

INTERPRETATION
LESSON SEVEN – RESOURCES ENABLING INTERPRETATION

INTRODUCTION

"Studying Scripture is like mining and refining a precious metal. We are to continue working at the task until all is mined and then refined to its purest form." (Mayhue, p. 58). As we continue to wind our way through the hermeneutical process let us pause a moment to reflect. Thus far we have discussed the steps of affirmation, preparation, and observation. It is now time to add the remaining elements of 'cutting it straight' for yourself.

After you have made your initial observation, it's time to see what other people have discovered. No one person holds a corner on discovering all that a passage contains. This is what we will call hermeneutical "piggy-backing" or pyramids. We will now turn to the works of others and hopefully by standing on their shoulders we will be able to see further than they have.

Before we move on let us note a simple contrast between observation and investigation. Observation is singular and independent. You do it by yourself without outside intrusion. Investigation is plural and dependent. Here you gather counsel from other resources. However, it is here that we must also sound a grave alarm. External resources must always "be seen as a valued *source* for reference study, and not a *substitution* for original, independent study." (Jensen, *Independent Bible Study*, p. 104). The tragedy of the times is that in our quest for immediate gratification we have cut the corner on initial research and thus have made ourselves slaves to our resources and the pre-chewed thoughts of others. Nothing and I mean NOTHING can take the place of independent Bible study: You, your Bible, and the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit.

John Newton lived from 1725-1807. He came from a converted sailor's background. He is noted mostly for having penned the words to "Amazing Grace". He made this statement long ago: "I am cautious of recommending books. I advise everybody to study the Scriptures with prayer, to draw from the Fountainhead and to try the writings of men by the infallible standard and not to pay too implicit a regard to the sentiments of great authors and preachers. The best are defective and the wisest may be mistaken." Yet, with this said let us consider the works of others.

Here are several Initial concepts concerning books. **First**, God has given teachers and the gift of teaching to His church (Ephesians 4:11; Ezra 7:10). Because neither you nor I have a corner on all the truth it is only logical and reasonable that others have received knowledge from the Holy Spirit concerning His Word. Thus it stands to reason that we should avail ourselves of this resource. Listen carefully to the following exhortation.

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A large library is no guarantee of spiritual competence. It is far better to master a few basic books than to snatch a smattering of truth from many volumes and never be able to put it all together in a practical way. (Warren W. Wiersbe, *Book List for you the Bible Student*, GOOD NEWS BROADCASTER (November 1984), p. 29.

Are you starting to get the picture? External resources are like sticks of dynamite, if you properly they can minimize work, but if used improperly they can cause great harm!

Second, we should use discretion in reading other works as to not jeopardize our time in THE book. Francis Bacon in his work entitled, "Essay: Of Studies," made the following comment. "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested." It is my intent to point out the works that need to be "chewed and digested."

In 1870 Benjamin Disraeli in *Lothair* provides this warning. "Books are the curse of the human race. Nine-tenths of existing books are nonsense, and the clever books are the refutation of that nonsense. The greatest misfortune that ever befell man was the invention of printing." Wow, that might be a little much! But in looking at books we need to walk with care. Despite all of my warnings concerning their abuse let us consider this issue of good books. Charles Dickens once said, "We never tire of the friendships we form with books." Another wrote, "Show me the books that are your friends and I will tell you the kind of a person you are." (Kent, *The Pastor and His Work*, p. 34.) John Milton wrote, "A good book is the precious life-blood of a master-spirit." The great motivational speaker Charles E. Jones made the following observation, "You are the same today as you will be in five years, except for two things, 'the people you meet and the books you read.'" (Charles E. Jones, "People to Meet, Books to Read," *Fundamentalist Journal* [January 1986]: 35.) Books can be an incredible blessing. Yet there is a question begging to be asked, "if you were starting a library what books would you purchase?" The answer really depends on how serious a person is about studying and how much money is available to invest." (Mayhue, p. 34).

Tools are not *always* necessary. However, they do have the potential of making the task go smoother (without problems) and with more efficiency (time spent). For example you could cut a board with one's hand, hand saw, or circular saw or buy the product already made. Each has the potential of getting the job done, but not with the same amount of smoothness and efficiency.

