

History and Authenticity of the Bible
Lesson 20
Interpretation of the Bible – Part One

By
Dr. David Hocking

Brought to you by
[The Blue Letter Bible Institute](http://www.blbi.org)
<http://www.blbi.org>

A ministry of
The Blue Letter Bible
<http://www.blueletterbible.org>

Okay. We come to the next gigantic subject related to the history and authenticity of the Bible and in some respects one of the most important that we've got, and that is the interpretation of the Bible. There are 12 principles we are going to give you about the interpretation of the Bible. Anybody ever say to you, "Ah, you can't understand that Book" or "That's just your interpretation—well, there are many interpretations anyway."

First of all, the very word for interpretation is a word that is in the Bible. Hermeneutics is just set into English from the Greek word *hermenuo*. Hermeneutics, it means interpretation. There is only one interpretation of the Bible, the one the Lord intended. There are lots of opinions and lots of applications, but there's only one true interpretation of the Bible. The one the Holy Spirit wanted when it was written. Now that's our job, you see, in interpreting the Bible is to get back to that and find out how we could understand that. Is that just a quickie little fix? Attend Bible College for at least one year and you will now always interpret the Bible completely accurately. No!

How do we do accurate interpretation of this Bible? It's one thing to know how it came into our hands. It's another thing to know how to interpret it. These principles must be there if we are going to accurately interpret the Bible. And there are twelve of them. And we will spend more time on some of them, especially the last three we're going to spend quite a bit of time on. But let's get started.

Principle number one is faith. Faith. If you begin to try to interpret the Bible in your study without depending upon the Lord, you're going to be in big trouble. Big trouble! I wonder how many of you, when you start to prepare something from God's word get on your knees and pour out your heart before God, ask for His help.

Turn to Psalm 119 and let's just see what God has to say about it. I've come to believe that we get into more trouble because of the lack of prayer than anything else. We just don't pray. I've seen people have critical spirits towards people they don't even know. And you know every time I see it I say, "You must not be on your knees much

before God." I just want you to know that we can find fault with each other any time we want to.

In the final analysis, if you and I aren't serious before God and do some changing, who cares what anybody's saying. And I wonder when people get into this Christian game, and I see attitudes, I wonder have you been on your knees before God?

Prayer is a serious matter. I cannot interpret this Book without prayer. But I'll tell you something, the real school is the school of prayer. That's a school.

I love that series by Andrew Murray. But he has a beautiful little book, if you've not read it, it's called *With Christ in the School of Prayer*. Excellent. I also recommend to you all the books by E. M. Bounds. They were original lectures to preachers about prayer. They now come in that little set, you know, in the bookstore, by E. M. Bounds. In fact, they now have a larger edition where they take all those little booklets and put them together, beautiful stuff that E. M. Bounds wrote about prayer and our need of prayer.

I was in Korea this summer, and was talking to the pastors about what an example to see all these people early in the morning going up to the mountains to pray. One of the pastors came to me and he said, "It's not as great as you think."

I said, "Why's that? He said a lot of these people were Buddhists and that's what we did under Buddhism. The question is what are they saying once they get there?"

And I thought to myself, isn't that the truth?

What are you and I like when we are all alone with the Lord? Do you really want Him to show you God's word? Or do you kind of just want Him to bless what you already decided you're going to do? Where's the heart of humility and brokenness before God? Do you really believe it's the word of God? Do you really believe that God will answer prayer and show you?

I was stuck on a problem the other day. Two passages of Scripture looked contradictory one to another. I have studied and studied. I got no where. And as I often do

when that happens, I went in my office and shut the door, got on my knees and said, "Lord, I'm stuck." I could almost hear Him say, "Well it's good to see you, David. You've been messing around over there in the library a while. You should have started with Me. It would have made those books a lot more interesting."

It's just like you get on your knees like you're embarrassed. All of a sudden you're aware. "I probably should have done this before I started. Please forgive me." It was amazing how the Lord just...the answer was there. The very thing I'd been struggling about. And you know it's a reminder to me over and over and over again. We need prayer. We need faith. We need dependency on the Lord.

In Psalm 119, we have a lot of beautiful statements. Let's just highlight a few. Verse [18](#) here's a prayer: "Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law." The Hebrew word for wondrous is incomprehensible, meaning too difficult to understand. Now class, let's be honest. There are things difficult to understand in this Bible. Lots of it—very hard to understand! Then what's the secret? Go to the Lord and depend upon Him. "Open mine eyes that I may behold difficult, incomprehensible things out of Thy law."

