

Biblical Interpretation

Unit 1: Introduction – Lesson 1: The Importance of Interpretation

Course Goal: To equip the believer to “Rightly divide the Word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

At the conclusion of this lesson, the believer should be able to:

- Appreciate why the proper interpretation of Biblical passages is important
- Recall the definitions in the “Vocabulary” section below
- Appreciate the need for the Holy Spirit’s guidance when interpreting His Bible
- Understand the overall flow of the course

Vocabulary

- **Exegesis:** An interpretation of a passage’s intended meaning.
- **Hermeneutics:** The methods (principles and processes) used to exegete.
- **Criticism:** The exercise of judgment.
- **Context:** The surrounding clues that aid in exegesis, such as the setting.
- **Sensus Plenior:** Scripture possesses a “fuller sense” than what the human author intended. It also considers what the Divine Author intended to convey.

What is Hermeneutics?

Hermeneutics is both **science** (formal methods) and **art** (not applied rigidly)¹

1. First Century Greek verb *hermeneuo* means **“to explain, interpret, or translate”**.
 - As seen in John 1:42; John 9:7; Hebrews 7:2
2. In proper exegesis (or, interpretation) of Scripture, the reader applies the **principles** of hermeneutics to arrive at a correct understanding of the author’s intended meaning.



OR



The Hermeneutic Principle of “Criticism”

Bible scholars resort to the hermeneutic of “criticism” (the exercise of **judgment**) to overcome obstacles in uncovering (exegeting) a text’s original meaning.²

1. Textual Criticism: Investigates issues of authenticity (the original *wording*, not meaning).
2. Historical Criticism: Investigates issues of genuineness (is this manuscript a fake?).
3. Literary or Source Criticism: Investigates authorship and unity of documents.
4. Form Criticism: Investigates genres, myths, poems, etc.
5. Tradition Criticism: Investigates pre-written traditions (oral, ritual, etc.)
6. Redaction Criticism: Investigates differences in versions or accounts.

¹ Virkler, H. and Ayayo, K., *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd Ed. (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academic, 1981), 16.

² Geisler, Norman and Nix, William, *A General Introduction to the Bible: Revised and Expanded* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1986), 434-439.

A Confluence of Authorship

The Divine Author and the human author “flowed together” to produce the inspired text.

1. *Sensus Plenior*: Scripture possesses a “fuller sense” than what the human author intended. It also considers what the **Divine Author** intended to convey.³
2. More details presented in Lesson 2 (the Bibliology of Inspiration).
3. Why is this important to keep in mind when interpreting Scripture? Because hermeneutics focuses on determining the intended meaning of the author, human and Divine. Therefore, a hermeneutic of “remaining prayerful” also helps.

Context

If the goal of hermeneutics is to exegete the authors’ intended meaning, then it would also be helpful to apply the principle of “context”: the original **setting** of the human author and audience.

1. Scriptural: Does the passage refer to the Old Testament, New Testament, or Inter-Testamental Period?
2. Geographical: Where on the globe is the author and audience?
3. Historical: When is this being written? What else is happening in history at this time?
4. Cultural: What influences are working on the author and audience?
 - a. Political: Which government and economic system is in operation?
 - b. Religious: Is the audience atheistic, polytheistic, Christian, Hebrew? What sects exist?
 - c. Philosophical: Do they embrace an Eastern or Western philosophy?

Class Exercise

1. When you read a news article, are you typically aware of the hermeneutical processes that you utilize to understand it? Now read the attached Shakespeare’s *MacBeth* (1606). Describe the additional barriers to understanding that exist when you read the latter that are not present with a contemporary news article.
2. While in a Bible study, you come across a word in Scripture whose meaning is unclear. One participant suggests, “We should look-up the word in a Bible dictionary and also find other places in Scripture where it occurs.” Another participant replies, “That sounds so academic! We can simply pray and ask the Holy Spirit to show us.” Your response?

Homework (Preparation for next week’s lesson)

From the church’s website (<http://www.bellevillefirst.net/index.php?page=biblical-theology-audio>), review the definitions of the following terms from Unit 1, Bibliology (i.e., what the Bible says about itself):

- Inspiration:
- Canonicity:
- Sufficiency:
- Inerrancy:
- Clarity:
- Authority:

³ Virkler and Ayayo, 24-25.

Macbeth

ACT I SCENE II *A camp near Forres.*

[Alarum within. Enter DUNCAN, MALCOLM, DONALBAIN, LENNOX, with Attendants, meeting a bleeding Sergeant]

DUNCAN What bloody man is that? He can report,
As seemeth by his plight, of the revolt
The newest state.

