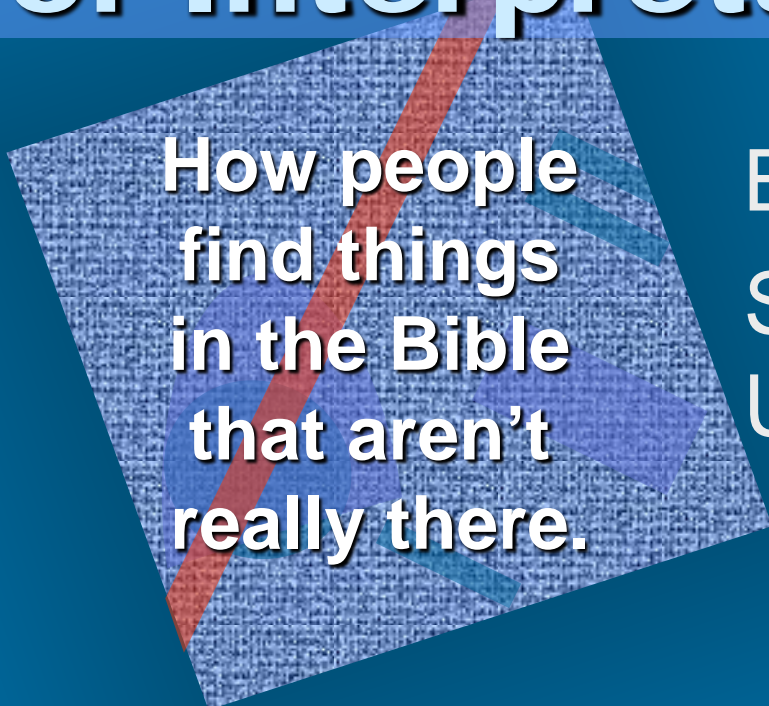


7 Common Errors of Interpretation



How people
find things
in the Bible
that aren't
really there.

Biblical Perspectives
Southern Nazarene
University

Dr. Howard Culbertson

Error #1: Allegorizing TOO much

Allegory:


a story or description in which the reader is pointed to a second meaning beneath the surface one.

Allegory:

A sustained metaphor

- characters and actions represent something else
- meanings are hidden behind a story

. . . Or to put it another way . . .



Instead of concentrating on clear and obvious meanings, we look for the real meaning beyond or behind the text

- “This stands for This stands for”

Allegories in Scripture

The Prophet Nathan's story to
David (II Kings 12)
Jesus' parable of the Sower

Stories people like to turn into allegories

Good Samaritan
Jonah

When is it permissible?

- When listeners are clearly (and perhaps repeatedly told that the allegory is neither implicit or explicit in Scripture:
 - Example: “Let’s imagine for a moment. . .”

Error #2: Ignoring the context

Ignoring a passage's cultural, historical and literary setting

SO PAUL SAYS IN VERSE 14 THAT,
BECAUSE OF HIS **CHAINS**, OTHERS
HAVE BEEN ENCOURAGED. WHAT
DO YOU THINK HE MEANS?

OH, I
KNOW...



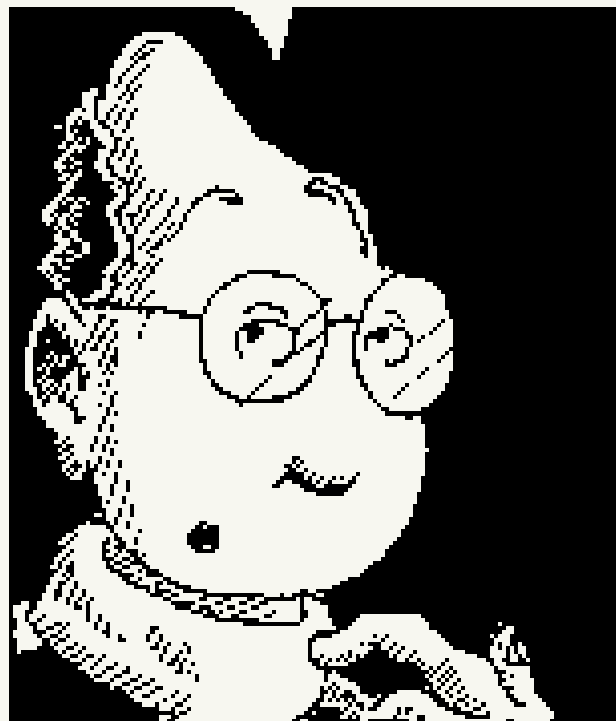


NO, NO, YOU'RE MISSING THE POINT!
I'M A CHAIN SMOKER, AND GOD IS
SPEAKING TO ME
THROUGH THIS TO
TELL ME I AM
TO ENCOURAGE
OTHER CHAIN
SMOKERS!

