

Theory & Practice of Biblical Hermeneutics

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Talk Two: Meaning and Significance in Relation to Hermeneutics

Theory & Practice of Biblical Hermeneutics



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A Look at Meaning and Significance by E. D. Hirsch

THE PHILOSOPHY OF MEANING

Theory & Practice of Biblical Hermeneutics



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***WHAT IS THE TYPE-MEANING
OF A TEXT?***



What is Meaning?

Meaning “[T]hat which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign or sequence; it is what the signs represent.” (p. 8)



What is Verbal Meaning?

Verbal meaning is whatever someone has willed to convey by a particular sequence of linguistic signs and which can be conveyed (shared) by means of those linguistic signs.” (p. 30)



ILLUSTRATION OF TYPE MEANING

Traits of a Bush

Leaves
Form and Substance
Color
Plant
Roots
Branches



Traits of a Tree

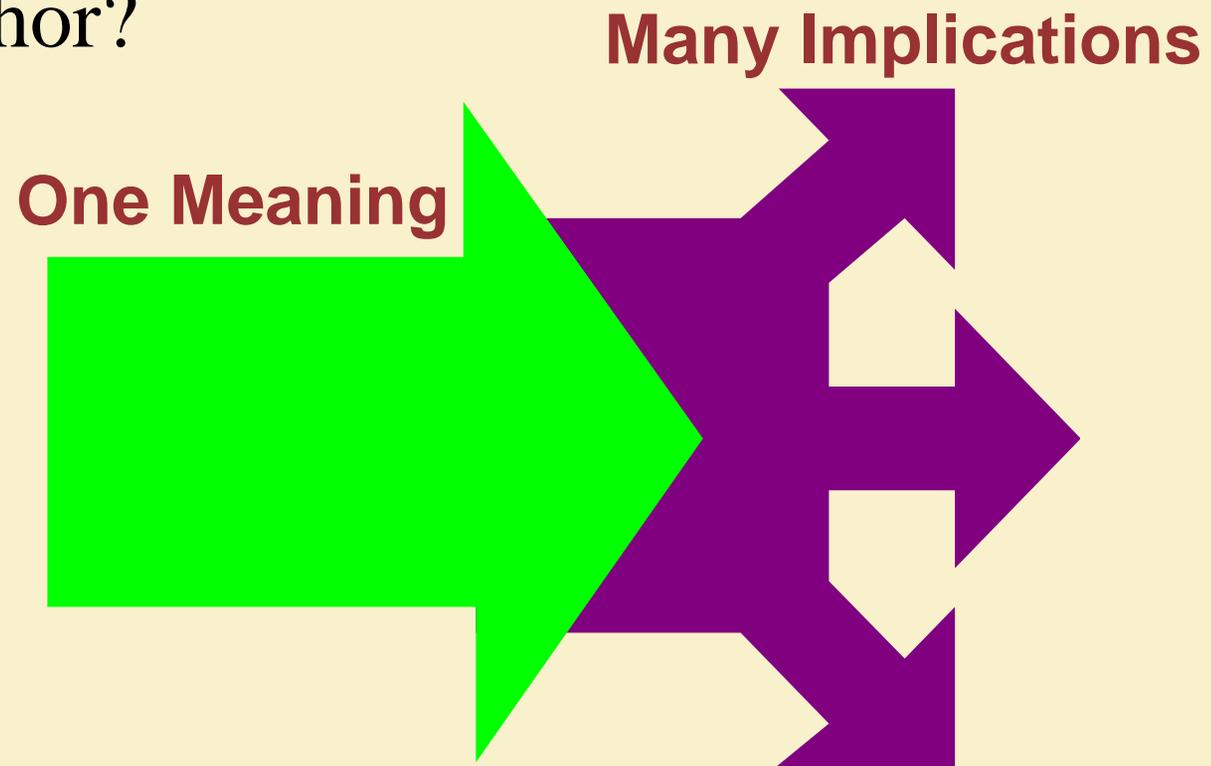
Leaves
Form and Substance
Color
Plant
Roots
Branches
Trunk





WHO DETERMINES THE MEANING OF SCRIPTURE?

- Human Author?
- Divine Author?





How do we decide what is the right interpretation of a text?

“Banishing the author”

Hirsch says that the normal way that would understand what a text means is what the author means by it. (p. 3). Yet this view is questioned by many today, though it is only reasonable that a text means what the author means by it.

He says that if the author is banished there is no one as the authority over the text, but the critic or reader, since the text must have someone’s meaning. (pp. 3-4)



How do we decide what is the right interpretation of a text? (continued)

It is common today to hear of the feminist reading, or black reading, ect., of a text, as if the reader comes away from the text with a legitimate and different reading of the biblical text.

But this would be like an amillennialist reading of the text, or a Calvinist reading of the text, or even a Mormon reading of the text, all of which there is no final meaning possible in a biblical text, so there is no determinate meaning at all.



Does Meaning of a Text Change?

In response to the claim that an author may change the meaning of his or her text, Hirsch says,

“If the work’s meaning had changed (instead of the author himself and his attitudes), then the author would not have need to repudiate his meaning and could have spared himself the discomfort of a public recantation. No doubt the *significance* of the work to the author had changed a great deal, but its meaning had not changed at all.” (p. 8)

“[A]n author’s original meaning *cannot* change—even for himself, though it can certainly be repudiated.” (p. 9)



Determining the Type-Meaning Intended

“A type is an entity with two decisive characteristics. First, it is an entity that has a boundary by virtue of which something belongs to it or does not. . . . The second decisive characteristic of a type is that it can always be represented by more than one instance.” (pp. 49-50)



Determining the Type-Meaning Intended continued

“Thus a type is an entity that has a boundary by virtue of which something belongs to it or does not, and it is also an entity which can be represented by different instances or different contents of consciousness. It follows that a verbal meaning is always a type since otherwise it could not be shareable. . . .” (p. 50)



Can an Author Have Meanings that He is Not Aware of?

“The interpretation of texts is concerned exclusively with sharable meanings, and not everything I am thinking of when I write can be shared with others by means of my words. Conversely, many of my sharable meanings are meanings which I am not directly thinking of at all. They are so-called unconscious meanings. It betrays a totally inadequate conception of verbal meaning to equate it with what the author ‘has in mind.’ The only question that can relevantly be at issue is whether the *verbal* meaning which an author means is accessible to the interpreter of his text.” (p. 18)



Can an Author Have Meanings that He is Not Aware of? (continued)

“Since I was not think either of ‘a swim in the sea’ or ‘Brueghel’s *Hay Gathering*,’ some principle in my meaning must cause it to exclude the first and include the second. This is possible because I meant a certain *type* of ‘thing that pleases me’ and will all possible members belonging to that type, even though very few of those possible members could have been attended to by me. Thus, it is possible to will an et cetera without in the least being aware of all of the individual members that belong to it.” (p. 49)



Can an Author Have Meanings that He is Not Aware of? (continued)

“An author almost always means more than he is aware of meaning, since he cannot explicitly pay attention to all the aspects of his meaning. . . . Suppose I say, in a casual talk with a friend, ‘Nothing pleases me so much as the Third Symphony of Beethoven.’ And my friend asks me, ‘Does it please you more than a swim in the sea on a hot day?’ And I reply, ‘You take me too literally. I meant that no *work of art* pleases me more than Beethoven’s Third.’ How was my answer possible? How did I know that ‘a swim in the sea’ did not fall under what I meant by ‘things that please me’? (p. 48-49)



Can an Author Have Meanings that He is Not Aware of? (continued)

“Since I was not think either of ‘a swim in the sea’ or ‘Brueghel’s *Hay Gathering*,’ some principle in my meaning must cause it to exclude the first and include the second. This is possible because I meant a certain *type* of ‘thing that pleases me’ and will all possible members belonging to that type, even though very few of those possible members could have been attended to by me. Thus, it is possible to will an et cetera without in the least being aware of all of the individual members that belong to it.”

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WHAT IS SHAREABILITY?



What is the Principle of Shareability?

“The most important version of the Humpty-Dumpty effect is the one that Alice pointed out: when somebody does in fact use a particular word, sequence, his verbal meaning cannot be anything he might wish it to be. This very general restriction is the single important one for the interpreter who always confronts a particular sequence of linguistic signs.” (p. 30)



The Words of an Author Meaning Must have Shareability

“There’ s glory for you!” [said Humpty Dumpty].

“I don’ t know what you mean by ‘glory,’ ” Alice said.
Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously.

“Of course you don’ t—till I tell you. I meant ‘there’ s a nice knock-
down argument for you!”

