

# HOW TO STUDY GOD'S WORLD

1 Peter 2:2-3 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.



***Rev. Dr. Jerry Schmoyer***

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# **WORDS ABOUT THE BOOK BY PASTOR MOSES**

Frameworks.

# **WORDS ABOUT THE BOOK BY PASTOR .....**

Frameworks.

## HOW TO STUDY GOD'S WORD

- Summary .... 8-9
- Preface .... 10
- Introduction .... 11
- How We Know the Bible Is God's Word .... 11-14
- Importance of Learning the Bible .... 15
- Three Bible Study Steps .... 16

### STEP 1: OBSERVATION .... 17-23

- 1. Pray .... 17
- 2. Look at the Whole .... 18
- 3. Write Down Questions .... 18-20
- 4. Look at the Parts .... 21
- 5. Look at the Details .... 22-23

### STEP 2: INTERPRETATION .... 23-50

- 1. Organize and Save Your Work .... 24-25
- 2. Keep Everything in Context .... 26-28
  - a. Passage Context .... 25-26
  - b. Geography Context .... 26-27
  - c. Historical Context .... 27
  - d. Cultural Context .... 27-28
- 3. The Main Idea .... 28
- 4. Types of Literature .... 29-35
  - a. History .... 9-30
  - b. Teaching .... 30
  - c. Poetry .... 31-33
  - d. Parables .... 33
  - e. Prophecy .... 33-34
  - f. Proverbs .... 34-35
- 5. Basic Principles of Interpretation .... 35-44
  - a. Structure & Grammar .... 35-36
  - b. Normal, Literal Interpretation .... 36-38
    - 1) Use Common Sense .... 36-37
    - 2) Take the Word in Its Usual Sense -
    - 3) Take the Word in Its Context .... 37-38
  - c. Figures of Speech .... 38-39
  - d. Types .... 39-42
  - e. Numbers .... 42-44
- 6. Other Resources .... 45
- 7. Deeper Studies .... 45-50
  - a. Word Studies .... 45-48
  - b. Topical Studies .... 48-49
  - c. Character Studies .... 49-50

### STEP 3: APPLICATION .... 50-53

- 1. Developing Good Applications .... 50-51
- 2. Types of Applications .... 51-52
- 3. Learning to Obey .... 52
- 4. Memorize the Word .... 52-53
- Conclusion .... page 53

## BIBLE STUDY SUMMARIZED

After reading this book and doing the practice assignments, you will have a very good understanding of how to study the Bible. I've summarized it all here so you can turn to this page and follow this list. It will help you remember the steps and what to do in each.

### STEP 1. OBSERVATION

1. Pray
2. Read the passage many times, silently and out loud, in various translations
3. Write Down Questions
  - What would you ask the author if he were sitting with you?
  - Ask who, what, why, when, where, how
  - Don't try to answer, just ask
4. Look at the Parts – Outline the passage
5. Look at the Details
  - Look at passage as if you are seeing it for the first time.
  - Rewrite the passage in your own words
  - Look for compared, contrasted, repeated, logical relationships, generalizations, progressions

### STEP 2: INTERPRETATION

1. Organize and Save Your Work in a way that is comfortable for you
  2. Keep Everything in Context
    - a. Passage Context – understand what comes before and after the passage
    - b. Geography Context – where it happened and the significance of that place
    - c. Historical Context – answer who, what, why, when, where, how
    - d. Cultural Context – what was life like then that would help understand the passage?
  3. The Main Idea
    - What was the main idea the writer was trying to convey in the passage?
    - What would the original audience think the main idea of the passage was?
  4. Types of Literature
    - a. History – know who, what, why, when, where and how
    - b. Teaching – main idea broken down into an outline
    - c. Poetry – rhyme, relationship of line 2 to line 1; main idea of passage; figures of speech
    - d. Parables – history questions, also culture of the day, one main idea
    - e. Prophecy – what did author mean? what did readers understand? know symbols & culture
    - f. Proverbs - short parables teaching a truth, principles not promises
-

## 5. Basic Principles of Interpretation

- a. Structure & Grammar – verbs, prepositions, parts of speech
- b. Normal, Usual, Literal Interpretation – as writer meant it and readers understood it
- c. Figures of Speech – rhetorical question, allegory, metaphor, simile, personification
- d. Types – event, person, object which conveys spiritual truth
- e. Numbers – as writer meant and reader understood it.

## 6. Other Resources – books, internet – chew your own food!

## 7. Deeper Studies – Word, Topical, or Character studies

- 1) list all the Bible references referring to the word, concept or person
- 2) write a short summary of what each passage says about it
- 3) group the verses that say the same thing together, label them
- 4) define the word or concept as clearly as you can
- 5) write a summary of what you have learned

## **STEP 3: APPLICATION**

So what? How should I respond? What should I do with what I've learned?

### 1. Developing Good Applications

Bible written FOR us but not TO us

Only one interpretation – what writer meant and readers understood

But many, many applications

Must agree with interpretation, whole Bible, be specific and measurable

### 2. Types of Applications

Is there a command to obey? If so, what? How does it apply to me today?

Is there an example to follow? If so, what? How does it apply to me today?

Is there a challenge to heed? If so, what? How does it apply to me today?

Is there a sin to avoid? If so, what? How does it apply to me today?

Is there a teaching to learn? If so, what? How does it apply to me today?

Is there an action to take? If so, what? How does it apply to me today?

Is there something to pray about? If so, what? How does it apply to me today?

Is there a promise to claim? If so, what? How does it apply to me today?

### 3. Learning to Obey – apply what you have learned to your life first of all

### 4. Memorize verses that are important or significant for you



## PREFACE

Suppose an official looking document was given to you by a stranger who said it revealed a great inheritance that was yours because you were a close relative to a very powerful and influential king. What would you do with that document? Would you discard it? Would you just let it sit around your house gathering dust? Or would you seek the truth behind it and discover how you could enjoy this wonderful inheritance?

You probably would want to learn as much as you could about the document, its history, and its authenticity. After being fully assured it is authentic, you would study the contents: examining all the provisions and benefits it has for you, noting carefully the requirements leading to the maximum enjoyment of its promised blessings, making the understanding of this document and the claiming of all that is rightfully yours a top priority. You would be very foolish not to do so!

The Bible is such a special document from the King of Kings, your heavenly Father, which grants you unlimited riches and blessings for this life and for all eternity. It is God's Word, given to us that we may know how to live victoriously, knowing the blessings and benefits of assuming our rightful position as sons of our eternal Father. To not learn all it has for us would be very, very foolish.

Yet, many Christians do not read and study their Bible. Are they not aware of the riches of wisdom, grace, peace and glory that it contains for those understanding it, or that it is a very special document made just for them by their Father in heaven? Maybe spending time discovering its wonderful blessings simply is not a priority. Or, it could be, they just do not know how to read it to fully understand its meaning and truth. If that is true of you, then this book will help you dig out the rich benefits which God makes available for His children through His Word.

If you are a pastor, it is especially important for you to know what His Word says so you can fulfill His requirement to "feed My sheep" (John 21:17). That is the only way you will one day hear God say to you, "Well done, My good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21; 2 Timothy 4:7).

Paul tells Timothy, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). Bible study takes diligence (“do your best”): time, focus, and wisdom in how to study God’s holy Word. The goal is to correctly handle the “word of truth.”

Bible study takes work. You only get out what you put in, like many things in life. Those searching for gold or diamonds do not find them lying on the ground, but must dig down deep to obtain them. They also need to know how to dig correctly so as to achieve their goal. I want to help you do that by sharing with you what I have learned, both from others and from my own experience, in the past 60 years I have been studying the Bible. I want you to be able to study the Bible for yourselves.

Some pastors use sermons and lessons others have written, instead of studying the Bible for themselves, and it may save time, but the results are not as good. Studying the Bible, like eating food, takes time. You could save eating time if you had someone else chew your food for you, then you could take it and swallow it! No one wants to do that with physical food. We should not do it with spiritual food, either. After you have worked your way through this book, you will be able to chew your own spiritual food so you can feed yourself as well as the people to whom you minister.

## **BIBLE STUDY – INTRODUCTION**

*1 Peter 2:2-3 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.*

Every growing thing needs to eat. Plants eat, animals eat, and people also must eat to live. Sheep eat, so do pigs – but they don't eat the same thing! They have different appetites because they have different natures. Before coming to Jesus, we had pig appetites, eating any garbage the world offered. But after salvation, we have sheep appetites, preferring to eat what is safe, healthy, and nutritious. God has provided for us His written Word, the Bible, (1 Corinthians 3:1-3; 1 Peter 2:2-3), that we may receive the nourishment needed to live and grow spiritually (1 Corinthians 3:1-3; 1 Peter 2:2-3). Without physical food our bodies weaken and get sick. The same is true for our spirit when we go without spiritual food (Jeremiah 15:16).

Pastors need to grow spiritually so they can effectually help those to whom they minister to grow as well. The Bible tells us that Ezra "devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel" (Ezra 7:10). First, he had to devote himself to study and application of the Bible to his life. Only then, could he teach others. God expects us to place the study of His Word above anything else we do in ministry. May God bless you as you learn to better study His Word through the use of this book.

## **HOW WE KNOW THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD**

In the Preface, we talked about what you would do if you were given a very important document from a special King detailing all the benefits and blessings that were yours through Him. Checking its authenticity would be your first concern. We must be absolutely sure that the Bible is from God, or why study and follow it? How can we be certain?

We know that God exists. This being true, then it is reasonable to assume that He would reveal Himself to man; otherwise, man, who

cannot see God, could never know anything about Him. Therefore, if God has truth to reveal, if man is accountable, and if God wants a relationship with man, it is necessary for God to reveal Himself to man, to make the first move. God has revealed some things about Himself in creation, but that is just a rough sketch. Not only is this necessary, it is also possible for God to reveal Himself to man. And if He is really God, communicating truth to us and keeping it accurate down to our day is not at all a difficult possibility with Him. Thus, we accept that a revelation from God to man is both possible and necessary. But how do we know the Bible, and not another book, is that revelation?

First, we cannot go by what the book itself says. The Bible claims to be God's book, but anyone can write a book and say it is from God. We need proof from outside the Bible, which I give here, to show it is a special book that only God could write.

1. The Bible is about God, not man. If man wrote the Bible, he would be the leading character. In the Bible, God is sovereign and absolute authority (1 Chronicles 29:11; Isaiah 43:7). Man's highest good is submission to His will. The purpose of all we do is for His glory (Revelation 4:11). All other 'holy' books focus on man and build up man, not God.

2. The Bible emphasizes that there is one God, not many. Some say that man started with many gods and eventually evolved to having just one. The Bible, at the beginning, says there was just one God. If man were writing the Bible, he would have one God evolve out of many. Even the fact that the Jews were worshipping the golden calf and other gods at the time. God wrote for them the first commandment (saying God was the only god, Exodus 20:1-6) shows that even they believed there was more than one God. Islam believes in one God, but they come from Abraham, whose story first comes to us in the Bible.

3. The fact of the Trinity helps prove man did not write the Bible. Would natural man write about something that he could not understand, something with no parallel or analogy in nature? No finite mind has ever comprehended how three separate persons could form one essence/substance. If man wrote the Bible, he would NOT write about a Triune God.

4. If man wrote the Bible, would he say that the world was created from nothing (Hebrews 11:3)? Nothing is a state man has never known. He would come up with some rational explanation, as evolution tries to do today.

5. If man wrote the Bible, would he say his basic nature is evil and sinful (Romans 3:23)? Would man say there was nothing he could do but accept God's cure for sin (Ephesians 2:8-9)? Every religion man has developed, or 'holy' book man has written, has something man must do to earn/deserve removal of sin, but not the Bible.

6. The extent of revelation in the Bible shows it is beyond what man could or would write. How could man write of things beyond his own senses and experiences? Yet the Bible speaks authoritatively about heaven, hell, and eternity without hesitation (1 Corinthians 2:9-12; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Luke 16:19-31; Revelation 19:20-21).

7. If man wrote the Bible, its ethics would be based on individual, relative decisions (Judges 17:6) rather than absolutes. Because man is a child of wrath (Ephesians 2:3) by nature, his ethics would be corrupt (as they are today apart from the Bible) and would end in chaos. One example: the Bible tells us to use things (1 Corinthians 7:31) and love people (Romans 12:10). Man's ethics are the opposite.

8. It is humanly impossible for 44 authors over a period of 1500 years, unknown to each other, and from vastly different backgrounds and cultures, to arrive at 66 books so internally systematic and consistent as the Bible. It would be like 44 men each tossing a stone on a pile over 1500 years and the finished product being a modern hospital. There must have been one Author behind it all.

9. The fantastic number of fulfilled prophecies in the Bible show that it is no book authored by mere man. Experts in probability mathematics have come up with these statistics concerning the following prophecies coming true:

7 against Tyre in Ezekiel 26:3-4,7-8,12,14,21: 1 in  $7.5 \times 10^7$

5 against Samaria in Hosea 13:16 & Micah 1:6: 1 in  $4 \times 10^4$

- 5 against Gaza & Ashkelon in Amos 1:8, Jeremiah 47:5, Zephaniah 2:4-7: 1 in 1.2 x 10<sup>4</sup>
- 3 against Moab & Ammon in Ezekiel 25:3-4, Jeremiah 48:47; 49:6: 1 in 10<sup>3</sup>
- 9 against Edom in Isaiah 34:6-15, Jeremiah 49:17-18; Ezekiel 25:13-14; 35:5-7: 1 in 10<sup>4</sup>
- 8 against Babylon in Isaiah 13:19-22; 14:23; Jeremiah 51:26,43: 1 in 5 x 10<sup>9</sup>
- 9 about Jerusalem in Jeremiah 31:38-40: 1 in 8 x 10<sup>10</sup>
- 7 about Palestine in Leviticus 26:31-33; Ezekiel 36:33-35: 1 in 2 x 10<sup>5</sup>
- 9 about Petra & Edom in Isaiah 34:6-18; Ezekiel 25:13-14; 35:5-7: 1 in 2 x 10<sup>5</sup>
- 4 about Thebes & Memphis in Ezekiel 30:13-15: 1 in 10<sup>3</sup>
- 4 about Nineveh in Nahum 1:8,10; 2:6; 3:10,13,19: 1 in 10<sup>2</sup>

The probability of all these 11 prophecies coming true is 1 in 5.76 x 10<sup>59</sup>! This is almost impossible to visualize. Suppose this number were silver dollars. There would be enough to fill 1028 suns! Or think of it like this. In the universe, there are about 2 trillion galaxies, each containing about 100 million stars. From our 5 x 10<sup>59</sup>, we could make all of the stars in all of the galaxies 2 x 10<sup>5</sup> times! Only one silver dollar in all of these stands for the chance a writer could have guessed all these prophecies correctly! Even more astounding is the fact that these are only 11 prophecies. There are literally hundreds and hundreds of others which have already come true. (This comes from "Evidence That Demands A Verdict" by Josh McDowell).

