

LEARNING TO STUDY THE BIBLE

INTERPRETATION

Interpretation is the next step of Inductive Study after Observation. In the interpretation step we start working to understand the meaning of the passage that the author had in mind. Since the Scriptures are the words of God this means we are trying to understand what God meant in any given passage. Remember, we do not want to force our own meaning into the text (eisegesis). Instead we want to draw out the meaning that is there that God had (exegesis). Really we are asking, "God, what do you want me to know from this passage?"

INTERPRETATION means **trying to find:**

- The BIG idea - The main thought The point that pulls the whole passage together
- Ask repeatedly "WHY does it say this? WHAT is this part pointing to?"

For example, what do the following have in common:

Pug, wolf, dingo, labrador, doberman = _____

Roof, siding, windows, door, foundation = _____

See how each example has one main subject that pulls together each thing on the list. Pugs, wolves, labs, etc are all "dogs." Dogs is the main idea/thought. We do the same thing with Scripture. What topic would tie all of the following together:

Help others materially, obey Jesus, self-sacrifice, expressed in action and truth, greater than the gifts, husbands to wives, God demonstrated, God sent Jesus = _____

Some questions to ask for helping you interpret the text:

1. Why do the action words help us focus on the point of the text?
2. Why does a word or phrase seem to be repeated?
3. Why does a key word or phrase help pull parts of the passage together?
4. Why is there a cause or effect and how does it make us focus on something important?
5. Why is there a contrast between two things and how does it highlight the importance of that difference?
6. What do you read before and after the passage you're studying and how do you see it relating to the passage you're studying?
7. Take the repeated words, or key words, along with the action words and explain how they relate
8. How would it change the text if the contrast, cause-and-effect, repeated word, key word, action word did not exist?

RULES OF INTERPRETATION

1. Read each passage in its **context**
 - a. Context is King. Do not read a text out of context. The meaning of words can vary based on the context so context is critical for understanding the meaning of words
 - b. “Her brown eyes are blue” vs “the sky is blue.”

2. Understand words in their **normal** meaning
 - a. Literal interpretation, NORMAL, PLAIN, STRAIGHTFORWARD meaning of the words,
 - b. allows for figures of speech (Gen 41:44; John 6:55), symbolism (Rev 1:17), metaphors (Galatians 4:24) and poetic expression.
 - c. Do not seek hidden meaning or assume there is one. It creates an arrogant elite mentality where only few can truly understand the Bible, and it creates SKEPTICISM of God in that we can’t ever know for sure that the Bible means what it says.
 - d. Secondary hidden meanings are ONLY to be held if the SCRIPTURES teach a secondary, hidden meaning (Matthew 1:23 gives us the secondary meaning of Isaiah 7:14; Revelation 1:20; 11:8)
 - e. Prophecy interpreted literally (“...things turned out exactly as he interpreted them to us..” and “just as Joseph had said” 41:13, 53)

3. **Clear** passages interpret unclear passages.
 - a. Don’t base views and beliefs on obscure passages that are unclear. If those passages appear to contradict more established and clear teaching of the Bible then the clear teaching rules the interpretation.
 - b. Clarity often through repetition - God EMPHASIZES things through REPETITION (Gen 41:32, “The reason the dream is given twice is because God has firmly decided the matter and it will happen soon”)

4. Scripture **interprets** scripture (scripture is the **authority** of scripture)
 - a. All scripture has one Author
 - b. What is being said in this passage needs to be considered in the larger teaching of the book and entire Bible.
 - c. What is said in one part of Scripture will be commented on in other places in Scripture.
 - d. When one passage comments on another passage that passage is the authority for the passage’s meaning. Since God wrote all of it, then when He speaks in one place about something He said in another place it is the final authority.
 - e. DO NOT let these become the authority for interpreting Scripture: feelings, experiences, traditions, denomination, theological system, translation preference, politics, current events, personal gain, personal lusts, church history, favorite podcasters, etc.

Finally, write down in one sentence the point of the passage. Summarize the meaning in one sentence.