

## Interpretation - What does it mean?

### **THE PROCESS OF INTERPRETATION**

The definition of interpretation is to determine, clarify, and explain the meaning of something.

In this case, biblical passages in accordance to the author's original intention and context of the

historical situation. During the process of interpretation we seek to:

- **Re-create** – what did it mean to the original author and audience?
- **Re-live** – how would I have experienced this?
- **Re-tell** – how would this be expressed or told today?

### **Three Phases of Interpretation**

The definition phase – determine the author's **intended** meaning of significant or key terms, phrases, or statements.

The rationale phase – determine the **reason** the author used a certain term, phrase, or statement.

The implication phase – determine what is the author's intended point? What is the significant point, idea, or truth the author is expressing to his audience?

## Reaching an Interpretive Conclusion

### Step 1: The Process

- Begin with **prayer** – ask for and depend upon the guidance and assistance of The Holy Spirit.
- Thoroughly **observe** the passage – good observation is **absolutely essential** to guide the interpretation process (take your time...don't rush!).
- Make a **list** of interpretive questions – based upon your prior observations, bombard the text with interpretive questions. Types of interpretive questions are **definition** (what did the author mean by...?), **rationale** (why did the author use this term...?), and **implication** (what is the significant point...?)
- **Search** for the answers – consult reference books like Study Bibles, Bible Dictionaries, Concordances, Bible Software, etc.
- **Important** interpretive contexts for background studies are grammatical (word studies), historical (Biblical and World), geographical (atlas, maps), and cultural (Jewish, Greek, Roman, etc.)

## Step 2: The Research

- Use **common sense**.
- Always **interpret (cross-reference)** in the light of the context of the **whole** Bible.
- Be sure to factor in the type of **literature** you are dealing with.
- Be sure to factor in the **atmosphere** of the passage.
- Always consider the author's **point-of-view** and **purpose**.
- Be aware of **progressive revelation**.
- Remember the **unity** of Scripture Principle.

*“The Bible correctly interpreted **does not** contradict itself.”*

*“Interpret the **obscure** in the light of the **obvious and clear**.”*

- Consider the interpretations of others but **do your own work first!**
- Identify locations on a map if you are unfamiliar with them.
- Look up cultural practices if relevant.

### Step 3: The Conclusion

Write an interpretive conclusion in **your own words**.

Summarize your thoughts and findings in **one** clear, concise, carefully worded sentence. This

should be written in **3<sup>rd</sup> person, past tense** from the perspective of the original author directed

solely to his audience. If your not able to do such then the meaning of the passage is **not clear**

**and properly interpreted!**

*Remember...What is the single meaning of the passage? It may say several things, but what is the*

*main point? Scripture does not contradict Scripture. Look for passages that speak on the same*

*subject but may seem to contradict it. Read the current passage with the other passages in mind,*

*and read the other passages with this passage in mind.*