

Interpretation

Interpretation – What does it mean?

Observation is a means to interpretation. The quality of your interpretation depends on the quality of your observation.

Bible interpretation or hermeneutics is a branch of theology that focuses on identifying and applying sound principles of explaining Bible passages. While the Bible is generally plain in its meaning, proper interpretation requires careful study and is not always easy. Remember, the Bible was written over a period of roughly 2,000 years by 40 or more authors using three different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek). The authors wrote in different genres with different vocabularies, personalities, cultural backgrounds, and social standings. The Holy Spirit moved each of these men to produce His inspired and infallible product. But He allowed their various writing styles and personalities to be expressed in its pages. It was written in a culture very different from our modern world and has been translated from its original languages. These are just some of the factors that must be taken into account as we interpret.

CONTENT – Inventory the raw material.

Literary forms or genres.

Narrative, poetry, parable, apocalyptic, historical prose, law, wisdom literature. Proverbs...a thousand fortune cookies!

Literal vs. figurative.

Do you take the Bible literally? “The Lord is my Shepherd,” was not written by a sheep. “Four corners of the earth” was not written by the flat earth society.

Figures of speech.

Hyperbole – “unless a man hates his mother/father...”

Euphemism – “those who have fallen asleep” (died).

Irony – the sign, “King of the Jews”

Sarcasm – Elijah, “Yell louder...”

Acrostic – Worthy woman of Pr. 31 as well as Ps. 119.

CONTEXT – what goes before/after?

Acts 1:8 is the answer to a question concerning the kingdom.

“I will never leave you nor forsake you.” Heb. 13:5. The first part of the verse says, “Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said...”

When you see a “therefore” ask, “what’s it there for?”

When you see “so that” or “in order to” know that this is a purpose clause.

Quote out of context – “The man was a saint.” “I think myself happy.” Acts 26:2, “I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews.”

COMPARISON – “You rarely have to go outside the Bible to understand what is inside the Bible.”

Barnhouse. 40 authors over 2,000 years but 66 books have one message. Compare scripture with scripture. This is where your concordance becomes important.

CULTURE – danger of reading our culture into theirs. The folded napkin left in the tomb. Not a “napkin.”

Not a custom to use a napkin while eating. Not “folded.”

CONSULTATION – the more tools the better the product. (Half Price Books)

Study Bible

Exhaustive concordance

Bible dictionary – a drachma vs. a denarius.

Maps – Dan and Beersheba were not a Jewish couple!

Commentary

Our goal is to be confident that we have arrived at an accurate understanding of the word of God. Uncle Luther...are you a preacher or a possible preacher?

A good interpreter explains what the passage means.

We matter in interpretation. Our own background, culture, socio-economic group, ethnicity, all influence our interpretation of scripture. I could turn Jesus into a Republican or Democrat depending on which passages I want to emphasize. The important thing is not what the passage means to me but what did it mean to the writer? My son was once “sent to the principal’s office.” He thought it was an honor.