meant by History & Culture?

Economic

Culture = the total pattern of human behavior [including] thought, speech, action, & artifacts

Clothing

Legal

Military

Religious

Domestic

Agricultural

Political

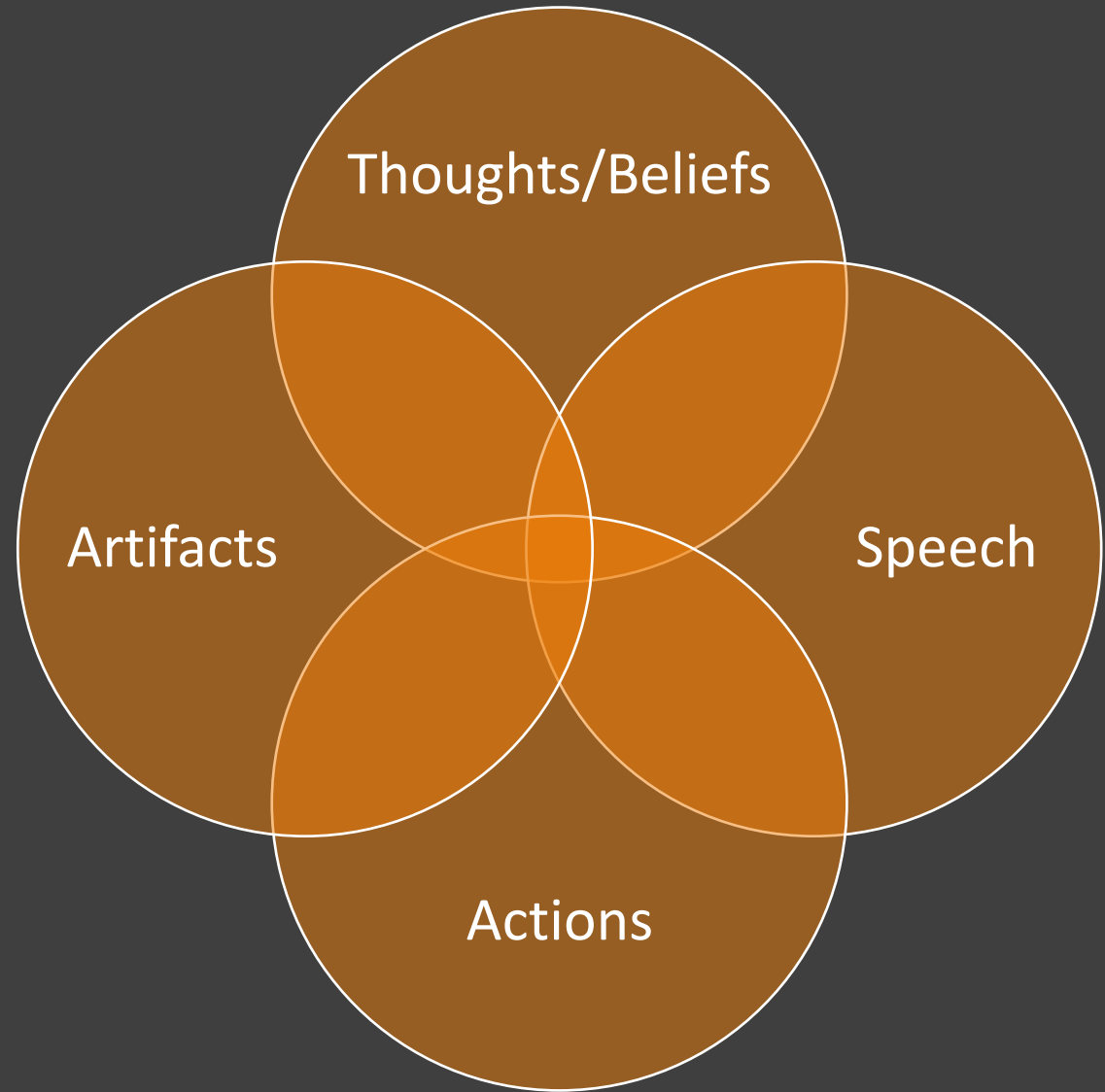
Social

Geographic

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How Do Customs Affect Interpretation?