10. The exceptional literary value of the Bible cannot be attributed to the natural ability of human writers. How could such unlearned men write such a surpassing piece of literary genius beyond their own ability? The Bible far exceeds the intellectual and moral qualifications of other books being written in its time such as the Talmud (Jewish), Apocrypha (Christian) and Koran (Islamic). The living quality of the words, reaching to all ages and social positions of people for century after century, shows its uniqueness. The Bible is deep enough for the most gifted scholar to spend a lifetime in one small part of it and never get out all there is, but also simple enough for a young child to read and

understand. One of the greatest truths expressed is just 7 monosyllables, each 3 letters or less: "You in me and I in you" (John 14:20). The Bible stories are never hurried or cramped, neither are they drawn out and boring. The Bible does not gloss over the sins of its heroes, neither does it overemphasize them. The values and opinions of the individual writers are not the focus, just the story they are telling.

11. Another proof for the Bible not being written by man is its enduring freshness. Voltaire said 150 years ago: "Within 100 years, the Bible will be obsolete." That has not happened. In fact, his home now houses a Bible society! The Bible never grows old. No other book in the world not only invites, but sustains, a ceaseless re-reading. Other books have come and gone, but the Bible has remained for thousands of years, a fresh, up-to-date book; not a stale, outdated book.

12. If man wrote the Bible, would he say to further spiritual ends by love & reliance on divine power or by political force? The Inquisition and Crusades in Christianity as well as the history of Islam, Shintoism, Nazism, etc., all show man used political force to spread their beliefs. The Bible commands to share its truths without force; a way that is not natural for man.

13. No human science book has been able to avoid being obsolete in a later time. Science is always changing, but the Bible is scientifically infallible in all ages. The Bible spoke accurately of scientific truths thousands of years before man 'discovered' them, while the very writers often believed the opposite of what they were writing. For example, the Bible says the life of the flesh is in the blood (Leviticus 17:11), yet until recent times doctors bled people to cure them. The Bible says the physical world was framed by the word of God, it did not have a physical origin (Hebrews 11:3; Colossians 1:16-17), something no human writer would imagine. The Bible has always said the earth was round (Isaiah 40:22), rotates (Job 38:12-14), has gravity (Job 26:7), and the whole solar system orbits in the universe (Psalm 19:6). Man believed the moon was greater than the earth for many centuries, but the Bible says opposite (Genesis 1:16). Even atomic energy and its results is found in 2 Peter 3:10-12 (the Greek word means to "loose" or "set free," as what happens

when atoms are released). The laws of thermodynamics are there, too: #1 (Genesis 2:1-2; Hebrews 4:3,10) and # 2 (Psalm 102:25-27; Hebrews 1:10-12; Romans 8:20-22). There are hundreds of other examples, too.

14. The number and accuracy of the ancient manuscripts of the Bible that have come down to us today show God's work in giving and keeping the Bible for us. Of Caesar's "Gallic Wars," we have only nine manuscripts, the oldest being 900 years after the original. Of the "History of Thucydides" and "History of Herodotus," we have only eight manuscripts, each from 1300 years after they happened. Yet of the Old Testament, we have 1,700 manuscripts, the oldest being 100 years after the original. The variation percentage between them is one minor difference every 2,000 words! Evidence for the New Testament is even greater: 13,000 manuscripts with the oldest portion 10 years after the original, and the variation percentage being only one minor difference every 200,000 words! Manuscripts have come down in many different languages, and large portions come to us quoted in the works of hundreds of authors. The recent discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls pushed back the date of the earliest Old Testament manuscripts 1,000 years, yet there was no difference between them and what we had before they were discovered!.

15. The study of archaeology continues to prove there are no historical inaccuracies in the Bible. William F. Albright, one of the greatest archaeologists ever, said, "The Bible's incredible historical memory has been many times validated by the process of discovery. No archaeological discovery has contradicted a Biblical reference." For many years, scholars thought the Bible in error about the Hittites, for no trace of that vast and great civilization had ever been found. In recent years, though, much has been found about them, again validating the truth of the Bible.

16. The preservation and regathering of the nation Israel after 2,000 years is proof of the greatness of the Bible. It has never happened, nor was it ever thought possible to happen, for a group of people to survive 2,000 years without a homeland, yet stay a separate cultural unity. That has happened with the Jews. Where are the Ammonites?



Philistines? Hittites? Not only that, but the Jews are now back in their homeland, truly a sociological miracle!

17. The inner testimony of the Holy Spirit inside His people gives us assurance that the Bible is true. He gives us peace and assurance within that the Bible indeed is God's book.

18. The life and resurrection of Jesus also give validity to the Bible. If everything about Him, His deity, and His resurrection is true, then the Bible is true. If it is not true, the Bible cannot be from God. This will be considered in the next article about the deity of Jesus.

No one of these alone may be strong enough to prove beyond a doubt that the Bible is inspired by God, but all of them together certainly do so. But if there is this much evidence, why do so many deny the Bible as being God's Word? Let me answer that with a story. Many years ago, while on a visit to England, a wealthy man was fascinated by a powerful microscope. Looking through its lens to study crystals and the petals of flowers, he was amazed at their beauty and detail. He bought one and took it home. He thoroughly enjoyed using it, until one day he examined some food he was planning to eat for dinner. He discovered tiny living creatures were crawling in it. He was especially fond of this food and did not know what to do. Finally, he concluded there was only one way out of this dilemma: he smashed the microscope to pieces. That is what man tries to do to the Bible when it shows up his sin. Like bugs under a rock run from the light when the rock is turned over, so man in sin runs from the light of God's truth about him. Man does not want the Bible to be God's Word, for then they would have to obey what He says, but instead they want to live their own lives without Him.

Now that we know the Bible is indeed the true Word of God, let us look at the importance of studying it.

## **IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING THE BIBLE**

Since the Bible is God's inspired Word, it is important for us to study and learn it. It shows us how to receive God's blessings, nourishes us spiritually, and helps us grow and live as Jesus would want us to live (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17 ). The Bible teaches us God's perfect truth of all we need to know and gives us all that is necessary to live a righteous, holy life; one that honors Him. It also reproves us by convicting us of the wrong in our lives, and shows us the proper corrections for those errors.

The Bible gives us God's truth about Who He is and what He has done (Jeremiah 9:23- 24), about the world and creation (Genesis 1:1; Psalm 19:1), and about ourselves and where we came from, as well as why we are here (Genesis 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 10:31). It also shows that the world around us is sinful and dysfunctional (Romans 3:23; 8:7). Best of all, it gives the solution to the world's problems (Titus 2:14). The Bible is infallible (Psalm 19:7), without any mistakes (Proverbs 30:5-6), complete (Revelation 22:18-19), authoritative (Psalm 119:160), sufficient for all our needs (2 Timothy 3:15), effective for all we need (Isaiah 55:11), and eternal – it will last forever through all eternity (Isaiah 40:8).

The Bible produces godliness in those who learn and follow it (James 1:22-25; Psalm 119:9-11; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; John 17:17). It guides like a light (Psalm 119:105) or map (Proverbs 3:5-6; John 14:6). Knowing it helps us grow spiritually (1 Peter 2:2; Psalm 119:103- 104; Hebrews 5:13-14). As we study it, we will grow in faith (Romans 10:17), faithfulness (Psalm 1:1-3), prayer (John 15:7), blessing (Luke 11:28), power (Hebrews 4:12; Ephesians 6:17), peace (Psalm 119:165), and joy (Jeremiah 15:16). It helps us have victory over Satan and demons (2 Corinthians 10:4-5; Ephesians 6:11-17), and temptation (Matthew 4:1-11; Hebrews 2:18; 4:15).

Therefore, God commands that we read the Bible (Colossians 3:16; Deuteronomy 31:11; Revelation 1:3; Isaiah 34:16; Luke 4:16; Ephesians 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:27; 2 Timothy 4:13). He also says we are to obey it (Psalm 119:9; 1 Timothy 4:16), pass it on to others (Matthew 28:19-20), desire it (1 Peter 2:2), preach it (2 Timothy 4:2), understand it (2 Timothy 2:15), live by it (Matthew 4:4), suffer and, if need be, die for it (Revelation 1:9; 6:9; 20:4), and apply it to every aspect of our daily lives (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The child of God is to know it in his head, stow it in his heart, show it in his life, and sow it in the world (Deuteronomy 4:1-10; 12:32; Joshua 1:8; Psalm 33:11-12; Proverbs 30:5-6; Mark 4:24; Luke 8:12; John 12:48-50; Romans 8:7; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Hebrews 1:1-3; 2:1-4; Revelation 1:1-3; 20:12; 22:18-19).

Some time ago I read a story about a man who died in deep poverty. In fact, he died from lack of proper food and housing. Among his possessions was found a Bible and in the Bible thousands of dollars were stuffed. The Bible was left to him by his parents -- but he never opened it! How often we are like that man -- our soul is starving and we are living in spiritual poverty while the provision for our needs lies between the covers of our Bible. We must get it and use it.

## THREE BIBLE STUDY STEPS

Before traveling to India, I make a list of things I want to bring with me, then gather them together. I start packing by putting the largest items in first, then the smaller ones around them. Finally, I close and label the suitcase and am ready to go. Whenever we work on a project or have a task to complete, we break it down into parts. What must we do first? Then what comes next? And after that? What is the last thing to do to complete the task? We cannot just jump in the middle or start just anywhere, there must be an orderly progression of steps to completion. The same is true of Bible study.

There are three basic steps, or stages, necessary to in-depth Bible study, and they must be in this order:

1. **OBSERVATION - WHAT DOES IT SAY?** We don't assume or jump to conclusions.  
We observe carefully and take note of all the passage has to say.
2. **INTERPRETATION - WHAT DOES IT MEAN?** Then we seek to understand what we have seen. We interpret what we have observed.
3. **APPLICATION - HOW DOES IT APPLY?** Now that I see what is there and understand what it means, how does it apply to my life?

When you go to see a doctor because of an illness, he follows these three steps:

- He makes careful observation, gathering all possible information; asking questions, taking your temperature, touching, probing, perhaps taking blood or an X-ray.
- He interprets the collected information, looking for a cause which leads to his diagnosis
- He applies all he has learned toward his patient's recovery, ordering a prescribed treatment

First he observes, then he interprets, and finally he applies. He must do them in this order. What would you think if you went to a doctor, told him you were not feeling well, and then he wrote a prescription,

or said he was going to operate, but he had never checked you, asked questions, or taken any tests? Would you trust what he wanted to do? Of course not! First he observes, then he interprets, and finally he applies. Those are the steps to studying a Bible passage as well.

Likewise, a detective trying to solve a crime needs to look for clues that are not at first obvious. The same is true of a scientist. For both of these, the final application is only as good as the early observation. The more thorough the discovery period, the more accurate the conclusion. The same is true in Bible study. Too often we skip the observation period, jumping quickly ahead to try finding out what the passage means and how it applies. This always leads to shallow, surface results that leave us thinking we cannot get anything out of the Bible.

## **STEP 1 - OBSERVATION**

The first step in studying the Bible is OBSERVATION - learning to look carefully, seeing details you overlooked before. This is like chewing food. The better your food is chewed, the easier it is for your body to digest it. Digestion is like the second step in Bible study. After that, your body applies it where it is needed in your body – that is the third step, application.

Observation is much more than simply looking. It involves learning how to see things that one would normally overlook. A doctor is trained to notice details so he can make an accurate diagnosis with the correct treatment. A detective must carefully look for that which most wouldn't notice if he is to find all the clues at a crime scene. Just because we look doesn't mean we see. Jesus Himself said this about the religious rulers of His day who saw and heard Him, but missed the reality of it all. "Having eyes, do you not see, and having ears do you not hear?" (Mark 8:18) We are so used to seeing some passages in the Bible we only notice what we have already seen, or what someone else has taught us. We have not learned to look deeper and observe details that are there, but which are often missed. Diamonds do not lie on top of the ground, one has to dig deep down to find them. They are there, but only those who know how to dig discover them. So it is with Bible study.

I have broken Bible study down into 3 main parts; observation, interpretation, and then application. First we will learn about observation, but that must be broken down into different steps as well. How can we better learn to observe? Follow these steps:

### **1. PRAY**

People who want to learn how to study the Bible often ask, "Where do I begin?" It is a good question, but the answer might be surprising. We actually begin by preparing our hearts. Many activities in life require preparation. Before exercising, we first stretch our muscles to avoid injuries. If we're going to do a job around the house, we first gather the tools and materials the job requires. To prepare for a trip, we make sure our car is properly maintained, that we've packed everything we need,

and that we have a good map. The Bible says that people should “not rely on their own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5) because we need His wisdom and insight to understand His Word. Confess any sin in your life and ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit (1 John 1:9)

1. Pray for guidance (Read James 1:5)
2. Pray for truth (Read John 8:32)
3. Pray for insight (Read 1 Corinthians 2:10)
4. Pray for application (Read James 1:22-25)

Sample Prayer: “Heavenly Father, as I come to Your Word, I ask for the guidance of Your Holy Spirit. Open my eyes to Your truths and give me insight into Your Word. Help me to apply to my life what I learn today.”

Prayer is not only the first step, it is something we do continually as we study, and after we read His Word. Thank Him for it. Ask Him to keep giving you wisdom and insight concerning it. Pray He helps you remember it and apply it to your life. Pray that the words you have read will sink into your mind and heart so that you may not be distant from it, no matter where you go.

God will teach you, as long as you ask Him (Jeremiah 33:3 and James 1:5).

## **2. LOOK AT THE WHOLE**

The first thing you do when food is placed before you is to look at the whole, get an idea of what is there. When you feed on God's Word, do the same thing. Read through the passage or book you are studying in one sitting. Do this several times for a short passage. When you are starting, it is best to do this with a short passage of 5 to 10 verses. It is better to learn well a short portion of Scripture than to look at a large portion, but not know it very well.

Do nothing else yet, but read it over and over. Do this for several days if possible. It might seem to take time, and you are anxious to move ahead quickly, but this is a crucial foundation. It's like looking at a favorite picture or listening to a favorite song, you seem to notice new things each time. You never get it all the first time!

When I am away from home and get a letter from my wife, the first thing I do is read it through, not study or analyze it; I just enjoy reading it over and over, letting it soak in. After a while, I start looking at some things she said in more detail. We should approach Bible study in the same way. The Bible is not an instruction manual, a list of orders, or a doctrine book. It is God's love letter to us, from the One who loves us more than anyone else can.

Read it over and over before you start studying it. Think about it even as you go about daily tasks – meditate on it (Psalm 119:97; 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18). Read it all in one sitting. Use different translations if you have them. Read it out loud so you can hear it. Let someone else read it while you close your eyes and listen. Read it as a prayer. Like with a favorite picture or song, you'll notice new things each time you read it. This might seem a waste of time, quite the contrary. This and the next step are highly important for getting the most out of your Bible study. The better you chew your food, the healthier it is for you. The same is true with Bible study.

**PRACTICE:** You cannot learn to study the Bible just by reading about how to do it. You have to put it into practice. Neither can you learn to cook, drive a car, or sew a sari just by reading about how to do it. You must do it yourself. The first times you try are always more difficult, until you get used to doing it. So start your Bible study now, even if it seems hard for you. Reading this book will not teach you how to study the Bible. But reading it and doing the practices will.

