

22T08a INFER? – Deeper Meaning

Hello my friends. Thanks for joining me today for an @ the PUNLA coffee table for INFER. I'm a scientist and engineer and in my profession, we use logical deductive reasoning. Another way to say it is, we infer things from other things. But it really is a guess, an educated guess but still just a guess. Believe it or not, many Christian doctrines use this same secular approach to interpret the Bible.

The question you need to ask is does it work? Well that depends on what "it works" means. What is Right or Correct.

What do you know about carbon dating. This is the method used to date things to millions of years old. Like dinosaurs bones or artifacts. We hear this used in science all the time. Scientist infer from observation that living things have carbon obtained from breathing and eating. Most of these carbons are normal stable carbon 12 but some are unstable Carbon 14. Scientists assume that every living thing has the same ratio of Carbon 14 to Carbon 12 when it dies no matter where or when it lived. Then the unstable Carbon 14 constantly changes into Nitrogen 14 by a process called radioactive decay. Then the ratio of Carbon 14 to Carbon 12 can be used to determine how long ago something died just like a clock. Sounds very intellectual and complicated huh. But despite how well known and accepted this method is, it requires two major leaps of faith.

Leap of Faith #1) the ratio of Carbon 14 to Carbon 12 has always been the same in the atmosphere for millions and millions of years. Fact is air sample from all over the world do not show the same levels today, let alone millions of years ago when we simple don't know what the atmospheric conditions were. That is a very big inference.

Leap of Faith #2) The method has been used successfully to date objects with known origin dates. If this is true it is only for objects in the last few hundred years, older items origins are just not certainly dated. But if the method works for a few hundred years, it still takes a great deal of faith to believe it can accurately date objects to thousands or millions of years. That is a very big inference.

Now there are others. But my point is not that Carbon dating is invalid. No I can't say that anymore than someone can say it's accurate. It may be but it is not without skepticism. In fact, there are cases of living organisms being carbon dated to millions of years old. Or objects that we know the death and origin to be a few years, dating to thousands of years with carbon dating. My point is when we infer grandly like this, we can and often do miss the target. If you begin walking toward something and you are off 1 degree. At 100ft you would miss your target by a foot or two. At 100 miles you would miss your target by more than a mile... you would not even be able to see the target. So minor errors become huge errors the further you move from your time and place. This is just science fact.

So that is how science works but what if we apply this type of approach to philosophy or bible interpretation.

Many of you may know of Augustine. Some say St. Augustine. If you don't know him I encourage you to research him yourself. All accounts of Augustine speak of his intellect and spirituality. I don't wish to comment on Augustine or his personal motives but only this one single belief that Augustine was a proponent of. That is his belief that there are deeper meanings or meanings beyond the text itself when studying the bible.

Augustine believed that no one could understand the Bible simply by reading it. That was too easy. Like many philosophers before him, he was always grasping for deeper meaning in the texts. He therefore came to view the Bible as a series of allegories or narratives in which the characters and events had a deeper, often moral, meaning beyond what the text actually said. Allegorical interpretation tends to reject the literal aspects of a text and seeks to create other levels of meaning that only the initiated can appreciate. The text becomes a coded message.

Augustine described his allegorical interpretation of the Bible as “effort for effort's sake.” In fact, Augustine went beyond the efforts of the philosophers and created “a singularly comprehensive explanation of why allegory should have been necessary in the first place.” The Bible, he said, was a work for philosophers, not laymen, to understand.

Augustine inferred, that because he could not understand by simply reading the bible, that no one could. He inferred the only proper way to view the bible was as an allegory which only the intellectual philosophers could interpret. Several leaps of Faith here.

Leap of Faith #1; Just because you don't understand one part of something, does not mean it is impossible to simply understand most things. Make it more confusing to make your lack of understanding seem normal. Common approach of modern Christians. If I don't understand, then it's because it is too difficult to understand. Instead of simply reading, thinking and allowing the Holy Spirit to guide you.

Leap of Faith #2: The whole Bible is a series of Allegories with higher and deeper meanings. Very dangerous thought. Who then gets to decide the true meanings if it is not apparent to the masses. We all know how this process leads to two groups. The “INS” the people elected to know and the “OUTS” those not capable of knowing.

So, Deeper meanings, really. I take exception to the idea the common man cannot read and understand the Bible. The idea only learned people can truly understand is demeaning and simply against the basic concept of Jesus teachings.

James 1:5 (ESV) says, *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.*

Proverbs 2:6 (ESV) says, *For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;*

Also in Matthew 18:1-4(AMP) *¹At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” ²He called a little child and set him before them, ³and said, “I assure you and most solemnly say to you, unless you repent [that is, change your inner self--your old way of thinking, live changed lives] and become like children [trusting, humble, and forgiving], you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

Now, I obviously don't believe that scripture is a code book that only certain people can understand. I believe the Bible was written to all people so all of us can understand. But, don't think I'm against all of Augustine's writings. I do not claim to be an expert on Augustine. And I cannot be certain whether or not Augustine was right or wrong. I'll leave that up to you. This same Augustine wrote this, *“It's true that when trying to understand Scripture we need to establish an analysis of concrete terms. But if we aren't careful, we just might explain away the beauty of descriptive language the Bible. Saint Augustine of Hippo”* Even Augustine understood the dangers of over thinking the Bible.

I just want you to be aware when you are INFERING, when it's someone else's guess and when it's your own. Don't just take what someone says as fact. Check it out for yourself. Check out anything that I say, don't just take my word for it.

Let's Pray. Father God, thank you for your word the Bible, Thank you for the holy spirit to guide us, so we don't need to guess. Help us to listen to you and allow you to give us the wisdom we lack such that we can have understanding. Give us the strength and will to evaluate what people say to determine if it is from you Lord or just from men. And Lord I pray if I said anything wrong today the listener would remember only what you wanted them to hear. I pray these things in your name Lord Jesus, Amen

In our zeal to understand, we forget that God promised wisdom if we ask and the Holy Spirit is with us to guide our process of understanding. I'm not saying we don't use our God giving intelligence and logic but be very careful when we begin to extrapolate to find deeper means or hidden codes in the pages of our bibles. We need to remember, every word and page in our bible was written to and for peoples of all walks of life, all intelligent levels. From the slave to the king and everywhere in between. So, when we start believing our intellect is somehow giving us special privileges of understanding, just stop. Who do we think we are? God loves every person equally, so why could we possibly believe his truth would only be revealed to the few who have the intellectual capacity to decipher these things. Shame of us.

The real problem with philosophies and doctrines like this is the unwanted side effects. If people don't think they can understand the Bible, then they don't try. They don't read it, study it, or live it. And the other group who think they “get it”, can become arrogant, proud and condescending. Even if it's right it's still wrong. This does not help me to

follow Jesus or be more like Jesus. This becomes a diversion from our goal as Christians, followers of Jesus. To follow the King Jesus and to live humbly.

Thank you for joining me today @ the PUNLA Coffee Table our series INFER?. See you next time @ the PUNLA Coffee Table. God Bless.