

My Bible Study Tool Bag #4 The Keys to Interpretation

Review

Observation: What do I see? (Using strategies like answering who, what, where, when and how questions.) Being a careful observer, we look for things emphasized, repeated or related. We ask questions and look for terms to explore and structure to note. What is the CONTENT of the passage? Do we know what the author was saying? We are looking for the BIG IDEA.

Let's do some more practice. Consider Daniel chapters 1 and 2 and fill out the attached form.

Interpretation: What did the author mean? What was he saying to the original audience?

Four Keys to Interpretation:

1. Context

- A. Literary Context: What is before and after the passage or section?
- B. Historical Context: When does this take place? What was going on in the world at that time? What were the influences on the writer and his audience?
- C. Geographic Context: What was the terrain like? What topographic features made this area unique? Are there any weather issues? What about transportation? Size of the town?
- D. Theological Context: What did the author know about God? How much scripture did he have access to?
** Progressive Revelation: Over time, God reveals more and more about Himself and certain subjects like heaven or hell.

Let's do some more practice on Daniel 1 and 2. Read II Kings 24-25 and II Chronicles 36 to get the context for these two chapters.

2. Comparison

This is the practice of comparing one scripture to another. "The more you compare scripture with scripture, the more the meaning of the Bible becomes apparent" (Hendricks).

Word comparison example: "Equip" (Eph. 4:12). This term has three basic meanings:

- a. "To repair nets."
- b. "To mend bones."
- c. To outfit a ship for a journey

Biographical example: Moses (see the book of Exodus, Acts 7, Hebrews 11)

3. Culture

This is how people behaved in that time period. What were their customs, family traditions and ways of doing business?

Some examples:

The book of Ruth-takes place during the period of the judges (Israel's Dark Ages).

The Last Supper-take a look at John 13 and then study Leonardo's painting.

I Corinthians 8-eating meat offered to idols.

4. Consultation

This is the use of secondary resources, books and materials that can shed light on the passage and our understanding of it.

Concordance

Bible Dictionary

Bible Handbook

Atlas

Bible Commentary

History books like Edersheim's *the Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*

Figuring Out the Figurative

Principle # 1. Use the literal sense unless there is some good reason not to.

Example: Song of Solomon

Principle # 2. Use the figurative sense if a literal meaning is impossible or absurd.

Example: Rev. 1:16

Principle # 3. Use the figurative sense if a literal meaning would involve something immoral.

Example: John 6:53-58

Principle # 4. Use the figurative sense if a literal interpretation goes contrary to the context of the passage or the general character or style of the book or contrary to the plan and purpose of the author. ** Context is your best tool to use here.

Examples: Ps. 63:7 (the shadow of His wings), Psalm 1

Principle # 5. Use the figurative sense if a literal interpretation involves a contradiction of other scripture or a well-established doctrine.

“Although the Bible sometimes presents us with a paradox, it never confounds us with contradiction.” (Hendricks, pg. 262)

Example: I Cor. 3:16-17

Some Suggestions for your own Bible Study Tools

8. *The Cultural World of the Bible: An Illustrated guide to Manners and Customs* by Victor Matthews

9. Apps to consider:

Strong’s Concordance (Watchdis Group B. V.)

Bible Map (Kimberly)

Bible Dictionary and Glossary

**The Bible Memory App

Passage: _____

WHO: _____

WHAT: _____

WHERE: _____

WHEN: _____

HOW: _____

QUESTIONS:

ANSWERS:

1.

2.

3.

4.

Context:

Comparisons:

Culture:

BIG IDEA (Interpretation: What this passage meant to the original audience)

APPLICATION (WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO ME?)

