

## “Students Living By the Book”

### Session #4 – Interpretation

**BIG MOVE TUESDAY – Sign ups**

**Rent-a-Youth starts**

**BIG MOVE SUNDAY -- Welcoming new students**

#### *Outline:*

1. Quick Review
2. What Do We Mean By Interpretation?
3. Why Interpretation?
4. 5 Keys to Interpretation

#### **Quick Review**

- b. There’s a METHOD
  - i. Involves taking *certain* steps in a *certain* order to guarantee a *certain* result.
    1. Not just any steps in any order for just any result.
- 3 Step Approach – 3 crucial steps carried out in a particular order
  - c. Observation -- What do I see?
  - d. Interpretation -- What does it mean?
  - e. Application -- How does it work? –
  - ❖ **Observation is never an end in itself but always a means to an end.**
    - It is impossible to understand what a writer means until you notice what the writer says.
  - ❖ **In like fashion it’s impossible to apply what you don’t understand.**
    - In fact the better you understand the better you can apply it.
      - **It’s all related** – One’s Application is only as good as their Interpretation, and their interpretation is only as good as their Observation – the foundation of Bible Study
  - ❖ **Thus David’s prayer:**
    - Psalm 119:34 – “Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart.”
  - ❖ **Acts 8 -- In a real sense, the step of Interpretation helped to open Africa to the gospel**

- Philip – *Billy Graham of his day*—Spirit of God directs him from the big crusades of the metropolitan to a desert road south of town from Jerusalem to Gaza.
- Philip meets an Ethiopian eunuch – *the secretary of treasury for his country. This man has been reading a passage of Scripture*
- Philip asks “*Do you understand what you are reading?*” – Could you imagine asking such a question?
- **The Ethiopian replied: “*Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?*” (v.31)**
  - This man had a copy of the Scriptures but needed help understanding it. He was deeply involved in the process of Interpretation. This is seen in his question:
  - “*Tell me please, who is the prophet talking about? Himself or someone else?*” remember he’s reading Isaiah 53 – **The Suffering Servant.**
- Philip helped the man gain insight into what the text meant.
- His understanding allowed him to respond in faith – v.39 says “*he went home rejoicing*”.

### WHAT DO WE MEAN BY INTERPRETATION?

- ❖ **God’s Word has a purpose, it has meaning.** And God is not playing a game
  - God Himself is far more interested in you understanding the text than even you are.

#### *But what do we mean by “meaning”?*

- ❖ **Illustration:** Color-blind – one seeing blue, the other seeing green.
  - Scenario #1 – people have different interpretations (seeing diff colors)
    - Both interpretations can’t be correct – rules of logic apply to Scripture
  - Scenario #2 – **some don’t really care what color you see** –for them the meaning is not in the text, but in a person’s response to the text – *you see blue, I see green—all is well.*
- ❖ **Fundamental Premise of God’s Word:**
  - “**Meaning**” is not our subjective thoughts read into the text but God’s objective truth read out of the text.

### WHY INTERPRETATION?

- ❖ *Why must we interpret Scripture?*
- ❖ *Why can’t we just open the Word, read it and then do it?*

- ❖ *Why do we have to go to so much trouble to understand the text?*
- ❖ **ANSWER:** Time and Distance have thrown up barriers between us and the biblical writers, which block our understanding. *We need to understand these road blocks:*
  - Language Barriers
    - The Bible was written in a language foreign to us (Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic)
    - English leaves us a long way from complete understanding.
      - **Helps: Bible Dictionaries**
    - **We have to go back and recover the shades of meaning translated words alone cannot convey.**
  - Cultural Barriers
    - The Bible is the product and presentation of culture – one dramatically different from our own.
    - **To appreciate what is going on in Scripture we have to reconstruct the cultural context –**
      - *communication, transportation, trade, agriculture, occupations, religion, perceptions of time, and so on.*
    - **Helps: Bible Handbooks, Atlases**
  - Literary Barriers
    - *Scripture varies in terrain.*
      - **If it were all mountains or desert or ocean, we could outfit ourselves appropriately and have at it.**
    - The literary genres of the Bible are quite diverse and demand vastly different approaches.
      - **Song of Solomon varies greatly from the style of Romans**
      - **Parables are to be handled a little different than the arguments presented in Galatians.**
        - Exposition, Narrative/Biography, Parables, Poetry, Wisdom Literature, Prophecy & Apocalyptic
  - Communication Barriers

## FIVE KEYS TO INTERPRETATION

### ❖ CONTENT

- **There is a direct cause-effect relationship between content and meaning.**
  - Content is the raw material with which you will interpret the text.
- The more time you spend in Observation the less time you will spend in Interpretation and the more accurate will be your result—vice versa.
  - ***Spend great energy in Observation:***
    - “Who, What, Where, When, Why, Wherefore?”
    - **Things that are *Emphasized, Repeated, Related, Alike, Unlike, and True to Life.***

