

BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

PART 2

STEP 1

OBSERVATION

Reading the Bible strictly for devotional insight, as if every passage has some magical meaning tucked away for you, to help get you through today, is one of the biggest hoaxes the devil has pulled on Christians. Scripture must be read with a much more practical approach in mind.

Read for understanding. Eph. 1:18; 5:17. You want a solid framework in your mind of how God operates in this world, and how Christians should operate in this world, and of the nature of what we are up against. Seeking an emotional feeling every time you approach scripture will lead to burn-out, and will ultimately relegate scripture study to a phase of your life rather than a lifelong pursuit.

Imagine a Military leader reading a field manual in little emotional snippets every day rather than applying himself to thorough study. How's the battle going to go when the bullets start flying?

We are to love the Lord with all of our minds, which means to have our intellect completely engaged in the process of Christian spiritual maturity, growth, wisdom, and understanding.

Re-shape the concept of being "devotional" to the concept of being devoted. A steady diet of devoted study of scripture will ensure that your pilot light is always on, ready to go into full flame thrower mode when the situation dictates. We don't want to misunderstand the concept of so-called "daily bread" from Matthew 6:11 so that we are the spiritual equivalent of a starving child waiting for a daily dose or fix of an emotional high so that we can cope and not succumb to the first-world pressures of our day. We are the ant of Proverbs 30:25 preparing for the long haul. We are preparing ourselves for battle (1 Cor. 14:8). We are storing up for our own little fortress so that when the bullets are flying in the final few moments of the real-life Fortnite game from the God of this world, we don't run out of stock and provisions.

Ultimately, there is an application for you in each passage, and the process we will cover here will equip you to find that application. Some Christians who read scripture in a strictly devotional manner walk away with wild ideas like some comforting spiritual promise they read out of Psalms is why the grocery store really did have one more package of their favorite coffee in the back, even though the shelves were bare, because God will provide for his own. Meanwhile, our faithful brothers and sisters in Egypt who just watched their wives and daughters get mutilated, raped and murdered or sold into slavery are out on a beach getting their throats slit or being burned alive by a bunch demoniac terrorists who had that exact same verse in their Bible. It's time to grow up and put your big-boy pants on, and stop living in a fantasy world.

3 Steps to Biblical Interpretation

Observation: There is no limit to the quantity of observations that can be extracted from a text. The more thorough this step is, the more sound the interpretation.

Interpretation: There is only one interpretation. What the original author intended to convey to the original audience is the one and only MEANING of the passage. Interpretation will be comprised of the correct answers to the questions asked in the observation phase. There may not be enough information to produce a certain answer to an observation question. This needs to be acknowledged during exegesis and during exposition. Since the method is inductive, write down your meanings and conclusions in PENCIL, because you never know when you'll encounter more information elsewhere that may affect the outcome of the passage in question.

“That’s your interpretation” – there are no personal interpretations. There is only one interpretation. There are personal OPINIONS of the interpretation.

Interpretation is very often confused with application.

~~“This means that we should...”~~

Application: What does the modern day reader of this passage do or believe as a result of this passage? There is no limit to the quantity of applications that may be derived from a text. The LESS application to the modern reader is considered in the first two steps, the higher the fidelity of application can be derived when it’s time for the third step.

All the Bible is FOR you. Not all of the Bible is TO you.

Ask as many questions of the text as possible.

Who is speaking/writing?

Where are they?

Who is the original audience?

Where are they?

What are the historic and cultural considerations?

How would the original audience understand the message and intent?

What controversy's may have been going on that needed to be addressed?

What other passages address similar issues that might shed light on the passage?

Are there any (apparently) congruent narratives elsewhere in scripture?

What is the genre?

What does the passage say?

What does it not say?

What historic, doctrinal, or prophetic transition comes before, after, or during this?

What is the desired end-state of the human author? ...divine author?

What commands are in the text?

Are any commands abrogated by future events or circumstances?

Identify and emphasize key words. Identify and emphasize key verbs in a different way.

Are there any key words or ideas that show up repeatedly or frequently?

Another way to do this is to identify the main ideas of the text.