Read Psalm 1 several times today. Read it again tomorrow several times. Use different translations. Read it out loud to your family. Have them read it out loud to you. This is not the time for writing or research. Just read it over and over and over.



### 3. WRITE DOWN QUESTIONS

After you have become very familiar with the passage by reading it over and over, you begin your observation stage. You do this by writing down questions. As you have been reading, you probably have begun to wonder about what some things mean, what the author meant, and why they are written down for us. Have a paper and pencil where you can write down each and every question that comes to mind. No matter how simple or how hard they may seem, write them down. After you have been doing Bible study for some time, you will not need to write them all down any more, but until then, writing every one down is a good practice.

Try to write down as many questions as you can. Do not try to answer them now, even if the answers seem simple. Most will answer themselves as you go along. However, if you do not ask the question, you will never notice the answer when you see it and will miss it! So, as you read through the passage a few more times, make sure you are thorough, creative, and patient in writing questions.

When you are reading something that Paul wrote, for example, think about what you would ask him about the verse. I cannot overemphasize the importance of developing this skill of asking the right questions! Before a doctor can determine what is wrong with a patient or what to do to help him, the doctor must first ask a lot of questions. Some he asks the patient, other questions he asks must be answered by a blood test or X-ray. The same is true of a detective trying to solve a crime. He asks questions, some out loud and some just to himself.

To help you get started, here are some types of questions you should ask.

**DEFINITION** - What does a word or phrase mean? For example, from Psalm 1 you could ask what it means to "walk in the counsel of the wicked" in verse 1.

**REASON** - Think in cause-effect terms. Why will the wicked not stand in the judgment (Psalm 1:5)? What is the reason for that?

**PROCESS** - Ask HOW it happened. We know trees produce fruit in season (Psalm 1:3), but what is the process in a Christian's life by which they produce fruit?

**DESCRIPTION** - Collect details about an attribute, person, place or idea. How is a believer described in Psalm 1? How is an unbeliever described? Why are these descriptions used? What does this show about them?

**COMPARISON** - Look for differences or similarities between people, objects, events or aspects of the verse. For example, why is an unbeliever described as chaff (Psalm 1:4)? What is similar between them?

**CLASSIFICATION** - Put ideas, events, attributes, etc., into categories. What two kinds of people are described in Psalm 1?

When I take my car to be checked, the first thing that happens is the mechanic asks questions about what is the problem (observation). Then, he looks for answers to the questions as to causes of the problem (interpretation). Only then can he begin to repair the problem (application).

The same is true when I counsel someone as a pastor. I do not begin by telling them what to do, but first I listen and ask questions until I determine what the problem is (observation). Then I look at what I have learned and seek the cause of the problem (interpretation). Only then do I give advice or suggestions (application). There must always be these steps, and they must be in this order.

Asking questions is a good way to dig deeper, to look for more than we can see at first if we just quickly look at the passage and then try immediately to apply it.

Remember, you are only asking for now. Answers will come later. Do not get distracted looking for answers now. Read carefully between the lines. Put yourself in the place of the people then and wonder what they might have wondered about or asked. Pretend the author, the person who wrote the passage, was sitting with you. What questions would you ask him about his meaning?

Those who write for newspapers are trained to ask 6 questions: who, what, where, when, why and how. That is good for Bible study as well. Below are some examples.

WHO wrote it?

Is involved in it?

Was it written to?

WHAT is happening?

Is the passage about?

Is the main idea?

Are the key words?

Is the tone, mood of passage?

Does \_\_\_\_\_ mean (word, phrase)?

Is implied but not specifically written?

Are the key events?

Main words are used? What do they mean?

WHERE is it happening? Significance of that?

Is it written from?

Is it written to?

Are the key geographical locations?

WHEN are the events taking place?

Significance of time it is happening?

WHY is it written in the Bible?

Did these things happen?

HOW did the things happen?

Does this fit with the rest of the Bible?

As you do this, you will find some questions are similar to others. Some are impossible to answer, for there are things God does not tell us. Other times, asking a question will bring up several more questions. Throughout your Bible study, even when you move to the next stages, you will still be thinking of questions and should continue to write them down. In fact, sometimes when you answer one question, the answer itself will bring up several more questions.

Do not rush this stage. Your final product depends on doing this right. You need to ask a question before you can find an answer for it. And you cannot apply a Bible passage until you really understand it by asking and answering questions.

**PRACTICE:** Spend some time looking at Psalm 1 and writing down questions you would like to have answered to really understand it. Doing Bible study well is more important than doing it fast. You do not want your doctor to be in a hurry when he is trying to find out what is wrong with you. Go slowly. I gave some examples of questions above. You can write them down, but come up with some others as well. For example, you could wonder why this Psalm was chosen to be first in the Psalms (the Jews' song book). Overlook nothing. The first word, "blessed," should cause you to ask what it really means. Take your time and write down 15 or 20 questions you want answered.

If you wish for some help, email them to me (jerry@schmoyer.net). You may send me any, or all, of the assignments in this book. I would love to look over them and help you in any way I can.

#### **4. LOOK AT THE PARTS**

After you look at the whole and start asking questions (keep adding questions the whole time, you never stop writing questions down) then you divide the passage into parts. When you eat , you don't shove all the food into your mouth at once. You divide it into portions and eat it mouthful by mouthful. Do this with the passage you are studying.

Start breaking your Bible passage into major sections. These can then be broken into subsections. This is called outlining. You will be constantly changing and improving your outline; but this is the start. An outline gives you word labels to make large sections easier to grasp and manage. It forces you to think through the flow of the passage and discover the relationships of the various parts. It makes you read between the lines, thus improving your observation. Of course you keep adding to your list of questions.

I have many papers on my desk and it can get hard to find things when I need them. . So I organize them, grouping together papers about the same subject into folders and labelling the folders. Then I

can easily work with all the information I have. It's the same with Bible study. You have several verses and a lot of questions so far. If you can break the passage down into smaller segments, it is easier to study each part and to see how the parts relate to each other, how the truth flows through them.

If you are going to teach or preach the Bible to others, you absolutely must learn to study for yourself in this way. You can only feed God's Word to others bit by bit, you can't dump all the food on them at once. That will never work. When studying a whole chapter or more, you will find that breaking down large sections into smaller sections is very helpful.

It's like when a person packs up their home to move. They put all their kitchen things in one box, their bedroom things in another box, etc. I cannot stress enough the importance of outlining for understanding when teaching/preaching a passage. My book on How to Preach God's Word will give you more help on this. Remember to keep writing down questions as you do this. It's not time to start answering the questions, although you will start discovering some answers as you get to know the passage better.

**PRACTICE:** You may already have seen a natural breakdown in Psalm 1. Look for it now. Would you divide this Psalm into 2 parts or 3 parts? Actually, it could be broken down either way. It depends on how you see it and what God shows you. In some of these parts of Bible study there is no 'right' or 'wrong' way of doing it. There is room for each person to break it down as they see best. So on your paper outline Psalm 1. What verses would you put in the first group? Next group? Etc.

## **5. LOOK AT THE DETAILS**

Now that you have the food broken down on your plate and are starting to eat it, you must make sure you chew it thoroughly. Do not put too much in your mouth at once or you can't chew it all well. That's another advantage of your outline. You have it divided into small enough portions to thoroughly study each part.

Now you start thoroughly working through each small segment -- looking closely at everything. Let me make some suggestions to help you here. Try to look at it as if you are seeing the passage for the first time. Pretend you never read a Bible before, or a missionary just brought you one, or you are a child who doesn't have training in the Scriptures. That will help give you a fresh start, keeping you from looking beyond the passage and from thinking only of what you already know.

Or pretend you are teaching this passage to a group of new believers. What questions would they ask? This will add a freshness to your study. Another way to accomplish this is to rewrite the passage in your own words. This can be extremely helpful, for it will quickly show you how much you don't know about the passage! But remember, until you discover what you don't know (write those questions down!) you won't be able to come up with answers for it! You won't get all your questions answered -- no one does. However, as your study continues, you will find the answers to most of them as you learn God's Word.

Be patient if this is new to you. Think of a child learning to eat. He doesn't do it well the first time and neither will you -- just don't give up! Try to spend even a few minutes a day at it and you'll be amazed at the results! Bible study is like cooking, farming or any skill you learn, it takes a lot longer when you start. As you develop your Bible study skills, you will become able to work more quickly and efficiently. For now, though, you need to make spending more time for Bible study a top priority.

As you do this, remember to keep writing down questions. Do not be afraid to change or refine your outline throughout your study. You

are working toward an overview of the passage, a clear summary, to better understand it.

To help you better notice the details, look for things listed below:

1. **COMPARISONS** Very often, an object or idea is described by comparing it with something similar or by giving an illustration. Make note of such comparisons and illustrations to determine how they bring out the author's message. "AS, LIKEWISE, ALSO, LIKE" are words used for this. Psalm 42:1
2. **CONTRASTS** Contrast is the association of opposites. Our minds can recall contrasts better than comparisons. "BUT, YET, ALTHOUGH, OTHERWISE, MUCH MORE" are words to look for. Mark 6:22-23;
3. **REPETITIONS** In order to impress a point, a teacher will repeat words, phrases or ideas - maybe in the same or maybe in different ways. Note these carefully. Ephesians 6:11-14
4. **LOGICAL RELATIONSHIPS** Whether we write or speak, we often give commands, advice, or warnings and then back them up with reasons, purposes, proofs or results. Make special note of such admonitions because they are very important. Look for cause and effect relationships. A writer may describe a condition and then give the reason for it. Train yourself to look for BECAUSE or FOR (shows reason or result), IN ORDER THAT (gives the purpose), THEREFORE(summary, result, conclusion), IF (condition which requires action).
5. **GENERALIZATIONS** Noting the arrangement of the material is important. Sometimes the author makes a general statement and then explains it with an example or illustration. Or he may list a series of ideas and then summarize them with a general statement.
6. **PROGRESSIONS IN THOUGHT** Take special note of lists, looking for how the items relate and build on each other.
7. **QUESTIONS** An author may use a question to introduce a problem or for a summary challenge.
8. **GRAMMATICAL CONSTRUCTIONS** Verb tense, prepositions, and all that goes with grammar is very important in Bible study. God picked each word and tense for a reason. Use your Bible passage for a grammar lesson. Watch for words like HOWEVER, YET, LIKEWISE, TRULY, FINALLY, BEHOLD, etc.

9. WORDS THAT INDICATE THE PASSAGE OF TIME Words such as WHEN, THEN, UNTIL, WHILE, AFTER THIS and IMMEDIATELY all describe chronological relationships in a verse. The order in which things happened is important.

Butterfly's and bees both live off pollen. The butterfly just skims the surface of the flower while the bee digs deep. When winter comes the butterfly dies, but the bee has a supply to last through the winter. Be a bee -- dig deep in God's Word. Go slowly and work at it. God's best truths come to those who diligently study His Word, not to those in a hurry who quickly skim the surface.

PRACTICE 1: Continue working on Psalm 1. Look slowly and carefully at each word, each phrase, each sentence. Look for the things mentioned above. Don't rush to the next verse until you have thoroughly considered every part of the one you are looking at.

PRACTICE 2: Now that you have learned how to observe, let's try it on another passage. It should go more easily this time. Turn to Mark 5:1-13. Read it several times in different translations, out loud some times, and start writing down questions, about 20 or 25. Then move on to Interpretation.



## STEP 2 - INTERPRETATION

So far we've talked about the first step in Bible Study, observation. It's the most important step and must be done correctly. It's like the foundation of a building. If you hurry it or move too fast the whole building will be affected. It is the same way with Bible study. The interpretation and application of a passage will only be as good as the observation.

But now it's time to move on to the next step – interpretation. Now we start answering the questions you have been writing down. Of course, there will be more questions to add to the list, and the outline may keep changing, but now we are like that doctor who asked questions and took tests. Now we see what it all means.

How do you know when to start interpreting? It will happen naturally when you realize you have done a thorough job of observing by asking questions, outlining, and looking at the details. Just as when you were observing it was important not to rush into interpretation, so also now that you are interpreting it's important not to rush into application. How the passage applies will come later, so don't think about that now. Patiently wait until your interpretation is completed.

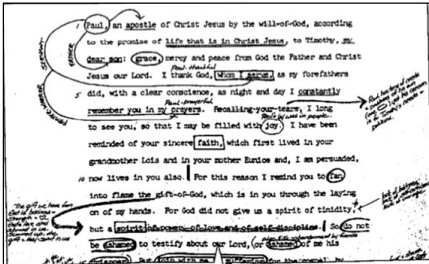
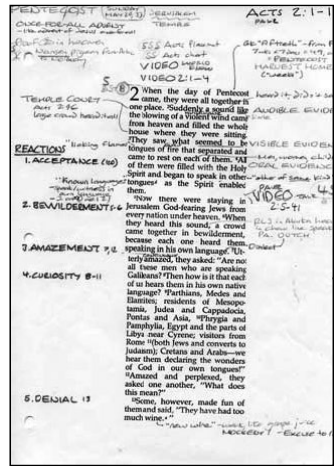
When I was young, my sister and I used to pick berries for baking. I didn't want to wait until we got home for my mother to make a pie so I ate them as fast as I could pick them. I always regretted it later, though, for the pie would have been better than eating them all plain. In Bible study, too, it's natural to want to start making application of everything you learn, but be patient. Your application will be much, much better if you wait until the full meaning of the passage is clear to you.

In observation, I told you to pretend the writer of the passage was sitting with you. What would you ask him? Now in interpretation you put yourself in the place of the original audience, the ones the passage was first written to. What would they think it meant? How would they understand it? This is key to interpreting a passage.

# 1. ORGANIZE & SAVE YOUR WORK

When a doctor examines you, he keeps clear notes about what he has discovered. He needs these to form the right conclusions now, but also to use as a reference in the future. The same is true of a lawyer or a detective. It is also important for Bible study. You can't keep it all in your head, so you must record it, either on paper or on a computer.

There are two ways you can do this. You can write by hand or type the passage in the middle of the page, as seen here, and record your notes alongside it. If you use a computer, you can cut and paste the passage, then print out the paper. You don't have to write your questions on this paper, but anything you learn or discover about the passage should be written down. You record the answers to your questions here for your study now, and years later, when you come back to this same passage, you'll still have your notes. I have notes I've done 30 or more years ago that I still get out when I want to study a passage I've studied before. I continue adding to them.



If possible, use various colors for different notes. I use green for stories or illustrations that I may use, red for main points to stand out, brown for other Bible verses that talk about this same thing, and so on. Highlighters are good to focus

Another way you can do this, especially if you are typing the passage, is to double space and leaveroom between the lines as well. This is shown in the picture to the left.

## SEAL 2. (6:3-4) Rider on a red horse - war

3 When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!"

God's sovereign control over world history  
God's justice and judgment sent on unbelieving and evil

4 Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other. To him was given a large sword.

fiery red = blood shed by this judgment

To him was given a large sword. = powerful weapon of destruction - WW III

World cannot have peace without the PRINCE OF PEACE!