But ‘glory’ doesn’ t mean a ‘nice knock-down argument,’ ” Alice
objected.



The Words of an Author Meaning Must have Shareability (continued)

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, which is to be master—that’s all.”

Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*

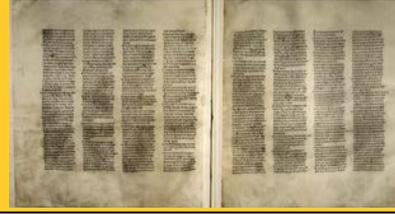


Can a Person Understand the Meaning of an Author Better than the Author?

“A final argument leveled against the normative status of authorial meaning is that ‘the author himself often does not know what he means.’ What is inadequate about this argument when Kant says he understands Plato better than himself?”

Kant is actually referring to subject matter and having a greater understanding of the subject matter. This is different than authorial meaning. The distinction between subject matter and authorial meaning must be made. (p. 20).

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THE NATURE OF SIGNIFICANCE?



Meaning of Significance

- Significance “[N]ames a relationship between a [particular] meaning and a person, or a conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable.” (p. 8)



What Does Significance mean? (continued)

In regards to significance, Hirsch says, “Clearly what changes for them is not the meaning of the work, but rather their relationship to that meaning. Significance always implies a relationship, and one constant, unchanging pole of that relationship is what the text means. Failure to consider this simple and essential distinction has been the source of enormous confusion in hermeneutic theory.” (p. 8)



Meaning and Significance in Relation to Hermeneutics

Hirsch is engaged with a view of meaning called “radical historicism.” Under this view—whether in law, biblical studies, or literature in general—the judge, biblical exegete, or reader determines the meaning, since meaning is dependent when the literature is read and the understanding comes from the individual of that time.

Those who hold this hermeneutical skepticism fail to recognize that such a view belies the ability of anyone to claim genuine knowledge or truth.



Significance and Application—How Do They Relate?

Whereas significance is the way the author relates to his meaning, application is how the author connects his type-meaning to the same type-meaning in another context not specifically stated by him in his original statement.



Meaning of Application

Application is the extension of the meaning of the text in a consistent manner to a new situation in the life of the interpreter. The context of the interpreter is different from the original author but is not disparate to the meaning in the original context.

Short Definition: Application is the Extension of the Meaning in the Text to a Different Situation in Life
Consistent with the Type Meaning of the Text



Purpose of Application

Application is the using our varied gifts to make the Word of God relevant to man so that a change in behavior results.

Interpretation without application is as useless as application without proper interpretation.



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Application is the using our varied gifts to make the Word of God relevant to man so that a change in behavior results.

Interpretation without application is as useless as application without proper interpretation.

Application is applying the meaning in a different setting, not coming up with a new meaning. If an application is not within the type-meaning of the text, it is disparate, or inconsistent, or outside, the meaning of the text.



Rules of Application

- ★ DO NOT READ FOR APPLICATIONS
- ★ Decide the meaning intended by the author of Scripture
- ★ Decide what aspects of the passage in question extend beyond the original setting, thus drawing a principle.
- ★ Relate this principle to a specific area in your life.



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Biblical Example of Meaning and Implications

Implications in Determining Meaning

Jew/Greek

slave/free

male/female

seed of Abraham

heirs

sons of God

position by faith

Equal functions in the church

Type meaning: All people, apart from social distinctions, may participate in the Abrahamic covenant by faith.

Disparate meaning: Equality of position in Christ requires interchangeability of roles in the church.



A Biblical Example of Meaning and Implications

Galatians 3:26-28:

Meaning: All people, apart from social distinctions, may participate in the Abrahamic by faith.

Principle: In regards to believing in Jesus Christ for salvation, there are no differences among groups of people.

Application: We should offer the gospel to people of all races, sexes, religious views, economic classes, social strata, etc.

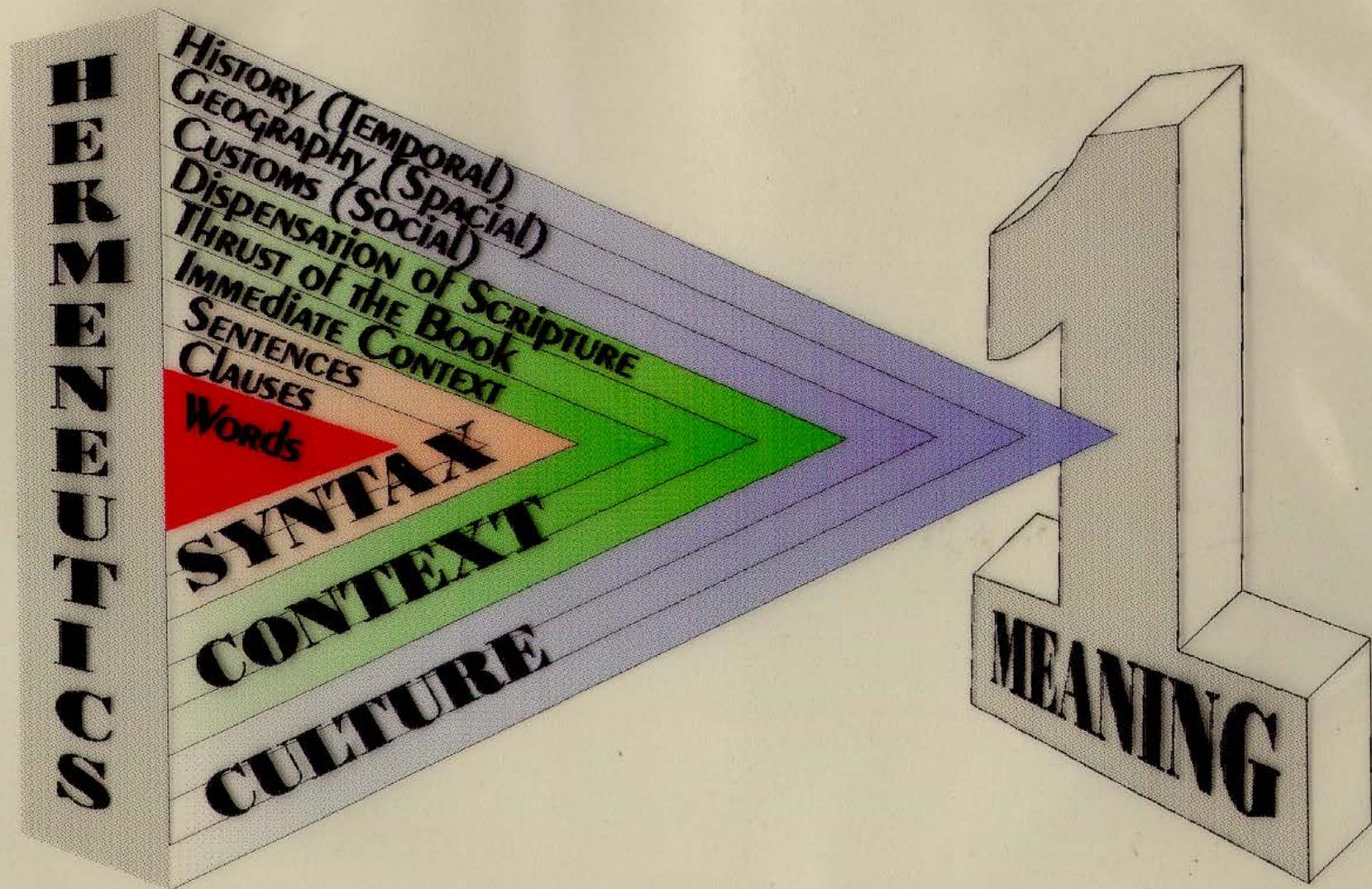
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THE PROCESS OF LITERAL INTERPRETATION