Following is a list of the most basic tools necessary in the fundamental task of investigation. There is no easy way to do this so what follows is a listing of the category and one or two key works.

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The Bible Atlas. An atlas is map. A map tells you where you have been, where you are and where you are going. The same is true concerning an atlas. Here are two of the best. Barry Beitzel, Moody Atlas of Bible Lands, Moody.

Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, The Macmillan Bible Atlas.

The Bible Dictionary. A Bible Dictionary is much like a Webster's Dictionary except the subject matter is Biblical. The articles are not restricted to a simple definition, but are more detail oriented. The standard Bible Dictionary is by Merrill F. Unger.

Unger's Bible Dictionary, Moody.

An English Concordance. The Bible Concordance is the most fundamental outside resource you can own. It is a listing of every word in the Bible and all of its occurrences. The king of concordances is Strong's Exhaustive Concordance. None top it for thoroughness.

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance.

The Bible Commentary. The Bible commentary comes in various shapes and sizes. Depending on its approach they can range from devotional to exhaustive. From the scholar to the beginner in their readability. Here a warning needs to be sounded. "The right way to use a commentary is as a help. We should first of all study a passage without reference to any helps. Only after coming to an initial understanding of the passage should we consult commentaries." (Tremper Longman III, Old Testament Commentary Survey, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995, p. 18). Two of the best work's range are easily manageable by the beginner and accurate enough for the scholar.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary, 2 volume set.

The Expositor's Bible Commentary series.

Theological Volumes. Theology forms a backdrop against which all interpretation must pass. Theology forms for the reader the big picture. Theology is indispensable in the understanding of the Scripture. Two works equally good, but different as to audience are by Charles Ryrie and Millard Erickson.

Basic Theology, Charles Ryrie.

Christian Theology, Millard Erickson.

Bible Background Books. "In order to observe a proper hermeneutic, it is necessary to know the historical and cultural backgrounds of the people to whom the particular Scripture portion was directed." (Robert C. Anderson, The Effective Pastor: A Practical Guide to the Ministry, p. 42). Two of the best are . . .

James Freeman, Manners and Customs of the Bible.

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Fred Wight, Manners and Customs of Bible Lands.

Figures Of Speech. The standard work and by far the best is by E. W. Bullinger. It is an exhaustive work listing all of the figures of speech found in the Bible.

E. W. Bullinger, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible, Baker.

All of the works cited are called *reference* works. One does not sit and read through reference works. You can, but they are used for study, not for casual reading.

All books are expensive, but some are well worth the expense. “And remember: When you buy books, especially good Christian books, you are not *spending* your money, you are *investing* it.” (Warren W. Wiersbe, *Book List for you the Bible Student*, GOOD NEWS BROADCASTER [November 1984]: 31).

Before leaving this area I would like to end with a question,

WHY IS THERE A NEED FOR FORMAL INSTRUCTION BY OTHERS WHEN WE HAVE THE SPIRIT’S ANOINTING UPON US?

First John 2:27 teaches us that the Spirit’s presence provides for us an anointing that enables the true believer to lay hold of biblical truth. Does this in any way suggest that there is now no need for us to sit under the teaching ministry of others?

I would like to examine the question from three distinct avenues. **First**, to suggest that we have no need for the teaching ministry of others is to deny the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit in the lives of others. That same Spirit that ministers to us is also endeavoring to minister through us to others.

Second, to suggest that we have no need for the teaching ministry of others is to negate the truths of First Corinthians 12 addressing the issue of body dynamics. There are many members but only one body and no member is an island unto himself, and therefore no one can say, “I have no need of you” (1 Cor. 12:20,21).

Third, the Scripture is clear concerning the giving of gifts to the Church. Some do have the gift of teaching (Eph. 4:11-16). In fact one of the pastoral qualification is the ability to teach (1 Tim. 3:2). These things do strongly teach the need for the receiving of instruction from others.

Yet in light of these three avenues, what exactly is the role of the teacher? I take my lead from Nehemiah 8:7,8. Here we have the teachers translating and explaining the Scripture with the intent that the people might understand and obey. This same intent is seen in Ephesians 4:14-16. The gift of teaching is so that the recipients of God’s Word would be moved toward spiritual maturity.

