



UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

Why you think it is important for a Christian to learn to study the Bible correctly?

2 Timothy 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

1. The Bible has been a source of comfort and inspiration to mankind for more than 2,500 years. It is without question the most amazing book in the world!
2. No individual or group planned to write the Bible. It was written in different lands over a period of some 1,500 years, by more than 40 authors from all walks of life: Prophets, kings, shepherds, farmers, tentmakers, physician, fishermen, philosophers, and a tax collector. These authors lived hundreds of miles apart, and some of their lives were separated by centuries. Most never saw each other at all. Yet, the Bible has a close-fitting unity, as if one author wrote it, which is indeed the case.

2 Peter 1:19-21 And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

3. The Bible is the unfolding development of the Kingdom of God. It is the story of how the Sovereign LORD acted in human history to establish His Kingdom to save man and glorify Himself.
4. The Bible has been translated into more than 1,100 languages and dialects while the works of Shakespeare, who was probably the greatest author of secular literature, have been translated into less than 50 languages. Although the Bible originated in the Middle East, it has transcended all national and ethnic boundaries and is accepted by people around the world!
5. **The Bible's central Character is Jesus Christ!**

Although the main focus of the Bible is on the Kingdom of God, Jesus Christ is the Center of that activity. He is the Redeemer promised to Adam and Eve who will defeat Satan and bring salvation to all who put their trust in Him. (Genesis 3:15; John 3:3)

John 5:39 *You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.*

Luke 24:27 (On the road to Emmaus after His resurrection) *And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded (explained) to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.*

Reflection

1. How have you approached Biblical interpretation in the past?
2. Do you think the doctrines (teachings) you have been taught about the Bible regarding such topics as water baptism, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, predestination, women in leadership, or the second coming of Christ influence the way you interpret certain passages of the Bible? Describe one area you have had to “re-adjust” your interpretation.
3. In what ways do you think our “scientific attitude” that looks primarily at cause and effect might influence how we read the following parts of the Bible: The feeding of the five thousand in Matthew 13:14-21? John’s picture of the Holy City in Revelation 21:1-4, 10-27?
4. What is a result of Christians practicing “selective literalism?” (Deciding what is and is not literal)

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WORD OF GOD

1. The Bible is food for the soul. (Deuteronomy 8:3; Job 23:12; Psalm 119:103; 1 Peter 2:2-3)
2. The Bible has power to change us. (Romans 1:16)
3. The Bible is a mirror. (James 1:23-24)
4. The Bible is a discerner of the motives of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)
5. The Bible is a life-producing seed. (1 Peter 1:23; Luke 8:5-15; James 1:8)
6. The Bible is water with the power to purify. (Psalm 119:9; Ephesians 5:26)
7. The Bible is a light to guide us. (Psalm 119:30, 105; Proverbs 6:23; 2 Peter 1:19)
8. The Bible is a consuming fire. (Psalm 39:3; Jeremiah 20:9; Luke 24:32)
9. The Bible is like a hammer. (Jeremiah 23:29)
10. The Bible is a sword. (Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12)
11. The Bible teaches us and gives us hope. (Romans 15:4)
12. The Bible is absolutely trustworthy and eternal. (1 Kings 8:56; Psalm 93:5; Luke 21:32-33)

THE CENTER OF THE BIBLE

1. What is the shortest chapter in the Bible? Answer: Psalms 117.
2. What is the longest chapter in the Bible? Answer: Psalms 119.
3. Which chapter is in the center of the Bible? Answer: Psalms 118.
4. There are 594 chapters before Psalms 118.
5. There are 594 chapters after Psalms 118.
6. Add these numbers together and you get 1188.
7. What is the center verse in the Bible? Answer: Psalms 118:8 *It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man.*

THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

The Bible is divided into two main sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word Testament means Covenant. The difference between the two Testaments is that the Old Testament is the record of God's dealing with people under the Law, and the New Testament is the record of God's dealing with people under Grace, through the Church, His Body..

