

Research – Leveraging the Secret to Becoming a Brilliant Interpreter

How to Study the Bible Like a Pro – Week 5

Introduction

- Key question
 - Have you ever listened to a pastor, priest or Bible study teacher and thought, “That was brilliant! How did they know that?”
 - Or thought, “I could never figure out something like that!”
 - Well chances are, they didn’t get there on their own ☺
- The secret to appearing “_____” to other people is known as “concealing your sources.” Once you discover another person’s sources, that person rarely appears as brilliant as they did before you discovered where they learned what they know.
- Today, you’re going to discover one of the best-kept secrets of the pros. Once you know this secret, not only will you appear more brilliant, but chances are you won’t be as impressed as you were in the past with others.
- Research is something _____ does, including you. Therefore, it’s nothing to be afraid of. Rather it’s something to be embraced.
- Research is defined as, “carrying out _____ into a problem, subject, or issue.” It comes from the French re + cercher (again + search) and it’s driven by asking and answering questions (i.e. searching again and again until you find an answer to the question you’re asking)
- The questions we’re trying to answer when we’re engaged in responsible Bible study are the questions that we surface from step one in ORIA: observation. To skip this step and move on to interpretation without doing research will usually result in poor interpretative decisions
- A few quick reminders
 1. Interpretation = what the text meant (to the original audience)
 2. Application = what the text _____ today (for you or others)
 3. The goal in accurate interpretation isn’t to be a certain knower but a responsible interpreter. Certainty is an illusion. _____ is a reality.
 4. The hermeneutical spiral should always remind you to be _____
 5. There are four steps to studying the Bible like a pro (ORIA)
 - Observation (“What do I see?”)
 - Research (“What could this mean?”)
 - Interpretation (“What did it mean?”)
 - Application (“What does this mean for me?”)
 6. The Bible is an _____ document, not a systematic theology
 7. _____ reigns as king in interpretation (the first of 14 principles of interpretation we discussed in week two)
 8. Genre can _____ influence the meaning of a text
 9. We all have scotomas (blind spots) that make it hard for us to both see and observe
 10. _____ is the enemy of observation

I. The Best Kept Secret of the Pros - _____

1. Why commentaries

- a. Thinking that you can come up with a new responsible insight that no one else has ever thought of before is a low probability exercise
- b. _____ matters. Authors of commentaries spend years studying one book of the Bible in depth. Most of us “normal people” only have a few hours per week to do Bible study and we tend to go through multiple books of the Bible per year.
 - i. Commentators (meaning the good ones) have studied the text in the original language(s)
 - ii. They’ve studied the history
 - iii. They’ve studied the contexts
 - iv. They’ve read a number of other relevant commentaries on the same book
- c. Time matters. Commentaries are a quick _____ (i.e. hack) that you and I can take versus taking the time to find and use a wide variety of Bible study aids
- d. Commentaries are what _____ use
- e. One Big Cautionary Note: You don’t want to use commentaries to decide the meaning of a text. Rather you want to use them to provide you with the research and ideas you need to possess in order to make better, more informed decisions about what the text you’re studying meant (and then means).

2. Commentary series

- a. There is no one series that is equally good on every book of the Bible
- b. To see this visually go to - <http://bestcommentaries.com/topseries/>
- c. Click on the book you want (e.g. Matthew <http://bestcommentaries.com/matthew/> where you’ll find 118 commentaries listed)
- d. Then click on the commentary to get more detail and to read the reviews (e.g. <http://bestcommentaries.com/book/3324/0310365007-matthew-donald-a-carson>)
- e. If you’re looking for a series, the more consistent series are (in no specific order other than alphabetical)
 - i. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
 - ii. New American Commentary (both OT and NT)
 - iii. New International Commentary (both OT and NT)
 - iv. NIV Application Commentary (OT)
 - v. Pillar New Testament Commentary (NT)
 - vi. Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (OT)
 - vii. Tyndale New Testament Commentary (NT)
 - viii. Word Biblical Commentary (OT and some NT - though this is a pretty technical series)