INTRODUCTION – OBSERVATION – **INTERPRETATION** – APPLICATION

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I believe that the gift of teaching encompasses several distinct abilities. First, the ability to focus on the subject matter for a large quantity of time or simply to study. The teacher must be willing to put their hands on the plow and not look back. Second, the ability to see the part in light of the whole. Teachers must have a working knowledge of theology. Third, the ability to communicate discovered truth to others. Fourth, the ability to stimulate in their audience a passion for their own pursuit of the truth.

This is the reason for such ministries as Bible Institutes, Colleges and Seminaries. Why would one want to go to such places? Because it is an invaluable opportunity to sit under a concentrated dose of Biblical instruction. None of these places are absolutely essential to the learning process, but unfortunately the day and age in which we live has turned us into a generation of sloppy, lazy, careless handlers of the Word. Such concentrated periods of instruction assist the believer in developing disciplined habits of biblical study. Those who teach in such places have abandoned themselves to that one task. They are given the gift of teaching and have endeavored to cultivate the gift to such a degree that they have become “experts”. Such places do allow the believer to potentially progress at a much quicker pace in having themselves exposed to large blocks of biblical truth. Yet this is where the anointing or teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit comes into play.

First, the true believer is not to abandon themselves with out reservation under the instruction of any teacher. Every teacher is to be checked against the truth of God’s Word. **Second**, the Holy Spirit’s ministry is such that we are not at the mercy of or to become dependent on the instruction of any man. **Third**, the true believer’s primary responsibility in the handling of God’s Word is to submit himself under the Spirit’s teaching ministry.

Unfortunately, we have allowed the gift of teaching to take the place of the Holy Spirit. No human individual is to be a substitute for the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. Has God given to the Church gifted men to lead us in the instruction of His Word? Yes, but it is not to be at the expense of the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. In the hermeneutical process there must first be singular and independent observation before moving on to the next stage of plural and dependent investigation.

May God enable us to see our responsibility in the handling of His Word. May we gladly place ourselves under the gifted teachers given to the Church for Her understanding and obedience.

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Tools for Bible Study

“Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching” (2 Tim. 4:2).

<http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/tools-bible-study/>

This week we have been looking at the process of hermeneutics, the science of biblical interpretation. We explored the grammatico- historical method, explicit versus implicit deductions, and the basic literary forms found in the Bible. Today we conclude our brief study of hermeneutics by outlining some of the tools necessary for Bible study.

Scripture. The first tool for Bible study is the Bible itself. Since most people cannot read the original Hebrew and Greek text of the Scriptures, a good English translation is needed. The best translations in English rely on a literal “word for word” approach to translation. The English Standard Version is perhaps the best translation currently available in English that relies mostly on a literal “word for word” approach.

Concordances. Serious study also necessitates the use of a concordance to look up Bible verses. You can find the location of a verse in the Bible by looking up a word that you know is part of the verse. A concordance can also be used to find many of the texts that address a particular biblical theme. Dozens of concordances are available in book stores and on the Internet.

Bible Dictionaries. A good Bible dictionary for looking up definitions and a good Bible atlas for viewing biblical maps are also indispensable for study. These tools help the modern reader become familiar with unfamiliar terms and the biblical culture.

Commentaries. The Bible is the church’s only infallible authority, and throughout history God has raised up men within the church to teach the truths of His Word. Biblical commentaries help us see what the church has learned from Scripture. Commentaries written by those within the Reformed tradition, such as John Calvin’s commentaries, have proven to be reliable commentaries that have withstood the test of time.

In *Knowing Scripture*, Dr. Sproul recommends that those who would like an overview of the message of Scripture read these books in the following order: Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Ezra, Nehemiah, Amos, Hosea, Jeremiah, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Psalms, Proverbs, Luke, Acts, Ephesians, 1 Corinthians, 1-Peter, 1 Timothy, Hebrews, and Romans. At the bottom left-hand corner of *Tabletalk’s* devotional pages you’ll find verses that, if read daily, will take you through the entire Bible in a year.

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Coram Deo

An important work of the Holy Spirit is to illuminate the meaning of Scripture for us. One way He does this is by working through our diligent study of His Word, utilizing the commentaries of men He has raised up throughout history. When you sit down to study, do not neglect the tools the Spirit has given the church for understanding the Bible.