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How Do Customs Affect Interpretation?

Political (including national, international, & civil)

1. Why was Daniel offered the 3rd position in government? Dan. 5:7, 16
2. Why did Paul write about his reader's citizenship in heaven? Phil. 3:20
3. Why did Jonah not want to go to Nineveh?
4. Why were Edom & Judah at odds throughout their shared history?
5. Why did Boaz go to the city gate to talk about Naomi's land? Ruth 4:1
6. What does it mean to take up one's cross? Mat. 16:24

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How Do Customs Affect Interpretation?

Religious

1. Why did Moses give the weird command, “Do not cook a young goat in its mother’s milk”? (Ex. 23:19; 34:26; Deut. 14:21)
2. Why did God bring 10 particular plagues on Egypt?

The Plagues & the Gods & Goddesses of Egypt

Plagues	References	Possible Egyptian Gods & Goddesses of Egypt Attacked by the Plagues
1. Nile turned to blood	Exodus 7:14–25	Hapi (also called Apis), the bull god, god of the Nile; Isis, goddess of the Nile; Khnum, ram god, guardian of the Nile; & others
2. Frogs	8:1–15	Heqet, goddess of birth, with a frog head
3. Gnats	8:16–19	Set, god of the desert
4. Flies	8:20–32	Re, a sun god; or the god Uatchit, possibly represented by the fly
5. Death of livestock	9:1–7	Hathor, goddess with a cow head; Apis, the bull god, symbol of fertility
6. Boils	9:8–12	Sekhmet, goddess with power over disease; Sunu, the pestilence god; Isis, goddess of healing
7. Hail	9:13–35	Nut, the sky goddess; Osiris, god of crops & fertility; Set, god of storms
8. Locusts	10:1–20	Nut, the sky goddess; Osiris, god of crops & fertility
9. Darkness	10:21–29	Re, the sun god; Horus, a sun god; Nut, a sky goddess; Hathor, a sky goddess
10. Death of the firstborn	11:1–12:30	Min, god of reproduction; Heqet, goddess who attended women at childbirth; Isis, goddess who protected children; Pharaoh's firstborn son, a god

From *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament* (Victor Books, 1985)

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Religious

3. Why did Elijah want Mount Carmel to be the site of his contest with 450 Baal prophets?
4. Why did Paul write in Colossians 2:3 that Christ is the mystery of God “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” & in verse 9 that “in Christ all the fullness of Deity lives in bodily form”?

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5. What was the point of meat being sacrificed to idols, discussed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 8?
6. Why did the Herodians, Sadducees, & a scribe ask Jesus the questions they did in Mark 12:13–28?

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Economic

1. Why did Eliphaz accuse Job of demanding “security from your brothers for no reason?” Job 22:6
2. Why did Elimelech’s closest relative give his sandal to Boaz? Ruth 4:8, 17

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How Do Customs Affect Interpretation?

Legal

1. When Elisha said to Elijah, “Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit,” was he asking for twice as much spiritual power as Elijah had? 2 Kings 2:9
2. Does “Firstborn over all creation” in Colossians 1:15 mean that Christ was created? Heb. 1:2

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How Do Customs Affect Interpretation?

Agricultural

1. What is so unusual about Samuel calling on the Lord for rain during the wheat harvest in 1 Samuel 12:17?
2. Why does Psalm 1:4 compare the wicked to chaff?
3. Why did Amos call the women of Bethel “cows of Bashan” in Amos 4:1?
4. Why did the Lord say to Job in Job 39:1, “*Do you know when the mountain goats give birth?*”

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How Do Customs Affect Interpretation?

Agricultural

5. In Matthew 13:31–32 did Jesus make an error when He said the mustard seed is the smallest?
6. In Luke 13:32 did Jesus call Herod a fox because He meant Herod was sly and cunning?
7. In Mark 11:12–14 why did Jesus condemn a fig tree for having no fruit when it was not even the season for figs?