

Week #3 – Interpretation – What Does it Mean?, Part 1

In the New Testament, the Greek word for “interpretation” is hermeneutics (*lit.* to “explain” or “translate” occurs in *Mark 15:34; Luke 24:27; Acts 4:36; 1 Corinthians 12:10*).

Why Interpretation is Important:

God has a specific, original **meaning** intended for each text. “Meaning” is not a *subjective* idea, thought, etc. Rather “meaning” refers to **God’s** objective truth, which is present in the text for us to find.

Q: *What do we mean by “subjective” v. “objective?”*

Consequently, Interpretation is often like a re-creation **process**. We must ask “What did this mean to the **author**?” before we ask “What it means to **us**?”

What Interpretation Looks at (i.e. the Gaps that Interpretation Bridges):

When reading the Bible, we experience the collision of two “worlds:” The Ancient/Biblical World and the Present World.

1. **History** – 2,000 years exist between the time of Jesus and our present day. 4,000 years exist between the time of Abraham and our present day!

Thus, we must examine the:

- a. Author
- b. Date
- c. Readers/Recipients
- d. Circumstances
- e. Purpose

2. **Culture** – What were the customs of the people? Studying ancient cultures can be one of the most important tools of interpretation. What did people *think, say, do, and make*?

Culture can be broken down into two general categories: **Material** and **Social**.

The following are specific cultural categories that must also be “bridged:”

Political (*Ruth 4:1*)

Family (*Luke 9:57-62*)

Geographical (“Engedi”)

Dietary (*Genesis 43:31-32*)

Economic (*John 2:12-16*)

Architectural (*Joshua 2:15*)

Legal (*Genesis 16:2*)

Clothing (*Job 38:3; 1 Peter 1:13*)

Agricultural (*Habakkuk 2-3*)

Social (*Luke 17:2*)

Military (*Habakkuk 1:10*)

Religious (*Matthew 16:13*)

3. **Theology** – What did the author know about God? How has God’s revelation “progressed” since the author wrote? Remember, the Bible was written over a period of 1,500 years. God revealed His truth to humanity over time instead of all at once from the start.

4. **Literature** – What kind of writing is it? Poetry? Prose? This relates to the genres of the Bible that we discussed during our first week.

Remember our assertion from Week 1: *Context is king! A text without a context is pretext.*

5. **Grammar** – The precise language of the ancient civilization in which the Bible was written. This deals with the meanings of the words as well as how the words “work” together to communicate a message.

What Interpretation Requires:

1. **Salvation** – In order to accurately understand what God intended by His word, we must have His Holy Spirit, which illuminates His word (*Ephesians 1:13-14; 1 Corinthians 2:10-14*).
2. **Humility** – God reveals His truth to those who are humble enough to seek Him (*Matthew 11:25*). We must be dependent upon God’s Spirit for wisdom in discerning God’s truth (*1 John 2:27*).
3. **Obedience** – This means knowing good from evil and acting accordingly. The Bible is our “gymnasium,” which trains us for the real game of life. When we’re “dull” of hearing, that shows that we are lacking maturity (*2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 5:11-14*).
4. **Hard Work** – We do have a responsibility to be diligent in our study of the Bible (*2 Timothy 2:15*).

Suggested Resources to Consult:

Bible Atlas – So helpful for giving us a geographic understanding of the text.

Bible Dictionary – Defines terms and themes throughout with scriptural references (*New Bible Dictionary*).

Bible Handbooks – An “encyclopedia” for each biblical book.

Commentaries – Records research done by scholars on the history, culture, language, geography, etc. (*Bible Knowledge Commentary; www.sonlight.com*).

***Concordance** – Shows where words occur in both the Old and New Testaments.

***Cross References** – Located in the margins of most Study Bibles.

Home Work Assignments – Week 3:

#1 – Understanding *John 3:16-18*

Take some time this week to read these three verses in John's gospel. Answer the following questions dealing with Observation and Interpretation:

3:16 –

1. What does it mean for God to love? Who did God love? What is meant by the "world?"
2. What does "one and only" or "only begotten" mean when referring to God's Son? Who is this Son?
3. What does it mean to "believe" in God's Son? What is the result of believing in Him?

3:17 –

1. Why did God send His Son into the world?
2. How is the world "saved" through God's Son? What does it mean to be "saved?"

3:18 –

1. What happens when you believe in God's Son? What happens when you do *not* believe in God's Son?
2. What does it mean to believe in the "name" of God's Son? Is this different than believing "in" God's Son? Do you believe in Him? Why or why not?
3. How many times is the term "believe" repeated in these verse? Why does John repeat this term? What other terms or phrases are repeated?

You may have more questions than you do answers, but that's okay! You are on the start of an exciting journey! Our hope is that you see how important these verses are in understanding Jesus Christ is and what He has done for you!

#2 – Brainstorm: Confusing Passages

Come up with a list of passages about which you have questions. Our hope is to tackle some typically misinterpreted texts in Scripture. We want, however, your ideas for passages that are hard to understand. We won't get to everyone's, but we at least want you to think about some!