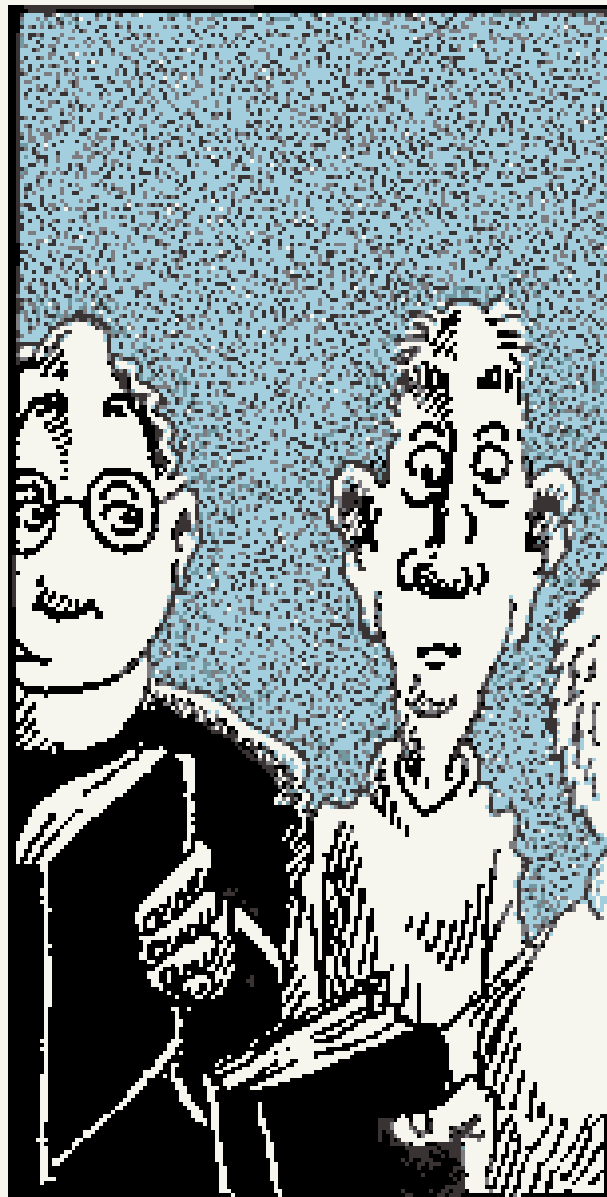
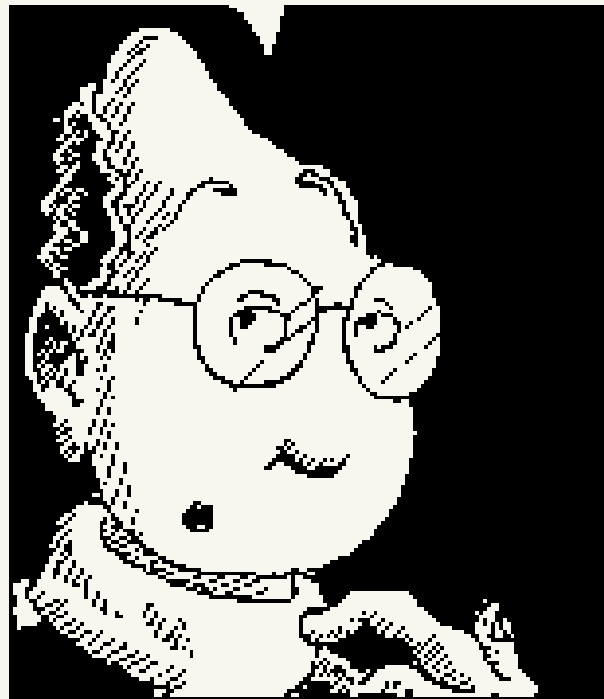




UM...THOSE ARE...VERY
INTERESTING INSIGHTS.
...BUT DO YOU THINK
PAUL COULD SIMPLY BE
REFERRING TO HIS
PRISON CHAINS,
IN ROME?