3. How to choose a commentary

- a. Choose _____ commentaries over series or one volume commentaries
- b. My recommendation is that you buy at least one commentary per book of the Bible you’re studying (even better if you buy two). The reality is that very few pros ever consult more than two commentaries so two should serve you well.
- c. Look for commentaries that balance technical information with pastoral/applicational sensitivities (e.g. Baker, Pillar, New International Commentary, etc.). Personally, I

wouldn't recommend using a devotional commentary for Bible Study (they lean toward application vs. research)

- d. Look for commentaries with some _____ (i.e. don't purchase a short commentary). Having more pages doesn't automatically mean "Great," but rarely does fewer pages. In general, you'll probably need to pay in the \$20-\$50 range for a good commentary.
 - i. Note: A commentary is a lifetime investment. Don't think of it as a one-time, short-term purchase. You'll use this book for as long as you live.
- e. As you get to know authors/theologians, you'll get familiar with who tends to write in a style you like and at a high value level (e.g. Gordon Fee, D.A. Carson, I. H. Marshall, F.F. Bruce, Peter Davids, Douglas Moo, Peter O'Brian, etc.)
- f. In general, _____ tends to be better (meaning, in the past ten to twenty years)
- g. Read the reviews and comments online
 - i. www.BestCommentaries.com
 - ii. www.Smile.Amazon.com
- h. Make your selection (at least one, preferably _____). Or buy one now and then buy the second the next time you study the same book of the Bible
- i. Note: If you'd prefer a book that offers recommendations for individual commentaries you can check out one of the following
 - i. Carson, D. A. *New Testament Commentary Survey*. 7th ed. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2013
 - ii. Longman, Tremper III. *Old Testament Commentary Survey*. 5th ed. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2013.

II. How To Conduct Research Using a Commentary

1. Never use a commentary _____ doing your own observational work
2. Read the section that corresponds to the text you're studying

"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

- a. NICNT, The Book of Revelation, Robert Mounce
 - b. Laodicea is at the juncture of two important trade routes
 - c. The major weakness for Laodicea was that it lacked a convenient source of water. It's location was driven by routes of commerce, not natural resources.
 - d. Therefore, its sister cities, Hierapolis six miles to the north (famous for its hot springs) and Colossae, ten miles across the Lycus river (famous for its cold waters) were essential for its survival
 - e. The solution to their problem was to pipe water from Hierapolis and Colossae to Laodicea. Unfortunately, when water is piped that long, both hot and cold water become lukewarm (i.e. it becomes "useless").
3. Look for answers to your research questions. Most of the time they'll be there (but not always).
 - a. Last week. Baptism of Jesus. "You are my son," (Mark and Luke) vs. "This is my son" (Matthew)
 - b. EBC, Matthew, D.A. Carson

- c. "He saw" most naturally refers to Jesus, not John ... The presence of John (and possibly others) is probably implied by the third-person address, "This is my Son," displacing Mark's "You are my son."
4. Use them to surface _____ and contextual information (especially historical context)

"His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins." 2 Peter 1:3-9

a. Gnosticism

- i. Gnosticism didn't flourish until the second century. But it started its influence in the first (known as incipient Gnosticism) and was a major threat to the early church.
- ii. It's hard to pin down exactly what gnostics believed because there's no one school of Gnosticism. It's an amalgamation of several different philosophical schools of thought.
- iii. However, at its core, gnosticism, (which comes from the Greek word for knowledge; gnosis) believed that redemption was attained through special knowledge not accessible to ordinary people/Christians.

"To a certain religious temperament, the more so as it was presented as a form of advanced teaching for a spiritual elite. Christians were urged to go in for this higher wisdom, to explore the hidden mysteries by a series of successive initiations until they achieved perfection." Introduction to Gnosticism by Wil Pounds 2006.