Not now, not ever!

The Antichrist will eliminate 3 horns (countries or rulers) on his way to power (Dan 7:8, 24; Rev 17:10, 13:3). This probably is 3 of the 10 countries of the Revived Roman Empire (10 toes, 10 horns). They are quickly and totally defeated by the Antichrist. Perhaps this is where the United States fits in - one of those who rebel and lose their power.

on main words – just don't overuse them or your notes will be more confusing instead of more clear. Keep your notes neat and clear, not sloppy or cluttered..

If you can keep your notes on a computer, that is even better. You can type, or copy and paste the verses and leave space between each verse for your typed comments about the verse. An example of this is shown here.

The way you organize your notes is up to you, just do it so you have them in the future, and do it in a way you can understand, use, and come back to later. Some people like to write in their Bibles, however, unless you get a special Bible with lots of space, there isn't enough room to write all you will want to record.

**PRACTICE:** Since we're going to be working with Mark 5:1-13, let's get ready to take notes. Either on paper or on a computer, use one of the methods above to make pages to record notes.

## **2. KEEP EVERYTHING IN CONTEXT**

One of the first and most important lessons to learn when studying the Bible is to keep everything in context. That is the anchor that helps you understand what is being said. Without considering the context, any word or verse can mean almost anything at all. Keeping the context in mind limits the possible meaning, pins it down, connects it to a time and place that can be understood.

When airplanes were starting to be used, Charles Lindberg, a famous pilot, was flying when a valuable instrument fell overboard and down into a field of bushes below. He landed his plane nearby and went looking for it but couldn't find it anywhere. He took off his coat, spread it out on a bush, then flew up over the field again. He was able to spot his instrument and notice where it was in relationship to his coat. After this, he could then land and easily find the valuable piece of equipment. That's how it is in Bible study. The context gives you a reference point to build from, a starting place which guides and directs all that comes next.

For example, think of going to see a play in a theater. Suppose there were no props, nothing to show if the events were happening inside, outside, or in India or Europe. If the people just stood there and talked it would be much harder to understand what was happening.

Or suppose you went to see a movie, but were blindfolded through the whole thing and all you could do was hear the people talk. How much of what was happening would you miss because you didn't see the context, the setting for what is happening.

### **a. PASSAGE CONTEXT**

No verse or passage in the Bible stands alone. It must be taken in context. Suppose you walk into a room where some friends are talking and you walk up to them. The first thing you do is listen to find out what they are talking about. If you just listen to a sentence or two and then start talking, you could miss the whole point of what they are saying.

In order to understand a Bible passage, you must understand what comes before and after the passage. You don't have to know all the details, but generally what is happening. What is the writer talking about before the passage? For example, Isaiah 53:5 says "by His stripes we are healed." Many take that to refer to physical healing, but the verses before show it is about emotional and spiritual pain.

It's also important to know what the whole chapter and book are about. Paul says "I die daily" in 1 Corinthians 15:31. Just looking at that one verse, we can think he means daily dying spiritually to himself and what he wants. But the context of the chapter shows he is referring to the possibility of physically dying (see verses 4-8, 12-17, 20-23, 35-42, 56-57).

Another example is Revelation 3:20 where we read that Jesus stands at the door and knocks. Taken by itself it could refer to Him coming to people offering them salvation, but the context shows this is written to a church of believers who have turned their back on Him. He wants the church to renew its commitment to live for Him.

In John 6:1-5 Jesus asked Philip where they could get enough bread to feed all the people. Some say Jesus asked Philip because he was calm under pressure, or because he had lived nearby and knew the area, but if you read verse 6 you will find the answer.

Another example is John 16:7 where Jesus says that when He goes back to heaven He will send the 'Helper.' We can speculate and guess about what He is referring to, or we can go to John 14:26 where He says the 'Helper' is the Holy Spirit!

Suppose you are walking down the street and find a piece of paper lying on the ground. You pick it up and realize it is part of a letter, but you don't have the first or last page. You don't know who wrote it, who it is to, if it is very old or recent, or even if it was written from or to a different country. All these things would be very important to gain an accurate understanding of what was written. To think you can accurately understand the letter with only a part of the middle of it is foolish. So it is with studying the Bible.

**PRACTICE:** Look at the context of Mark 5:1-13. What is Mark writing about up to this point? Specifically what is the story before this one? What happens after it? What do you know about the Gospel of Mark and the man Mark? If you have a Bible with footnotes, Bible study books, or my "Bible Overview" book use them to learn about the Gospel of Mark. How does Mark 5:1-13 fit into the flow of the Gospel of Mark?

## **b. GEOGRAPHY CONTEXT**

The geographical context of a passage refers to where it happened, the location of what is going on. It can shed much light onto what is happening. If you find an old book and inside it are a few pages from a diary, it would be very important to know in which country the words had been written. They would be much harder to understand apart from its geographical context.

A good example is Matthew 19:1-9 where the religious rulers challenge Jesus about divorce. Some interpret those words as if Jesus is talking to Christians today, but that is far from the truth. You see, Jesus had already addressed the topic of divorce with these men earlier (Matthew 5:27-32), so why are they asking again? Certainly not to learn what He thinks for they already know that. So why ask if they already knew the answer? Because Jesus has just entered the territory ruled by Herod Antipas, who recently beheaded John the baptizer for saying he shouldn't have taken another man's wife. These rulers who were jealous of Jesus wanted him to say something that could be used to get Herod to arrest and kill Jesus as well.

They thought if He talked against divorce, Herod might hear and arrest Jesus, too. We must keep this in mind when interpreting and understanding Jesus' words on divorce here.

**PRACTICE:** Look at a map to see where Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee (Mark 5:1). If you have study books or footnotes, find out the difference in where Jesus came from and where He went to. How will this help you understand the passage? What were storms like on the Sea of Galilee and how does that help us understand the danger to the boat?

### **c. HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

History refers to those portions of the Bible which give information about people, places, events, groups or time periods. Genesis through Ruth and Matthew through Acts are mainly history. Today we have historical books and novels and biographies.

Questions like who?, what?, when? why?, where? and how? are good to help understand the historical context of a passage.

WHO is involved? HOW did it happen?

WHEN in history did it happen? HOW did it affect them?

WHERE was it located? WHY did it happen?

WHAT happened? WHY is it recorded for us?

WHAT was life like then?

Using other books like a Bible dictionary or handbook can help with this. Footnotes in your Bible or reading a Bible commentary about the passage can help as well. My book on "Bible Overview" is very good for this as well. Don't become dependent on them, though. Do your own study and just let them supplement it. Chew your own food!

As you pay attention to the context, you will notice some of the questions you wrote earlier will be answered, but you may come up with new questions as well. Write them down, too.

**PRACTICE:** Where does Mark 5:1-13 fit into the life of Jesus? Was it at the start of His ministry? The middle? The end? What difference would that make? How did Jesus use this to train His disciples? What was He trying to teach them at this time in their training?

#### **d. CULTURAL CONTEXT**

Understanding the cultural background of incidents in the Bible is also helpful in interpretation. For example, Jesus said to Peter, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades (hell) shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). How can gates prevail? We need to understand, however, that the gates of a city in the Middle East were places where those with power and authority met to make decisions. Thus, "gates" became synonymous with "power" or "authority." With that piece of cultural information, we can easily see that Jesus is saying Satan's power and authority would not defeat Jesus.

Understanding the cultural role of the veil that women in Corinth wore can help us accurately interpret that for us today. And when Paul says women are to remain silent in church (1 Corinthians 14), it was because women sat far from men during the service, so to shout to her husband was disruptive to all. She should wait until she got home to talk to him.

Again, Bible dictionaries, handbooks, commentaries or my "Bible Overview" can be very helpful in understanding many of these things. Even without them, you will still learn a lot if you take time to think

about what life must have been like for the people then. Read slowly, deliberately, and thoughtfully.

**PRACTICE:** If you have a study book or some way of reading about life in Jesus' day, think about how Mark 5:1-13 fit into their culture. What would the original readers know that you don't? How would they feel about pigs? What did they know about someone being demonized? How did the religious rulers try to help those who were demonized?

### **3. THE MAIN IDEA**

In observation it is helpful to pretend the writer of the passage was sitting with you and you could ask him questions. What would you ask? In interpretation we put ourselves in the place of the original readers and ask ourselves what they would have understood the passage to mean. First we talked about the context of the passage in the Bible, in geography, in history and in culture. The original readers would automatically know those things, for they lived in those times. We have to study to put ourselves back where they were. They might also have known the author of the passage or book, or at least known about him from others who did know him. Therefore they'd understand why he wrote. What was the purpose of his recording this? Why did he write it for them to read? What did he want to communicate? Thinking in this way is very important to getting the correct interpretation. When you can grasp the writer's main intent, then everything else can build on that foundation.

One of the most important steps in interpreting a teaching section is to discover the main idea of the section. This is the most important truth a pastor wants the people to remember all week from his sermon. In effect, this is what you are doing when you outline and then title a section. The title should summarize the main idea. The titles of each sections of an outline should relate directly to the main idea. Doing this is very helpful and important for all kinds of Bible literature, but for teaching sections it is a real must.



Think of a good sermon or Bible study you heard recently, or a book you enjoyed -- you should be able to summarize it in one or two sentences. Now think of one which was confusing to you and didn't seem to be about any one thing -- there was no one main idea. Remember this when you are teaching or communicating. Always write down and know your main idea, what you want to convey. Stick to what your main idea is and don't add too much extra information. This is what makes the difference between a good teacher and a not-so-good teacher. Good speakers always have a main idea. If you don't try to read the writer's mind and discover it, you won't be able to correctly interpret the rest of the passage correctly. There is more about that in my book "How To Preach God's Word."

Remember, you have direct access to the very mind of the One who wrote it all, so stay in constant contact during this process through prayer. Do not go further in your Bible study until you can write the main idea of a passage in as few words as possible. You can and probably will adjust and fine tune this as you go, but you must work hard to make sure this is straight. It is the foundation for all you will build as you study the passage - make it true!

**PRACTICE:** Put yourself in the place of the original readers of Mark's gospel. What would they have seen as the main idea Mark was communicating? Was he mainly writing to tell how to kill pigs? Or was He teaching them about when to take a boat ride? Clearly those weren't his reasons for writing. What was it? What is his main idea? Write it out. You will probably change it a bit as your study continues, but it is important to understand that now.

#### **4. TYPES OF LITERATURE**

We don't read everything the same way. Science and math books we read carefully, slowly, and we study them as we go. Newspapers we read more quickly, picking out the main details. A letter from a close friend we read with joy and understanding. If it is a short story, something simple and easy, we read through quickly. We approach each type of literature in different ways.

The same is true with music. There are various genre, styles of music, and each is approached and enjoyed differently. There is folk music, pop, Indian classical, even Western classical. It is all music, but different in many ways, so we listen differently.

Suppose you open a book and the first sentence is, "I awoke from my sleep to find I had been transformed into a giant insect." It makes a great difference if this is a science book, or a fiction book, or a journal or a book of poetry. We would look at this statement differently depending on the type of literature we were reading.

There are 5 different literature types in the Bible. The same basic rules of interpretation apply to all of them, but because they are different kinds of writing there are interpretation principles that apply to each one. They are:

**History:** stories, events, people or groups. In the Bible Genesis through Ruth, the Gospels, and Acts are history books. They are to be read and interpreted like history books today.

**Teaching:** communicate ideas to the mind. Jesus' teachings and Paul's epistles, along with many other portions of the Bible, instruct, train and educate us.

**Poetry:** communicate feelings and emotions along with content. Bible books like Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, and large portions of the prophets are written in Hebrew poetic style which must be understood to interpret it correctly.

**Parables:** short stories to illustrate a truth. Jesus' parables are the main example of this type of writing.

**Prophecy:** prediction of the future. Much of what the prophets wrote was prophecy at the time it was written. Daniel, Ezekiel, Revelation and Matthew 25-26 contain prophecy that has yet to be fulfilled. It is still in the future for us.

Knowing the form of literature is important. For example, for many years scholars said the book Song of Solomon was teaching about Jesus and the church. They said it was an allegory to show us how Jesus loves us. But the Old Testament is not about the church but Israel, and the Song of Solomon is a poetic book, a love story between Solomon and his bride, the Shulamite.

### **a. HISTORY**

History refers to those portions of the Bible which give information about people, places, events, groups or time periods. Genesis through Ruth and Matthew through Acts are mainly history. Today we have historical books and novels and biographies.

Earlier we talked about the importance of understanding the historical context of a passage to accurately interpret it. That is true of all passages, but especially true of those having to do with history.

Suppose you received a letter from someone in a foreign country. In order to understand it properly, you'd need to know who wrote it, when they wrote it, and where they were when they wrote it. If it was written a few days ago from a neighbor in India or several years ago from someone you don't know in Great Britain makes a great difference to understanding what they say. You must know these things to accurately interpret the letter. To really understand all about Bible history takes study because of different customs and historical events. These lessons give guidance, encouragement, precedents, examples and principles for us to fall back on and use when necessary.

Questions like who?, what?, when? why?, where? and how? are good to help understand the historical context of a passage.

WHO is involved?	HOW did it happen?
WHEN in history did it happen?	HOW did it affect them?
WHERE was it located?	WHY did it happen?
WHAT happened?	WHY is it recorded for us?
WHAT was life like then?	

Using other books like a Bible dictionary or handbook can help with this. Footnotes in your Bible or reading a Bible commentary about the

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passage can help as well. My book on “Bible Overview” is very good for this as well. Don’t become dependent on them, though. Do your own study and just let them supplement it. Chew your own food!

If you are studying an event, person, group of people, place, or time period, you will need to include all the passages that speak about it in your study.

**PRACTICE:** You should have done some of this earlier when we talked about Historical context, but now we will go into more detail. Using Mark 5:1-13 again, try to answer the who, when, where, what, why and how questions above. Some may be difficult, but think about them and do the best you can.

## **b. TEACHING**

Teaching, or doctrine, refers to any communication of ideas from one person to another. This would include Jesus’ teaching, Paul’s epistles, the preaching of the Old Testament prophets, and many other portions of Scripture. Literature today of that type would include study books, sermons, how-to books, lectures, educational programs on TV, and non-fiction books of any kind. It is quite a large area, and being the most direct means of communicating truth from God to man through His Word, it is most important to Bible study.

One of the most important steps in interpreting a teaching section is to discover the main idea of the section (SEE SECTION 3 ABOVE, The Main Idea).. In effect, this is what you are doing when you outline and then title a section. The title should summarize the main idea. That is very helpful and important for all kinds of Bible literature, but for teaching sections it is a real must.

**PRACTICE:** You already wrote down what you thought the main idea in Mark 5:1-13 was, so go back and read what you wrote. Would you still agree with it or would you change it a bit now? If you would, do so and write it again.

### **c. POETRY**

Sometimes when we are hungry and feeling weak, we need to eat something that will give us quick energy. It must be easy to digest and help us have the strength to do what needs to be done. The same is true spiritually, and God has provided that nourishment through the literature type poetry.

