



HOW TO
STUDY YOUR

BIBBLE

A RESOURCE FOR WOMEN

STUDY GUIDE #2: INTERPRETATION



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HOW TO STUDY YOUR BIBLE

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OVERVIEW

Interpretation — What Does the Text Mean?

HOW TO:

After walking through the steps of observation, you're ready to interpret! But remember: **the quality of your interpretation depends on the quality of your observation.**

As you ask, "*What does this mean?*" there are **four key principles of interpretation** to guide you:

Principles of Interpretation

1. Context is Key

Always consider the historical and literary context. Meaning is discovered, not assigned, and context sets the boundaries for meaning.

2. Scripture Interprets Scripture

Use the clear passages to help interpret the more difficult ones. The Bible is consistent and interconnected.

3. Read Literally (Mostly)

Expect the text to be straightforward unless the context or genre signals otherwise (like poetry or prophecy). Let the text speak plainly first.

4. Stay in Your Lane

There's nothing new under the sun when it comes to Biblical interpretation. If your interpretation is completely novel or contradicts faithful Christian teaching, go back to observation. Always test your interpretation against Scripture and trusted sources.

HELPFUL HINT:

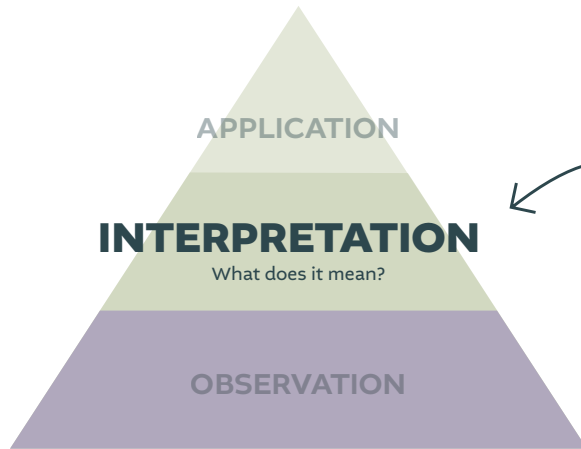
Try rewriting the verse(s) in your own words, then summarize the passage in one or two sentences. This helps clarify your understanding.

Word of Caution:

Approach the Bible with a posture that seeks to draw meaning out of the text—not put your own meaning into it.



LESSON 1: HOW TO INTERPRET



In Guide #1, you walked through the process of **observation**. Now that you've laid a solid foundation by discovering what a passage *says*, it's time to move on to **interpretation** and ask:

What does it mean?

Let's start by making sure we understand what interpretation is. It's actually something we're all very familiar with. Think about how we communicate through texts or messaging apps.

If you received a message that simply said, "I'm fine" or "great," what would it mean?

Depending on the sender, the situation, and even those little emoji add-ons, those words could mean very different things.

As the recipient of the message, you naturally take all that into account—tone, timing, relationship, and context—to understand what's really being said.

That's interpretation. You're already doing it. You're an interpreter!

So here's how we want you to think about interpretation:

You *already are* an interpreter.

The real question is—will you be a **good** one or a **bad** one?

To dig a little deeper, there are two key terms we want you to know. You might be thinking, *Do I really need technical terms?*

Yes—and here's why:

Everyone who reads the Bible interprets it. These two terms will help you recognize the difference between **faithful** interpretation and **faulty** interpretation.





Term #1: Eisegesis – *putting* meaning **into** the text.

This is when the Bible is interpreted through our own biases, beliefs, perspectives, or agendas. The text doesn't speak for itself. Instead, the reader imposes their meaning onto it.

Let's be clear: **this is what we do *not* want to do.**

We don't want to do it, but let's be honest—it's common, and we've all been guilty of it at some point.

Ever seen Philippians 4:13 — "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*" — on a T-shirt or church sports banner?

Eisegesis.

Or maybe you've heard Jeremiah 29:11 — "*For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord...*" — quoted before a job interview or promotion?

Eisegesis.

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Why do you think eisegesis is dangerous for the interpreter?

Term #2: Exegesis – *pulling* meaning **from** the text.