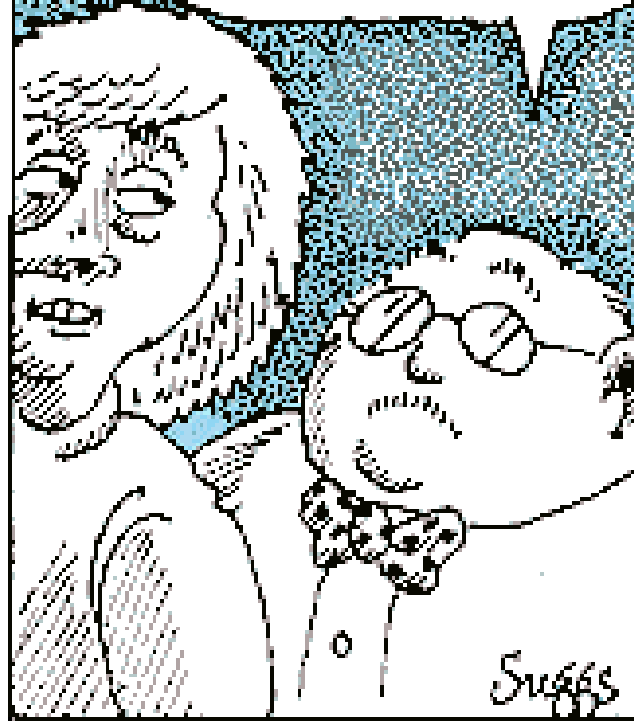


UM...THOSE ARE...VERY
INTERESTING INSIGHTS.
...BUT DO YOU THINK
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PRISON CHAINS,
IN ROME?



I TOLD YOU THIS BIBLE
STUDY WASN'T ABOUT
PRACTICAL LIVING.

"R-E-S-P-E-C-T" IS
ANOTHER ARETHA SONG
THAT MINISTERS TO ME



ROB SUGGS

Context is important

- Words carry meaning in sentences. For the most part, biblical sentences build their meaning as they relate to preceding and succeeding sentences.
 - My own Lord's Supper experience

Context and contradictions

- Those who claim the Bible is full of contradictions often find them because they haven't read the passages in context.

Error #3:

Over-selectivity

- Choosing specific words and phrases while ignoring others
- Danger: may miss the overall sweep of a passage
- "Missing the forest for the trees"

Error #4: False Combinations

Takes phrases and verses from here and there and makes a point out of the resulting mixture, a point that would not be valid if the passages were considered separately

For example . . .

Example of False Combination:

Psalm 23 must mean one's real enemies are in the church rather than outside the church

Ridiculous example of False Combination:

- Matthew 27:5 and Luke 10:37

*“Judas went away and hanged himself . .
. Go and do likewise.”*

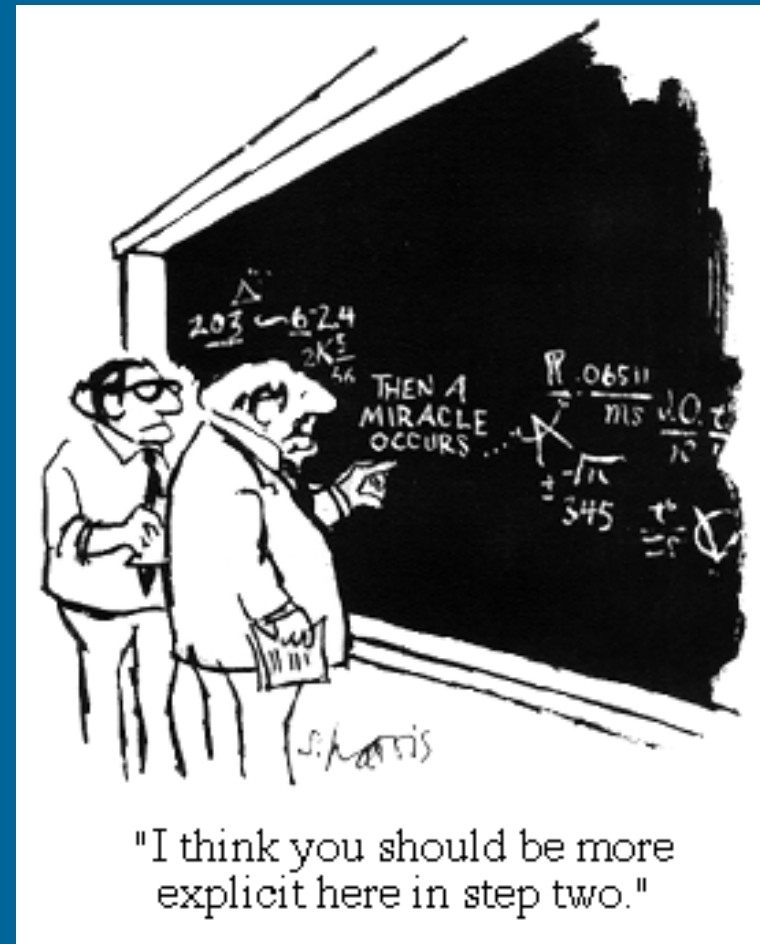
Error #5: Redefinition

When plain mean of a text leaves us cold or it says something we do not want to hear, we re-word it.