- iv. Gnostics believed that the body was evil, which led to one of two options either licentiousness (do whatever you want because it doesn't matter) or asceticism (extreme avoidance of anything that might tempt the flesh)
- v. Gnosticism denied the deity of Christ

b. Household Rules

"Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." 1 Peter 2:18-21

- i. Household rules (in German, Haustafeln) were used by Peter and Paul to encourage Christians to comply with the rules of Roman society (e.g. Patria Potestas)
- ii. The family was the basic unit of Roman society and the father/husband was the ruler of that unit (he had complete legal privilege, fully owned the property rights, and could make decisions for the entire family unit, including making decisions about life and death)

- iii. Roman society was based on these hierarchies; emperor over citizen, master over slave, husband over wife, parents over children as the basis for what constituted a strong, orderly and prosperous society.
- iv. Any religious group or organization that threatened any of these hierarchies, was deemed to be an enemy of the state for threatening the entire Roman way of life.
 - 1. Case in point: Isis worshippers from Egypt were persecuted because they believed that a woman could exercise authority over a man
- v. Christianity with its emphasis on equality, created a major potential problem because it could easily be considered to be subversive to the Greco-Roman social order.

“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, 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. 3:26-28

- vi. You can imagine that all of these people in the “under” side of the relationship would want to exercise their newfound freedom and be seen as equals.
- vii. If they did that, Christianity would have been seen as an enemy of the state
- viii. The solution, that both Peter and Paul used, was to reinforce the household rules of Greco-Roman society so that Christianity wouldn’t be labeled as an enemy of the state
- ix. In other words, the advancement of the gospel was/is considered to be more important than any one individual’s personal freedom/privileges/rights (Note: this is a dominant theme throughout the NT epistles)
- x. At the same time, while both Peter and Paul affirmed the household rules, they also elevated the status of women and slaves (in other words they both affirmed and challenged the social order at the same time). The basic rule was/is, “Move the social order to reflect more and more of God’s ideal without going too far or too fast so as to make Christianity the enemy of the state/culture.” For example,
 - 1. In Roman culture, a woman was required to adopt the faith (and gods) of her husband (neither Paul or Peter endorsed that)
 - 2. Likewise, when a woman got married she was required to leave behind her old friends and adopt the friends of her husband (again, something neither Peter or Paul affirmed).

“Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight.” 1 Peter 3:1-4

- 5. Use them to help you discover the grammar and syntax of a passage

“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.” Mark 11:24

- a. Second aorist active indicative - aorist typically means, something that has happened (past tense = for us - ed) and can refer to an event past, present or future. English = Future Perfect tense (an action will be completed at some point in the future)
- 6. Use them to help you see the _____ and opposing arguments (i.e. “There are four views on this verse ...”)

7. Use them to help you learn to think _____ (i.e. try to follow the arguments an author makes for why they think a verse means a over b)
8. Use them to _____ with (i.e. just because an author says a verse means X does not mean that the verse in question means X). Note: once you accept that certainty is an illusion, you'll be fine. ☺
9. Use them to unearth _____ verses that relate to the verses in question

"Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free. And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him." Eph. 6:5-9

"Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you – although if you can gain your freedom, do so. For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord's freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ's slave." 1 Cor. 7:21-22

III. Additional Tools In Your Research Library

1. The Internet
 - a. *"They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach." Mark 1:21*
 - b. Google, "Capernaum" (or the name of any place, person or thing you're unfamiliar with)
2. Bible Atlas
3. Bible Dictionary or Encyclopedia
 - a. Names
 - b. Places
 - c. Words
 - d. Theological terms
4. Concordance
 - a. Cross references
 - b. Critical for word studies

Making It Real

1. What is the next Bible book that you want to study? _____
2. Research a couple of commentaries and then purchase at least one
3. Allocate some money each year to building up your own personal commentary library
4. Move to the next chapter of 1 Peter and do you observation and research for 1 Peter 3:1-7
5. What's a biblical question that you've had for awhile? Make it a point, over the next few weeks, to research that question. If you want to be a great interpreter, you have to become a great researcher.
6. With whom will you share what you learned from this session in the next 48-72 hours?

Who: _____ When: _____

"Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly." James 3:1