THE PROCESS OF INTERPRETATION





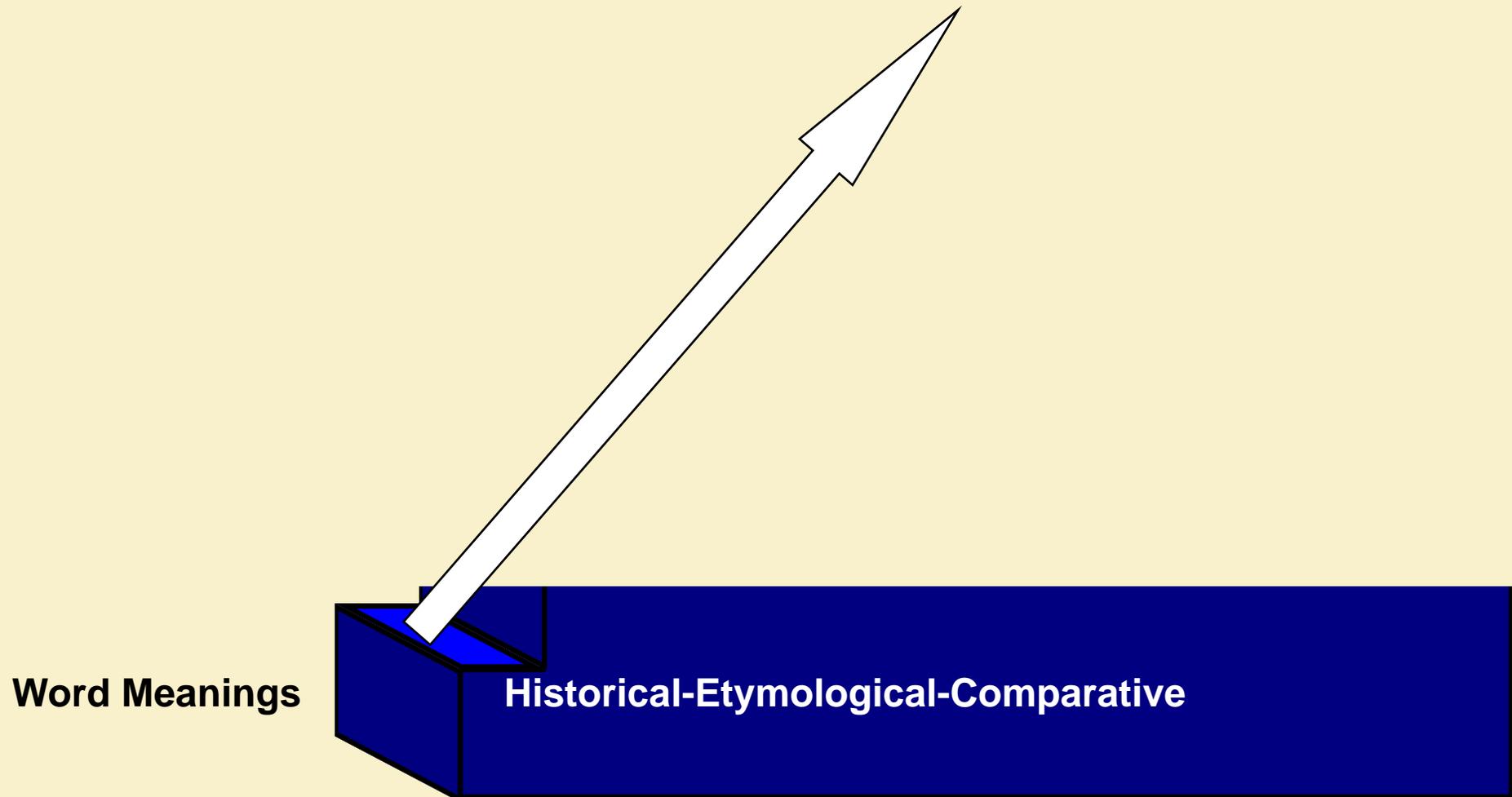
THE PHILOSOPHY OF MEANING

- **Who Determines the Meaning of Scripture**
- **Determining the Type-Meaning Intended**
- **Distinguishing Meaning from Application**
- **Distinguishing Disparate and Different Meanings**
- **Observing What the Author is Saying**
- **Deciding between Literal and Figurative Meaning**
- **Examining the Grammatical Structure**
- **Determining the Kind of Literature**
- **Paying Attention to the Context**



The Process of Literal Interpretation

Literal Interpretation



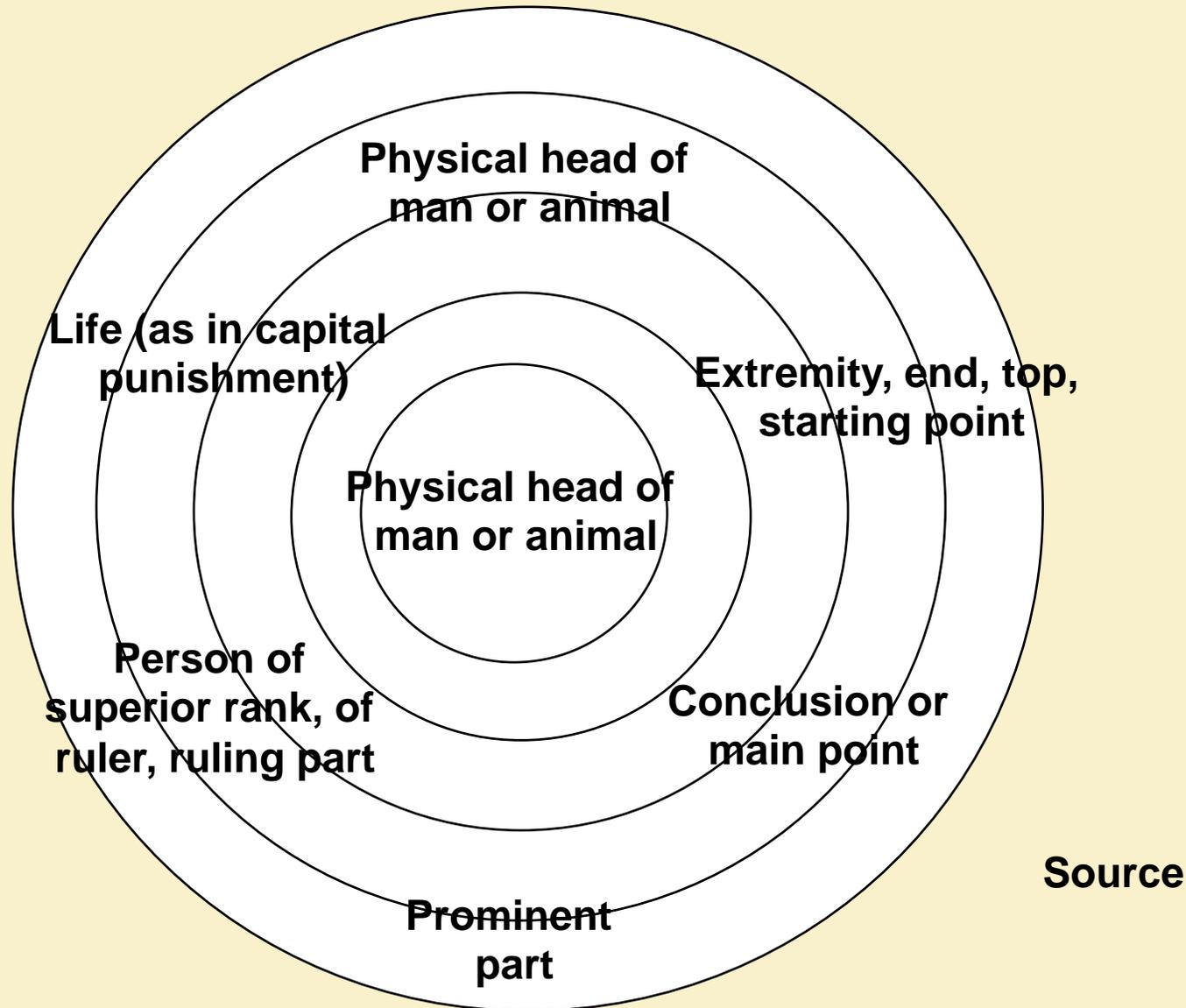


THE PROCESS OF LITERAL INTERPRETATION

WORD MEANINGS



Semantic Distance and the Meaning of Kephale





***Words Do Not Have Meaning in
Themselves—the Author Does***

God is Love

God is Love.

God is Love?

God is Love!

God **is Love**

God is **Love**

****God** is Love**

Love is God

Is Love God?

Is God Love?



Word Meanings

Etymological

Historical

Contextual



Etymology

- Etymological background of the word
- Find the root meaning and attempt to understand the word by the way it is formed.
- Words may have prefixes and suffixes, and sometimes a combination
- Church, from *kuriakos* (κυριακος), belonging to the Lord, but standing for *ekklesia* (ἐκκλησία), from *ek-kaleo* (ἐκ-καλέω), to call out



Etymology

BUT

ἐκκλησία used in Old Testament for the assembly of Israel as translation of Hebrew *qahal* (קהל). Different from Hellenistic assembly of free male citizens called to democratic rule.

Rather than simply joining Greek words together, one must pay attention to the historical and theological development of a word.