Poetry is easy to digest and provides quick spiritual energy. It is one of the easiest forms of Bible literature to understand and apply. It is full of emotion and life and speaks to our hearts.

It provides the quick boost of spiritual energy we sometimes need. Poetical portions of the Bible include Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. There is hardly a Bible book without at least some poetry in it. Much of what the Old Testament prophets had to say was in poetical form.

One of the chief characteristics of poetry is rhyme. In most languages poetry rhymes word sounds, but in Hebrew, which the Old Testament was written in, this is not true. If it were, then it would be lost when translated into another language. God knew that, so He created Hebrew to rhyme thoughts and ideas instead of sounds. That way the poetic element remains in any language into which it is translated.

It is the relationship of the 2nd line to the 1st that makes Bible poetry 'rhyme.' Look to see if the second line in a poetic section repeats, builds upon, or says the opposite of the first line. That can go far in helping to understand Biblical poetry.

Sometimes the first line is repeated in the same or nearly the same words (Psalm 93:3). Other times it is repeated in different words to reinforce the thought (Psalm 24:1). At times the pattern gets more involved so that the first line is repeated in the third line and the second line repeated in the fourth line (Psalm 103:11-12). It's not unusual for us to say something more than once to emphasize it and make sure it is understood. That is what happens here as well.

Another form of poetry is when the second line says more than the first line. It builds on it and completes the thought (Psalm 29:1). The second line can explain and add to the first line (Psalm 19:7-9).

In addition, the second line can say the opposite of the first line – not to contradict it, but to show more clearly the truth being conveyed (Psalm 1:6). The contrasts show more clearly the principle involved. This is common in the Book of Proverbs where pride is often contrasted with humility, or the ungodly with the godly.

Understanding these simple patterns can make the study of the Psalms and all Bible poetry more enjoyable and easier. The Bible explains and interprets itself when these principles of interpretation are understood. It may be a bit confusing at first, but keep working at it and you'll find this very helpful in your Bible study.

**PRACTICE:** To get started, stop for a minute and practice what we talked about. Look at the following verses and see what patterns you can find. How does the second line relate to the first? Does it repeat it, add to it, finish it or say the opposite of it? How can this help you understand these verses?

Psalm 37:9

Psalm 19:2

Psalm 2:6

Now apply this to Psalm 1 which you started studying. What rhyming pattern is used in these verses?

Psalm 1:1

Psalm 1:2

Psalm 1:5

Psalm 1:6

Something else that is important in understanding Bible poetry, especially the Psalms, is to know what the main idea of the section is. We saw the importance of this with teaching, but it is also important here. The book of Psalms, for example, was the Hebrew song book. They had different types of songs, as we have today. Here are the main types of Psalms.

Praise and Thanksgiving Psalms help us express our worship, love and appreciation for all God is and what He does for us. Some are personal, written by an individual to thank or praise God for something in his life (Psalms 8, 9, 11, 16, 19). Others express the appreciation of the whole nation for God (Psalms 33, 36).

Other Psalms are not written out of joy and happiness, but out of sadness and loss. These Psalms express grief such as we all feel from time to time. Sometimes it is an individual going through great difficulty and grief who asks God for help (Psalms 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 13, 14, 17, 22) and other times it is the nation as a whole who is turning to God for deliverance (Psalm 12).

Some focus on asking God's help, while others are more about confession of sin (Psalms 6, 32). At times of great difficulty, the Psalm writer might ask God to curse and bring judgment on his enemies, as He promised to do in protecting His children (Psalm 7, 35, 55, 58, 59, 69, 79, 109, 137). Or the Psalm might be to affirm the author's trust in God (Psalms 11, 16).

Psalms are also used to teach Bible truths to people. Many of these are about the coming Messiah, prophesying His person and work (Psalms 22, 53). Similarly, a few Psalms talk about Christ's second coming to rule and reign (Psalms 2, 20, 21). Also, some Psalms are to teach and remind the Jews about their history (Psalms 78, 105, 106). A final category of Psalms were sung by the Jews when they walked long distances as a group. The joyful ones were sung when they would visit Jerusalem, as they were required to do several times a year, and the less joyful ones when traveling in captivity (Psalms 120-134).

**PRACTICE:** To help you understand this better, take a few minutes to read the following Psalms and decide that type they are – if their main idea is praise, grief, asking deliverance from and judgment on enemies, teaching, etc. Again, this is something that with a little practice is quite easy and very, very helpful in understanding the Psalm.

Psalm 23

Psalm 139

Psalm 25

One literary device of special value in understanding poetry is the use of figures of speech. While these pop up in all forms of literature, they are especially common in poetry.

These make reading more interesting and enjoyable. They include asking questions which really don't require an answer. The statement is made in question form to emphasize the answer. Similarities are shown by words such as "as" and "like." Something familiar is used to help us understand something not familiar. Exaggeration or understating something can be used to make a point. Objects can sometimes be referred to as having traits of living people to explain an activity or event. Each language has its own way of using figures of speech, and understanding how the Jews used them helps interpret the Bible, especially poetic portions. More will be said about this a little later in this book.

**PRACTICE:** In Psalm 1 there is a figure of speech in verse 3 and verse 4. Can you see what it is? What truth is it conveying? How does understanding this help you understand the verse better?

(For more information about Psalms and the other books of poetry see Bible Overview by Jerry Schmoyer.)

#### **d. PARABLES**

Parables are simply stories used to illustrate a truth, a way of teaching used much by Jesus which brings light to the truth so we may see more clearly the lesson presented. Aesop used them, so did Jesus. There are many in the Old Testament, too, although there they are not as common or as easy to pick out.

Many of the skills you have been developing in studying the Bible are used in interpreting parables. Your history questions (Who, When, Where, What, How and Why) must be answered correctly. Also, customs and practices of how people lived in the time and place the parable is about is of the utmost importance!



To accurately interpret the parables Jesus told, you must remember Jesus' purpose in using them. He wanted to reveal truth to believers so they would understand it and to hide truth from unbelievers so they wouldn't mock it (Matthew 13:10-17). Look for the main idea of the parable. Interpret all other details in light of the main idea, for parables only teach one main spiritual truth. Remember that not all details have a spiritual meaning, so don't try to force more than the main idea into a parable.

For example, Jesus told a parable about a woman who kept nagging an unjust judge until she finally got what she was asking for (Luke 18:1-8). Jesus is teaching perseverance in prayer (Luke 18:1). He isn't saying God is unjust or we need to nag Him. Parables only teach one main truth. That is very important to remember. The context is the best interpreter of parables.

What was the occasion, the audience, the effect of it? Always keep in mind that parables illustrate doctrine, they do not establish it.

**PRACTICE:** Read Matthew 13:1-9 as if you are reading it for the first time. Don't think about what you have been taught it means, that may not be totally right. What do you think is the one main idea, the truth Jesus is throwing light on?

Now read Matthew 13:10-23. What did Jesus say His main idea is? Is this the same as you wrote down?

Try one more. Read Matthew 13:24-30 and write down how you would interpret it. Then look at what Jesus said in Matthew 13:36-43. How did you do?

### **e. PROPHECY**

At the time it was written, about one fourth of the Bible was prophecy. Much has been fulfilled but there is a lot that hasn't and is still future for us. Matthew 24-25 and the book of Revelation are still future, as are large portions of Daniel and Ezekiel.

Here, too, there are principles to help interpret prophecy. Interpret prophecy literally, taking the words in their usual/normal sense. The same rules of grammar and language apply here, use them! Don't make interpreting prophecy harder than it is! Put yourself in the place of the ones who first read this passage, the ones it was written to. How would they have understood it? Would they have thought it meant? What is the main idea? That is the only right way to interpret the Bible. Prophecy is really just teaching, so interpret it in the same way as you would a teaching passage.

Interpret it in harmony with other prophecy. It must fit in with the rest of the Bible. You aren't going to discover something new which everyone else got wrong. Often one prophecy will refer to similar happenings (for example, Old Testament prophets often talk about Jesus' first and second coming in the same prophecy). The purpose of prophecy is to focus on Christ and give Him the glory. As you work in the power of the Spirit, He will glorify Christ through it all.

Symbols can be more difficult to interpret. They made great sense to the Jews living when the Bible was written, but often aren't things we understand today. Again, let the Bible interpret itself. Just use your common sense. When interpreting a symbol, look for the main characteristic the writer would have seen in it. Symbols are used the same way when used at different places in the Bible. If you aren't sure of a meaning, don't push. Just make sure your interpretation agrees with the rest of the Bible.

(For more information about prophecy see *Biblical Prophecy* by Jerry Schmoyer.)

**PRACTICE:** Remember, if you were studying this passage you first would pray for God's guidance, then you would write your observation questions. As you start interpreting the passage, you would look at the context of the passage in the Bible, geography, history and culture. You would try to determine the main idea and outline the passage. So let's say you have already done all that and now you are looking at how to interpret this passage since it is prophecy.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. If you take the words in their normal sense and look at it as if you were among the first ones reading these verses, what would you think was being taught? What is the main idea?

## **f. PROVERBS**

Proverbs are figures of speech comparing a principle or truth with something that can be seen so they can be better understood. They are often short parables, usually consisting of two lines, the second repeating, expanding on, or contrasting with the first.

Proverbs point to the truth without saying everything about it. They are not sure promises of God with a guaranteed outcome, but principles to live by. For example, Proverbs 22:6 says if we train a child in godly ways he will follow them when he is grown. That is a true principle and usually happens, but there is no promise given here, for children have their own free will and some choose to deny Jesus when they grow up. When interpreting proverbs, try to look at them as if you are reading them for the first time. Don't just jump to a conclusion, but observe carefully figures of speech (we will talk about them later) and the context, the verses that go before and after the proverb. Never make a verse say something it doesn't just because you think it should say that. Stay faithful to the written word, never adding or taking away from what is really there. Always interpret it as the original readers would have interpreted it.

**PRACTICE:** Look at Proverbs 2:12-15. Make a list of questions you would like answered in order to understand this passage. Answer the who, what, when, why, where and how questions. What is the main idea, the basic principle being taught here?

## 5. BASIC PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

So far we've looked at observing – asking questions to see deeper into the text. Then we talked about interpretation. We said first we must look at the context of the passage, geography, history and culture relating to the passage. Next we talked about looking for the main idea. Then we covered the importance of knowing what type of literature we were looking at. Now lets look a little deeper as we continue learning how to interpret the Bible.

### a. STRUCTURE & GRAMMAR

In school, we are taught the principles of grammar and sometimes we wonder why it is important to learn those things. An understanding of grammar is very helpful in Bible study.

There are some important parts of grammar that we should focus on if we want to interpret God's Word correctly, because grammar deals with the basic structure and relationship of words. These are the foundational building blocks of communication.

An important part of grammar is the meaning and tense of verbs – Look closely at the verbs (the "action" words) in a sentence. Speaking of the promise made by God through the prophets, Paul says it was "concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit holiness, by the resurrection of the dead" (Romans 1:3-4). Can you find the two verbs about Christ that are they key words in the whole sentence? (They are "born" and "declared"). When we see these as the key words we know everything else builds upon them. That helps us be able to understand the main idea as well.

PRACTICE: Look at Psalm 1:1. What are the three main verbs in this verse? How do they relate to each other? Is there a progression between them? What is it? How does this help you understand the verse? In Mark 5:6-7 there are three verbs that describe what the demonized man did when he saw Jesus. What are they? Picture these things happening. What does this show about this man?

The use of prepositions – Even a small part of speech like a preposition (words such as “on” “to” or “for” that are combined with a noun) can influence the meaning of a verse. For example, Romans 3:21-22 says, “But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference.” In the phrase “to all and on all who believe” notice that Paul changes the preposition from “to” to “on.” Can you see the significance of this? When we believe Christ’s righteousness comes TO us, but it also stays ON us forever. The little word “on” brings a lot of important truth to light.

Some of the most common words that show relationship are:

ALSO = comparison (illustration) in phrase 2 to help bring out the meaning in phrase 1

ALTHOUGH = contrast (opposites) in phrase 2 to help bring out the meaning in phrase 1

AND = additional information (look for progression in thought)

AS = comparison (illustration) in phrase 2 to help bring out the meaning in phrase 1

BECAUSE = logical relationship (reason, purpose, proof, result) usually reason or result

BUT = contrast (opposites) in phrase 2 to help bring out the meaning in phrase 1

FINALLY = last in a series

FOR = logical relationship (reason, purpose, proof, result) usually reason or result

HOWEVER = gives an exception

IF = logical relationship (reason, purpose, proof, result) condition which requires action

IN ORDER THAT = logical relationship (reason, purpose, proof, result) gives the purpose

LIKE = comparison (illustration) in phrase 2 to help bring out the meaning in phrase 1

LIKEWISE = comparison (illustration) in phrase 2 to help bring out the meaning in phrase 1

MUCH MORE = contrast (opposites) in phrase 2 to help bring out the meaning in phrase 1

OTHERWISE = contrast (opposites) in phrase 2 to help bring out the meaning in phrase 1

THEREFORE = logical relationship (reason, purpose, proof, result) summary, result, conclusion

TRULY = emphasized because of being extra important

YET = contrast (opposites) in phrase 2 to help bring out the meaning in phrase 1

PRACTICE: Psalm 1 has several of these. What can you find (they are in verse 2, 4, 5 and 6). What does each of them show? How do they help you understand the verse? Mark 5:1-13 has some also: "For" in 4 and 8, "and" in 10. How do they help you understand what is happening. What other words could you use instead of these?

## **b. NORMAL, LITERAL INTERPRETATION**

Usual interpretation, also called literal interpretation, means to understand the writer's original intended meaning based upon the normal and proper use of words and language customary for the day it was written. It means to understand it as the original writer meant it and the first readers interpreted it. That is how we tell the difference between what means exactly what it says and what is a figure of speech. This sounds easier than it sometimes is, especially since the Bible was written thousands of years ago in a different place and culture than we live in now. So how are we to make sure we interpret it as it was meant to be interpreted?

### **1) Use Common Sense**

One of our biggest problems in Bible interpretation is that we think we know what a verse means before we study it. Perhaps we've read it before and formed an opinion, or we've heard someone share their thoughts about it. What we heard or think is usually not wrong, but there is so much more to the verse that we miss if we stop with what we already know. And sometimes what we think it means isn't quite right. So the best thing to do is to set aside any ideas we have and start fresh. Come with a clean, open mind, as if you are seeing it for the first time. That way you will be chewing your own food from the start, not using what someone else started chewing for you!

Use common sense when you interpret Scripture. That's how you'll know the difference between what is normal or usual and what is figurative. I heard about a man who read Jesus' words to "cut off your hand if it offends you" (Matthew 5:30; 18:8; Mark 9:43). One time he used his hand to sin, so he cut it off with a knife! How do we know this isn't what Jesus meant? Common sense tells us so. There is not one example of anyone in the Bible cutting off their hand because of sin. In fact, the Bible says we are to confess our sin and God will forgive it (1 John 1:9). Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) and taken care of. This is another way of knowing what the Bible really means – look at the rest of the Bible.

