

Humpty Dumpty Hermeneutics, NOT or Right ways and wrong ways to use the Bible

Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes!
Matthew 18:7



Louis Berkhof defines **hermeneutics** as "the science that teaches us the principles, laws, and methods of interpretation". He goes on to set this science's task as the removing of the "distance between an author and his readers".

Bernard Ramm likens hermeneutics to a rule book, and **exegesis** to the game. Without the rule book Bible interpretation would resemble a dialogue with Lewis Carroll's Humpty Dumpty, who set as his rule "When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean -- neither more nor less". 'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you can make words mean so many different things.' 'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master -- that's all.'

Hermeneutic Principles or Rules

1. Read the full sentence.
2. Read the paragraph of which the sentence is a part. Read the paragraphs on either side of the paragraph in which the sentence is a part.
3. What is the subject? i.e. 1 Cor. 13 – chapter before and after (spiritual gifts)
4. What is the purpose of the book it is in? i.e. Proverbs (not promises, general truths) Job (who is speaking?) Ecclesiastes (whose perspective is being represented?) Revelation (of whom?)
5. What Testament is it in? What difference will that make to understanding? To whom is it addressed to? Who is the audience, hearer?
6. Look at it in light of the whole Bible.
7. Look at it in light of Christ (the Word became flesh).
8. And – the most important question of all – what did this passage or term mean to the *original* hearers?