Historical

- Historical background of the words.
- Get a picture of what the word means.
- For example, *pneumatikon* (πνευματικῶν) in 1 Cor 12:1, in light of the mystery religions and pagan cults at Corinth.



Historical—Comparative

- **Comparative background**
 - Synonyms—by noting what a writer considers as a synonym for another word gives us a clue about what the writer understood the first word to mean.
 - For example, “in His kingdom” and “in His glory” in Matt 20:21 and Mark 10:37



Historical—Comparative

- **Comparative background**
 - Cross References
 - Verbal—conform in Rom 12:2 and disguise in 2 Cor 11:13-15
 - Parallel—Matt 7:7-11 and Luke 11:11-13
 - Conceptual—Eph 5:18f and Col 3:6f



Historical—Comparative

- **Comparative background**

- Culturally

- Often behind a word in the New Testament or Old Testament is a practice of the culture, and really to know the richness of the word we must know the cultural practice.

- For example *airo* (αἴρω), lift up, in John 15:2



Historical—Comparative

Flesh in John and Flesh in Paul

For John flesh refers to human nature at times (Jn 1:14), sometimes to the soft tissue of the body (Jn 6:56), to the entire body at others (Jn 6:53), and to outward appearance (Jn 8:15).

For Paul flesh refers to fallen human nature (Rom 8:1), sometimes to the human nature (Rom 8:3), sometimes to being human (Col 3:22), to the soft tissue of the body (1 Cor 15:50) and sometimes to the body (1 Cor 5:5).



How to Do a Basic Word Study

- ❑ Look up the word in a Bible dictionary, noting the various meanings it may have.
- ❑ Write down examples of any particular and look up verses in which the meaning(s) is found.
- ❑ Use *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, looking up each example of the word being studied and classify the various verses according to specific meanings.
- ❑ Seek to understand how the word is used by the different authors of the Bible, noting similarities and differences.
- ❑ Decide how the word is used in the passage under discussion, noting if it is consistent with the other uses of the word by the same author.



THE PROCESS OF LITERAL INTERPRETATION

WORD RELATIONSHIPS



The Process of Literal Interpretation

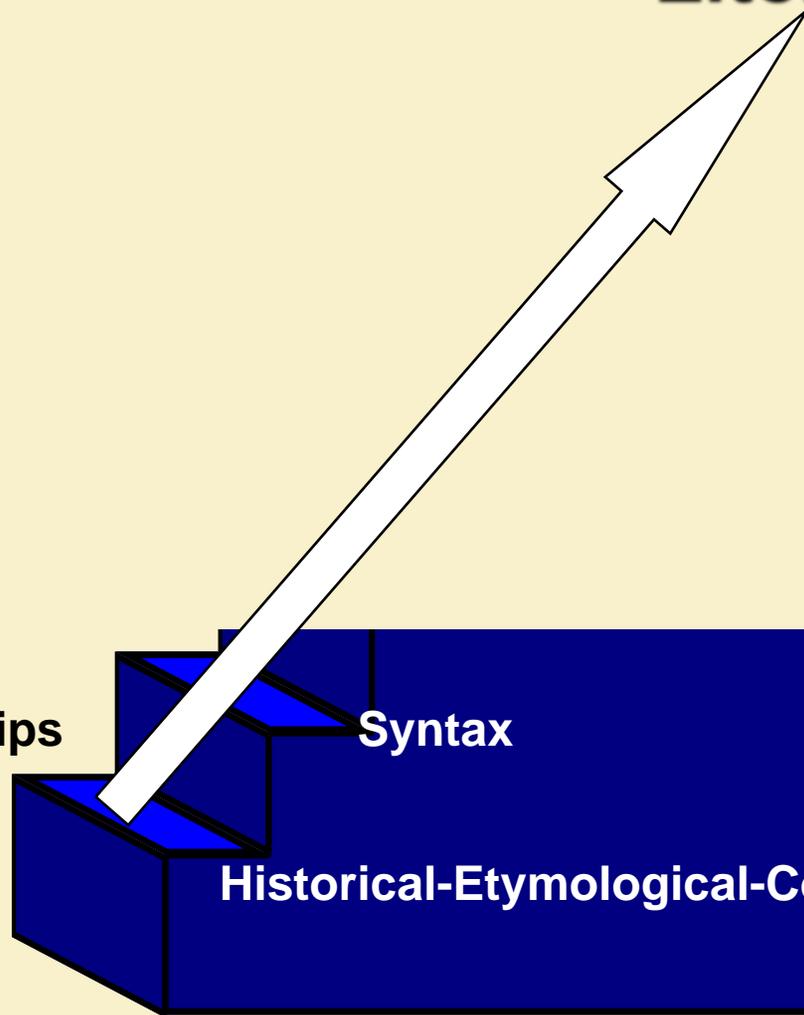
Literal Interpretation

Word Relationships

Syntax

Word Meanings

Historical-Etymological-Comparative



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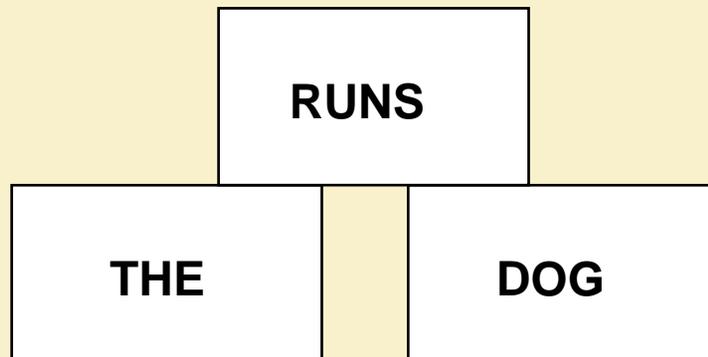
Word Relationships



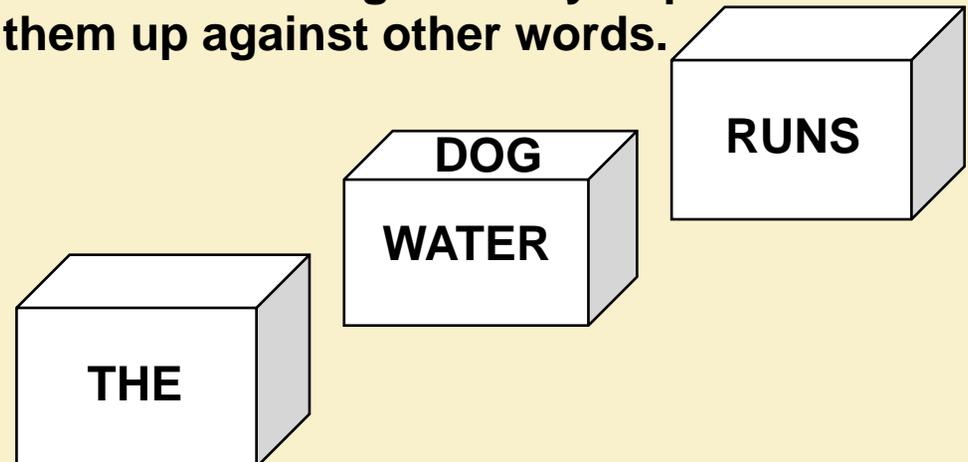


Word Relationships

**Words are like
building blocks:**



**But words change when you put
them up against other words.**





Word Relationships

- The process of interpretation is to move from the meaning of words to the relationship of words. You can have a great word study, but by itself this is not interpretation. You must then consider how the words relate to each other, for words are affected by the words that surround them.
- For example, John 1:1
- The word was God or the word was a God



Word Relationships

- Learn to diagram a sentence—this enables you to see how every word is related to every other word
- Don't ignore little things (i.e. articles)
- Give special attention to verbs—that's where the action is. The verb is at the heart of any statement
- For example, Matthew 28:19-20 (what is the verb?)



