

# **Biblical Interpretation (CL1)**

## **Starting With the Text**

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Jan. 29 – Introduction to Biblical Interpretation

Feb. 5 – Starting with the Text

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Mar. 5 – Interpreting the New Testament

Mar. 12 – Interpreting the Old Testament

Mar. 19 – Applying the Principles; Final Exam



# Our Mandate from Scripture

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

2 Timothy 2:15-16

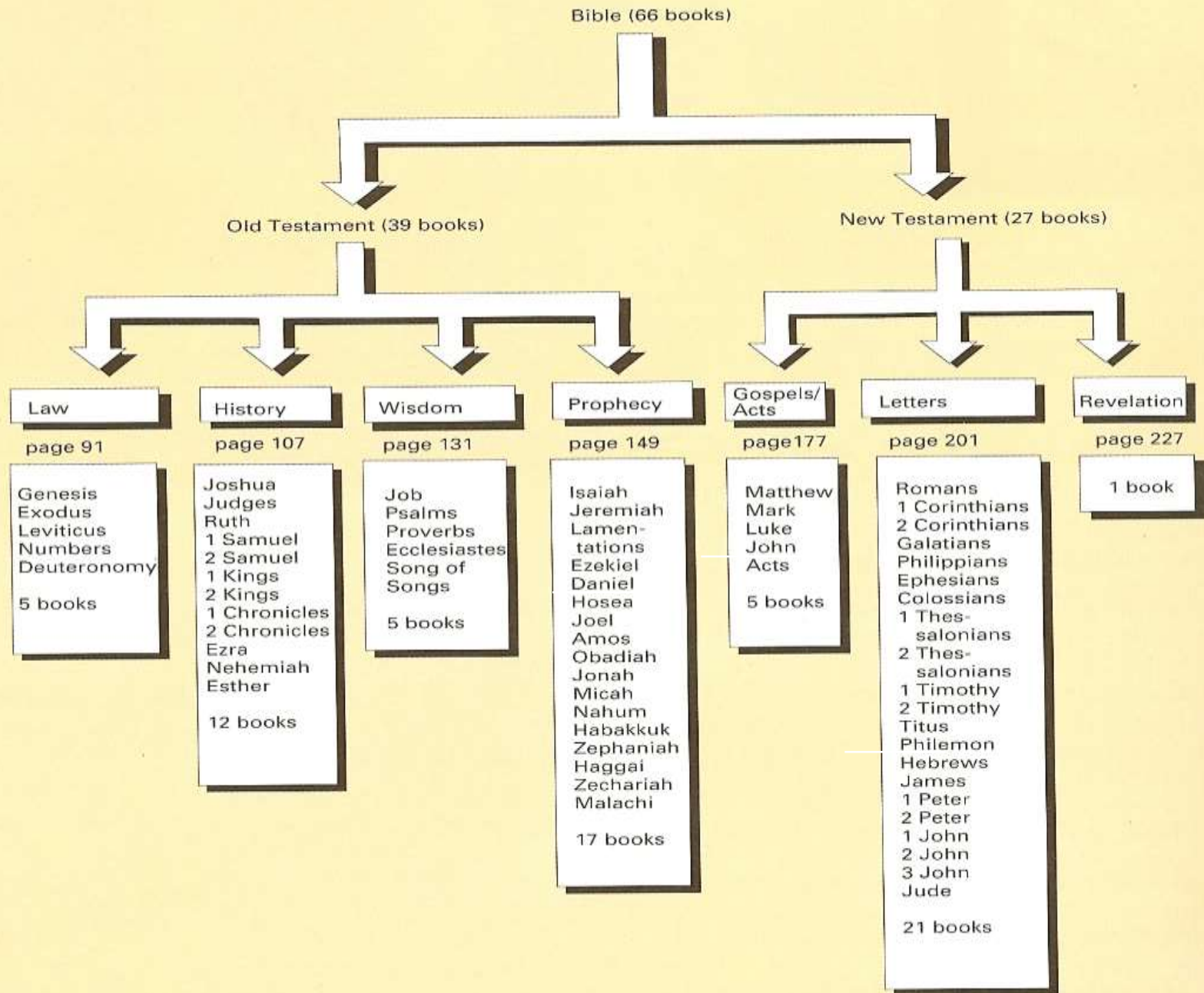
# Introduction to Biblical Interpretation

- **Exegesis:** (Greek *ἐξήγησις*, 'to lead out.')
- **Hermeneutics:** (Greek *ἐρμηνεύω*, 'translate, interpret.')
- **"Hermeneutics" & "Exegesis"** are sometimes used interchangeably, but hermeneutics is a wider discipline, including written, verbal, and nonverbal communication. Exegesis focuses primarily on texts.

# What Scripture Does for Christians


- Conviction of Sin.
- Correction and Instruction.
- Spiritual Fruitfulness.
- Perseverance.
- Joy and Delight.
- Ultimate Authority in Doctrine and Deed.