**PRACTICE:** Luke 14:26 quotes Jesus as saying that if we don't hate our parents, siblings, mates, children and even ourselves, we can't be His disciple. Yet 1 John 4:20 says if we hate our family members, we are liars and don't love God. Which does common sense say is right? What, then, does Jesus mean in Luke 14:26?

## **2) Take the Word in Its Usual Sense**

The Bible is literature and as such, words must be taken at their face value. Words are to be taken in their usual, normal sense. This is how Jesus understood the Old Testament. He literally interpreted it down to a comma (in Luke 4:14-30, quoting Isaiah 61:1-2) and verb tense ("I Am" in Matthew 22:23-33). This means we aren't to look for hidden, 'spiritualized' meanings everywhere. On the other extreme, we aren't to take it so exact that we miss what the writer had in mind. For instance, in the United States many people eat hot dogs. "Hot dogs" can mean one thing in a strictly literal sense (eating a dog that has been cooked) and another in its normal, usual sense (the name of a popular food item). Use your common sense in determining the meaning. We will talk about figurative language next, so don't worry about that for now. Just read the Bible as you would a letter from a friend! Put yourself in the place of those who first read it.

God revealed His Word over a period of many centuries. Everything He said was true, but He didn't say everything at once. When God revealed His truths to Moses, He knew everything, but He didn't choose

to reveal everything to Moses. Instead, He chose to reveal additional truths centuries later – some to Paul, others to John and so on. A parent doesn't tell a child everything the child needs to know right away. Little by little, as they grow over time, a child is able to understand more and more. That's how God revealed His truth in the Bible as well. That's why God's laws get more specific as we read from Genesis to Revelation. God's revelation of Himself and His truth become clearer and clearer as time moved on. From Adam to Abraham to Moses to David to Ezra, God's revealed truth grew in amount and depth. Then the New Testament expands it even further. So don't expect the Old Testament to have as deep and specific teachings as the New. Remember this when you study the Bible as well.

### **3) Take the Word in Its Context**

If a word by itself is unclear (like "hot dogs"), look at the sentence it is used in and let that help determine the meaning. Read the meaning out of the sentence, not into it. Again, put yourself in the writer's place and read his mind.

If you can't tell for sure what a word means by its sentence, then look at the whole paragraph or chapter. Keeping in mind what is the main idea of the verse, chapter, or book will help interpret each specific word as well.

Don't jump to wild conclusions or read in what you assume or have heard. Look at each word clearly and objectively, as if reading it for the first time. Interpret the Bible in its natural sense according to the rules of grammar. The meaning of a word is tied to the sentence by the rules of grammar. Look at it in its context in the Bible. Then see how the word is used elsewhere and what the Bible says about this word or topic. Other parts of the Bible can give insight because the whole Bible always agrees with whatever you are studying. The Bible will never contradict itself.

Quite often, if you look at the first time the word or idea is mentioned in the Bible, you will get a good idea of how it is used elsewhere. When God first introduces a word or concept into Scripture, He does so in such a way that it can be clearly understood, and that meaning carries on when it is used later in the Bible as well.



### c. FIGURES OF SPEECH

All forms of literature have figurative language. They add color and flavor to language, making what is said more understandable and also more enjoyable. It's like adding spices to food. The value is the same with or without the spice, but the right spices at the right time can make the food more appealing and easier to eat. God could have created a world that is without color, everything just black and white. He didn't have to create color for life to exist, but it certainly makes everything nicer and more pleasant. That is what figures of speech is to language and communication of God's truth. Often a knowledge of the culture of the times helps interprets these.

The most common figures of speech used in the Bible are:

**RHETORICAL QUESTIONS:** Questions that are asked to make a statement, not to get an answer. In Romans 6:1 Paul asks if we should keep on sinning so God's grace can be seen in forgiving us. It's not that Paul was asking this question because he didn't know the answer. He was using the question to make a statement. Paul uses 6 rhetorical questions in making his point in Romans 3:1-9. They are effective in emphasizing his point and making it clearly understood.

**PRACTICE:** In James 2:14 there are 2 questions. What are they? Was the author wanting an answer or making a statement? What is the significance of saying them this way?

**ALLEGORY:** A story to teach something spiritual from each part recorded. Pilgrim's Progress is an allegory, so is the Christian's Armor in Ephesians 6:11-17.

**PRACTICE:** Galatians 4:22-26 uses an extended allegory, a comparison of Sarah and Hagar, to illustrate the truth Paul is teaching. What are the comparisons between the two? Why do you think Paul chose to explain them this way?

**METAPHOR:** A figure based on some similarity between two objects, things or beings. One is characterized by what is true of the other. Jesus used this when He said, "I am the door..." (John 10:7-9).

**PRACTICE:** Jesus calls Herod a fox in Luke 13:32. Did He mean Herod was a small animal that walked on four legs? If not, what did He mean? Why do you think He used this way to describe Herod?

**SIMILE:** This is the smallest of the figures of speech, yet perhaps the most common. It compares two objects, showing something that is true of one is also true of the other. Usually the words “as” or “like” introduce a simile. Isaiah 53:6 says “all we like sheep have gone astray.” Sheep are ignorant, helpless and foolish. They can’t sense danger or defend themselves. They will wander off to their own destruction unless carefully watched. We are the same way without Jesus.

**PRACTICE:** Psalm 1 has a simile in verse 3 and 4. What are they? What are the similarities being taught by them? What is the simile in 1 Thessalonians 5:2? What is being compared here? What is the point being made? Also turn to Proverbs 10:26. What is being compared here? What is the point of the comparison?

**PERSONIFICATION:** Actions of people attributed to inanimate objects. “O death, where is your sting” (1 Thessalonians 15:55). “The mountains leapt for joy, the hills clapped their hands.”

**PRACTICE:** Isaiah 55:12 has 2 personifications in it. What are they? What are they picturing? What advantage is there in saying it this way?

Figures of speech make God’s truth easier to understand and remember. We all know what it means when we hear “The Lord is my Shepherd” and similar figurative language. Look for figures of speech when you study the Bible. Use them when you teach or preach it to others. They add spice and color to our communication and understanding.

**PRACTICE:** For practice look up some of the following verses: Proverbs 1:20; 12:19; Luke 13:32; 18:1-7; 1 Corinthians 4:8; Isaiah 55:9, 12; Romans 7:1-6; 3:30; Judges 12:7; Hebrews 1:14, 10:20; Deuteronomy 1:28; Galatians 1:10; 5:1; 4:14, 21-31; 1:18; 18:25; Numbers 21:6-9; Matthew 13:3-8; 24:42; 5:13; Genesis 18:25; John 3:14; 6:51-63

#### **d. TYPES**

“And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He (Jesus) explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.” (Luke 24:27) How great it would have been to have attended that Bible study! Jesus went through the whole Old Testament revealing all the things it taught about Him! I’m sure He referred to all the obvious prophecies (starting with Genesis 3:15) and teachings about the coming Messiah. However, that was only part of what the Scriptures said “concerning Himself”. Much of what He told His followers that day were what we call “types” today.

A type is a physical event, person or object in the Old Testament which communicates a spiritual truth which is fully explained in the New Testament. The physical events were real, but in addition to what they obviously were to the people in their day, they carried a picture of a spiritual truth not then fully expressed.

A type is like a shadow which you see before the person, event or object itself is seen. It is like seeing a shadow come around a corner of a building before the person making the shadow appears. Shadows are hard to identify for they are unclear, showing only rough outlines. When you see the person, then you can appreciate all the more what the shadow was.

That’s what a type is. For example, before Jesus referred to the first prophecy about Himself in Genesis (3:15), He explained about how the skins covering Adam and Eve after their sin were a picture of what He would do on the cross. Man can’t cover his sin with the works of his hands (fig leaves), only as innocent blood is shed (the animals whose skins they wore) can sin be covered. Man is helpless, he only receives the covering. But he must receive it or it won’t do him any good. This type is carried out in the whole Old Testament sacrificial system. While those using it didn’t understand all about Jesus’ work on the cross, they did know they were at the mercy of a holy God whose only provision for their sin was innocent blood being shed. This was the shadow before the event, not as clear, but certainly containing the basic truths of it all. Adam himself was called a “type” of Jesus according to Paul (Romans 5:14).

The Bible is full of types, and the richness they add to our understanding of New Testament truth is astounding. God uses types to illustrate and make alive points of doctrine the same way your pastor uses stories and illustrations in his sermons. They are like windows to let light in so you can see a subject more clearly. Jesus used Jonah (dead 3 days then back to life) as a type/illustration of what would happen to Him (Matthew 12:39).

In fact, the whole Old Testament is an acting-out of the spiritual truths in the New Testament. Man is sinful (Genesis), under the power of the world (Egypt), the flesh (themselves), and the devil (Pharaoh). Only God can deliver them, and He does so by blood (Passover) and power (Red Sea opened). They are given a new life with God's Presence with them and to guide them (Shekinah Glory in the cloud). They are to live holy, obedient lives.

When they do, there is victory and blessing, when not, there is defeat and lack of blessing. This is the story line of the Old Testament physically, and the story line of our lives spiritually. By understanding the Old Testament picture we (adults and children, too) can better see and appreciate the New Testament doctrines.

Augustine said, "In the Old the New lies hidden; in the New the Old stands revealed." We need them both for a full, clear picture. Understanding types is the key to bringing them both together. Use the following list of types. Ask God's Spirit to reveal these truths to you as you develop these wonderful truths from God.

## TYPES

**AARON:** Christ as a priest Exodus 28:1; Leviticus 8:12

**ABEL:** Christ as shepherd slain Genesis 4:2

**ACACIA WOOD:** Christ's humanity Exodus 26:15; Isaiah 53:2

**ADAM:** Christ the last/second Adam, head of new creation Romans 5:14; 1 Corinthians 15:22

**BEAUTY & BANDS:** Christ with Israel Zechariah 11:7

**BENJAMIN:** Suffering one, Victorious One Genesis 35:18, 43:34

**BIRDS:** Christ in death and resurrection Lev 14:4

Slain bird: Christ in death

Live bird, dipped in blood: Christ in resurrection

**BLOOD, SACRIFICIAL:** Innocent blood (Christ's) shed for sin to satisfy God's Holiness Leviticus 17:11

**BURNT OFFERING:** Leviticus 1:3

a. Ox: Christ as a servant

b. Sheep: Christ's surrendering to death

c. Goat: Christ as sinners substitute

d. Turtledove, Pigeon: Christ the "poor man's" sacrifice

**CITIES OF REFUGE:** Refuge from Judgment in Christ. Numbers 35:15

**COATS OF SKIN:** Christ the believers' righteousness Genesis 3:2;  
Revelation 19:8

**CORN OF THE PROMISED LAND:** Christ resurrected and glorified  
Joshua 5:11

**DAVID:** Christ as shepherd and King 1 Chronicles 17:7

**FEASTS:** Leviticus 23

a. Passover: Christ's death for sin

b. Unleavened Bread: Christ's sinless life

c. First Fruits: Christ's resurrection

d. Pentecost: Christ to send Holy Spirit, unite Jew and Gentile in himself

e. Trumpets: Jews regathered

f. Atonement: Israel turns to Christ

g. Tabernacles: Christ's Kingdom

**FINE LINEN:** Sinless life of Christ Exodus 26:1

**GATE or DOOR:** Christ as access to God for salvation

a. Ark Genesis 6:16

b. Tabernacle Exodus 27:16; John 10:7

**GOATS:** Leviticus 16:5-10

a. Goat Sacrificed: Christ's death satisfying God's Justice

b. Scape Goat: Christ taking our sin Hebrews 9:26

**ISAAC** Genesis 21:3; 22:9; 24:1

a. Miraculous birth as God promised

b. Obedience unto death

c. Resurrection in type Hebrews 11:19

d. Bridegroom of the called-out Bride

**JONAH:** Christ to die, and rise after 3 days Matthew 12:39

**JOSEPH:** One of the most nearly perfect types

- a. Special object of Father's love Genesis 37:3; Matthew 3:17
- b. Hated by brethren Genesis 37:4; John 15:25
- c. Superior claims rejected Genesis 27:8; Matthew 21:37-39
- d. Brethren conspired to slay Genesis 37:18; Matthew 26:3-4
- e. Slain by brethren Genesis 37:24; Matthew 27:35-37
- f. Blessing among Gentiles, obtained a Gentile Bride Genesis 41:4-41; Acts 15:14; Ephesians 5:25-32
- g. Reconciled brethren to self & then exalted them Genesis 45:15; Deuteronomy 30:1-10; Romans 11:1,15, 25-26

**JOSHUA:** Hebrew equivalent of Greek "Jesus", captain of our salvation Hebrews 2:10-11

**KINSMAN-REDEEMER:** Ruth

- a. Was a person & an inheritance Leviticus 25:25;48; Galatians 4:5
- b. Must be a kinsman Leviticus 25:48-9; Ruth 3:12-13; Galatians 4:4; Hebrews 2:14
- c. Must be able to redeem Ruth 4:4-6; John 10:11,18
- d. Must pay the just demand in full Leviticus 25:27; Galatians 13:13

**LIGHT:** Christ the Light of the world Genesis 1:10; 1 John 1:5

**MANNA:** Christ as the Bread of Life Exodus 16:35; Joshua 5:11; John 6

**MEAL OFFERING:** Christ in His perfect humanity tested by suffering Leviticus 2:1

**MELCHIZEDEK:** Christ as King - Priest Genesis 14:18; Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 6:20; 7:23-24

**MOSES:** Christ our Deliverer and Prophet Exodus 2:2

**NAZARITE:** Christ separated wholly unto God Numbers 6:1

**PEACE OFFERING:** Lev 3:1; Colossians 1:20; Ephesians 32:14,17

**PRESERVATION IN ARK:** Christ cares for believers 2 Peter 2:5,7,9

**PRIESTHOOD:** Believers' priesthood in Christ

**RAM:** Christ our substitute Genesis 22:29; Leviticus 16:3; Hebrews 10:5-10

**RED HEIFER:** Sacrifice of Christ is the ground of the believer & cleansing Numbers 19:2; 1 John 1:7,9

**ROCK:** Christ smitten to make possible the outpouring of the Holy Spirit Exodus 19:6; Numbers 20:8; 1 Corinthians 10:4; 1 Peter 2:8; Matthew 21:44

**ROD OF AARON:** Christ in resurrection Numbers 17:8

**SERPENT OF BRASS:** Christ made sin for us Numbers 21:9; Jn 3:14

**SIN OFFERING:** Christ in our place Leviticus 4; 2 Corinthians 5:21

**SWEET SAVOR OFFERING:** Christ in His perfection offering his merit for us Leviticus 1:9; 2 Corinthians 5:21

**TABERNACLE:** Exodus 25:9

- a. Brazen Altar; Atonement through sacrifice Exodus 27:1
- b. Brazen Laver; Spiritual renewal (through the Holy Spirit); Christ's cleansing from defilement Exodus 30:18; John 13:2-10; Ephesians 5:25; 1 John 1:9
- c. Table of Showbread; Christ the Bread of Life Exodus 25:30
- d. Candle Stand; Christ the Light Exodus 25:31
- e. Altar of Incense; Christ our intercessor Leviticus 30:1; John 17; Hebrews 7:25; 13:15; We must pray in His name. John 14; Revelation 5:8
- f. Ark of the Covenant; Access through the Covenant Relationship (our access through Christ as our Covenant) Exodus 25:10
- g. Mercy Seat; Acceptance by God (through Christ) Romans 3:25

**TRESPASS OFFERING:** Christ atoning for the injury of sin Leviticus 5:6, 7:1-7; Psalm 51:4

**TURTLEDOVE:** Christ innocent Hebrews 7; Leviticus 1:3,14

**VEIL OF TABERNACLE:** Christ's human nature perfect, broken in death for us Exodus 26:31; Matthew 26:26,27:50; Hebrews 10:20

**PRACTICE:** Read John 3:15-16. What is the comparison you see there? It is a simile ("as", but it is also a type. What is the type? What does the serpent in the wilderness show about Jesus? (If you aren't familiar with the story read Numbers 21)

## e. NUMBERS

The study of numbers and their meaning can be a very fascinating study when done right. Usually people go to extremes. Some totally ignore the symbolic meaning of numbers in the Bible, and others read symbolic meanings into every number with strange results. Of course, we need balance. We need to look at the numbers as the original readers would have interpreted them.