THE PROCESS OF LITERAL INTERPRETATION

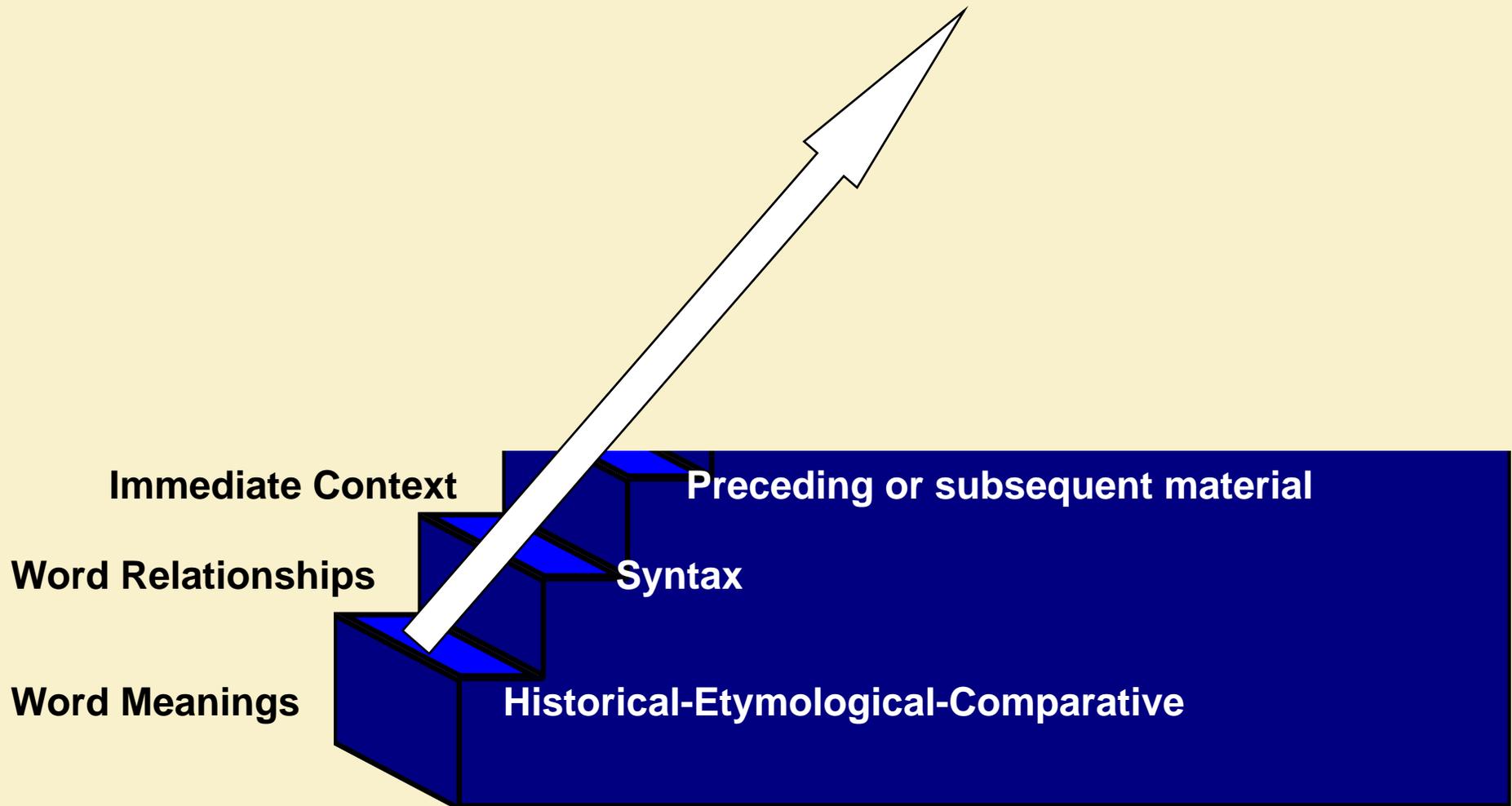
CONTEXT

**A text without a context
is only a pretext**



Process of Literal Interpretation

Literal Interpretation





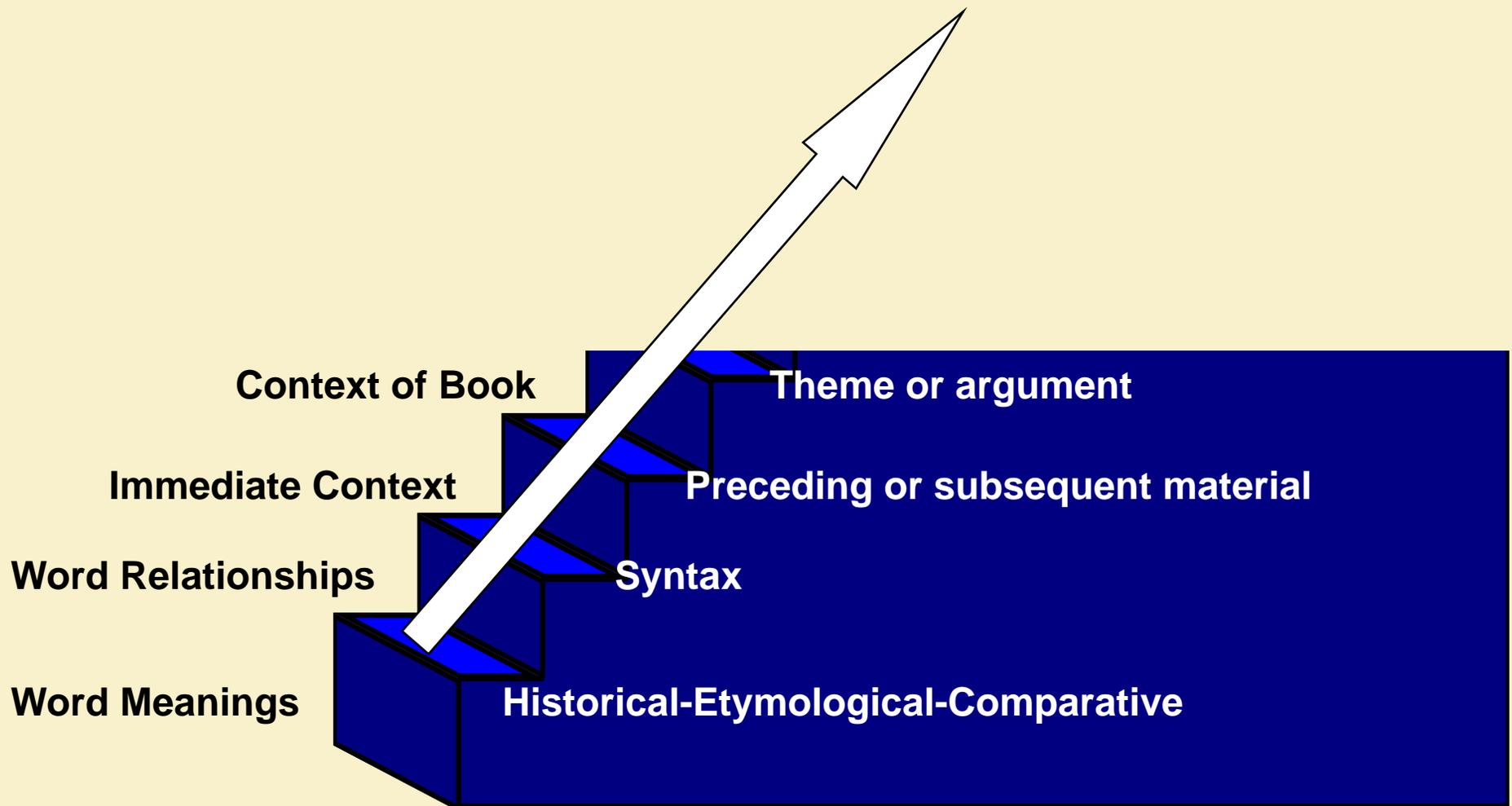
Immediate Context

- ***Matthew 18:15-20 “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”***
 - ***(15) A brother sins against another brother***
 - ***(16) The need of two or three witnesses for accuracy
(application of Deut 19:15)***
 - ***(17a) Rejection of repentance and reconciliation***
 - ***(17b) Judgment of the community of faith***
 - ***(18-19) Affirmation of God to judgment that follows divine principles***
 - ***(20) Concurrence by Christ of righteous judgment***



Process of Literal Interpretation

Literal Interpretation



Context, Context, Context

Observe What the Author
is Saying



Context of a Book

- **Hebrews 5:11-6:12**
- Does the book of hebrews teach that believers can lose their salvation.
- **TALK 4**



