

SCOPING THE TERRAIN

How can you "get more" out of reading your Bible? It begins with "observation" as you explore its content, to apply to your life. "Content" is key. What does the passage actually say? Who, what, when, where, why, how? Look at the content, the key words and concepts, figures of speech and other literary devices. You first read the Bible just like any other literature. Pay attention to the literal, grammatical, historical, literary context of the content of the passage. Start with the actual content, not presuppositions.

Romans 15:4, "*for whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*" What does the text say? Look at some key words in this passage. "*Whatever was written*" - not some things, but all things written in Scripture. "*For our instruction*" - written not TO you but FOR you. Every notice that? The Bible is not a product of your language, your time, your culture, but the past. "*That we might have hope*" - God's words for that time, applied to your time, to fulfill His purposes through all time. "*Through the Scriptures.*"

1- Consider the source. Pastor Brian H. Edwards, author of "*Nothing But The Truth*" says of the Bible: "it is God-given, a book of authority and relevance, and the apostles placed themselves under its commands." In Romans 15, Paul quotes from Psalm 69, "*it is written.*" Edwards notes, "this is not merely a convenient way of introducing an Old Testament reference. Rather, it registers the fact that what follows is part of the written and unbreakable Word of God." The phrase "*it is written*" occurs 86 times in the New Testament, nearly half of these quoted by the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Bible is God's own divinely written words, inspired, "*breathed out*" by God (2Timothy 3:16) and written down over more than 1,600 years by some 40 human authors "*carried along*" by the Holy Spirit (2Peter 1:21), both the Old and the New Testaments. 2Peter 3:16 says about the apostle Paul's letters, "*some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.*" Edwards notes, "the loss of faith in the complete trust-worthiness of the Scriptures has robbed many ministers of their Bible, many churches of Christians, and many Christians of a living and powerful faith in Christ. Throughout the world it is a fact that the living, growing Christian churches are the evangelicals, committed to the trust-worthiness of Scripture."

2- Look at the content. It is a practical warning for us, to not be ignorant and unstable, and twist the Scriptures. Remember, "*the clear enlightens the obscure.*" Some verses are not obvious at first. It can take a lot of re-reading, prayer, meditation, and more. Reading more context. Difficult obscure passages are always explained by the more clear ones. That's why you compare verses with other passages, with other translations, and make use of language tools and other resources to study the Bible.

"Exegesis" means "*to draw out*" the author's meaning in the passage. Observe the content, words and context. Don't try to jump over "observation" and go straight to "interpretation." First ask "what does it say" before you ask "what does it mean." This big mistake results in "eisegesis," reading your ideas "*into the text.*" Psalm 119:18 says "*Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Your law.*" That's exegesis. Eisegesis is "wonderful things in the Bible I see, things that were put there by you and by me."

3- What is the big idea? The first step is observation. What does the text say, in the actual literature. In the genre, is this passage narrative, poetry, prophecy, didactic teaching, proverb, parable? Where does it fit in redemptive history? In the observation stage, you are looking at content for the "big idea" of the text.

Again, Romans 15:4, "*for whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*" What's the big idea of this passage? God wrote down what was important to Him, to pass along to us. He gives us instruction for when we need answers and truth. This gives us endurance, for when we encounter trials. And encouragement, for when we want to give up. Hope, when we need to remember "God's got this." Because this life is only a prelude to our real life with Him forever. So when I read Scripture, I can trust and obey, and live by His power within me, according to His word and His ways.

4- Read it and heed it. JI Packer in RC Sproul's "Knowing Scripture" writes: "if I were the devil, one of my first aims would be to stop folk from digging into the Bible. Knowing it is the Word of God which teaches mankind to know and love and serve the God of the Word, if I were the devil I would do all I could to surround it with the spiritual equivalent of pits, thorn hedges and man traps, to frighten people off. How? I would try to distract all clergy from preaching and teaching the Bible, and spread the feeling that to study this ancient book directly is a burdensome extra which modern Christians can forgo without loss. I would broadcast doubts about the truth and relevance and good sense and straight-forwardness of the Bible.

"And if any still insisted on reading it, I would lure them into assuming that the benefit of the practice lies in the noble and tranquil feelings evoked by it, rather than in noting what Scripture actually says. At all costs I would want to keep Christians from using their minds in a disciplined way to get the measure of the message of the Bible." Well said. Read it and heed it! Study the Bible and live it! Do so today! □