

As we saw in the previous Bite Size Bible Study, the meaning of a scripture can have several levels of understanding. The understanding of the scripture lies in understanding their context. Generally there are four levels of interpretation that can be considered. The authors themselves used these methods to write scripture and expected the audience of their time and culture to use them to understand their meaning. Using these interpretive methods along with an understanding of the culture of the times brings a richer knowledge of the scriptures.

THE 4 RULES INTERPRETATION

The four levels of interpretation are called: Simple (*Parshat*), Hinting (*Remez*), Concept or Search (*Drash*) & Hidden (*Sud*). Each layer is deeper and more intense than the last, like the layers of an onion.

Simple: This is the plain, literal sense of a text, which examines the arrangement and meaning of words and phrases within sentences and paragraphs, as well as the historical setting as background for deciding the intended, explicit meaning of a passage. This is the primary way to interpret a text.

This method provides the understanding a scripture in its natural, normal sense using the customary meanings of the word's being used, literary style, historical and cultural setting, and context. If we discard the Simple meaning, we lose any real chance of an accurate understanding. A verse cannot depart from its plain meaning.

This Simple meaning is not without its complexities because it can include several types of language, including figurative, symbolic and allegorical.

Hinting: This is a word, phrase, or other element in the text that hints at an earlier text or underlying thought or idea not always readily seen in the Simple or literal interpretation. Understanding this makes many Bible texts clearer since these verses were not written to be understood completely on the literal level. Thoughts and Ideas are hinted at, meaning that one needs to read between the lines. This can make it necessary to look for equivalent language and/or equivalent meaning in other parts of the Scriptures.

An example of hinting is Proverbs 20:10 - *Different weights, and different measures, both of them are alike an abomination to the Lord.* The simple meaning would be concerned with a merchant using the same scale to weigh goods for all of his customers. The hinting implies that this goes

beyond this into aspects of fairness and honesty found in the teachings of Moses.

These next two need to be used with much prayer and understanding as they can, and have, led to misunderstanding rather than a better understanding. The misapplication of these two interpretative levels is not for the beginner or those not well versed in the Bible. They rely heavily on concepts from different parts of the Scriptures.

Concept or Search: This is a teaching or exposition or application of the Simple and/or Hinting interpretation levels. This could be considered comparable to a Bible Study or Sermon or any deeper level of instruction. For instance, Biblical writers and teachers may take two or more unrelated verses and combine them to create a verse(s) with a third meaning; without losing or contradicting the Simple meaning of any other scripture.

There are three rules to consider when utilizing the concept method of interpretation of a text:

1. Its understanding can not be used to strip a passage of its simple meaning, nor may any such understanding contradict the simple meaning of any other scripture passage. No passage may lose its Simple meaning.
2. Scripture must interpret scripture. Look for the scriptures themselves to define the components of an allegory (*something that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically a moral one*).
3. The primary components of an allegory represent specific realities and the understanding of the text should be limited these primary components.

Hidden or Secret: A mystical or hidden meaning, often arrived at by considering the numerical values of the Hebrew letters, noting unusual spellings, considering the transposing of letters, seeing connections between similar words and numbers, and the like. Many Hebrew words mean something different with only one of two letters changed.

This interpretation is the most difficult to use correctly. Through its misuse it has produced much of the heresy in the world today.

Rely on the Simple interpretation first, then the Hidden, later on the Concept, and lastly on the Secret for your understanding.