

# Reading and Interpreting the Bible

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## **Two Presuppositions:**

1. The Bible as a whole is the very Word of God. It is therefore completely trustworthy, fully reliable and without error.
2. The Bible principally teaches us two things:
  - a. What man is to believe concerning God (his character, his ways, and purposes) and
  - b. What duty God requires of man (how we are to think and live).

## **Four Implications:**

1. Study the Scripture prayerfully, with an eye toward changing your life (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Seek not to master the Scriptures, but to be mastered.
2. Since Scripture is revelation about God and since Jesus Christ is the supreme revelation of God, then fundamentally all Scripture (Old and New Testament) is about Jesus-his life, death and resurrection (Luke 24:27, 45-47, Hebrews 1:1-3).
3. The fullest understanding and therefore the richest understanding of Scripture can only happen in community. We need expert help sometimes. We need our cultural and personal distortions removed by others. Therefore we read books, commentaries, and discuss in community.
4. Never set one passage against another so that they contradict. Interpret the obscure in light of the clear and plain.

## **The Basic Principle of Biblical Interpretation:**

**Seek the plain, natural, intended meaning of the text.** What did the original author (in this case God through the human author) intend for his original audience to understand, and therefore what is implied for Christians today.

### Basic Steps to Interpretation

1. Read the passage several times so you get a general idea of what the passage is about.
2. Consider the type of literature (genre) you are reading...such as prophecy, gospels, poetry, and historical narrative. Each type of literature communicates its message through different means. For example, the Gospels communicate

through story, parable and proverb, whereas Psalms often communicates through word picture and personal testimony.

3. Consider the context. Read and understand the entire book from which the passage comes. To whom was this book of the Bible written? What comes before and after the passage at hand and how does it fit together with the theme of the book.

As you read the Bible and lead discussion, ask questions that direct members to think of the Bible in terms of...what the passage says (observation)...what the passage means (interpretation)...and how can we apply what we've learned (application).

## **Steps for Inductive Bible Study** **(Observation→Interpretation→Application)**

### **Step ONE: What does the passage say? Research for facts (Observations)**

What are the main points the text is making? Can you summarize the passage in a sentence or two? Are there historical or cultural situations that impact the meaning?

- Who is involved?
- What is happening?
- What is said?
- How do people relate/respond?
- When?
- Where did this happen?
- What image does this passage create
- What is surprising?
- What is troubling?

### **Step TWO: What does the passage mean? Review for meaning (Interpretation)**

Why does the writer say it? What did this communicate to the original audience? What concerns or issues is the writer addressing? How does this passage connect with overall themes of Scripture?

- Repetition... same or similar words?
- Contrasts/Opposites...(tip: but, yet, therefore)
- Comparisons/Similarities...(tip: as, so also, like)
- Key Words: Why so important? (tip: Reveals main point)
- How does this passage reveal God to us?
- How is this passage understood more clearly in light of what we see in Jesus?
- Significance or implications

### **Step THREE: How can I apply it? Respond for life (Application)**

We need to guard ourselves from moralism and mysticism here. Moralism asks for application without the power and hope of the gospel. Mysticism believes in the blessing of the gospel without personal responsibility. What did the passage communicate to us about God? How is that understood more clearly in the person and work of Christ?

- Is there a promise that can be claimed?
- Is there something to thank for?
- Is there something to be confessed?
- Is there something to repent of/to?
- Is there something to praise God for?
- Is there an example to follow?
- Is there a command to be obeyed?
- How will this make a difference in my life this next week . .

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