Observation questions:

1. Who is writing this?
2. Who else? (Co-writers? HS?)
3. To whom is it being written?
4. What is the condition of these people?
5. How are these people described?
6. Is the audience saved?
7. How did they get in this condition?
8. Who is the "he" that chose?
9. Chosen for what?
10. Who is the "us"?
11. What is the basis of According?
12. Did WHAT according as he hath chosen us in him?
13. According "as" - does this indicate a simile or comparison?
14. If so, to what?
15. What, where, where, how, why "in him"?
- 16. how did they get there?
- 17. how long were they there?
- 18. where were they before they got there?
- 19. how does "in him" impact the meaning if it's not there?
- 20. how strong is this modifier?
21. What is the foundation of the world?
22. What does "before" indicate?
- 23. Precedence in time?
- 24. Precedence in importance or priority? Such as "above" the foundation of the world, or "prior to" the foundation of the world....
25. Is this is a good time to discuss the nature of God being outside of time?
26. If so? Can modern quantum physics dealing with matters higher than the 4th dimension help me understand this?
27. Do other passages use this phrase, "foundation of the world?"

Ephesians 1:4 (KJV)
4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

28. If so, in what ways is that usage DIFFERENT from how it is used here?

29. Who is the "we"?

- 30. Is it the same as the "us"?

31. What does "should" indicate?

- 32. Does it imply that a person might be chosen but not meet this other criteria?

33. "Be" - is that an absolutist existential type of "be," or is it merely a reference to behavior?

34. Holy - practically, as in behavior?

- 35. Or forensically/positionally because we are in Christ?

- 36. is this an "in his sight" type of thing, as in Rom. 3:20?

- 37. is it like 1 John 3:9 in some way?

- 38. is it like James 2:18, or practical?

- 39. why or why not?

40. Without blame- observation - we've seen a positive (holy) and now a negative (without blame).

41. Without blame to whom? (Yes it is answered in the text, but get used to asking anyway. Assume nothing.)

42. "Before" is used twice in English, Is it the same both times?

- 43. Are the underlying Greek words the same or different?

- 44. How different, if different?

- 45. What is the variance in the use of the English word "before"?

46. "In love" - whose love? Ours or God's? Subjective or Objective love?

47. Sentence structure - what is the subject and verb of the sentence?

48. Is the subject and verb in this verse, or elsewhere? (Blessed be God...v. 3)

49. What are the phrases employed, and what elements do they modify? (Vs. 4-6 are all elaboration of the specifics of "hath blessed us" from back in verse 3, so the 3 prepositional praises that modify that phrase will also have an effect on the extensiveness or impact of vs. 4-6.)

Diagram the sentence.

OBSERVATION

Read an entire book of the Bible, front to back multiple times before stopping to determining the meaning of any passage or portion contained therein.

Take notes and keep a list of observations. Look for

- repeated concepts (1 Thess – second coming)
- contrasted concepts
- compared concepts
- similar phrasing or words to other passages (in and out of that book) Acts 3:19 cf. Isaiah 28:12
- limitations and restraints (time, geographical, people groups) until (Eph. 4:30) thy people (Dan. 9:24) Asia (2 Tim. 1:15) Macedonia and Achaia (1 Thess. 1:7) Romans 16:7 (when did Paul get “in Christ”)
- Writer’s goal or desire for the reader or audience: Understanding, Revelation, Wisdom, Enlightenment (Eph. 1:17-18) or 1 John 1:4; 2:1; 2:12-14; 2:21; 2:26; 5:13; John 20:30-31.

Who is the audience?

Ephesians 1:1 (KJV)

¹ Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus:

Ephesians 1:5 (KJV)

⁵ Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

Galatians 1:2 (KJV)

² And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia:

Galatians 1:6 (KJV)

⁶ I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:

Galatians 5:4 (KJV)

⁴ Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.

2 Timothy 1:15 (KJV)

¹⁵ This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me; of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes.

James 1:1 (KJV)

¹ James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

Acts 1:1 (KJV)

¹ The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,

Acts 15:24 (KJV)

²⁴ Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, *Ye must* be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no *such* commandment:

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