

SOAR

A Method for Interpreting Scripture

Survey (*Background Information*)

- What is the genre of the book? What do you expect from a text of this genre?
- Author: who wrote the book, and what knowledge do you have of his life and other writings?
- Date: when was the book written? What historical events of that time could the book be addressing?
- Audience: who was the book written for? What was their situation like? How does knowledge of the audience contribute to our understanding of the book?
- What was the author's purpose for writing? How does he address the audience's situation? (Combines everything above)
- What are the primary themes of the book?
- How is the book structured?

Observe (*Gathering Data*)

- What comes before and after the passage you are studying?
- What subject(s) does the author write about?
- Look for words and phrases that explicitly connect one idea to another (i.e. therefore, for, so that, but, if...then).
- Are there any words or phrases that are repeated?
- Is there unusual grammar (verb tenses, pronouns, word order, etc.)?
- Are there any unusual words or phrases?
- Are there any figures of speech?
- Are there any historical or cultural references that you do not understand?
- Do any of the author's comments assume an understanding that is specific to his culture?
- Are there any details that are especially striking?
- Are there any details that appear to be unimportant at first?
- Does the author reveal the motives and feelings of people?
- What symbols, metaphors, and/or images are used?
- Tips:
 - Read slowly and carefully.
 - Read the text multiple times. The more you read it, the more you will notice details that you missed before.
 - Resist the temptation to reshape your observations so that they support your preferred theology.

Analyze (*Interpreting the Data to Discover the Passage's Meaning*)

- Build on your observations by discovering what they mean.
- Interpret single verses in light of their immediate context.
- How does this passage relate to what comes before and after it?
- Try to determine why this passage belongs precisely where it does, and nowhere else.
- Look for thematic statements that introduce or interpret an entire section.
- Look for implicit and understated connections.
- What situation caused the text to be written? What aspect of human fallenness is displayed in that situation (specific sin, suffering, mistaken theology, etc.)?
- How do the author's words address the situation?
- Research your questions regarding the historical and cultural background. How does that information affect the meaning of the text?
- How does the genre of the text impact your interpretation?
- Do any of the author's other writings help you understand the text?
- What do the symbols, metaphors, and/or images mean?
- What themes in the book are present in this passage? How does the author treat those themes?
- How does this passage help accomplish the author's purpose for writing this section? For writing the book as a whole?
- **What unifying idea ties all of this together? Use your answer to create a one-sentence summary of the message of the passage.**
- Tips:
 - Observe the text thoroughly before you try to interpret what it means.
 - As you interpret the text, make sure your interpretation fits your observations.
 - Make sure your one-sentence summary takes into account the situation that the author was addressing.

Respond (*Applying the Passage to Your Life*)

- Find the Fallen Condition Focus: the aspect of our fallenness that is common to all human beings, which the text was written to address.
 - What situation does the text address? What aspect of human fallenness is displayed in that situation?
 - Look for fallenness in one of three places:
 - Original Audience (NT Epistles, OT Prophets)
 - Characters (Narratives)
 - Author (Psalms)
 - How do you experience the same aspect of fallenness?
- How does the message of the text minister to you in these situations?
- Tips:
 - Look for two different kinds of application:
 - Change in Action
 - Change in Attitude