

Steve Whitacre

## SESSION 2: INTRO TO INTERPRETATION

### Class Overview

“Now these Jews [in Berea] were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men.” (Acts 17:11–12).

"Raking is easy, but you get only leaves; digging is hard, but you might find diamonds." John Piper, *Future Grace*, 387.

Theologian Grant Osborne (*The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 21-22) says that bible interpretation is:

- Science:
- Art:
- Spiritual act:

### Class Schedule

- January 17: What is the Bible?
  - January 24: Genre Matters
  - January 31: Context is Key
  - February 7: Find Christ
  - February 14: Interpretation Lab 1: Old Testament
  - February 21: Interpretation Lab 2: Old Testament
  - February 28: Interpretation Lab 3: New Testament
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“The way to benefit fully from the Spirit’s ministry of illumination is by serious Bible study, serious prayer, and serious response in obedience to whatever truths one has been shown already.”<sup>1</sup>

## I. General Principles

- Approach the Bible in prayer, with a posture of faith and obedience.
  - I “**Incline** my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain!” (Psalm 119:36)
  - O “**Open** my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.” (Psalm 119:18)
  - U “Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; **unite** my heart to fear your name.” (Psalm 86:11)
  - S “**Satisfy** us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.” (Psalm 90:14)<sup>2</sup>
- Read the Bible as a book that points to Jesus.
  - “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he [Jesus] interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” (Luke 24:27)
- Meditate on the Bible.
  - **For** God so loved the world.
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  - For God so loved **the world**.
- Let Scripture interpret Scripture.
- Get good help.
  - Submit to the preaching of God’s word in your church.
  - Most bang for your buck: a good study Bible.
  - Consult good resources.

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<sup>1</sup> J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology*, 155.

<sup>2</sup> John Piper, *When I Don’t Desire God*, 150–152.

<sup>3</sup> This is just one of several different ways to describe the central theme of Scripture. This comes from Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, modified slightly by Vaughan Roberts in *God’s Big Picture*.

## II. Observation

### UNDERSTAND THE BIG PICTURE

- What is the background? Who wrote it? When? To whom? Why?
- What is the context? Where in the book does this passage occur?
- What is the literary unit?

### READ THE PASSAGE

- Are there any major differences between translations?
- Are there any details that are particularly striking?

### LOOK AT THE DETAILS

- Pay attention to key words (names, places, unusual vocabulary, etc).
- Pay attention to small words (for, and, but, so, therefore, etc).
- Pay attention to repeated words.
- Note any genre-specific features.

### CONSIDER THE FLOW OF THOUGHT

- How do the sentences relate to one another?
- How do the paragraphs relate to one another?

## III. Interpretation

### WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- In one sentence, what is the main idea of this passage?
- What doctrines are in view in this text? (E.g. justification, sanctification, doctrine of God, etc.)
- How does this passage reveal God's kingdom (God's people, in God's place, under God's rule and blessing)?<sup>3</sup>

### GOSPEL

- Does this passage point to Christ explicitly?
- How does this passage foreshadow or reflect upon Christ?
- How does this passage reveal man's need for a savior?
- How does this passage reveal God's provision of a savior?

## IV. Application

- How would this passage have directed the original recipients?
- What effect should this passage have on my life?
- Does this passage contain:
  - promises to lay hold of?
  - commands to obey?
  - sins to forsake?
  - principles to live by?
  - examples to imitate?
  - hope for the future?

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## V. Short Version

Questions for your devotions:

- What are the details of this passage?
- What is the main idea of this passage?
- How does this passage point to Christ?
- What effect should this passage have on my life?
- Bonus: What is something I learn from this passage that I can use to pray for others?

## VI. RESOURCES

Interpretation

- Robert Plummer, *40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible*
- R.C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture*
- Daniel Doriani, *Getting the Message*
- J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word*
- Gordon Fee, *New Testament Exegesis*
- Tom Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*
- Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*

Other resources

- *ESV Study Bible*
  - Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God at His Word*
  - Vaughan Roberts, *God's Big Picture*
  - Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*
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