There's a prayer to understand. Look at verses [26 and 27](#). "I have declared my ways and Thou heardest me. Teach me Thy statutes. Make me to understand the way of Thy precepts. So shall I talk of Thy wondrous works."

Do you ask God, "Teach me Your statutes?" Do you say, "Make me understand?" To say, "Make me understand"—and it's because of a grammatical form of the word that it's translated "make me to understand"—it suggests that there's a natural tendency on our part not to do this. Somehow God needs to give us these gentle nudgings and proddings to make us understand. The psalmist was recognizing his own depravity and resistance when he says "make me to understand."

[Psalm 119:33-34](#). "Teach me [again the prayer] Teach me O Lord, the way of Thy statutes." Notice back in verse [26](#) he said, "Teach me Thy statutes" and here he says, "Teach me the way of Thy statutes." See when you come to study the Bible and find out the interpretation, some times it's not just the content that you get down, but it's the point of the content. It's the direction in which God wants you to go by what you have learned. And sometimes we see people who are very intelligent in the Bible, but they don't know what it means. They don't know how to apply it. They don't know the direction they should walk because of it. And that comes as a result of dependency upon God as well. "Teach me [not only Your statutes, but teach me] the way of Your statutes and I shall keep it unto the end. Give me understanding. I shall keep Thy law. Yeah, I shall observe it with my whole heart." Sometimes we have no commitment to follow what God says. So don't expect Him to answer prayer in understanding your Bible. "Lord, show me what this passage means. I will obey You no matter what it comes out as."

See, frequently I find the Bible contradicts what I previously thought. Then I'm faced with the issue of whether or not I'm going to bow myself down to the word. Or whether I'm going to keep doing what I thought. And sometimes when the Bible clearly shows you something you should do, but it's contrary to what you do, all of a sudden your mind thinks, "I wonder if there's another interpretation?" Oh, there'll always be another one in those books. But the one interpretation that God intended is the most important. That's why we use all these principles to help us, of which the first is of course prayer.

In [Psalm 119:68](#) it says, "Thou art good and doest good. Teach me Thy statutes." Here we have a motive for it—because everything behind it is good. "All things work together for good" ([Romans 8:28](#)). God is good. "His goodness leads to repentance" ([Romans 2:4](#)). So Lord, I want to learn. I know that behind all of this is Your goodness.

Verse [73](#) says, "Thy hands have made me and fashioned me. Give me understanding that I may learn Thy commandments." You know you can learn something by memorizing it. But did you learn it. You might be able to reduplicate something on a test, but has it become part of your lifestyle? Very important!

Verse [169](#) says, "I love the way this is expressed. "Let my cry come near before Thee O Lord. Give me understanding according to Thy word." All the way through this, there's a hunger. There's a thirst. There's a cry from God's servant to the Lord. "Lord, I want to know Your word more than anything else."

This morning before I came here, we had a call from Philadelphia. A man said, "I heard you on the radio years ago do a series on Psalm 119. Twenty-two messages on that one chapter.

I said, "That's true."

"Do you still have them?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "I want them desperately."

I said, "Why?"

He said, "Well, when I first heard them I guess I wasn't paying a whole lot of attention, just listening. But now I've got such a hunger for the word of God. What will it take to send them priority mail?"

I said, "You don't have to do that. We can just send them regular mail."

"No, no, no. I want them now!"

I said, "You're really desperate aren't you?"

He said, "Something significant has happened in my heart and I don't want to settle for anything any more than hearing from God and His word."

Boy, that blessed me! I thought—I can use that in my class today! May God give us all that same heart.

In [Hebrews 11:6](#) it says, "Without faith it's impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those that [what?] diligently seek Him." You see if you're going to go after this and you really want to know it, God's going to reward you. And you come with faith believing that He will. He'll show me. He'll reveal to me.

And I guess all that we impart to you here at this college, praise the Lord for it. But if we haven't taught you to depend on the Lord, what have we taught you?

But the issue I'm trying to say to all of us is our need of prayer and dependency and faith and confidence in the Lord is crucial. And I believe that one of the reasons why we get into trouble is because we hurry. I know that's why I do it. "Man, I got to get that message ready. I've only got about three hours left. You know, I usually look up all the passages. I've got to get a commentary. Maybe he's already looked them up." Flip through it. I get another one. I'm flipping through. I'm going like crazy, you know. "Oh man, now what I'm going to do?" Get on the phone, call a pastor friend of mine, "Hey, you know that passage over there, have you got anything on that?"

