

EHBC Introduction to the Oral Interpretation of Scripture

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A. Goals for Learning How to Improve Reading the Bible Aloud

Our first goal is to enhance our personal reading of the Bible and to be inspired by it. Knowing God's words so well that we can read them aloud as if they were our own words can be inspiring, a sort of mountain-top (or at least hill-top) experience. The Holy Spirit uses His word to encourage us to continue to live faithfully whatever our situation.

Our second goal is to develop the skills that help us attain a deeper interpretation of Scripture. Oral Interpretation works together with other skills to help us better understand what the Bible meant originally and how it applies to us today. By other skills I mean inductive and deductive Bible study methods, mediating on Scripture, and specific and technical studies of the historical, cultural, and literary background of the biblical books. Oral Interpretation helps us focus more immediately on the very words of God.

Our third goal is to develop the ability to minister directly to others through Scripture reading. Whether in family devotions, small group Bible studies, ministry preparation, or the public reading of Scripture during worship, reading the Bible aloud as if God's words were your words is a ministry to everyone who listens with ears to hear.

Our fourth goal is to alleviate whatever degree of oral performance anxiety we might have. If you have performance anxiety like me, developing this skill and learning to practice it in a friendly and safe atmosphere, helps you cope with the anxiety, even if you don't plan on reading Scripture during any sort of service. Practicing reading out loud will be a normal part of each class but is not required. Read, don't read, it's your choice.

Our fifth goal is to enhance our ability to analyse written English. Whether English is your second language, or even your first language, Oral Interpretation will help you better understand and analyse written English.

B. Four General Interpretation Questions to Ask of Every Biblical Text

- 1. What does the text actually say?* Reading out loud helps us focus on the very words of Scripture.
- 2. What meaning did the human and Divine authors intend to communicate to their audience?*
- 3. How did the text apply to the original readers?*
- 4. How does the text apply to me and to those I minister to now?*

The first two questions lead a reader to ask more specific historical, cultural, and literary questions as he reads the passage over and over. Examples of these historical, cultural, and literary questions will be given later. These are *exegetical* questions.¹ The last two questions are about relating the Bible to our own situations today. These are *application* questions.

¹ Exegesis is from a Greek word 'exegeomai' and it means 'to lead out, draw out'. M.E. Manton, *A Dictionary of Theological Terms*, London: Grace Publications Trust, 2001, p. 54.

C. Isaiah 7:1-17 The Sign of Immanuel

1 When Ahaz son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, was king of Judah, King Rezin of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel marched up to fight against Jerusalem, but they could not overpower it.

2 Now the house of David was told, "Aram has allied itself with Ephraim"; so the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind.

3 Then the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out, you and your son Shear-Jashub, to meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Launderer's Field. ⁴ Say to him, 'Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood - because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and of the son of Remaliah. ⁵ Aram, Ephraim and Remaliah's son have plotted your ruin, saying, ⁶ "Let us invade Judah; let us tear it apart and divide it among ourselves, and make the son of Tabeel king over it."

⁷ Yet this is what the Sovereign LORD says:

"It will not take place,
it will not happen,
⁸ for the head of Aram is Damascus,
and the head of Damascus is only Rezin.
Within sixty-five years
Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people.
⁹ The head of Ephraim is Samaria,
and the head of Samaria is only Remaliah's son.
If you do not stand firm in your faith,
you will not stand at all."

¹⁰ Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, ¹¹ "Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights."

¹² But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test."

¹³ Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel. ¹⁵ He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, ¹⁶ for before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste. ¹⁷ The LORD will bring on you, and on your people, and on the house of your father, a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah - he will bring the king of Assyria."

D. Practice Assignment: Let's Start with a Hard One

1. Read Isaiah 7:1-17 over and over and write down all the questions about the meaning of the passage. Answer as many of those questions as you can with the resources available to you. Also write down all the questions about how to orally deliver the passage.

2. Go to < <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/> > and listen to how the various Oral Interpreters read Isaiah 7:1-17.

3. Read the larger context, Isaiah 7:1-8:10. List meaning and oral delivery questions.