

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR BIBLE

Session Two — Interpretation

GUIDING PRINCIPLE: Take the language in its normal sense, accepting it at face value, unless doing so does not make sense or something in the text indicates it should be

The Bible was written centuries ago in ancient languages to ancient cultures in distant lands. But there are a number of valuable Bible study “helps” to bridge these obstacles to interpretation:

1. Bible dictionaries — like encyclopedias on the people, places and concepts in the Bible.
2. Bible handbooks or introductions — provide historical background materials and overviews of Bible books.
3. Bible Atlases — contain not only time-period specific maps but archaeological and historical information.
4. Lexicons — dictionaries of the original Greek or Hebrew words from which our Bible is translated.
5. Commentaries — a scholar’s exegesis of a book of the Bible.
6. Dictionary — a good English dictionary to look up archaic or difficult words.
7. Concordance — shows everywhere a word occurs in the Bible.

TIPS: First, be a scholar. Second, let God’s Word speak for itself. Third, don’t make the Bible a book of contradictions. Fourth, if everyone has to be wrong for you to be right then you are wrong.

2 Timothy 3:16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is **profitable** for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

Matthew 4:4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

INTERPRETATION answers the fundamental question, “What does it mean?” This is not a subjective inquiry, but an objective quest for the author’s original intent. We are looking at **five** things:

1. Genre — apocalyptic, biography, parable, theological exposition, historical narrative, poetry, prophecy, wisdom literature, song
2. Context — literary, historical, cultural, political, geographical, theological
3. Content, including figures of speech — anthropomorphism, euphemism, hyperbole, idiom, metaphor, personification, rhetorical question, simile
4. Comparison — get guidance by comparing scripture with scripture *but never* losing sight of the fact that each book is a completed unit; we seek to harmonize passages, not use Paul to override Peter
5. Helps — look at secondary resource materials

EXERCISES:

1. “Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.” (Matthew 7:16-20)

Key terms: _____

What figures of speech do you see? _____

What is the larger context? _____

What is the immediate context? _____

What verses in Matthew might we compare to for Jesus’ use of the term “fruit”? _____

What verses outside Matthew might we compare to? _____

What is Jesus teaching in this passage? _____

What helps might I consult? _____

EXERCISES CONTINUED:

2. “Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse

With me from Lebanon:

Look from the top of Amana,
from the top of Shenir and Hermon
from the lion’s dens,
from the mountains of the leopards.

Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse;
Though hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes,
with one chain of thy neck.

How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse!

How much better is thy love than wine!

And the smell of thine ointments than all spices!” (Song of Songs 4:8-10)

What genre is this passage and why does it matter? _____

What are some key words? _____

What is the context for this passage? _____

Who is the speaker? _____

What is the speaker essentially conveying? _____

What helps might we consult? _____

3. “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” (John 1:14-18)

Key terms: _____

What genre of literature is John’s Gospel? _____

Context — what was John’s purpose? _____

What is the immediate context for this passage? _____

What passages does John allude to that will aid our understanding? _____

How might we get insight from other passages in John’s Gospel? _____

In a few words, what was the apostle John saying? _____

What helps might we consult? _____