MALCOLM This is the sergeant
Who like a good and hardy soldier fought 5
'Gainst my captivity. Hail, brave friend!
Say to the king the knowledge of the broil
As thou didst leave it.

Sergeant Doubtful it stood;
As two spent swimmers, that do cling together 10
And choke their art. The merciless Macdonwald--
Worthy to be a rebel, *for to that*
The multiplying villanies of nature
Do swarm upon him--from the *Western Isles*
Of *kerns and gallowglasses* is supplied; 15
And fortune, on his *damned quarrel* smiling,
Show'd like a rebel's whore: but all's too weak:
For brave Macbeth--well he deserves that name--
Disdaining fortune, with his *brandish'd steel*,
Which smoked with bloody execution, 20
Like valour's *minion* carved out his passage
Till he faced the slave;
Which ne'er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him,
Till he unseam'd him from the nave to the chops,
And fix'd his head upon our battlements. 25

DUNCAN O valiant cousin! worthy gentleman!

Sergeant *As whence the sun 'gins his reflection*

Shipwrecking storms and direful thunders break,
 So from that spring whence comfort seem'd to come
 Discomfort swells. Mark, king of Scotland, mark: 30
 No sooner justice had with valour arm'd
 Compell'd these skipping kerns to trust their heels,
 But the Norway lord [surveying vantage](#),
 With furbish'd arms and new supplies of men
 Began a fresh assault. 35
 DUNCAN Dismay'd not this
 Our captains, Macbeth and Banquo?
 Sergeant Yes;
[As sparrows eagles, or the hare the lion...](#)

Explanatory notes below for Act 1, Scene 2

From *Macbeth*. Ed. Thomas Marc Parrott. New York: American Book Co.
 (Line numbers have been altered.)

This scene is one of the most difficult of the play. Indeed, the extraordinary character of its diction and the irregularity of its metre have induced some critics to condemn it as un-Shakespearean and to assign it to Thomas Middleton. But there seems to be no good ground for this. The scene has very probably been 'cut' for purposes of representation, and the high-flown language of the principal speakers is due in part at least to their excitement of mind. Each of them has come hot-foot from a field of battle where he has seen a glorious victory over the enemies of his country; and at such a time men do not talk plain prose.

The purpose of the scene is to tell us something about Macbeth, who has only been named in the preceding scene. We learn here that he is a Scottish nobleman, a near kinsman of the old king, and a valiant warrior. In a single day he has routed two hostile armies, one of the Scotch rebels under Macdonwald, whom he has slain with his own hand, the other that of the invading Norwegians under Sweno. He has been assisted by another nobleman, Banquo, but the main glory of the victory is ascribed to Macbeth.

The scene is laid in the king's camp near Forres, a little town in the north of Scotland. Forres is really some ninety miles north of the county of Fife, in which Macbeth is supposed to be fighting, but Shakespeare, who knew little, and cared less, about Scotch geography, makes it within earshot of the battle. The phrase "alarum within," in the stage directions, indicates the noise of the battle; and as the king and his lords enter, they meet a wounded soldier who has just come from the front.

22. *the slave*, Macdonwald. The word, of course, is not used literally, but only as a term of reproach.

23. *Which*, Possibly something has been omitted after the word "slave," for the text as it stands is somewhat obscure. "Which" is equivalent to our modern "who," and would naturally refer to "the slave," i.e. Macdonwald. But the sense seems to require that it refer to Macbeth. Compare i. 5. 36-37 for a somewhat similar construction. The phrases "shook hands" and "bade farewell" have about the same meaning, equivalent to "left." The sense of the whole passage, then, is that Macbeth cut his way through the battle to Macdonwald and never left him until he had killed him.

26. *cousin*. According to Holinshed Macbeth was Duncan's first cousin.

29, 30. *So...swells*. Just as storms come from the east, where the sun rises, so trouble, i.e. a fresh battle, arises from the victory of Macbeth which seemed a source of comfort to his nation.

31. *justice ... with valour arm'd*. The reference, of course, is to Macbeth.

34. *urbish'd arms*, the reference is to the bright arms of the fresh Norwegians as contrasted with the battered and blood-stained weapons of Macbeth and his men.

37. *captains*, probably pronounced as a word of three syllables. An old form of spelling, "captain," shows this pronunciation.

38. Yes, spoken in irony.



http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/macbeth_1_2.html