

# Interpretation I: Learning to Be a Master Interpreter

How to Study the Bible Like a Pro – Week Two

## Introduction

- Key questions
  - Have you ever listened to someone talk about a Biblical text and thought, “I’m not sure that’s what that passage means”?
  - How do you know if you’re right or not?
  - The idea that, “You have your truth and I have mine,” is philosophically \_\_\_\_\_. When the writer of a Biblical text penned a statement to a specific group of people, he meant something specifically. We don’t have the \_\_\_\_\_ to make that statement say anything we want it to say. So how do you know if you’re right or not?
- In order to interpret anything, you need to have some guidelines/principles/rules that you use to evaluate one option over other options. The good news is that you don’t need to know a \_\_\_\_\_ different rules to become a master interpreter; you only need to learn a handful of them to be able to interpret your Bible like a pro.
- A few quick reminders from week one
  1. You don’t need to go to seminary or Bible school to become a great interpreter
  2. The big three for interpreting like a pro are – process, principles and practice
  3. The process involves only four steps (ORIA)
    - a. Observation (“What do I see?”)
    - b. \_\_\_\_\_ (“What could this mean?”)
    - c. Interpretation (“What did it mean?”)
    - d. Application (“What does this mean for me?”)
  4. The order between interpretation and application matters. Most people start at application (bad choice). You always want to start with interpreting what a text meant before you try applying that text to your life.
  5. The goal in accurate interpretation isn’t to be a certain \_\_\_\_\_ but a responsible \_\_\_\_\_.
  6. Certainty is an illusion. Probability is a reality (though on a sliding scale)
  7. The hermeneutical \_\_\_\_\_ should remind you to be humble whenever you’re interpreting any text because, since you’re not the author, you may be incorrect.
  8. The Bible is an \_\_\_\_\_ document, not a systematic theology
  9. You need a good Bible (either a literal or dynamic equivalency translation) and the leading of the Holy Spirit to help you reach better interpretative decisions

## I. Own the Principles of Responsible Biblical Interpretation

1. \_\_\_\_\_ reigns as king in interpretation
  - a. The only way to accurately understand anything that’s written or spoken is to understand its context
    - i. For example: the word run has \_\_\_\_\_ different definitions ([www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com))
    - ii. If I say, “Sally ran her stockings this morning,” what do you think I meant?
    - iii. Do you think I meant that Sally went jogging with her stockings on a leash (like running with a dog on a leash)?
    - iv. Do you think I meant that Sally lead her stockings (as in running a business)?
    - v. No. You probably jumped to definition #88: to cause stitches in (a garment or fabric) to unravel or come undone: *to run a stocking on a protruding nail.*

vi. Why? Context

b. Context is a virtual cycle

- i. You understand the parts by the \_\_\_\_\_
- ii. And you understand the whole by the \_\_\_\_\_

c. Biblically, you have multiple kinds of contexts to consider

- i. \_\_\_\_\_ context (words > sentences > paragraphs > chapters > books > testaments (NT/OT) > the entire Bible)
- ii. \_\_\_\_\_ context (language, time, culture, government, philosophy, social structures, audience, economics, social customs, etc.)

*“So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world. **So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together.** Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment.” 1 Cor. 11:27-34*

iii. Geographic context (locations, terrain, distances, etc.)

*“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth.” Rev. 3:14-16*

iv. Theological context (NT/OT, The whole Bible, recipients, adversaries, other cultures, etc.)

v. Authorial context (what else has that author said on that subject, their perspectives, flow of their argument, when they wrote, etc.)

d. The key principle: Never attempt to interpret a biblical text apart from its context

Note: The original text didn’t have any chapters, paragraphs or punctuation – translators added them. So make sure you read the verses surrounding the ones you’re attempting to study.

2. Interpret in light of the \_\_\_\_\_ of the author (i.e. the meaning of a text is the author’s original intended meaning – not what we’d like it to be)

*“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” John 20:31*

3. A text cannot mean what it never meant

- a. Power (dunamis) = Paul couldn’t have been referring to dynamite because it wasn’t invented until 1867
- b. Rev. 3:20 to The Church at Laodicea

*“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.”*

- c. Prov. 29:18

*"Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he." KJV*

*"Where there is no revelation, people cast off restraint; but blessed is the one who heeds wisdom's instruction." NIV*

4. Interpret \_\_\_\_\_ according to the normal rules of language

- a. If the text of a book of the Bible conveys a historical event such as, "Jesus walked on water," (Mt. 14:25) the plain meaning would be that Jesus literally walked on water
- b. If, on the other hand, we have recorded that Jesus said, "I am the bread of life," (Jn. 6:41) the plain meaning would not be that he's a physical loaf of bread. The literal interpretation would be that Jesus was using a metaphor to describe an idea.
- c. One of the more common figurative options that tends to trip church people up is that of hyperbole. For example, if a sports writer today penned the following words, "The entire city of Cleveland turned out to greet the Cavs after winning the NBA Championships," you do not assume that over 2M people showed up. So, don't get hung up on hyperbole. The idea is, "A lot of people showed up."