The 39 books in the Old Testament

1. **Pentateuch** - *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*
The first five books of the Old Testament describe the beginning of the world and the beginning of the Jewish nation. The Jewish people call these books the Law. Moses is considered their author.
2. **History** - *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*
This group of twelve books tells the history of Israel from the time the nation entered the Promised Land until about 400 B.C. These books also deal with the destruction, captivity and restoration of Israel.
3. **Poetry** - *Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*
The poetic books of the Old Testament have much to say about the problem of suffering, the need for praise, and how to live daily in relation with God.
4. **Major Prophets** - *Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel*
In this context, "major" refers to the length of the books, not necessarily to their importance. Through the major prophets, God warned Israel that he would judge her if she did not turn from sin and worship and obey the Lord. These prophets lived from about 740 to 540 B.C.
5. **Minor Prophets** - *Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*
The "minor" prophets are twelve prophets who wrote from about 800 to 400 B.C. during three periods: the period of Assyria's power (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah), the period of

Assyria's decline (Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah), and the post-exilic era (Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi). These writings are grouped together and referred to as "minor" because they are shorter than those of the major prophets, not because they are of minor importance.

The 27 books in the New Testament

6. **Gospels** - *Matthew, Mark, Luke, John*

The first four books of the New Testament recount the life of Christ--His ministry, death, and resurrection. Each gospel depicts Jesus' life and ministry from a particular viewpoint, for a particular audience, and for a particular purpose. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the Synoptic Gospels ("seen together"), because many of the same events and teachings appear in all three. John often relates events and sayings of Jesus not found in the other three.

7. **History** - *Acts*

Acts was written by Luke as the second volume of his two-part work, Luke and Acts. This book is an account of the early church as it grew from a small, frightened band of disciples to a group of believers spread throughout the Roman Empire. Acts centers around the work of Peter (with the Jews) and Paul (with the Gentiles).

8. **Epistles, Letters** - *Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude*

The twenty-one epistles of the New Testament were written by five (or six) authors to individuals, individual churches or groups of churches. These authors are James, John, Jude, Paul, Peter, and the author of Hebrews. Paul wrote the greatest number (thirteen or fourteen) of the epistles. His writings include much teaching about the Christian faith, as well as encouragement to put that faith into practice in daily living. First and Second Timothy and Titus are called Pastoral Letters because they contain Paul's encouragement and instruction to Timothy and Titus, who were responsible for overseeing the churches in Ephesus and on Crete.

9. **Prophecy, Apocalyptic** - *Revelation*

Revelation, the last book in the Bible, is the only New Testament book that is primarily prophetic. Revelation belongs to the category of apocalyptic literature because John received his message by means of a vision. John wrote to encourage Christians to refuse to give in to outside pressures. In the future final showdown between God and Satan, Christians must stand firm against Satan's persecution. Christians will be vindicated when Christ returns, destroys the wicked, fully establishes His Kingdom, and ushers in the new heaven and new earth.

THE BIBLE WAS WRITTEN IN THREE LANGUAGES

1. **Hebrew**, the language in which most of the Old Testament was written which died as a spoken language about 300 BC.
2. **Aramaic**, a kind of "first cousin" to Hebrew. This was the everyday language of the Jewish people in Palestine from 350 BC up to the time of Christ.
3. **Greek**, the language in which most of the New Testament was written. The Greek that was used is called Koine Greek, the Greek word for "common." It is related to the word *koinonia* from the word *koinonia*, which means "fellowship," having something in common.

TWO MAJOR TYPES OF BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

1. **Committee translations** are done by groups of scholars who work together on certain books or sections and usually specialists in Hebrew, Greek or Aramaic and who are also extremely knowledgeable about the history, culture and the book they are translating. Examples are the King James Version, New International Version, New American Standard, Revised Standard Version, The new King James Version, etc.
2. **One person translations** are produced basically by one person who is skilled in literary style and often have scholars advising them. These translations are paraphrased and are easier to read but often reflect the doctrinal framework of the translator. Examples are Good News for Modern Man, J.B. Philips' New Testament in Modern English, Ken Taylor's Living Bible, etc.

