

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION (V)

DISCOVER THE ORIGINAL INTERPRETATION OF THE AUTHOR.

In order to discover the author's intention it is important to try to determine the author's purpose and plan. The purpose has to do with the goal the author had when writing the book. The plan has to do with the arrangement or the way the material is organized. There is always a purpose, and there is always a plan, but sometimes these are not easily recognized. At other times the purpose and plan can be identified easily.

The Gospel of John is a book where the purpose and plan are easy to identify. John 20:30-31 states, "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life in His name." The signs John referred to are the miracles that are recorded in His gospel. Jesus performed seven miracles before the resurrection and one afterward. Even though Jesus did many other miracles, the ones recorded in John are given as signs to prove that Jesus was the Messiah. The story of Jesus as presented by John is organized around these miracles. Thus, the plan is clearly given. The purpose is found in the words, "that you may believe...and that believing you might have life in His name." From these key verses it is easy to see that the purpose of John's gospel is to show people how to have eternal life by believing in Jesus as the Messiah.

Genesis is another book which has a clear purpose and plan. The word "genesis" means origins or beginnings, and the purpose of the book of Genesis is to give the beginnings of the universe, earth, man, sin, the nation of Israel, etc. In reading Genesis you will see the phrase "These are the generations of" mentioned 10 times (Gen. 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2). This forms a natural outline and highlights the major features of the book.

When we are able to find the purpose and plan of a book we are able to interpret any passage accordingly. Therefore, the first thing to do is determine the purpose, or the plan, or both if possible.