*"And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him." Mark 1:4-5*

5. Interpret each word in light of its \_\_\_\_\_ context (Note: words do \_\_\_\_\_ always mean the same thing in every sentence)

- a. *"Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are **temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?** You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies." 1 Cor. 6:18-20*
- b. *"Don't you know that **you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.**" 1 Cor. 3:16-17*

6. Interpret each word in light of its \_\_\_\_\_ context

- a. Church (Ekklesia) – "called out ones" or "assembly"
- b. Boundary stones

*"Do not move an ancient boundary stone, set up by your ancestors." Prov. 22:28*

Boundary stones marked where one person's land ended and another person's started

7. Interpret the \_\_\_\_\_ in light of the more clear (i.e. if five verses are pretty clear and obvious and one isn't, go with the five). Similarly, avoid basing any doctrine on an obscure passage.

- a. *"Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?" 1 Cor. 15:29*

8. Interpret in light of the \_\_\_\_\_ of theology (OT > NT, Gospels > Revelation) and be careful about automatically translating what's said to Israel to the church.

*"All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?" Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.*

*Then come, follow me." When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven." Mt. 19:20-23*

9. Biblical \_\_\_\_\_ are only authoritative when there's a general \_\_\_\_\_ related to them

- a. *"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed." Mark 1:35*
- b. *"While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, "Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days." Acts 10:44-48*

10. Interpret your \_\_\_\_\_ in light of scripture, not the reverse

- a. *"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.*

*Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs – we hear them **declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!**" Acts 2:1-11*

11. Interpret scripture in light of \_\_\_\_\_

a. Prayer

- i. *"You may ask me for anything in my name and I will do it." John 14:14*
- ii. *"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." John 15:7*
- iii. *"Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." Mark 11:24*

b. Christians and Sin

- i. *"No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God." 1 John 3:9*
- ii. *"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." 1 John 1:8*

c. The Role of Women

- i. *"I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner."* 1 Tim. 2:12-14
- ii. *"Greet Andronicus and **Junia**, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was."* Rom. 16:7
- iii. *"Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When **Priscilla** and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately."* Acts 18:24-26
- iv. *"For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."* Gal. 3:27-28

12. Interpret in light of the \_\_\_\_\_ of the sentence

- a. *"Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit."* Eph. 5:18
- b. *"For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."* Acts 1:5

13. When appropriate, use \_\_\_\_\_ to shed light on texts that reference something scientific

- a. If God made the world (and he did), then what we observe in the world should reinforce what we see in the text (Note: this should be true of any of the sciences)
- b. However, be careful because what we "know" to be true in science often changes (i.e. scientists like to convey that "scientific truth" is fixed but frequently those "truths" change when new discoveries are made).
- c. That said, science can help shed light on interpretive tasks. For example,
- d. *"And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning – the first day."* Gen. 1:3-5
- e. *"This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens."* Gen. 2:4 ("in the day of their making" is a more accurate translation)
- f. Yom = 24 hour day or a period of time

14. Interpret in light of the \_\_\_\_\_ of the book or passage you're studying

- a. The Bible contains a variety of genres (Law, Historical, Poetical, Wisdom, Prophetic, Narrative, Gospel, Epistle, etc.)
- b. Next week our entire session will be devoted to this interpretive principle

## II. Avoid Making These Rookie Mistakes

1. Don't get excited if you think you've discovered something \_\_\_\_\_ has ever seen in the text before
2. Don't jump to application before interpretation (i.e. what does this mean to me BEFORE what did it originally mean)
3. Don't assume you're \_\_\_\_\_-free (everyone has perception bias)
4. Don't assume everything you've been taught in the past is correct (parents, relatives, friends, Bible study leaders, pastors, churches, denominations and countries are all human). Also, don't assume that because you've seen something in a movie it's accurate.

*"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."* Mark 10:25

5. Don't form a doctrine based solely on a historical event (i.e. don't make an experience \_\_\_\_\_ for everyone for all time)
6. Don't proof text (i.e. it usually negates context)
7. Don't question or avoid a text simply because you don't want to \_\_\_\_\_ or it doesn't fit your theological perspective
8. Don't switch \_\_\_\_\_ just because another version says what you want a verse to say

### **Making It Real**

1. What is one of your favorite Bible verses?
2. Go back and read that verse in its context (minimum = paragraph, better = chapter). Based on the context, what did you learn? Does your favorite verse really mean what you thought it meant?
3. Go back to the chapter you began studying last week (the one you started using ORIA with). Based on what you learned today, would you make any changes to what you were thinking the text meant?

Book: \_\_\_\_\_ Chapter: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Which of the principles of interpretation that we covered in this session do you think will be most helpful for you in interpreting your Bible more like a pro moving forward?
5. Which principles do you think you'll struggle with the most? Why?
6. Which rookie mistakes have you been guilty of in the past?
7. With whom will you share what you learned from this session in the next 48-72 hours?

Who: \_\_\_\_\_ When: \_\_\_\_\_