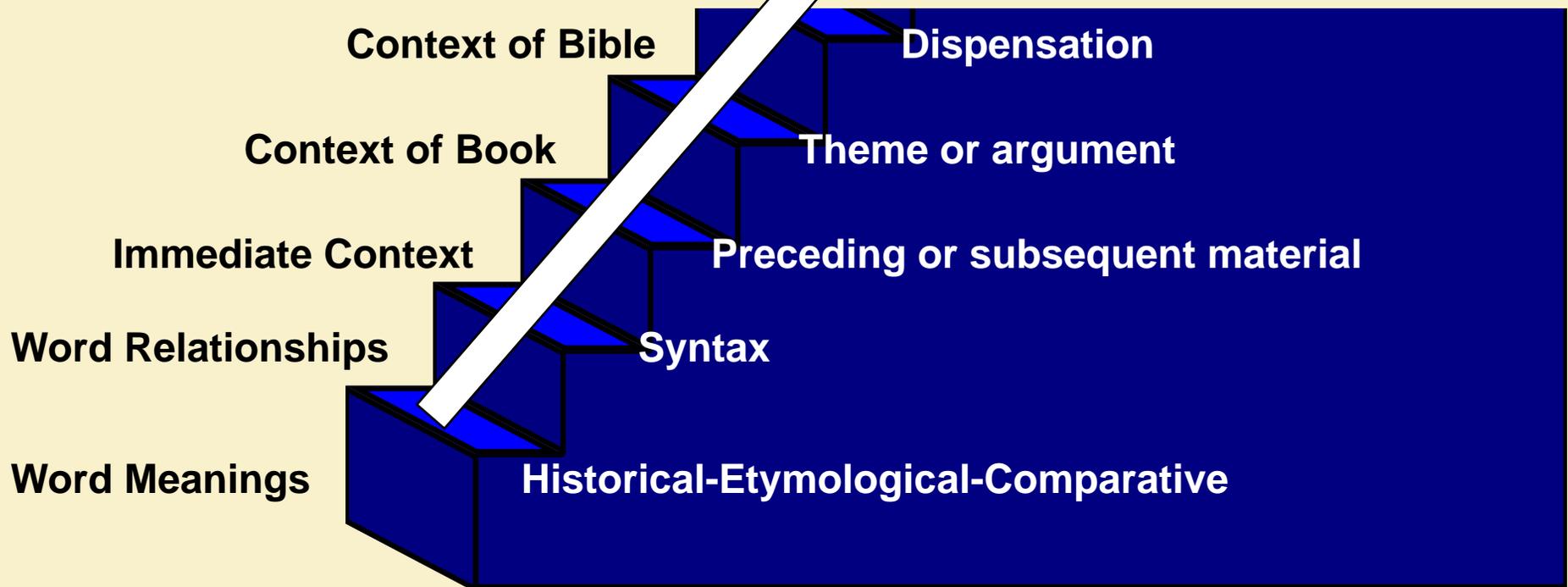
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Process of Literal Interpretation

Literal Interpretation





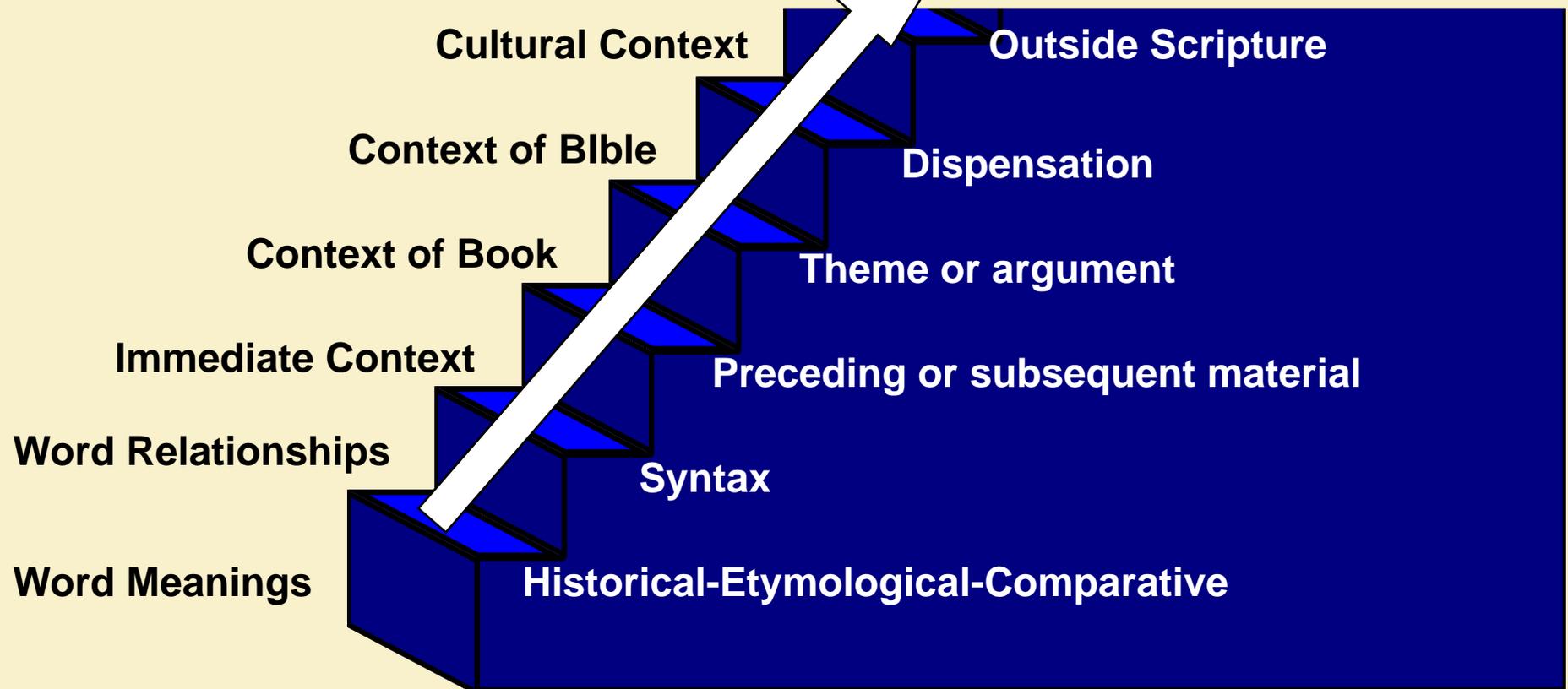
Context of the Bible

- The progression of revelation in Scripture demonstrates that God has different intentions regarding the Church and Israel.
- Failure to see these differences results in confusion of the promises and covenants of God.
- Failure to see these differences leads to Replacement Theology, in which the Church supplants Israel in the plan of God



Process of Literal Interpretation

Literal Interpretation





Cultural Context

John 15:1-8 Taking away, cutting off, or something else.

