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# How to Interpret Your Bible

Topic: Interpretive methods: Covenantal  
Date: September 14th  
Memory Verse: Psalm 138:2

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## Review

If you struggle to understand a passage, stop to ask yourself:

1. Am I depending on the Holy Spirit for understanding?
2. Did I observe all the details of the passage carefully?
3. Do I understand this passage to mean what the original author wanted it to?
4. Have I connected this passage to my life with valid applications?

## Forms of Scripture

### I. Story (narrative)

- a. Around 75% of our Bible is narrative, more depending on how you count some of the NT material.
- b. Story with a purpose, a true historical record of God's redemptive plan
- c. Examples: Torah, Esther, Daniel, the Gospels, Acts
- d. The point: Found in one major theme, with the point unstated
- e. Demands: heightened historical and cultural awareness

### II. Poetry

- a. Marked in most Bibles with unique paragraphing

- b. Examples: Psalms, Proverbs, in prophetic books, in NT hymns
- c. The point: found within creative, picturesque language
- d. Demands: awareness of word pictures, sentence structure

### III. Letter (teaching)

- a. Examples: Epistles
- b. The Point: found within logical, direct teaching
- c. Demands: attention to grammar, logic, exact wording

## The Million Dollar Interpretive Question

What is the Bible about?

Is there a theme and structure of the entire Bible?

## Covenantalism

### I. Main idea

God has initiated covenants to accomplish His plan for redemption. He has chosen a people for His own and is working out His redemption plans for them in history through His covenants.

- a. Brief history
- b. Finds its roots in the early church fathers, traces idea of covenant of grace to Augustine, and in a strict sense is uniquely related to the Reformed tradition.
- c. First creedal mention: the Westminster Confession, 1647

### II. Summary of its structure

- a. Biblical covenants

- i. Noahic                      Gen. 6:17-22, 8:20-22, 9:1-7, 5-17
- ii. Abrahamic                Gen. 12:1-3; 13:14-18; 15:1-6; 17:1-4
- iii. Mosaic                    Ex 20; 34:28
- iv. Davidic                    2 Sam. 7:14
- v. New                              Jer. 31:31-34

b. Structural covenants

One overarching covenant (Redemption), with 2 related covenants (Works and Grace).

1. Covenant of Redemption

The Persons of the Trinity entered a covenant in eternity past where each assumed a part in redemption's plan: the Father to give the Son, the Son to give Himself to the Father as the sacrifice, and the Spirit to enable and carry it out.

2. Covenant of Works

God and Adam entered a covenant where God promised life for perfect obedience and death for disobedience.

3. Covenant of Grace

God and the elect sinner enter a covenant in which God promises salvation through faith in Christ.

### III. Connection to understanding the Bible

a. Typological interpretation of prophecy

- 1. Consistent literalism isn't that impressive of an interpretive concept.
- 2. Dispensationalist don't consistently interpret the Bible literally anyway.
- 3. Instead of "allegorical interpretation," it would be better to call the covenant method "typological interpretation."
- 4. Literalness, normalness, in the prophecy genre means typological interpretation.

b. Priority of interpreting the OT by the NT

- 1. The New Testament has "fundamental hermeneutical control."

- a. Old Testament Scriptures can be interpreted accurately only by studying the New Testament.
  - b. The Old and New Testaments must be interpreted as a unit.
  - c. Historic Christianity has always tried to understand the Old by the New.
- c. The presupposition of the covenant of Grace

Hoekema: “The central content of Scripture is the revelation of the way of salvation through Jesus Christ to man in all the various periods of his existence. Despite differences in administration, there is only one covenant of grace which God makes with his people. The Old Testament deals with the period of shadows and types, and the New Testament describes the period of fulfillment, but the covenant of grace in both of these eras is one” (p. 195).

Moises Silva: “The organic unity of God’s people throughout the ages is a distinctive emphasis of covenant theology” (*An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, 266).

Note: In addition to saying that we should interpret the Old Testament through the paradigm of the New Testament, he is also saying that we should interpret the Bible through the paradigm of the covenant of grace.

“The doctrine of the Covenant lies at the root of all true theology. It has been said that he who well understands the distinction between the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace is a master of divinity. I am persuaded that most of the mistakes which men make concerning the doctrines of Scriptures are based upon fundamental errors with regard to the covenants of law and the covenants of grace. May God grant us now the power to instruct and you the grace to receive instruction on this vital subject.’

That wasn’t a Presbyterian. That wasn’t even an Anglican. That was a Baptist. His name was C.H. Spurgeon. And he knew that Covenant Theology is at the heart of the Gospel ministry because Covenant Theology is the Gospel. And if you don’t understand Covenant Theology, you are not ready to convey the Gospel in all of its glory and in all of its fullness to the people of God and to those outside of the covenant in order to draw them in to the experience of the fullness of the Covenant mercies.” (Ligon Duncan)

## What to do when good people differ

- I. Insist that Scripture be the ultimate authority.
- II. Accurately understand why people differ.
- III. Analyze how central their interpretation is to the Gospel and core doctrine.
- IV. Humbly come to your own best conclusion.