The Bible, section by section



# Content of the Bible – Old Testament

Thirty-nine individual books, varying in literary genre from historical narrative to romantic poetry.

1. **The Law** (Genesis–Deuteronomy). These five books are also called the Books of Moses or the Pentateuch. (“the five books.”)
  2. **The Historical Books** (Joshua–Esther).
  3. **Wisdom and Songs** (Job–Song of Songs).
  4. **The Major Prophets** (Isaiah–Daniel).
  5. **The Minor Prophets** (Hosea–Malachi).
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# Content of the Bible – New Testament

## 1. The Gospels

- Synoptic Gospels (3)- Matthew, Mark, Luke
- Theological Gospel (1) - John

## 2. Acts of the Apostles (1)

## 3. Pauline Epistles (13) – Romans, 1&2

Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1&2 Thessalonians, 1&2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon.

## 4. General Epistles (8) – Hebrews, James, 1&2 Peter, 1-2-3 John, Jude.

## 5. Book of Revelation



# Bible Timeline

- ▶ Adam and Eve; Noah - I.t.a.
- ▶ Calling of Abraham - 2000 B.C.
- ▶ The Exodus - 1446 B.C. (first Bible books written by Moses)
- ▶ Monarchy begins - 1050 B.C. (God chooses Saul)
- ▶ King David - 1010–970 B.C.
- ▶ Divided kingdom - 931 B.C. (Israel and Judah divided)
- ▶ Assyrian exile - 722 B.C. (destruction of Samaria)
- ▶ Babylonian exile - 586 B.C. (destruction of Jerusalem)
- ▶ Persian Period - 537 B.C. (return of Jews under Cyrus)
- ▶ Second temple finished - 515 B.C.
- ▶ Malachi (last Old Testament book) - 430 B.C.
- ▶ Intertestamental period - 430 B.C.–A.D. 45
- ▶ Jesus' birth - 7–4 B.C.
- ▶ Jesus' ministry - A.D. 27–30
- ▶ Jesus' crucifixion - A.D. 30
- ▶ First New Testament book(s) written - A.D. 45
- ▶ Revelation written - A.D. 90 (last book of New Testament)

# Textual Criticism & Translating

## The basic problem:

"We have no autograph manuscripts of the Greek and Roman classical writers and no copies which have been collated with the originals; the manuscripts we possess derive from the originals through an unknown number of intermediate copies, and are consequently of questionable trustworthiness. The business of textual criticism is to produce a text as close as possible to the original (*constitutio textus*)." *Paul Mass*

The textual critic's ultimate objective is the production of a "critical edition" – a text most closely approximating the original.

# The Nature of Textual Errors in Scripture

## Unintentional Errors (95% of textual variants)

1. **Errors of Sight.** Scribes sometimes copied texts by looking back and forth to the originals. By this method, they inevitably made a number of errors of sight.
2. **Errors of Hearing.** When scribes copied manuscripts through dictation (that is, scribes wrote as a manuscript was being read), errors of hearing were made.
3. **Errors of Writing.** Sometimes scribes introduced errors into texts simply by writing the wrong thing.
4. **Errors of Judgment.** Sometimes scribes exercised poor judgment through incorporating marginal glosses (ancient footnotes) into the body of the text or similar unintentional corrupting influences.

# The Nature of Textual Errors in Scripture

## Intentional Errors (5% of textual variants)

1. **Revising Grammar and Spelling.**
2. **Harmonizing Similar Passages.** Scribes tended to harmonize parallel passages and introduce uniformity to stylized expressions.
3. **Eliminating Apparent Discrepancies and Difficulties.** Scribes sometimes fixed what they perceived as problems in the text.
4. **Conflating the Text.** Sometimes scribes combined variant readings when copying, conflating them together.
5. **Adapting Different Liturgical Traditions.** It is possible that church liturgy (i.e., stylized prayers or praises) influenced some textual additions or wording changes.
6. **Making Theological or Doctrinal Changes.** Sometimes scribes made theological or doctrinal changes – omitting or clarifying something they saw as wrong.

# Reliability of New Testament Manuscripts

There are 5,686 Greek New Testament manuscripts in existence today. Compared to other ancient writings, the New Testament manuscripts far outweigh others in quantity and accuracy. 18 NT manuscripts are from the 2nd century, and one from the 1<sup>st</sup> Century.