TALK 4



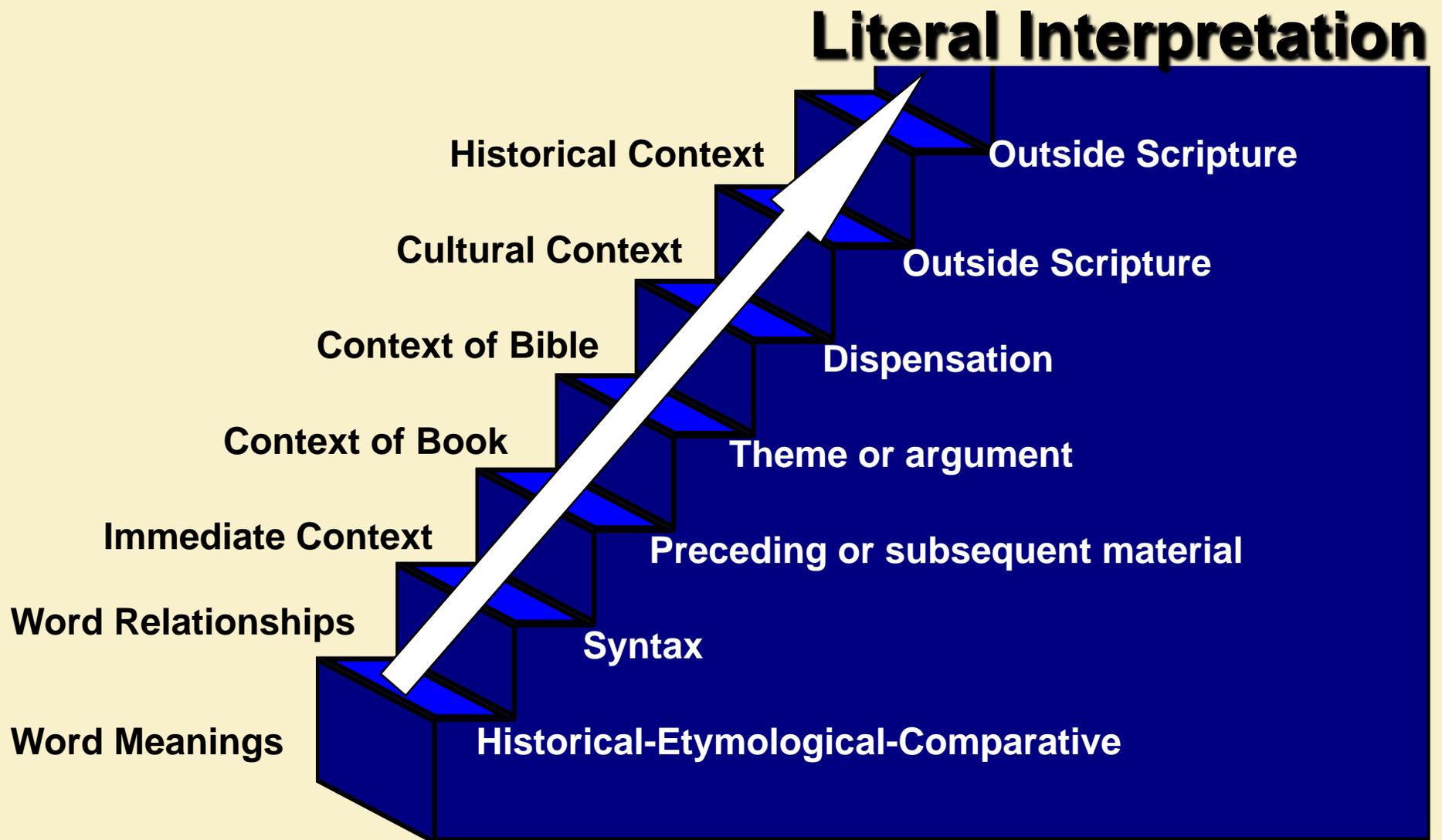
Cultural Context

John 10:1 “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the **sheepfold** by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.





Process of Literal Interpretation





Historical Context

- The word covenant relates to the practice of cutting the animals in half as expressed in this passage.
- That Yahweh goes through the halves alone indicates the unilateral nature of the covenant.
- The covenant can fail only if Yahweh Himself fails.
- God has promised all the lands mentioned in this passage to the physical seed of Abraham.
- The Gentiles are recipients of the spiritual blessings from Abraham, but Hebrew people will receive the physical blessings.



***THE PROCESS OF LITERAL
INTERPRETATION AND
APPLICATION***

APPLICATION

God's Communication Process



Revelation/
Inspiration

Transmission

Translation

Interpretation

Illumination/
Application

The Mind
and Will of
God

The Attitude
and Actions
of People



Some Applications are Very Obvious

James 1:5:

- **Meaning:** Why are there trials in the Christian Life?
- **Principle:** Trials are a tool by which God causes believers to have wisdom.
- **Application:** In trials ask God to give wisdom so as to grow into maturity.



Some Applications are Not So Obvious

Luke 10:25-37:

- **Meaning:** Who is a neighbor? The one who is in need upon whom we chance to meet.
- **Principle:** We are to meet the needs of people who need our help that God brings before us.
- **Application:** When someone's need is made known to us, we are to meet that need with the resources God has given us—not a bless you, be warm and be fed, but meeting specific needs.



Some Applications are Not So Obvious

Philippians 2:1-4:

- **Meaning:** Paul tells the Christians that they are to have joy in servanthood.
- **Principle:** Believers are to put other Christian's interest above their own, and so doing will have joy.
- **Application:** Not squeezing the toothpaste in the middle; making the bed when getting up; cleaning a room; finding SPECIFIC ways in which to please other people.



Remember: Be Specific

- **General:** Go out and love everybody
- **Specific:** What are some particular things that I can do today to show love to some specific person or persons.

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PRINCIPLES RELATING TO LITERAL INTERPRETATION

LITERAL-GRAMMATICAL- HISTORICAL



Does this need interpretation?

“*God has a spirit-body with bodily parts like man. This is proven by hundreds of plain Scriptures that do not need interpretation. They are too clear and literal to misunderstand. All we can do is either deny what the Bible says or believe it. If we are not going to believe, then be honest and say that we are not believers.*” (Dake, *God’s Plan for Man*, 56)

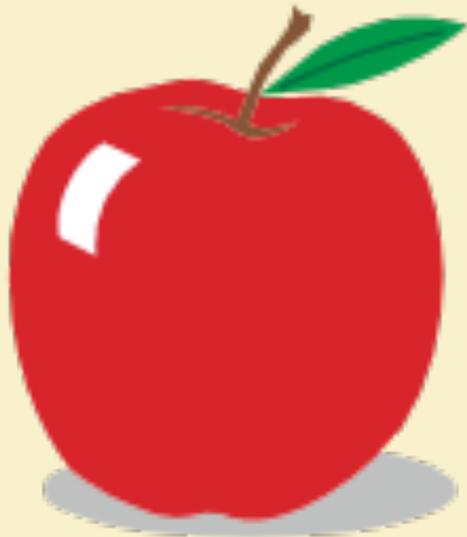
“He is described as being like any other person as to having a body, soul, and spirit.” (Ibid., 56)

“God ‘goes from place to place’ in a body just like anyone else.”

“He is ‘omnipresent,’ but not omnibody; that is, His presence can be felt everywhere but His body cannot. . .” (Ibid., 57)



The Two Senses of Literal



INTERPRETATION

"Literal" means according to the letter and thus is textual interpretation.

Literal interpretation understands a text according to what is written.

**Example: Israel means Israel;
Church means Church**



The Two Senses of Literal



FIGURE of SPEECH

Words or phrases can be:
1. Plain/literal (denotative)
2. Figurative (connotative)

Context determines whether something is a figure or plain and can be explained by textual factors.

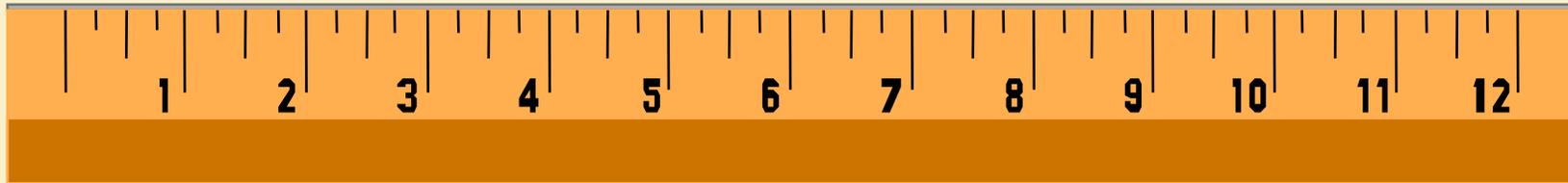
Example:

Literal = *He died*

Figure = *He kicked the bucket*



The Golden Rule of Interpretation



When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truth, indicate clearly otherwise.



The Principle of Literal Interpretation

By any given expression of Scripture, one meaning is conveyed, and only one. Every passage of Scripture has only one sense.



The Principle of Literal Interpretation

The meaning is in the
mind of the speaker or
writer

The interpretation is in
the mind of the listener
or the reader



The Principle of Literal Interpretation

Literal interpretation is finding the one meaning (sense) intended by the words used in their grammatical-historical-cultural setting.



The Principle of Literal Interpretation

- The literal interpretation as applied to any document is that view which adopts as the sense of a sentence the meaning of that sentence in usual, or ordinary, or normal conversation or writing.
- The literal sense is the words as they are intended by the author in their normal usage, following the ordinary and apparent sense of words.



The Principle of Literal Interpretation

• Meanings of Literal:

- It may mean *actual* in contrast to fictional
- It may mean historical, grammatical interpretation of a passage
- Thus, a word only has meaning as it is related to a context.



The Principle of Literal Interpretation

Definition—Normal

- The historical-grammatical-cultural method of interpretation is dictated, not merely by common-sense, but by the doctrine of inspiration, which tells us that God has put His words into the mouths, and caused them to be written in the writings, of men whose individuality was in no way lessened by the fact of their inspiration, and who spoke and wrote to be understood by their contemporaries. Since God has effected an identity between their words and His, the way to get into His mind is via theirs.



The Principle of Literal Interpretation

- The literalist is not one who denies that figurative language, that symbols are used in prophecy, nor does he deny that great spiritual truths are set forth therein; his position is simply that the prophecies are to be normally interpreted as tany other utterances are interpreted—that which is manifestly literal being regarded as plain-literal, and that which is manifestly figurative being regarded as figurative-literal.