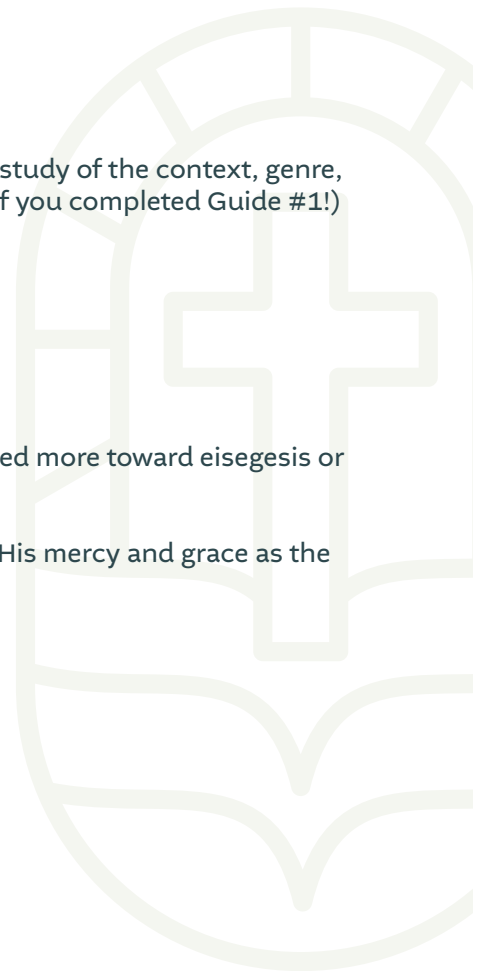
This is biblical interpretation through careful observation and study of the context, genre, historical setting, word choice, etc. (Sound familiar? It should if you completed Guide #1!)

Exegesis allows the **text** to speak for **itself**.

REFLECTION QUESTION:

How have you interpreted Scripture in the past? Have you leaned more toward eisegesis or exegesis?

Remember, this is a journey. Take a moment to praise God for His mercy and grace as the Spirit continues to grow us in our walk with Him.





The most important question that exegesis seeks to answer is:
What did this mean to the original audience?

The text will never mean something for us today that it didn't mean for them back then.

So once you've gathered your observations, ask: **"What did this mean to the original audience?"**

A helpful tool for grasping the meaning is this:

- Write the verse(s) in your own words
then...
- Summarize the passage in one or two sentences

WANT TO TRY IT?

Check out the exercises in **Guide #2: Interpretation Practice.**

Let's put everything we've covered so far into a simple process for studying the Bible:

- **Pray**
- **Read, read and re-read**
- **Make observations** (see Guide #1)
 - Historical-cultural facts
 - Genre
 - Literary observations
- **Meditate and pray**
- **Ask:** What did this mean to the original audience? (Interpretation)





LESSON 2: INTERPRETING WELL

Just like there are basic principles for using a map correctly (for example: north is north and south is south—we definitely don't recommend trying otherwise!), there are principles for interpreting Scripture correctly.

These principles are more than safeguards against poor interpretation. **They're keys to unlocking a true, biblical understanding of God's Word.**

Principles for Interpretation

1. Context is key

We know we've said a lot about the importance of observation, but it really can't be overstated. The historical and literary context of a passage **shapes** the meaning of that passage.

Start with the **immediate context**—what comes directly before and after the verse.

Then ask how that passage fits within the **chapter**, how the chapter fits within the **book**, and how the book fits into the **whole story of Scripture**.

2. Scripture interprets Scripture

The Bible wasn't written to confuse or trick us. That's not God's heart behind giving us His Word.

Yes, the Bible's message is clear, but that doesn't mean every passage is easy to understand. Some are more difficult than others.

When that happens, we use **clearer, easier-to-understand passages** to help interpret the ones that are more complex.

3. Read literally (mostly)

The biblical authors (used by **THE** Author) wrote in a way that was meant to be understood by their original audience. We should read the Bible with that same expectation.

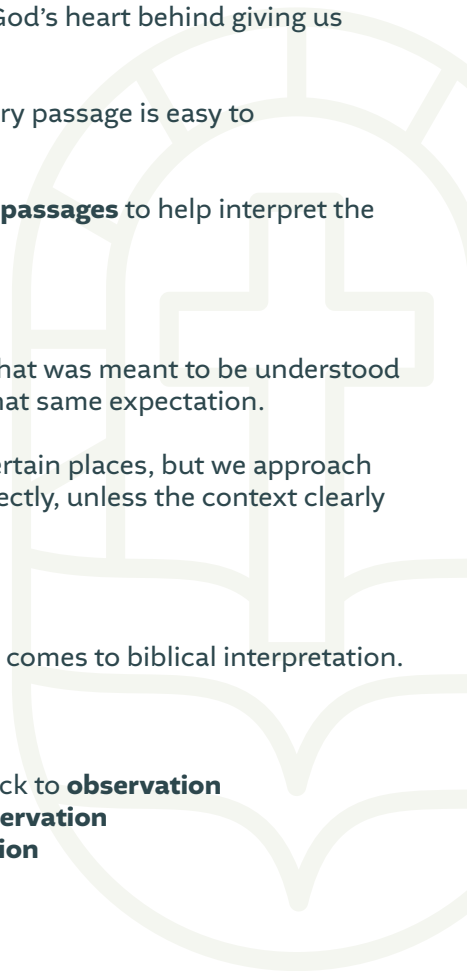
Of course, there is figurative language and symbolism in certain places, but we approach the text assuming it was written to be taken plainly and directly, unless the context clearly calls for a symbolic interpretation.