So, give me an example . . .

Our scientific mind-set pushes us toward re-definition

- Explanations that fit with our current scientific theories and understandings are offered for those Biblical events which seem to be miracles



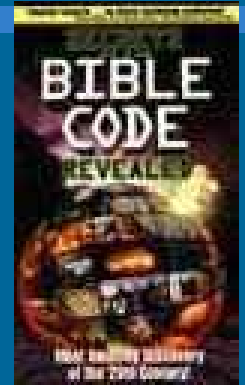
Sermon on the Mount phrases we want to redefine

- *Turn the other cheek* . . . “Well, you really can’t do that literally.”
- Matt. 5:42 -- “Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you”

- Re-definition springs from a different motivation than simply wanting to see the foundational principles behind a passage

Error #6: Depending on an extracanoncal authority

- Understanding the Bible takes special knowledge
- Only a special external key will unlock Bible "mysteries"
- Cults often appeal to an extracanoncal authority



Error #7: Personalizing everything

Asking insistently:

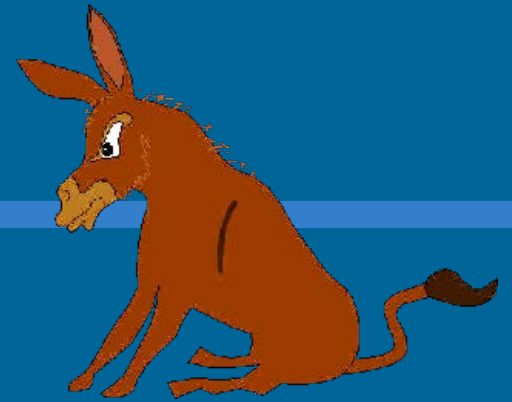
What is the moral of this story?

What does this mean for me?

Assuming there's a very personal meaning in every single Biblical passage

... For example

- Personalizing a historical event
 - “Today you are to pass by the region of Moab at Ar” – Deuteronomy 2:18
 - *What does that mean for me?*



- Example:
 - Balaam's talking donkey reminds me that I talk too much
- Example:
 - The story of building the temple is God's way of telling us that we have to construct a new church building.

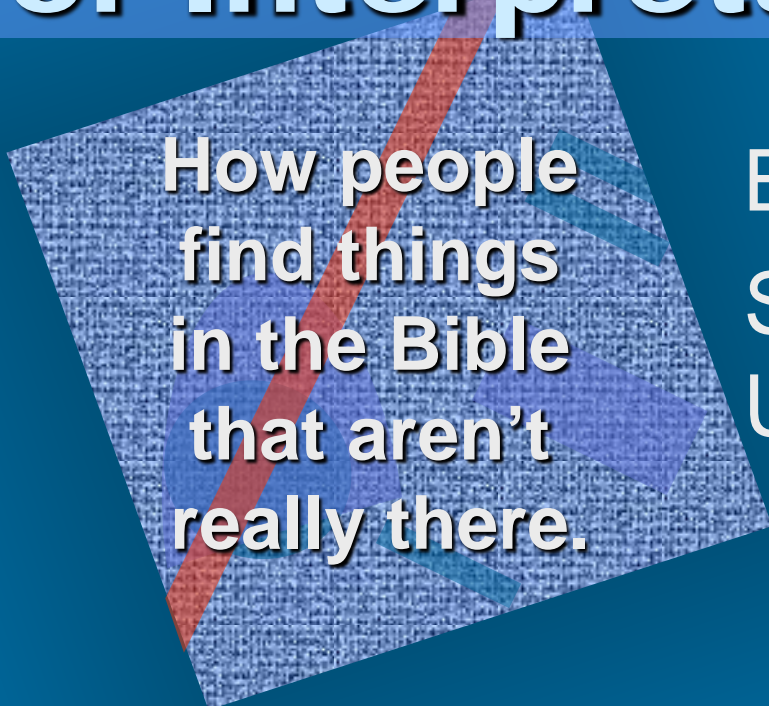
**A final note: Learn to
live with some
ambiguity**

A tilted square graphic with a blue and white pixelated pattern and a diagonal line.

Some questions about
the Bible will not be
solved this side of
eternity.

8 Common Errors of Interpretation

(end)



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This PowerPoint presentation is available along with related materials and other PowerPoint presentations at <http://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/ppt.htm>