The most common use of numbers in the Bible is to denote a specific quantity (like in the book of Numbers), but many times they are

used to convey spiritual truths (like in the book of Revelation). In Old Testament times, using numbers symbolically was a common literary device of scribes in Babylon, Egypt and other places. Examples start in the time of Hammurabi and appear in most cultures in nearly every generation.

Actually the study of numbers is only a part of the larger study of symbolism in the Bible. We are all familiar with the use of light (for God) and darkness (for Satan and evil), of blood (forgiveness of sin), and of the cross (the whole work of redemption). We use colors to teach spiritual truth (black for sin; red for blood; yellow for glory; etc.), too.

These symbols, like types (see above) usually have a literal as well as figurative meaning at the same time. The same is true of numbers. Usually numbers do not lose their numeric value when they become symbolic, they actually combine the two.

Below is a summary of what numbers can symbolically refer to in the Bible:

1 = UNITY One symbolizes the unity of God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Zechariah 14:9; Mark 12:32; John 10:30). It shows God is one, and is sufficient in Himself. In Ephesians 4:4-6 there are 7 distinct unities.

2 = UNION Two can be a figure both of unity and of division. Man and woman form the basic family unit (Genesis 1:27; 2:20-24). Animals associate in pairs and enter the ark in twos (Genesis 7:9). Two people often work together in companionship, for example Joshua's spies (Joshua 2:1) and the Twelve and Seventy disciples were sent out in pairs (Mark 6:7; Luke 10:1).

In addition, at Sinai there were 2 stone tablets and animals were often offered for sacrifice in pairs. 2 witnesses were necessary for a fair trial and 2 witnesses will testify during the tribulation (Revelation 11:3).

3 = DIVINITY Three is called the divine number because it is mentioned so often in connection with holy things. It speaks of the Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit). The third day stood for completeness (Exodus 19:11; Hosea 6:2; Luke 13:32; John 1:17; Matthew 12:40; 1 Corinthians 15:4). Jesus had three disciples in the inner group (Mark 9:2; Matthew 26:37). There were three great feasts. There is the three-



fold temptation of Jesus, and three occurrences of each; Peter's denial of Jesus, Jesus' question ("Do you love me?") and charge to Peter, and Peter's vision of the sheet. Of course, Jesus was raised on the third day. God is in the third heaven.

4 = EARTHLY COMPLETENESS Four, the number of the sides of a square, is one of the symbols of completion in the Bible. There are four seasons, points of the compass, quarters of the moon, elements (earth, air, water, fire), world powers (Daniel 2:7), and Gospels. The divine name YHWH has four letters in Hebrew (YHWH). Four living creatures symbolize God (Ezekiel 1; Revelation 4:6). There were four rivers flowing out of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:10).

Forty is four intensified by ten, the number signifying a period of testing. This earth is a place of testing and trials, and 40 stands for that. (4-completeness) x (10-testing) = 40. During the flood, rain fell for forty days and nights. Moses was on probation forty years in Egypt, forty years in Midian, and forty years with the Jews in the wilderness. He spent forty days on Mt. Sinai while receiving the Law. The spies were in the land forty days. Israel wandered forty years. Saul, David and Solomon all reigned forty years. Goliath defied Israel forty days. Nineveh had forty days before destruction. Elijah fasted 40 days. Jesus fasted forty days in the wilderness. He ascended forty days after His resurrection. Punishment was forty stripes (minus one).

400 is 4 intensified even more,  $4 \times 10 \times 10$ . It, too, stands for complete earthly testing. The Jews were in Egypt 400 years and there are 400 silent years from Malachi to Christ.

5 = DIVISION Five is not used often in Scripture. There were five wise and five foolish virgins (a total of ten), Jesus fed the multitude of 5,000 with five loaves. David took five stones when he met Goliath. There are five senses and five books of Moses (Genesis - Deuteronomy).

6 = MAN (FAILURE) The number six is closely associated with man. God created the world in six days and man on the sixth day. Man was to work six days of the week. A servant had to serve for six years to be freed. The land was to be worked six years and then rest one. For six days the Jews walked around Jericho once each day. There were to be six steps to Solomon's throne (1 Kings 10:19). Nebuchadnezzar's statue, a type of those who want to deify man, was sixty cubits by six cubits. Six falls one short of God's number of perfection - seven, as does man.

Three 6's make up the number of the beast in Revelation, 666 (Revelation 13:13-18). Also, it can be written as  $(6 \times 10 \times 10) + (6 \times 10) + (6 \times 1)$ , pointing to the intensity of evil he embodies. This is man's number intensified greatly. It refers to all that man is at his worst (short of God).

7 = SACRED PERFECTION Seven has an eminent place among sacred numbers in the Scriptures and is associated with completion, fulfillment and perfection. It is made up of the sum of  $3 + 4$ , the divine number and the world number. It is used more often in the Bible than any other number. God rested on the seventh day and sanctified it. This gave the pattern for the Jewish Sabbath and sabbatical year. The year of Jubilee followed seven sabbatical years ( $7 \times 7$ ). There were seven days of grace after Noah entered the ark. There were seven years of plenty and seven of famine in Egypt. Jericho's walls fell on the seventh day after the Israelites walked around the city seven times. Seven is used often in the Jewish feasts and sacrifices.

There are seven feasts, and seven branches of the lampstand. Aaron and his sons stayed seven days within the Tabernacle during their consecration as priests. Naaman washed seven times in the Jordan. Jesus spoke seven times on the cross. Revelation is full of the number 7. The book is clearly divided into seven sections, each with seven things in it (seven each of churches, bowl judgments, seal judgments, trumpet judgments, etc.). The tribulation will be seven years long. Israel's history from Daniel's time to the Millennium consists of 70 ( $7 \times 10$ ), seven-year periods.  $3 \frac{1}{2}$  is a division of 7 and shows incomplete perfection. 14, 49, 70 are all multiples of 7. Pentecost was after 49 days after Passover and the Year of Jubilee was after 49 years. Jesus sent out 70 disciples.

8 = NEW BEGINNING The 8th day is the beginning of a new week. Jesus rose on the first, or eighth day. Eight people were saved in the ark. Jews were circumcised on the eighth day.

David was the eighth son of Jesse. Eight fit in often with the feasts and sacrifices of Israel, too.

10 = HUMAN COMPLETENESS Man has ten digits on his hands and feet. Ten stood for completeness in man. There were ten Commandments given man, ten virgins in the parable, ten plagues in Egypt, etc. 10 also represents times of testing: ten days from Rosh Hoshanna to Yom Kippur, ten days from the Ascension of Jesus to the day of Pentecost.

1000 10 x 10 x 10, intensifying 10. This is the length of the Millennium.

12 = ETERNAL ELECTION This is the product of 3 (divine number) and 4 (world number). The Hebrew year was divided into twelve months, the day into two periods of twelve hours each.

Israel had twelve sons, and there were twelve tribes as well as twelve apostles. Jesus visited the temple when He was twelve years old. 144 is 12 x 12, and is used in Revelation as the number of Jewish evangelists during the tribulation (144,000) as well as the size of the wall of the New Jerusalem.

**PRACTICE:** Read the following passages. Are the numbers literal, figurative or both? What is the figurative meaning of each number? How does that add to understanding what the verse is talking about?

Genesis 2:2

Genesis 7:2

Genesis 7:4

Exodus 8:27

Exodus 20:1-17

## 6. OTHER RESOURCES

Throughout the years many gifted Bible scholars have written books and created web sites that can be a great help in studying the Bible. If you are able to use some of these they can save you time and help your results. It takes some time and work to learn how to use them just right, as it does with any tool a person learns to use. Don't let them become a substitute for Bible study as you have been learning it. Still do your observation and interpretation. Chew your own food! You can use these to help your own study, not replace it.

Books to help with your Bible study can include a study Bible with footnotes and cross references. Some even have a small concordance in the back. A large concordance can help you find other places in the Bible where a certain word is used. You can use an atlas of maps, a time line or books about Bible customs, geography or history. I've tried

to include as much of this as I can into the book "Bible Overview" by Jerry Schmoyer.

If you can use a computer and go online to find information that is a great resource as well. My web site at India. **[ChristianTraining Organization.org](#)** has all my books as well as hundreds of articles and sermons designed to help pastors study and learn the **[www.BibleGateway.com](#)** You can find any word or verse in the Bible. It has many other helpful features for Bible study as well. So does **[http://www.e-sword.net/.In](#)** addition to the Bible, there are many reference books and features to use. Books by many famous Christian writers are also available. Another site with commentaries, Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias, concordances, Hebrew and Greek lexicons and Bible study helps is **[www.BibleStudyTools.com](#)**. John MacArthur has a web site where you can study the Bible one verse at a time as well as see all his sermons at **[www.gty.org](#)**. One of my favorite sites to use has information on every book and verse in the Bible. It is by Dr. Tom Constable, a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary. The site is **[http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm](#)**.

Additional sites which have sermons and illustrations are  
**[www.sermoncentral.com/](#)**  
**[http://www.learnthebible.org/online\\_sermons.htm](#)**  
**[http://sermonseedbed.com/](#)**  
**[http://www.churchleaderinsights.com/aw/free\\_sermons.php](#)**  
**[http://www.sermonsearch.com/](#)**  
**[http://www.sermonaudio.com/main.asp](#)**

All these sites are free and are true to God's Word. All you need is a connection to the Internet. Remember, you don't start your study with these resources, but when you have done what has been outlined so far in this book and come to this point they can be very useful.

## **7. DEEPER STUDIES**

One of the most enjoyable as well as profitable parts of Bible study is learning to do word studies, topical studies and character studies. However, it is much easier to do these if you have access to a

concordance, a book which lists every word in the Bible alphabetically along with showing its location. In it any word can be looked up and you can clearly see every place in the Bible where it is used. Access to a concordance, either on paper or the internet, is very helpful to doing the following.

### **a. WORD STUDIES**

When you come upon a key word, a hard or confusing word, or just a very interesting word, it can be very useful to do a word study on it. First, go through the general principles of interpretation (normal sense, use in sentence, use in context, purpose of writer, etc.). Do this carefully and thoroughly. Like in anything else, your final product is only as good as what you put into it.

To do a complete study, though, you need to go beyond this. How much you can do here depends on what reference tools you have. If you have a concordance like Strong's or Young's Concordances of the Bible, that will give helpful information about the word, its root, and where it is use. Another helpful book is Vines' Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words. Some commentaries do a good job of explaining words (like John MacArthur), although use of commentaries can become a crutch that can undermine your Bible study. Don't become too dependent on them.

You don't have to know Hebrew or Greek if you have a good concordance. You can look up any word in the Bible and you will see every use of it in the Bible. You can look at the first use, a very important key to what the word means in the rest of the Bible. You can see how it is used in a particular book in the Bible or by various authors.

1. The first step in doing a word study is to write down or type all the Bible references which contain the word you are studying.

Here is an example. Psalm 1 says the godly man delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on it day and night (Psalm 1:2). Evidently meditating on the Word is key to following God, but what exactly does that mean? When you look in a concordance you see that the word "meditate" is in the Bible 14 times: Genesis 24:63; Joshua 1:8; Psalms

1:2; 63:6; 77:12; 119:15, 23, 48, 78, 148; 143:5; Isaiah 33:18, Luke 21:14; 1 Timothy 4:15.

2. The second step is to write a summary of how the word is used in each verse. Then look up each word and write or type a summary of what the verses says about the word you are studying behind it. You may have to look at verses before and after the one to get a good picture of it – context is always important.

Genesis 24:63 – Isaac meditating in the fields before meeting his new wife.  
Joshua 1:8 – meditate on Bible day and night so obey God  
Psalms 1:2 – delight & meditate on the law of the Lord  
Psalms 63:6 – meditating on God when awake at night  
Psalm 77:12 – meditate on God’s works  
Psalm 119:15 – meditate and respect Gods principles  
Psalm 119:23 – meditate on God’s statutes  
Psalm 119:48 – love & meditate on God’s commandments  
Psalm 119:78 – focus on God’s precepts, not on self pride  
Psalm 119:148 – meditate on God’s word at night  
Psalm 143:5 – remember and think about all god’s works  
Isaiah 33:18 – meditating on fear and terror  
Luke 21:14 – meditating before answering  
1 Timothy 4:15 – meditate upon what Paul wrote so will completely follow them

3. Group the verses that say the same thing together and label them. . Group together the information into topics related to your word. Finally you write a summary of what all the verses together say MEDITATE in general

Genesis 24:63 – Isaac meditating in the fields before meeting his new wife.

Luke 21:14 – meditating before answering

MEDITATE ON GOD’S WRITTEN WORD

Joshua 1:8 – meditate on Bible day and night so obey God

Psalms 1:2 – delight & meditate on the law of the Lord

Psalm 119:15 – meditate and respect Gods principles

Psalm 119:23 – meditate on God’s statutes

Psalm 119:48 – love & meditate on God's commandments

Psalm 119:78 – focus on God's precepts, not on self pride

Psalm 119:148 – meditate on God's word at night

1 Timothy 4:15 – meditate upon what Paul wrote so will completely follow them

#### MEDITATE ON GOD'S WORKS

Psalm 77:12 – meditate on God's works

Psalm 143:5 – remember and think about all God's works

#### MEDITATE ON GOD HIMSELF

Psalms 63:6 – meditating on God when awake at night

#### BENEFITS OF MEDITATING ON GOD AND HIS WORD

Joshua 1:8 – results in being able to obey God's Word and live a godly life

1 Timothy 4:15 – results in others seeing you become more Christ like in life

#### MEDITATE ON UNGODLY THINGS

Isaiah 33:18 – meditating on fear and terror

4. From what you have discovered define the word you are studying. You can look in a dictionary or elsewhere for help.

Meditate = "To think, contemplate, ponder or consider. To focus your mind deeply and carefully on something."