Author	Date Written	Earliest Copy	Time Gap to Copy	# of Copies	Accuracy of Copies
Pliny	61-113 A.D.	850 A.D.	750 yrs	7	----
Plato	427-347 B.C.	900 A.D.	1200 yrs	7	----
Demosthenes	4th Cent. B.C.	1100 A.D.	800 yrs	8	----
Thucydides	460-400 B.C.	900 A.D.	1300 yrs	8	----
Euripides	480-406 B.C.	1100 A.D.	1300 yrs	9	----
Aristophanes	450-385 B.C.	900 A.D.	1200	10	----
Caesar	100-44 B.C.	900 A.D.	1000	10	----
Tacitus	circa 100 A.D.	1100 A.D.	1000 yrs	20	----
Aristotle	384-322 B.C.	1100 A.D.	1400	49	----
Sophocles	496-406 B.C.	1000 A.D.	1400 yrs	193	----
Homer (Iliad)	900 B.C.	400 B.C.	500 yrs	643	95%
New Testament	1st Cent. A.D. (49-100 A.D.)	c. 130 A.D.	< 100 years	5686	99.5%


# Inspiration of Scripture

- **The Intuition Theory.** Writers of the Bible exhibited natural religious intuition that is also found in other great religious thinkers, such as Confucius or Plato.
- **The Illumination Theory.** The Spirit of God in some way impressed himself on the consciousness of the biblical writers, but not in a way essentially different from the way the Spirit communicates with all humanity.
- **The Dynamic Theory.** God gave specific impressions to biblical authors but allowed the writers to communicate those in their own words.
- **The Dictation Theory.** God dictated the exact words to the human authors.

# Inspiration of Scripture

- **The Verbal Plenary Theory.** There is a dual authorship to the Scriptures. The human authors of the Bible wrote as thinking, feeling human beings, while God so mysteriously superintended the process that every word written was also the exact word he wanted to be written—free from all error.
- We hold the Bible to be of dual-authorship – the miraculous process whereby God worked through thinking, feeling individuals, mysteriously superintending the process to have written exactly what he wants (Verbal-Plenary Inspiration). For that reason, it makes good sense for Biblical Interpretation to start with the clear intent and purpose of the human author, since Scripture cannot mean *less* than what the human authors intended.

# Implications of Dual Authorship

1. The clear purpose of the human author is a good place to start in understanding the Bible. The Scripture cannot mean *less* than the human authors consciously intended.
  2. God, as the Lord of history and revelation, included patterns or foreshadowing of which the human authors were not fully aware.
  3. While the biblical authors were conscious of being used by God to convey his word and believed that their revelation was part of a grand scheme of history, there are ways in which God's providential control of history exceeded their conscious reflection.
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# Inerrancy/Infallibility, etc.

- **Inerrant/Inerrancy.** The doctrine that the Bible is completely truthful in all things that the biblical authors assert—whether in geographic, chronological, or theological details. (Wayne Grudem: *“The inerrancy of Scripture means that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact.”*)
- **Infallible/Infallibility.** The belief that Scripture is without error in all matters of theology or faith (sometimes also called limited inerrancy).
- **Inspired/Inspiration.** To claim the Bible as divinely inspired is to assert that God was somehow behind its writing.


# Inerrancy/Infallibility, etc.

- **Neo-orthodox/Neo-orthodoxy.** A theological movement of the 1920s-60s in which scholars generally affirmed God revealed himself in history but that fallible human beings recorded these acts imperfectly. According to neo-orthodox theologians, these writings *become* the Word of God as they are newly proclaimed and people have an existential encounter with the living God.
- **Trustworthy/True/Authoritative.** Some critics charge words like inerrant and infallible are not found in Scripture and wrongly focus on negation (that is, *no error*), rather than on positive terms such as true, trustworthy, or authoritative.


# Qualifications to Inerrancy

1. Inerrancy applies only to the autographs (original copies of Scripture).
  2. Inerrancy respects the authorial intent of the passage and the literary conventions under which the author wrote.
  3. It is clear that the Gospel authors are not intending to give a strict chronological account of Jesus' ministry; the material is frequently arranged topically. Faithful interpretation respects individual emphases and purposes of the different authors and faithfully allows those original emphases to come through in teaching and preaching.
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# Qualifications to Inerrancy

4. Inerrancy allows for partial reporting, paraphrasing, and summarizing.
  5. Inerrancy allows for phenomenological language (that is, description of events as they are observed and experienced from *one* vantage point rather than providing an objective scientific explanation).
  6. Inerrancy allows the reporting of speech without the endorsement of the truthfulness of that speech.
  7. Inerrancy does not mean that the Bible provides definitive or exhaustive information on every topic.
  8. Inerrancy is not invalidated by colloquial or nonstandard grammar or spelling.
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# Dealing With Difficult Texts

1. Be sure that you are interacting with real texts and the best available translations.
  2. Approach the text in trust, not as a skeptic, while still investigating the truthfulness of Christianity.
  3. Pray about a difficult text.
  4. Keep in mind the “Qualifications of Inerrancy” when dealing with difficult texts (see above).
  5. Seek counsel when dealing with difficult texts.
  6. Be willing to set a text aside for further consideration rather than force harmonization.
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# Biblical Interpretation Process

1. Who wrote/spoke the passage and who was it addressed to?
2. What does the passage say?
3. Are there any words in the passage that need to be examined?
4. What is the immediate context?
5. What is the broader context in the chapter and book?
6. What are the related verses to the passage's subject, and how do they affect the understanding of this passage?
7. What is the historical and cultural background?
8. What can I conclude about the passage?
9. Do my conclusions agree or disagree with related areas of scripture and others who have studied the passage?
10. What have I learned and what must I apply to my life?