The Principle of Literal Interpretation

- It is consistent with and sustained by literal fulfillment of prophecy. All prophecies of Scripture where we have the fulfillment recorded as well have been fulfilled in a *literal* manner.
- It grounds interpretation in fact. Whereas allegorization is subjective, literal interpretation is objective in a grammatical-historical-cultural context.
- It exercises a control over interpretation. If one allegorizes Scripture, no one interpretation can be shown to be more accurate than another, and thus any interpretation is just as valid as another. However, with literal interpretation, results can be checked with objective data.



The Principle of Literal Interpretation

- It exercises a control over interpretation. If one allegorizes Scripture, no one interpretation can be shown to be more accurate than another, and thus any interpretation is just as valid as another. However, with literal interpretation, results can be checked with objective data.
- It has led to the greatest success in opening up the Word of God.
- It maintains a respect for the literal categories of Scripture, and it takes seriously the historical character and nature of the Bible. Literal interpretation is concerned both with history and factual data.



The Problem with Figurative Language

A Distinction

Plain-Literal

Denotative: The literal interpretation is the explicit assertion of the words.

Figurative-Literal

Connotative: The literal interpretation is the specific intention of the figure of speech. A connotative statement is one which expresses a literal truth by using a figure of speech.



The Problem with Figurative Language

Its Abundance

- God is spiritual, and in order to communicate with us in a physical world, He many times uses figures of speech.
- Literal interpretation includes figures of speech. Behind every figure of speech is a literal meaning. The literal meaning of the figurative expression is the proper or natural meaning, that which the author intends to convey his statements. Whenever a figure is used, its literal meaning is precisely that meaning determined by grammatical studies of figures. Remember, there are never two senses.



The Problem with Figurative Language

Its Abundance

- The use of figurative language does not compromise or nullify the literal sense of the thing to which it is applied. Figures of speech are a legitimate grammatical usage for conveying a literal meaning. Behind every figure of speech is a literal meaning, which we can find by means of the historical-grammatical method of interpretation.



The Problem with Figurative Language

Its Value

- It provides more life and greater emphasis, and it intensifies meaning. It does not diminish accuracy; in fact, it often enhances accuracy.



Guidelines for Interpreting a Figurative Language

- When to look for figurative language.
 - If the plain-literal interpretation produces an inherent contradiction with other Scripture
 - or with general facts, or
 - if it involves a moral or physical impossibility
 - If it involves a meaning contradicted by context ”
- For example, Galatians 2:9: “and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. ”



Guidelines for Interpreting a Figurative Language

- Look for an explanation in the context for figures of speech. If a figure of speech is used, often it will be explained in the passage. For example John 7:37: **“On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. ”**



Guidelines for Interpreting a Figurative Language

- Other examples. John 1:29: “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! ”
- Ezekiel 1: the glory of God mentioned at beginning and ending of vision of the wheels.



Guidelines for Interpreting a Figurative Language

- Look for a plain-literal meaning first, for this is the more common. For example Zech. 14:4: **“And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, Which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, From east to west, Making a very large valley; Half of the mountain shall move toward the north And half of it toward the south.”**
- Do not depart from the plain-literal interpretation unless you have good reason to do so from the passage.



Guidelines for Interpreting a Figurative Language

- Other examples:
- Isaiah 55:12: “For you shall go out with joy, And be led out with peace; The mountains and the hills Shall break forth into singing before you, And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.”
- Luke 13:32: “And He said to them, ‘Go, tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.’”



Guidelines for Interpreting a Figurative Language

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Guidelines for Interpreting a Figurative Language

- Do not use figurative language to build your doctrine on. Go to a similar passage which deals with the same material or topic in a plain-literal sense.
- Find out what the writer means when he uses a figure of speech.
- When the Scripture makes sense, seek no other sense, lest it be nonsense.

Theory & Practice of Biblical Hermeneutics



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PRINCIPLES RELATING TO LITERAL INTERPRETATION

THE CONTRASTS BETWEEN LITERAL AND ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION



The Contrasts between Literal and Allegorical Interpretation

Allegorical Interpretation ■ A verse can have more than one sense or meaning

Literal Interpretation ■ Scripture has only one sense or meaning: the grammatical-historical-cultural interpretation



The Contrasts between Literal and Allegorical Interpretation

- Allegorical Interpretation** ■ Interpretation becomes speculative & subjective. Invites interpretation by imagination
- Literal Interpretation** ■ No speculation or subjectivity. Interpretation is grounded in objective fact.



The Contrasts between Literal and Allegorical Interpretation

Allegorical Interpretation ■ No control over interpretation. Any meaning is as valid as another.

Literal Interpretation

■ Exercises control over interpretation by grounding interpretation in the grammatical-historical-cultural context.



The Contrasts between Literal and Allegorical Interpretation

Allegorical Interpretation ■ No concern with history or factual data. Looks only for a “deeper meaning.”

Literal Interpretation ■ Maintains respect and concern for both history and factual data.



The Contrasts between Literal and Allegorical Interpretation

Allegorical Interpretation

- Leaving literal meaning results in making Scripture say something that is not there.

Literal Interpretation

- Maintains the literal meaning, even where figures of speech are used. Figurative language is viewed as only one way of expressing a literal truth.



***PRINCIPLES RELATING TO
LITERAL INTERPRETATION***

***THE SUPERIORITY OF LITERAL OVER
ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION***



The Superiority of Literal over Allegorical Interpretation

Plain-Literal

Denotative: The Literal interpretation is the explicit assertion of the words.

Figurative-Literal

Connotative: The Literal interpretation is the specific intention of the figure of speech. A connotative statement is one which expresses a literal truth by using a figure of speech.



The Superiority of Literal over Allegorical Interpretation

- It is consistent with and sustained by literal fulfillment of prophecy. All prophecies of Scripture where we have the fulfillment recorded as well have been fulfilled in a *literal manner*.
- It grounds interpretation in fact. Whereas allegorization is subjective, literal interpretation is objective in a grammatical-historical-cultural context.



The Superiority of Literal over Allegorical Interpretation

- It exercises a control over interpretation. If one allegorizes Scripture, no one interpretation can be shown to be more accurate than another, and thus any interpretation is just as valid as another. However, with literal interpretation, results can be checked with objective data.
- It has led to the greatest success in opening up the Word of God.
- It maintains a respect for the literal categories of Scripture, and it takes seriously the historical character and nature of the Bible. Literal interpretation is concerned both with history and factual data.

Theory & Practice of Biblical Hermeneutics



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PRINCIPLES RELATING TO LITERAL INTERPRETATION

SPIRITUALIZING SCRIPTURE

**When the Scripture
makes sense, seek no
other sense, less it be
nonsense.**



Spiritualizing Scripture

- This view is contrary to the normal sense of words and the meaning only resides in the mind of the interpreter, not the text itself.
- It is a simplistic, marginal, and naïve use of the text to fit preconceived ideas not in the text itself.
- It can even be for lofty reasons but sincerity does not equal truth.
- Any interpretation that does not give proper recognition to the plain reading of the text is an abuse of the biblical text.



Spiritualizing Scripture

- God is pure spirit (immaterial) but chose to create a physical world.
- Upon completing the creation of the universe He declared this material world as very good.
- Humans are made in both as material and immaterial beings to reflect their relationship to God and to the physical universe
- The revelation of God to Israel presents a view of humanity that is primarily addressed to the material universe, but recognizing the immaterial.



Spiritualizing Scripture

- The revelation of God in the church presents the immaterial without rejection of the material.
- The issue is not of material OR immaterial BUT material AND immaterial. The attempt to force a decision between the two in the development of a unrealistic theology.
- Ancient Greek philosophy saw the material world as unimportant and temporal.
- Thus they saw the physical body as temporary giving rise to the view that the highest goal of humans was to be rid of the physical body and live only in immaterial form. From this kind of thought came Gnosticism, similar to contemporary eastern religion.



Spiritualizing Scripture

- This Gnostic view is what gave rise to a moral perspective leading to asceticism and libertinism, and to a view of the physical body which denied the true nature of the incarnated Jesus.
- Some of the ancient church fathers imbibed in this Greek way of thinking and developed at Alexandria of Egypt a view of biblical interpretation called allegory, greatly resisted by the school of interpretation at Antioch in Syria, the church which sent out Paul, Barnabas and Silas.



Spiritualizing Scripture

- Now this same view became present in thinking that came out of Germany with scholars like Rudolf Bultmann and much liberal theology.
- This view of biblical interpretation discounts the material reality of God's world and substitutes a fictionalized view of theology emphasizing an eschatology in which the material world is minimized in importance.
- By so doing, a great portion of the Scripture becomes irrelevant (more than 1/3) and the Messianic rule of Jesus foretold by the prophets becomes unfulfilled.

• STOP