5. Write a summary sentence or paragraph defining the word.

For example: to meditate in the Bible means think deeply, to focus your mind carefully on something. It can be general thinking about what is going on in life (Genesis 24:63) or even ungodly things like fear and terror (Isaiah 33:18). But it is usually used of focusing on God's Word (Joshua 1:8; Psalms 1:2; 119:15, 23, 48, 78, 148; 1 Timothy 4:15) and God's works (Psalm 77:12; 143:5). Doing this results in obeying God's Word and living a godly life (Joshua 1:8; 1 Timothy 4:15).

You can use the results of a study like this for your own devotions as you think and pray about it, you can apply it to your life as you learn to meditate on God's Word, or you can use it for a Bible study or sermon on meditating. There is much good information in God's Word about this concept and this is a good way to find it, study it, package it and apply it.

**PRACTICE:** The word “ungodly” is used 4 times in Psalm 1, verses 1, 4, 5 and 6. It is important to understand. It is also used in the following verses: Job 16:11; Psalm 3:7; 18:4; 73:12; Proverbs 16:27; 19:28; Romans 4:5; 5:6; 1 Timothy 1:9; 1 Peter 4:18. Notice that Psalm 1:5 and 6 uses a different word to describe this person, “wicked.” That can help you understand the word “ungodly” as well.

First see how the word is used in each of the references above, then define it and group the verses that talk about similar things. Then write a summary paragraph. This will be a good study you can use in a Bible study or sermon some day.

**HOW TO USE STRONG’S EXHAUSTIVE CONCORDANCE OF THE BIBLE:** If you are able to obtain a copy of this book, it would be very helpful for your Bible study. Remember that this book uses the King James Version for the translation of the words. Suppose you are studying a passage like Proverbs 10 and see the word “sin” in verse 19 and want to know just what it means. There are several words for sin and each has a different look at sin. They are all correct; they just show different aspects of it. To learn more about this verse, look up the word “sin” in Strong’s Concordance. You will see the word and a list of the phrases in the Bible in which it is found. References are given as well. There is a number for each which identifies it as a certain Greek or Hebrew word. You can look up these numbers in the back of the book to see which other ways these words were translated. You can also find the root word there.

So suppose you look up “sin” in Proverbs 10:19 and see the number is 6588. Turning to the back of the book, you see this refers to the Hebrew word ‘pasha’ and means “a revolt (national, moral or religious), a rebellion, sin, transgression, trespass.” You can see if it is translated as another word other than ‘sin.’ You also can see there that it is from 6586, ‘pasha,’ which means “to break away (from just authority), trespass, apostatize, quarrel – offend, rebel, revolt, trespass.”

By looking at the verses where this word is used, you can find various translations for it and how different authors used it. As you practice using this valuable resource, you will get better and better at



finding important information about Bible words. This is the first book you should get after a Bible. These two, a Bible and concordance, are enough to do much good Bible study.

### **b. TOPICAL STUDIES**

A topical study is similar to a word study, but more is included. It could be just one word, or it could be several words or phrases that are studied. Follow the same steps as above.

1. First you write or type all the Bible references you want to consider. A concordance can help with this, but sometimes the subject has various words and phrases so there is no one word to look up. Suppose you wanted to do a study about the greatness of God. You could look up words like "sovereign" and "great" but you would find them used about other people as well. There are verses about God being in control, about His being Creator and about His love and care for His people. It is too broad a subject to just look up words. In this case you need a topical index or cross-references in your Bible. These can be books you buy or a web site on the internet that has them. Many of the web sites I listed earlier can be of great help. Naves Topical Index is a good book to use, so is the Thompson Bible, and the back of Strong's Concordance is excellent, too.

2. Next, you write a summary of what each passage says about the topic you are studying.

3. Then you group the verses into groups of those with similar meanings.

4. You then try to define the topic you are considering so that it is easily understood.

5. Last, you write a summary sentence or paragraph about what you have learned.

**PRACTICE:** Try doing a topical study on faith in the book of Galatians, for Paul has a lot of important truths to share there. First of all, you'd list all the verses in Galatians that refer to faith: 1:23; 2:7, 16, 20; 3:2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 14, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26; 5:5, 6, 22; 6:10. Follow the steps above by summarizing each reference, grouping the verses, defining 'faith' and then writing a summary statement about what 'faith' in Galatians means.

### **c. CHARACTER STUDIES**

A character study is done the same way a topical study is done, except it is about a person instead of a concept. It's my favorite type of Bible study because I learn so much from the lives of others. That makes it easy to teach to others in a Bible study or sermon as well.

1. . Collect all the references you can about the person. If they are only referred to in one place this part is easy. If they are mentioned in various places in the Bible, you need to compile a list of all references. Look up the name of the person in a Bible concordance. Using cross-references is a more round-about way of things but may be helpful if you don't have a concordance. (Actually, if you don't have a concordance, you should get one - Strong's or Young's.)

2. Next, you write a summary of what each passage says about the person you are studying.

3. Then you group the verses by similar things they say about the person. I put them in chronological order so I can progress through the life of the person while teaching about them.

4. You then try to describe the person you are studying – tell what he or she is like. Make them come alive.

5. Last, you write a summary sentence or paragraph about what you have learned about them and from them.

**PRACTICE:** Let's look at Mark for a practice study. He is an important, but often ignored, Bible person. Gather a list of all the places where he is mentioned. You will find he is mentioned in Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37, 39; Colossians 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24 and 1 Peter 5:13. First write what is said about him in each of the references above, then put all that happened in chronological order and group the verses that talk about similar things. Then write a summary paragraph. This will be a good study you can use in a Bible study or sermon some day.

You have now gone through step 1, observation, and step 2, interpretation. Remember, you continue to observe even while interpreting. You keep writing down questions all the way through. You are never done observing, even when you start applying. Keep working on your outline and refining it as well. Likewise you are never done

interpreting, for you will be doing that as new questions come up during the time you are applying things.

It's very, very important to remember that the Bible is written FOR us but not TO us. It was written to people thousands of years ago in a very different culture and time. So to understand it, we must interpret it as it would have been by those who first heard the words. It was written to them, so we must discover what it meant to them. Only when that has happened can we apply it to us today. Do not misunderstand this or your application will be incorrect.

If you find a very old letter stuck inside an old book you would need to find when it was written and to whom (what culture they lived in). If it was written to a little girl in China 600 years ago or a scientist in Australia last year makes a great difference in understanding what it says and therefore how it applies.

## **STEP 3 - APPLICATION**

Application is the final step in Bible study. After the living food of God's Word is chewed (observation) and digested (interpretation) it is then sent to various parts of the body that need it. Some vitamins, minerals, calories or whatever go to the muscles, others to the bones, still others to whatever organ is in need of it. So it is with God's Word. The purpose of studying and learning it is to apply it to areas of your life where needed.

The digestion and application of food, as well as Bible truth, is a gradual but continual process. How much you get out of it depends on how well you chewed and digested it. You can't swallow food whole and expect it to do your body much good. Unfortunately, many people try to do that in their Bible study. They read a passage and then think about how it applies to them. They don't come up with much, for they have neglected the first two steps. Much of what happens after swallowing is out of your hands. Your body does it. Much of how the Bible is applied is out of your hands, too. Only God's Spirit can really make it work in your life. We must be willing to submit to what God teaches us.

Thus application is very, very important - in its proper order. It is the culmination of the first two steps. From it comes spiritual health and strength - the goal of all eating. Application asks and answers the questions: "How should I respond?", "What should I do with what I've learned?" During the observation and interpretation stages of Bible study, you study the Word of God; in application, the Word of God studies you! In the application process you look for principles, suggestions, commands, etc., that can affect your behavior and make you more like Jesus.

Think again about going to a doctor when you are ill. If he never observes or interprets, but just immediately gives you medicine, you will wonder if it is the right thing for he hasn't studied you. He is just guessing. That is what happens when we read a passage one time and then think about what it is saying to us.

By the same token, though, if the doctor just studies you and never comes up with a remedy, that would be wrong as well. The reason you go is for a good change in your life. We study the Bible so it, too, will make a good change in our lives. To learn the details about the Bible but not apply them to our life is not good, either. We need to observe, interpret and then apply.

## **1. DEVELOPING GOOD APPLICATIONS**

Never forget that there is always only one interpretation of a passage. It is what the original writer was saying to the first recipients. A passage can only ever mean one thing, never something to one person but something else to another person. It's meaning is what the writer was conveying to his readers. That's why knowing his main idea is so important. However, there are many applications of a passage.

For example, a passage's interpretation could be that God is in sovereign control of everything. That is the interpretation, the only interpretation. But the application can be different for each person. For one, it can bring comfort knowing that what they are facing is under God's control. For another, it can mean they can trust God for the health problems they are facing. Or it could bring peace to a person who worries about what will happen when they get old. It can reassure a

parent that their children are under God's care when they leave home. It can bring strength to a church that is being persecuted. There is only one interpretation, but there can be hundreds of different ways that truth can be applied. That's why it's so important to get the correct, accurate interpretation before trying to apply a passage.

To be an accurate application, it must be true to your interpretation. It can't be forced or made up. It can't be in another passage but not the one you are applying. It must be something with which the original writer would completely agree.

Also, it must agree with the rest of the Bible. It cannot contradict any other Bible passages. The Bible never contradicts itself.

Finally, it must be specific and measurable. It cannot be shallow and general, such as "be a good person." That is too vague and general. What does it mean to "be a good person" anyway? It should be something like, "Be more patient with my mate when they are impatient with me."

This is another reason why you must pray every time you study God's Word, and keep an attitude of prayer throughout. Not only does His Spirit give you insight into interpretation and meaning, He also gives insight into application. Ask God for wisdom – He promises to give it to you (James 1:5; John 14:26). Learn to listen to His Spirit as He speaks to you.

One of the benefits of being a farmer is that he gets to enjoy the fruit of his labor before anyone else. So it is with those who study the Bible (2 Timothy 2:6). Listen to what God is teaching you through the passage. This is your application. If you are teaching or preaching the passage to others, this is a good application to start out with. If God is making it real to you, then He will do so to others as well.

**PRACTICE:** As you have worked with Psalm 1, what has God been showing you from this Psalm that applies to your own life? As you worked with Mark 5:1-13, what from this passage stands out to you personally? What is His Spirit showing you that applies to you?

## 2. TYPES OF APPLICATIONS

A good way to come up with practical applications is to brainstorm them. Write down as many as you can think of. Don't analyze them, discard them as unworthy, or go into too much detail about them. Just write down all you can think of. In the start, with observation, you wrote down every question you could think of without answering them. Now you write down all the ways this passage can apply. Later you will weed through them to see which are most applicable at the moment.

To help give you an idea of what to look for in an application, you can ask yourself the following questions. Don't expect to find something from each one in every passage, for seldom does a passage have all of these.

Is there a command to obey? If so, what? How does it apply to me today?

Is there an example to follow? If so, what? How does it apply to me today?

Is there a challenge to heed? If so, what? How does it apply to me today?

Is there a sin to avoid? If so, what? How does it apply to me today?

Is there a teaching to learn? If so, what? How does it apply to me today?

Is there an action to take? If so, what? How does it apply to me today?

Is there something to pray about? If so, what? How does it apply to me today?

Is there a promise to claim? If so, what? How does it apply to me today?

**PRACTICE:** Use Psalm 1 and carefully go through the passage, seeing which of the questions above apply. Write as many applications as you can from the passage. Now do the same thing with Mark 5:1-13.

## 3. LEARNING TO OBEY

One problem Christians continually face is that of having more abstract knowledge of God than concrete experience with Him. Obedience is the objective of Bible study, and the best student is the one who regularly applies the principles of Scripture to his or her daily life. If we constantly fail to apply the Bible to our lives, God may turn off the flow of insight. Why should He instruct those who don't want to obey? Will He continue to reveal deep truths to those who reject them?

The better you know your own strengths and weaknesses, the more sensitive you'll be to Scriptures that speak to your own areas of

need. Then, as you study the Bible, you'll find yourself saying, "Yes, I do seem to have a problem with \_\_\_\_." If not, you'll find yourself always applying what you study to others, thinking of who could use this passage, and not applying it to yourself. Are you aware of what your strong and weak areas are? It would be good, in your Bible study notes, to keep a list. This is your own private list. Add to it as you discover more about yourself. If you have never done this before please do it now!

Make sure God's Word changes you before you try to use it to change others! Just as you must pray before starting to study the Bible, and pray all the way throughout, so, too, you must pray when you are done. Thank God for His Word and what He has shown you. Ask Him to keep on revealing His truths to you. Pray you would remember and apply what He has been showing you.

**PRACTICE:** Write down something God has been teaching you personally from Psalm 1 or Mark 5:1-13. What do you need to start doing (or stop doing) to obey it?

#### **4. MEMORIZE THE WORD**

One more important part of Bible application is to remember the importance of memorizing Scripture. That is a discipline we all should always be doing. Putting it in our hearts keeps us from sinning against God (Psalm 119:11). As you memorize a verse, you are actually meditating on it, and we saw the importance of meditating on God's Word in Psalm 1. Then, when they are in your heart, God's Spirit can bring them to mind when you need them to help you face life or temptation, as well as to share with others in need. God wants us to know His Word. It is the one thing we learn in this life that will last with us for all eternity. What you memorize now will be part of you forever. So as you study a passage, if a verse stands out to you and speaks to you, write it on another piece of paper and memorize it. It takes some work and effort, but is worth it.

Here are some good verses that every believer should have memorized: John 3:16; 15:7; 16:24; Philippians 4:6; Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 John 1:9; 5:11-12; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Proverbs 3:5-6; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 12:1 and Psalm 119:11.

**PRACTICE:** Are there any verses in Psalm 1 or Mark 5:1-13 that stand out to you? Any special truths or promises you want to make sure you remember? Think of which verse or verses would be good for you to memorize. Write them on a paper and learn them by heart.

## **CONCLUSION**

If you've read this far in this book, you've learned how to get more out of your Bible study. However, it won't do you any good unless you put it into practice. Any skill you learn takes time and practice. A child learning to walk will fall down many times, but he gets up and keeps going. Learning to drive a car or use a computer are difficult at first, but if one perseveres it becomes much easier. You can't learn to drive a car or use a computer just by reading about how to do it, you must practice. The same is true of Bible study. The only difference is that Bible study is much more rewarding and necessary, and the results last forever!

Satan does not want you studying God's Word, for he knows the power it has for victory in your life, so he will do anything he can to make it difficult for you. There will be interruptions, your mind will wander, you'll think of other things that need to be done – anything to keep you from God's word. That shows how important it is for you to feed on it. Your body needs food to be healthy and function correctly, and your soul/spirit need spiritual food from God's Word to be healthy spiritually (1 Corinthians 3:1-3; 1 Peter 2:2-3).

***1 Peter 2:2-3 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.***

Not that you have completed this book, you can use "How to Preach God's Word" by Jerry Schmoyer to learn how to turn what you have discovered into a Bible study or sermon.

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