

Notes on the Interpretation of Scripture

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A. General Comments

1. The three most important rules:
 - 1) Read it
 - 2) Read it
 - 3) Read it

Ps 1:1-2; Matt 4:4
2. The interpretation of Scripture is not a magical or mysterious process: Scripture was written in the ordinary words of the day.
3. Every Interpreter has only four sources of information about the text
 - 1) WORDS: Meanings of individual words and sentences
 - 2) CONTEXT: The place of the statement “in its context”
 - 3) WHOLE BIBLE: The overall teaching of Scripture
 - 4) BACKGROUND: Some information about the historical and cultural background

International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (Eerdmans); Oxford Classical Dictionary (Oxford Univ. Press); others
4. You should be able to give *reasons* for your interpretation and thereby to attempt to persuade others.
5. There is only one meaning for each text (though there are many applications). 1 Cor. 5:9; Gal. 3:16; Matt. 5:21-48; see Westminster Confession of Faith 1.9
6. You can do a short or long study of any passage. Don't get discouraged by all there is to do.
7. Pray for the Holy Spirit's help in the whole process. (Therefore personal obedience and faith in all of life play an important role in the interpretation of Scripture). Ps 119:18; 1 Cor. 2:14

B. Questions to ask in interpreting Scripture

1. Always ask, “What did the author want the original readers to understand by this statement?”
 - 1) For events: “What was God showing through this?”
 - 2) This will help you avoid fanciful allegories
 - 3) Yet note that the times the divine author can intend more than the human author understands

1Pe 1:10-12 Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, 11 inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. 12 It was revealed to them that

they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

2. Regarding application, ask first, “What application did the author want the original readers to make in their lives?”
3. It is always helpful to ask, “What does this text tell us about God?”

C. Perspectives on the text

1. Be aware of the kind of literature the verse is found in.
(Examples: history, poetry, prophecy, doctrinal argument, visionary or apocalyptic literature, wisdom sayings, etc.)
2. Note whether the text *approves* or *disapproves* or merely *reports* the characters’ actions.
3. Keep a “history of redemption” time line in your mind when reading the text.
4. Remember that the whole Old Testament points to Christ.

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