### ❖ CONTEXT

- We have to remember that the Bible has UNITY. It is a 66 book collection, that all hangs together as one book—a unified whole.
  - ***Every major cult is built on a violation of this principle of context.***
    - A great deal of error could be resolved if people were just asked to read preceding verses or the ones that follow!
      - ***Example: Philippians 2:12 – “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling” – not “works righteousness”***
        - *Philippians 2:13 – “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”*
- **ADVICE: When in a passage always consult its neighbors.**
- **Types of Context:**
  - **Literary Context** – verse → paragraph → section → book
  - **Historical Context** -- *when is this taking place? Where does this passage fit in history? What else is taking place around the world? What were some of the social, political, technological influences on the writer and those who he was writing?*
  - **Cultural Context** – the more you know about ancient cultures the more insight you’ll have in the text.
  - **Geographic Context** -- *What was the terrain, weather like? How far from surrounding cities? How large were the cities? What was the location known for?*

- understanding location can bring tremendous realism to a passage – e.g., storm in Mark 4.
- **Theological Context** -- *What did the author know about God? What was the relationship of his readers to God? How did the people worship him at that point? How much Scripture did the writer and his audience have access to? What other religions and worldviews were competing for influence? Where does this passage fit in the unfolding of Scripture?*
  - Example: Noah didn't have the 10 Commandments, yet you read *"Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen 6:8)*

## ❖ COMPARISON

- *Distortion is a common error when handling Scripture*
- Greatest REMEDY: compare Scripture with Scripture – the greatest interpreter of Scripture is Scripture itself.
  - **Donald Grey Barnhouse:** *"You very rarely have to go outside of the Bible to explain anything in the Bible."*
- The more you compare Scripture with Scripture the more the meaning becomes apparent.
- **The parts take on meaning in light of the whole.**
  - Priority of Scripture emphasized
  - Scripture has one common author (40 different human authors used by the Spirit of God)
- **Great Help: Concordance** – enables you to chase down terms and concepts from one book of the Bible to the next.
  - *Examples:*
    - "belief" , "equip," "Moses"

## ❖ CULTURE

- **Accuracy demands that one go back to the original period and culture to find out what was really going on.**
- *Examples:*
  - **Ruth** – story of love and courage
    - But most people overlook the fact that it takes place during the period of judges, Israel's Dark Ages.
    - Judges 21:25 sets up the context for Ruth 1:1 – the nation was in sin.

- *One would have to wonder, was anyone faithful to God during this period?*
- **Answer: look at Ruth** -- a faithful family in the midst of apostasy.
  - **Culture examination helps one understand Ruth's action -- *laying at the feet of Boaz.***
- **The Last Supper**
  - Classic example of interpreting Scripture to one's own culture is Da Vinci's masterpiece, *The Last Supper*.
    - A look at the context of Jesus' day paints a very different picture of the setting.
    - Da Vinci's is a 15<sup>th</sup> century interpretation of the event.
      - People didn't sit at tables—they reclined
      - And they weren't all facing one direction
      - Da Vinci's painting is during the day, the Bible records this occurring at night.
  - **Psalm 24**

<sup>7(A)</sup>Lift up your heads, O gates,  
 And be lifted up, O <sup>(A)</sup>ancient doors,  
 That the King of <sup>(B)</sup>glory may come in!  
<sup>8</sup>Who is the King of glory?  
 The LORD <sup>(C)</sup>strong and mighty,  
 The LORD <sup>(D)</sup>mighty in battle.  
<sup>9</sup>Lift up your heads, O gates,  
 And lift them up, O <sup>(B)</sup>ancient doors,  
 That the King of <sup>(E)</sup>glory may come in!  
<sup>10</sup>Who is this King of glory?  
 The LORD of <sup>(F)</sup>hosts,  
 He is the King of glory. Selah.
  - **What???**
  - A look at context opens this psalm up – it is a processional hymn.
    - Studying the life of David – before he became king, whenever he wanted go from the southern part of the country to the north, he had to pass a city by the name of Jebus.
    - Jebus was an ancient fortress—a hangout left over after the days of Joshua, when the Israelites never took the Promised land as God had commanded them.
    - So whenever David passed by Jebus, it's defenders appeared on the wall and taunted him

- ***“Hey David when you become king, don’t try to take this place. We’ll put cripples at the gate. We’ll put blind men on the watchtowers. But you still won’t conquer us.”***
      - David never forgot this – the first thing he did when becoming king was clean out Jebus and made it his capital (2 Samuel 5:3-10). There he brought the ark of the Covenant.
      - Psalm 24 is what they sang while entering the city.
      - ***“Who is this king who demands that we enlarge the gates? The Lord of hosts. He is the King of Glory.”***
        - **1 Corinthians 8**
- **When you study a passage study the background. Re-create the culture and the text will come alive.**

