

## A Brief Guide to Interpreting Scripture

1. Preliminary Work:
  - a. Begin with prayer and asking the Holy Spirit to guide you as you read and interpret this passage.
  - b. Read through the biblical book multiple times seeking to understand the main themes and the flow of the book.
  - c. It is also good to state any presuppositions you have about your passage or about the book as a whole. This includes ideas you have heard from others through sermons, books, etc. Try to set these aside for the time being as they can often control/alter your interpretation.
2. The World Behind the Text: Historically Grounded Questions
  - a. Who is the author and what do we know about him?
  - b. Who is the audience and what do we know about them?
  - c. When was this book written and what is important about this period for the author and audience?
  - d. What is the overarching purpose/s of this book? (Why was it written?)
  - e. Are there any other historical, cultural, or religious issues that need to be investigated further to help you understand the context of the author, audience, your passage, or the book as a whole?
3. The World Within the Text: Literary Grounded Questions
  - a. What is the literary genre of the book? (e.g. narrative, poetry, law, gospel, etc.)
  - b. Looking at the book as a whole, what are the major themes? (This is usually the strategy for fulfilling the purpose)
  - c. Looking at the immediate context, the passage/s that come directly before and after your passage, do these passages help you understand your passage better?
  - d. Are there repeated words, phrases, or ideas in your passage, the immediate context, or the whole book? How are they connected?
  - e. Are there any biblical texts that are cited or clearly alluded to in your passage? (These can often be found in your Bible's footnotes). What is the context of the cited text? Are there connecting words, themes, theological ideas? Can you determine why this text is being cited? (It is often used to [1] draw the reader into the previous story, [2] give support to the current argument, [3] provide an analogy).
  - f. As you take all the above information into account, what are the key ideas in your passage? If a longer passage, consider dividing the text into an outline with sections. Give a short title to each section that encompasses the main idea of that section.
  - g. How do these key ideas fit into the larger purpose the author is trying to fulfil in this book? Is it consistent? If not, is there another way of interpreting this passage?
  - h. Create a "summary statement" that attempts to capture the main idea of the passage in your own words.
4. The World in Front of the Text: Theologically Grounded Questions
  - a. How does your interpretation of this passage fit into the larger theological narrative of Scripture? Is it consistent? If not, is there another way of interpreting this passage?
  - b. How does your interpretation of this passage fit into your own theological worldview? Is it consistent? If not, is there another way of interpreting this passage? Or, if not, do you need to re-examine any of your theological positions?
  - c. What have others said about this passage? Is there anything that they have said that makes you need to re-examine your passage in light of this new information?
  - d. What are the theological implications of your interpretation of this passage? (What does it teach you about God, God's plan, humanity's role?)
  - e. What are the practical applications of your interpretation of this passage? What are some steps that can be taken to live out this truth in your context?