



Life Practices

Lesson #2: Learning the Word of God-Interpretation

I. A Bit of a Review

Why is the Bible such an amazing book, worthy of our study? (Remember: it's divine author, structure, the languages used, the time frame, number of earthly authors and ultimately how unique it is!)

Step #1 for learning how to study God's Word involves : **OBSERVATION-WHAT DOES IT SAY?**

Keys: Start with prayer, read slowly, repeatedly, with a pen in your hand while looking for things like any terms that are repeated, cause and effect words and so on. Learn to summarize with a "at a glance chart."

Bottom line for observation: Answer the Who, Where, What, When questions.

Some practice: Ezra 1:1. 4 "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and put it in writing saying.... The heads of the father's houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, with all whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.

Who: _____

Where: _____

What: _____

When: _____

II. Step #2: INTERPRETATION-WHAT DOES IT MEAN?



God's plan is to reveal Himself. He did not give us a riddle or a difficult book to confound us. What He says about Himself, our world and even mankind is PROFITABLE (II Tim. 3:16). He wants us to "get it!"

After we have the building blocks gathered (OBSERVATION), now we need to build something. We put those observations "together" so we can recreate the author's original experience. We want to "think his thoughts, feel like him, decide like him." We are answering the question, what did this material mean to him?

We are NOT YET ANSWERING WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO ME.

III. There are some Hazards to understanding God's Word

- A. Sometimes, we just plain _____ the text. Example: John 14:6
- B. Sometimes, _____ we the text. Try to make it fit our expectations. Look at II Pet. 3:16. (Just for fun compare Ecc. 10:2 and Ps. 82:3)
- C. Sometimes we _____ to the text. Look how Eve did that in Gen. 3:1-2.

IV. There are some Barriers to interpreting scripture

- A. Language: Most of us do not understand Hebrew or Greek.
- B. Culture: We live in a different world. Our trade (commerce) is different, our style of communication is different, our means of transportation are different. We are no longer an agrarian society.

Example: I Cor. 8:4 _____

C. Figurative Language

Golden Rule of Interpretation (by David Cooper): "When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense, but take every word at its primary literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context clearly indicate otherwise."

Examples: Rev. 1:13-15 _____

Rev. 1:16 _____

D. Literary Devices/ Genres



- A. Narratives (Historical accounts, stories) _____
- B. Biographies _____
- C. Poetry _____
- D. Proverbs _____
- E. Prophecy _____
- F. Apocalyptic (a revelation of something to come) _____

V. The Keys to Interpretation (Answering the question: What does it mean?)

A. Content:

In order to interpret the scriptures correctly, pay attention to the answers to “W.W.W.W.” questions.

B. Context:

H _____ Context What was going on? What did the writer see around him? What is his awareness of past or future events? Example: Job 19:25-27

C _____ Context What did that event mean to them in that day? How did they relate to the information? Examples: John 13:22 (reclining at the table) and John 14:2 (mansions, many rooms)

G _____ Context Where did the event occur?
(Desert, mountains, on a lake, in a home (what kind of home?)
Example: Mark 2:1-5

T _____ Context What did the author (or the people being written about) know about God? How much scripture did they have access to?
Example: Noah Gen. 9:12-17

C. Comparison:

Compare scripture with scripture. Example: Who got to the tomb first? John or Peter? Compare John 20:4 with Luke 24:12. Remember: Scripture NEVER contradicts scripture.

Perhaps using a tool like *The Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge* will help.



D. Culture

Use a tool like *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands* by Wight to give you insight into their world.

E. Consultation

Always: Read, reread and reread again the text. Then consult the tools.

VI. Resources to Consider:

Manners and Customs of Bible Lands by Wright

Bible dictionary (Holman or Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary)

Bible Handbook (Halley's bible Handbook)

Bible Atlas (Holman Quick Source Bible Atlas)

Concordance (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance for your Bible version)

Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge

Various commentaries

V. For the Over Achievers Among Us (Homework)

A. Memorize Ps. 119:34

B. Using the book of Philemon, answer the question "What was Paul trying to say to Philemon? (Not what was he trying to say to us!)"_

Use the five "C"s:

Content

Context

Comparison

Culture

Consultation

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