## ❖ CONSULTATION

- **Consultation involves the use of secondary sources.**
  - Carpenter’s quote: *“The more tools a guy has, the better a carpenter he’s likely to be.”* The same thing is true in Bible study.
  - Don’t be arrogant here. Thousands of people have walked this road before us. And some of them have left some valuable helps.
    - ***Illustration:*** mountain climbers who leave their pitons in the rocks for climbers to come.
- **Word of Caution:** *Never forget the order: first the text of Scripture; then secondary sources.*
- Concordances
  - Like an index to the Bible –
  - Listing all the words in alphabetical order, with references for where they appear
  - **Enables:**
    - **Word Studies**
    - **Looking up passages when you can’t remember reference**
      - ***Example:*** you are studying 1 Peter – *“For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and guardian of your soul.”*
      - **Christ as the Good Shepherd – concordance leads you to John 10:11**

- **Suggestions:**
  - Concordance in back of Bible
  - Strong's and Young's Exhaustive Concordance
  
- **Bible Dictionaries**
  - So many people consult Webster's dictionary when reading a book yet fail to pick up a bible dictionary when coming across an unknown word in the Bible.
    - *Example:* →
    - **"Babylon"** and you don't know anything about Babylon.
      - Looking up Babylon in bible dictionary is extremely helpful in studying Genesis 11, Nehemiah, Daniel, Revelation.
    - **"Ark of the Covenant"** – not Noah's ark
      - One learns it was a box used in Hebrew worship, in a place called the Holy of Holies.
  
  - **Suggestions:**
    - **W.E Vines Bible Dictionary**
    - **The New Bible Dictionary**
  
- **Bible Handbooks**
  - Goes book by book through the Bible offering all kinds of background material
    - *Example:*
      - **"Coins and money"** – *drachma and denarius ???*
      - **"Clothing and shoes"** –
        - *"What did the biblical characters wear?"*
        - *What did their clothes look like?*
      - **"Food"**
  
    - **Suggestions:**
      - Eerdmans' Handbook of the Bible
      - The Handbook of Life in Bible Times
  
- **Atlases**
  - Most people bypass the significance of place in the biblical account.
  - Geography can be extremely helpful in understanding the text.

- Provides information on landscape, terrain, type of soils of the Middle East.
- The storm in Mark 4 – Sea of Galilee was 690 feet below sea level.
- **Suggestions:**
  - Moody Atlas of Bible Lands
  - Zondervan Pictorial Bible Atlas
  - Macmillan Bible Atlas
  - Back of your Bible
- **Bible Commentaries**
  - A commentary offers you the insights of someone who has perhaps spent his whole life studying the text.
    - A commentary can't do the study for you, but it certainly is an excellent means of evaluating your own study.
  - **Suggestions:**
    - *Starting out get a good single-volume general commentary*
      - The Message of the OT and NT by Mark Dever
      - Bible Knowledge Commentary
    - Tyndale Commentaries
    - Expositor's Bible Commentary.
    - MacArthur Commentaries
    - The New Testament Commentary by Hendrickson
- **Additional Resources**
  - Books on specific subjects
  - Articles or journals
  - Early church fathers – works from early church history
  - Study Bibles
  - Systematic Theologies

❖ **Check out the Berachah Library!!**

❖ **WARNING: Never Forget the Order –**

- **First the Biblical Text, then secondary sources.**

- The danger is of depending too heavily on commentaries rather than familiarizing yourself with the biblical text..

❖ **Don't Stop Now! → Press on to Application**

- Don't acquire a mountain of information that does not make a difference in your life.
  - The Word of God doesn't bear fruit when it's understood but when it's applied.
    - *Illustration:* doing the work to tend a garden yet when fruit ripens the gardener walks away to do something else – only to later starve.

❖ **Bible Study Exercise for This Week:**

- Examine **Joshua 1:8** writing down as many observations as you can.

**Joshua 1:8**

<sup>8</sup>"This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.

❖ **Bible Study Exercise for NEXT Week:**

- Examine **Romans 12:1-2** -- Steps of Observation and **Interpretation**.
- *Remember that my main concern in observation is, "What do I see?"*

**Romans 12:1-2**

<sup>1</sup>Therefore I urge you, brethren,  
     by the mercies of God,  
 to present your bodies  
     a living and holy sacrifice,  
     acceptable to God,  
     which is your spiritual service of worship.  
<sup>2</sup>And do not be conformed to this world,  
 but be transformed  
     by the renewing of your mind,  
 so that you may prove what the will of God is,  
     that which is good

and acceptable  
and perfect.