

People obviously misinterpret the Bible; otherwise, everyone would interpret it alike. Since two interpretations of the very same verse are sometimes geometrically opposed to each other, they cannot both be correct. Somebody is wrong about something. It seems that we should all be able to read the Bible and understand the will of God. But let us not deceive ourselves into oversimplifying the process of Biblical interpretation. Even the apostle Peter said that some of the writings of Paul were “hard to understand” (II Peter 3:15-16). He went on to say that the “untaught and unstable” have a tendency to “distort” the Scriptures “to their own destruction.” However, we need to recognize that Peter **did not** say the Scriptures were **impossible** to understand, just “hard.” In fact, Paul said, “when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ” (Ephesians 3:4). We must also realize that we have an adversary who is the “Father of lies” (John 8:44). There is nothing that helps the cause of Satan more than for the Scriptures to be tangled and confused. Paul wrote, “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (II Corinthians 4:3-4). Satan wants us to become so discouraged by the tangled web of denominational confusion that we just give up and think that truth does not exist.

So then, WHY are there so many interpretations of the Bible, represented by so many different groups? Interestingly enough, the preconceived expectation a person brings into Bible study has a lot to do with the interpretation derived. In other words, we often find the Bible teaches exactly what we want it to say. Our “approach” to Biblical interpretation greatly influences our “conclusion.” There are about “Seven Different Approaches” to Biblical interpretation which result in the varied beliefs we see in the denominational world today.

1. The Mystical Approach says that only special people can interpret the Scriptures (those with a mysterious rapport with God). Cults have historically thrived on this mentality since it is so easy to control people who are willing to let someone else do their thinking for them.

2. The Spiritual Approach says that anyone can interpret the Scriptures after they become “Spiritual” enough. The emotions seem to play a big part in this one. The key question is, “What does this verse speak to me?” It is believed that the Holy Spirit will insert meaning into our minds as we read. We wonder why the Scriptures are needed at all if answers are just telepathically communicated to us. Another problem is that any ten “Spiritually In-Tune People” are likely to come up with ten different interpretations of the same verse relying on this approach.

3. The Allegorical Method says that the Bible is totally figurative. Nothing means what it says on the surface. A deeper, more meaningful interpretation must be sought than what seems to be obvious. There can be no doubt that division and confusion will result from this one.

4. The Rationalistic Approach says that science and nature is the standard for truth and that reason must be our guide in Biblical interpretation. Using this approach, we would have to discount the miracles of the Bible because they can't be seen in nature. Any moral teachings which oppose our own socially evolved practices must also be rejected. In essence, this approach is humanistic. Man has placed himself in the role of God and condensed the Bible to a neat little handbook of uninspired philosophies. Those determined to hold this view point might as well leave the Bible alone altogether, for the Bible reveals things which science and nature cannot measure nor perceive. Thus, the Bible is a totally frustrating nuisance for these people.

5. The Dogmatic Approach begins with a doctrine which is preconceived to be true, then sets out to find Bible verses to make it appear believable. If one is not concerned with context, a string of sentences can be collected from any book which appear to prove a point. Once again, the fallacy with this approach is easy to see. Rather than allowing the Bible to speak for itself, the advocates of this philosophy try to force the Scriptures to concur with their own beliefs.

6. The Literal Approach is just the opposite from the Allegorical. In this one, everything in the Bible is deemed to be literal. Even prophetic images and apocalyptic monsters, which are obviously

intended to be figurative, are interpreted literally. Those who hold this approach pride themselves with having a superior faith to allow them to believe even the absurd.

7. The Inductive Approach seems to be more reasonable than all the others. Rather than trying to read an interpretation into the text, this view strives to draw out the meaning which the author originally intended. It reasons from the specific to the general. That is, before drawing a general conclusion about a Bible doctrine, every passage dealing with that topic is consulted. This approach is based on the belief that the Scriptures are inspired. Thus, all facts will harmonize -- no contradictions will exist. The over-riding question in this approach is: "What did this mean to the original author and audience?" The context surrounding a verse, when it was written, to whom it was written, circumstances, customs, language, and other passages on the same subject all play a part in correct interpretation. Those who utilize this approach to Bible study have an easier time coming to united interpretations of Scripture.

Please do not become discouraged by the tangled web of deceit that Satan has spun. Perhaps you can now see why so many different interpretations are held. It is true that correct interpretation of the Bible demands study and commitment; but the alternative is far worse, an embittered attitude that truth does not exist. Believe me, every verse of Scripture has but one interpretation: the one intended by the inspired author. Don't give up. Like the Ethiopian nobleman of Acts 8:31, be willing to ask for some help. And, be like the Bereans of Acts 17:11, "examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so."



**Bible Talk**

**WHY DO PEOPLE MISINTERPRET THE BIBLE?**

1. Would you say that some things in the Bible are "hard to understand"? (II Peter 3:15-16)
2. What kind of people "distort" the scriptures "to their own destruction"? (II Peter 3:16)
3. Are the scriptures impossible to understand? (Ephesians 3:4)
4. Who would like to see the gospel "veiled" and our minds "blinded" to the truth of scripture?  
Who is the "Father of Lies"? (John 8:44; II Corinthians 4:3-4)
5. Briefly describe the fallacy with each of the following methods of Biblical interpretation:  
Mystical \_\_\_\_\_  
Spiritual \_\_\_\_\_  
Allegorical \_\_\_\_\_  
Rationalistic \_\_\_\_\_  
Dogmatic \_\_\_\_\_  
Literal \_\_\_\_\_
6. When we say the Inductive Method of Biblical Interpretation reasons from the specific to the general, what does that mean?
7. To determine what a scripture meant to the original author & audience, we must consider the \_\_\_\_\_ surrounding the passage, \_\_\_\_\_ it was written, to \_\_\_\_\_ it was written, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, & other \_\_\_\_\_ on the same subject.
8. Agree/Disagree: The tangled web of denominational confusion is a powerful tool of Satan to discourage people from learning God's Word for themselves.