4. Stay in your lane

In other words: **there's nothing new under the sun** when it comes to biblical interpretation.

If you come to a conclusion that...

- Is **unknown** to any trusted, biblically sound source > go back to **observation**
- Claims to **unlock all the mysteries** of God > go back to **observation**
- **Contradicts** other parts of Scripture > go back to **observation**



Here's a quick recap of our **principles for interpretation**—

YOU TRY IT!

Write a sentence describing each one in your own words:

1. **Context is Key**
2. **Scripture interprets Scripture**
3. **Read Literally (mostly)**
4. **Stay in Your Lane**

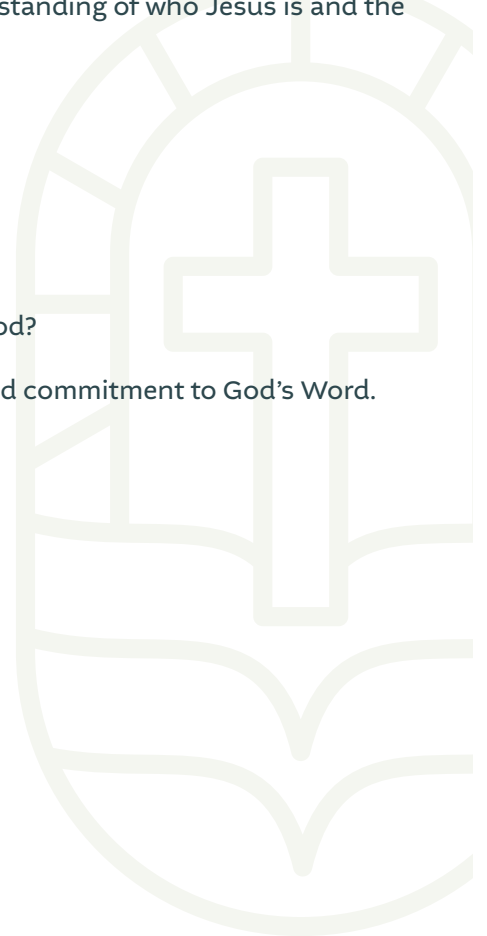
We have the *immeasurable* joy of reading God's Word, studying it, and knowing our Savior through it.

Let these principles shape your interpretation, and you'll find your time in Scripture becomes sweeter and more life-giving as you grow deeper in your understanding of who Jesus is and the good news He brings.

Read: Psalm 119:111, 162 and 2 Timothy 3:15

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What is the characteristic of an approved worker before God?
- How do you think that relates to the verses in Psalm 119?
- Pray and ask the Spirit to stir in you a growing affection and commitment to God's Word.





INTERPRETATION PRACTICE

Use at least two trusted commentaries to check your interpretations

Old Testament Exercise

READ: NUMBERS 21:4-9

- Pray – Ask God for understanding and reverence for His Word.
- Read the passage carefully – Take your time, reading it multiple times.
- Make observations – Look back at *Guide #1: Observation Exercises*.
- Meditate and pray – Pause and consider what stands out and what feels unclear.
- Ask: “*What did this mean to the original audience?*”
- Rewrite the verses in your own words. Restate the text in your own voice while maintaining accuracy.
- Summarize the passage in one or two sentences.
- Refer to the principles of interpretation. Let them shape how you process what you’ve read.
- Check your interpretation by reading 2–3 trusted commentaries.

New Testament Exercise

READ: PHILIPPIANS 4:10-20

- Pray – Ask the Spirit to open your heart and mind to understand God’s Word.
- Read the passage carefully – Read slowly and intentionally, more than once.
- Make observations – Refer to what you found in *Guide #1: Observation Exercises*.
- Meditate and pray – Sit with the text. Reflect on its tone, structure and message.
- Ask: “*What did this mean to the original audience?*”
- Rewrite the verses in your own words. Phrase it in a way that makes sense to you while staying true to the text.
- Summarize the passage in one or two sentences.
- Refer to the principles of interpretation. Let context, clarity, and consistency guide you.
- Check your interpretation using 2-3 trusted commentaries.