Don't tell me guys don't do that. They do it to me—every week! Yesterday a friend of mine called me up and said, "Hey man, I need something on"... he told me the passage and so forth.

I said, "Have you ever thought that the Lord could give it to you?"

"David, I've got two hours. I need the answer to this"

I said, "I'll bet ten minutes in prayer will do it."

He said, "You're not going to give this to me, are you?"

I said, "No."

"Do you know the answer to it?"

"Yes."

"Well come on, give me the answer."

I said, "But you wouldn't know it yourself. You wouldn't experience the joy of digging it out." I said, "I'll make a deal for you. You pray. You study it. And if you still haven't found it in two hours, you call me and I'll give it to you before you go in the pulpit."

He said, "You're rotten."

I said, "I know it."

He hung up. The next day he calls me back. He said, "You know, I really want to thank you for that."

Do you understand, many of us are suffering what we're suffering because of the lack of prayer. We're not going to the Lord. "Do you have notes on that? Send them to me. I need them for next week."

"Really? No. What you need to do is get on your knees before God in front of that open Bible and ask God to speak to your heart."

Prayer is a school. Prayer is hard work. Prayer is discipline. I'd like to suggest the following simple things for you. One is to have a prayer list. I don't know about you, but I get down on my knees to pray and my mind wanders. Or I think about a lot of things I'm going to try to do or whatever. So a prayer list is helpful with names of people and specific requests. And I like to put the date of answer down when you see God answers it. You know when people ask you to pray for them about something, you either do it then or you write it down because you usually don't remember it. But if you do remember and a week later ask them, say, "Hey what happened?"

People are often surprised. "What are you talking about?"

"Well, you asked me to pray about that thing."

"Oh that—yeah!"

I've had that happen over and over again. I said, "Well what did happen?"

"Oh the Lord worked it out great."

"Praise the Lord. It was a joy to pray for you."

"Oh, you prayed?"

"Yeah."

"Oh, I really didn't expect you to."

"Well you asked me. The Bible says, 'God forbid that I should sin in ceasing to pray for you,' if I promise to do it..." You see, so we need a prayer list with specifics.

Another thing that I think is missing is worship; in other words, how to pray. We need to focus a lot more on praise and blessing and exalting and magnifying the Lord. And for that, I use the Psalms. I need direction. I love to pray with the Psalms in front of me. I love to read this. "I will praise You, Lord, with my whole heart. My heart sings to You, Lord. My heart speaks of Your wondrous works. Lord, You are so full of compassion and kindness and You're so gracious."

Before I know what's happening, God's melting me. His Holy Spirit is just melting me. Some call it pray-reading but I like to do that, just pray through the Psalms. Righteous art Thou, O Lord; Upright in all Thy judgments. God, I want Your word in my life. The entrance of Your word gives light. It gives understanding to the simple. I need that. Do you understand? It puts a new little kind of boost and life into your prayer life, so it doesn't become routine.

Without faith we can't please Him. And if we're going to see God answer, He will answer if we "diligently," the Bible says, seek Him. I've always wondered about that in [Hebrews 11:6](#) where it says without faith it is impossible to please Him. "He who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek..." Commentaries? Seek to put it together themselves? What is it that we seek in order to be rewarded with the answer? Him! Sometimes in your desire to be blessed by the Lord, you miss the Blessor.

I'll give you an illustration. My four-and-half year-old grandson, I had a great time with him—a wonderful time playing. We crawled on the floor in a race through the house. My wife says if only your students could see you now. But I had a lot of fun with that little kid. But nothing blessed me more. After a long day of playing and everything else, he crawled in my lap, put his arms around me, kissed me on the cheek and said, "I love you so much, Grandpa." I just started crying.

He said, "What's the matter?"

I said, "Nothing." I gave him a big hug.

Imagine what our heavenly Father feels. I was made in His image after His likeness. And if that means so much to me, that little hug from that little kid, made my month! I mean it was so fantastic, that little grandson just saying, "I love you, Grandpa." But that little hug was all I needed.

Do you understand that in prayer, the focus needs to be on the Lord? Relate to Him as your heavenly Father. Tell Him all that He means to you. Speak of how He's such a blessing to you, how much you love Him. Very important, class! In diligently seeking Him, He's promised to reward us. Very important!

Let's pray.

Father, thank You for Your word. Help us, Lord, as we begin this section of learning to interpret the Bible that we might truly seek Your face and depend upon You. Thank You, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen.