

## “Interpreting Verses”

There are foundational reasons why so many people interpret the Bible so very differently. Even when everyone agrees to use the original Hebrew and Greek Texts as the authority, they still read the same Text and come to vastly different understandings about what is being said.

For example: The questions about what can and cannot be done on the Sabbath have been a controversial debate for centuries. Specifically, the subjects of “lighting fires” and what is a “Sabbath Day’s Journey” have been debated between Jewish groups, and between Believers groups, for thousands of years. We can use this debate about Exodus 35:3, “Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the Sabbath day”, as a focus example to understand why so many interpret the original Text so differently.

There are large numbers of Jewish groups who take major steps (they buy equipment to do things for them on the Sabbath) in an effort to ensure that they do nothing on the Sabbath which will cause anything similar to a fire being ignited. Many will not ride an elevator, or turn on a light-switch, because someone somewhere must keep the “fires burning” in order to keep the electricity going to “ignite” the elevator motor or light bulb. There are of course hundreds, if not thousands, of variants on this theme. The relevant question is: **“how to interpret a verse in the Bible?”**

The understandings given below will help answer this question. The reader can investigate further using the Internet.

**1.)** We are trained in our school system to think in a certain way. But the Bible was written centuries before, using a very different way of thinking.

Many summarize this difference as “Western Thinking” versus “Eastern Thinking”. This gets close, but even our modern “Eastern Thinking” has become significantly “Western Thinking”, due to movies and mass media.

A pictorial expression of this idea is that: “Western Thinking” teach students to examine things “logically”, sequentially, and by categorizing everything into a box. “Eastern Thinking” teaches students to examine things “poetically”, not necessarily in any sequential order, and ideas may belong to multiple categories or boxes at the same time. You can read up on this on the Internet.

What this means is that the Bible is written using mostly “Eastern Thinking”, but we scrutinize every verse as if it is from one of our “Western Thinking” modern school-system’s text-books.

We are taught to interpret everything as if it has to be logical, given in sequential order, and its ideas must fit neatly into one of our presumed categories, and confined into a single box. Thus, we often tend to misinterpret and miss the “poetic” intent.

For Example: you read a letter from a friend in which he writes “your eyes are beautiful pools flowing with sweet wine”. “Western Thinking” wants to envision your eyes as being “pool-like”, and maybe your tears might taste like sweetened wine. “Eastern Thinking” simply envisions your eyes to be captivating, with “pools” and “sweet wine” being irrelevant adjectives having no significance beyond the expression of captivation. “Western Thinking” will spend hours focused on debating the significance of “pools” and “taste”. “Eastern Thinking” cannot imagine why you are wasting your time, and worse, missing the whole point about being captivated.

Another example is: “God is light”. Is God composed of nothing but photons, or is God enlightening?

Another example is: “God is love”. Is God composed of nothing but emotional thought-waves, or is God caring, instructive, and committed?

**2.)** The original Hebrew and Greek Text have no commas and periods. In fact there are not even 'between-the-words' spaces. But yet, we rely implicitly upon the insertion of commas and periods to tell us how to interpret the Text. **These insertions are not part of the Bible!** Many inserted commas and periods are printed to give you the publisher’s own interpretations of the Text. Even the words printed are in fact those words chosen by the publishers to ensure that you read the verses as they want you to read them. Thus, you are reading the orthodox catechism of the publishers, ensuring that you believe the dogmas that the publishers want you to believe. **You are not really reading "The Bible". You are reading a biased catechism, and you are being led to believe things solely because that is what the publisher's Bible Version Catechism tells you to believe.**

Also everything is numbered, as Chapters and Verses. In school we were taught to consider each numbered paragraph to be its own stand-alone test-question. Thus, **we were trained from childhood to think of each numbered verse as being its own stand-alone Doctrinal Point.**

When we are told to consider “what is the Context” of the verse, we find it very easy to lose the overall higher-level Context, because we are trained to read each verse as if it were its own test-question or Doctrinal Point. When we read the Text we need to keep reading across Chapters and Verses. Only the Text itself can create a Context-change. Otherwise, keep reading across the Chapters and Verses, understanding that it is the same higher-level Context as it was before.

**3.)** We are taught to think of the word “Law” in a very specific manner. “The Law says...” is meant to enforce limits, to which one cannot deviate. But the Hebrew word translated as “Law” is “Torah”, which means “Teaching”. **There is a huge difference between reading “Laws”, and reading “Teachings”.** “Teachings” are principles, “Laws” are limits. This same confusion is in the Greek language also.

For example: if you read a “Law” saying: “You shall use 1 cup of salt for every 10 cups of soup”. You will then tell your cook to follow this “Law”, without deviation from this proportion. But, read the same sentence as a “Teaching”, and it is now providing a principle to follow, probably so that the soup is properly salted. But if your cook makes a different kind of soup with different salty vegetables, Kelp versus Carrots, they may see the need to add more or less salt to the soup, but, that kind of soup is still properly salted. **The cook may have broken a “Law”, but not a “Teaching”. Thus, one group calls your cook a “blatant sinner”, while another group calls him a “master chef”.**

In a debate about “kindling fires on the Sabbath”, the verse that talks about this should not be categorized as if it were a stand-alone Doctrinal Point. Rather, it is providing more “Teaching” about the same higher-level Context, how to keep the Sabbath, as a rest.

**4.)** The hardest concept of all is this one: “All Laws Have a Context”. Even when talking about a “Law”, the reader still must remember the implied Context forming the framework for the “Law”.

For example: you tell your little brother that you have to leave the house for an hour, and that he is not to use the phone, and is to stay in the house while you are gone. You laid down the “Law”, and you expect him to obey without deviation. Well, not always. If there were a fire in the house, then you would expect him not to follow your “Law”, but use the phone for 911 and get out of the house as quickly as possible. Every “Law” and “Teaching” in the Bible has an implied Contextual foundation for its application and administration.

This is a major reason why “Western Thinkers” can find so many flaws in the Bible, and are quick to point them out to diminish the authority of Yahowah’s word. But they are not flaws. “Eastern Thinkers” understand that all Torah “Laws” are really more like “Principles”. Imagined Bible flaws only demonstrate that a change in Context means that there is automatically a change in how to administer Yahowah’s word. The more you think about this, the more examples you will remember that are in the Bible, (i.e. Leviticus 10:16-20, Mathew 12:4, Acts 10:27-28, Hebrews 7:12).

For example: “Laws” given to the Temple priests have an implied Context, such as, there has to be a Temple so that they can do the “Law”. But without a Temple, then they cannot do the “Law” **verbatim**. Instead we, even us non-priests, should try to figure out what is behind the “Laws”.

What are the “Principles” behind why these “Teachings” were given in the first place? Why sprinkle seven times, why not nine? Why mix oil with no-yeast flour? There are reasons why these “Principles” were taught, and they may apply to us as well. We may actually be able to ponder how we can apply a ritual ordinance even without a Temple. That is, discover what is behind the Torah “Teaching”, so that we can apply and administer those concepts today. The “Laws” given to the Temple priests have not gone away. Rather their application and administration are still valid as Yahowah’s “Teachings” and “Principles”.

### **Summary**

Scriptural debates need to consider all of these understandings, to better determine how to interpret what is being read.

The kindling of fires verse is stating a “Principle”, **a concept**, about Sabbath activity. When viewed as a concept the prohibition makes sense. Such verses are providing “Teachings” that give us understanding, so that we can properly answer questions about even our modern activity choices.

Asking questions helps. “Why talk about lighting fires? Why not then list the 1000 other activities people might want to do on the Sabbath? Also widely debated is: “can a person go swimming on the Sabbath?” There are scores of activities that should have been listed, if these verses were intended to be itemized “Laws”.

Consider: what is the reason not to kindle fires on the Sabbath? How is this going to “Teach” people to rest? Who was it that kindled the fires in ancient times? Who was it that walked to the well or river to draw water? It was usually the women. Therefore, the man of the house should be listening to the “Principles” being given, and understand that he is being “Taught” how to ensure that the women of the house are allowed to rest too.

Observe that it is generally considered to be a good idea to prepare the food on Friday, instead of on Sabbath. But not because kindling fires on Sabbath is interpreted as a “Law” to be obeyed verbatim. Rather, it is a “Principle” which enables the women to rest also.

Such verses are better understood as providing us with a few easy to understand “Principles”, **which can then be applied in any era and culture**. Problems and confusions only come in when such verses are viewed with “Western Thinking”, and understood as stand-alone Doctrinal Points, etched into stone no matter what the context. Only with this thinking do we have great difficulty in understanding the application in a modern world. Only with this thinking do we misinterpret the “Principles” of the Torah, and make decisions that make the Sabbath a fearful, cold, hungry, boring, and burdensome task.

It is the misinterpretation of the Text which makes the Torah of Yahowah fearful and burdensome. But the “Teachings” and “Principles” of Yahowah are neither fearful nor burdensome.

"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: **and his commandments are not grievous [heavy]**", 1-John 5:3.

Viewing the “Teachings” of Yahowah as “Principles” we understand that we are not to walk in the fear of making the slightest infraction of the “Law”.

"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom", Luke 12:32.

For this promise to be true The Father cannot be looking at us with a lawyer’s-mindset, tallying our every infraction of “Law”. For this to be true The Father must be looking at our hearts, intent, zeal, and our graciousness.

**The “Teachings” given by Yahowah do not go away.** The Sabbath does not go away. Nor the fact that we must make decisions on questions about how to apply the Text to our lives, this never goes away either. This is why Yahoshua the Messiah said in Matthew 5:17-18 (**in the Greek Text**) that not even one stroke of the Hebrew Text will be diminished until all of the Text **has-become-itself (manifested)**. It is “Laws” that can go away, **but Yahowah’s “Teachings” do not.**

In Service To The Brethren,  
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