BASIC RULES FOR STUDYING THE BIBLE

1. Begin with prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to be your Guide (John 16:13).
Pray for guidance and insight, to see into a recorded situation and comprehend its message as God would want us to know it. Pray for personal application.
2. Generally, the Bible should be interpreted literally, exactly as it is written. The Bible uses figures of speech such as hyperbole (John 21:25), similes and metaphors, etc.
3. Interpret the Bible as a progressive revelation of God. Genesis is the seed, the Bible is the tree. The Old Testament is largely foundational truth. The New Testament is largely fulfilled truth.
4. Never interpret Biblical text in a way that contradicts the rest of Scripture. To "rightly divide the Word of God" (2 Timothy 2:15) means to cut in a straight line
Philippians 2:12 and Ephesians 2:8-9; Galatians 3 and James 2, Law and grace, salvation and rewards, Israel and the church, etc.
5. Interpret text in light of its immediate context. Scripture never means what it did not mean to the first (original) hearers and readers.
6. Interpret Scripture in light of its background and the purpose of the writing, historical, geographical and cultural background.
7. Wherever possible, let Scripture interpret Scripture. (Matthew 13:18)
8. Bible interpretation is singular (one meaning), Bible application may be plural (several ways to apply it).
9. After you have arrived at an interpretation, check it out with others you trust and get a "second opinion."
10. Above all, be charitable to those who may differ with your interpretation. Never allow yourself to think that you have "arrived." In Essentials: Unity. In Non-Essentials: Liberty. In All Things: Charity.

WHAT CAN AND SHOULD WE EXPECT FROM STUDYING THE BIBLE?

The Bible is *not* a book of magic. The Bible was not written to simply give us easy answers to life's complex problems. It is an unfolding of God's Kingdom on earth and the redemption of mankind. However, living consistently according to its principles will bring wisdom and understanding resulting in eternal life.

1. God is revealed in the history recorded in the Bible.
2. We can expect fellowship with God.
3. We can expect the Holy Spirit to guide us in our study.
4. We are confronted with Christ.
5. God speaks to us about love, truth, justice, righteousness and the effects of sin in our lives and in the world.
6. We can expect to understand God's Standards of right and wrong.
7. We can understand the problems of people in other times and learn how God did or did not respond to their problems.
8. We can learn about ourselves and others.
9. We can expect spiritual growth as we apply what we learn.
10. Personal Bible study will strengthen us and give us internal joy and peace.

WHAT SHOULD WE BE AWARE OF IN APPROACHING THE BIBLE?

If our realistic expectations about Bible study are to be fulfilled, we must be aware of approaches and attitudes that work against our gaining all we can from our time of study.

1. We can be bound up in the "scientific method." Interpreting the Bible through the lens of cause and effect.
2. We can be more committed to beliefs taught us in childhood than we are to the actual teachings of the Bible.
3. Our fear of paradox may influence our thinking (unable to resolve apparent conflicting information).
4. We may practice selective literalism, selecting the commands or teachings we like and ignoring the ones we do not like.
5. We may settle for easy answers to complex problems even at the expense of Truth.

CORRECT INTERPRETATION INVOLVES CONTEXT

Scripture never means what it did not mean to the first (original) hearers and readers. In speaking through real persons, in a variety of circumstances, over a period of 1,500 years, God's Word was expressed in the vocabulary and thought patterns of the people of those times and cultures. If they were going to hear it, it could only have come through events and in the language they could have understood. Our problem is that we are so far removed from them in time and culture, and sometimes in thought. This is one of the major reasons we need to learn to interpret the Bible.

1. Two foundational aspects of correct Bible interpretation:

Exegesis, the careful, systematic study of God's Word to discover the writer's original and intended meaning, taking into consideration the historical and literary contents, and the society of the time of writing.

Hermeneutics, the entire field of Biblical interpretation. In a narrower sense, it is bringing contemporary relevance to ancient texts, the Bible's meaning for today.

Note: An incorrect but "popular" method of Bible interpretation is **Eisegesis**, the interpretation of a passage based on a subjective (personal based on feelings), non-analytical reading. The word literally means "to lead into," which means the interpreter injects his or her own ideas into the text, making it mean whatever he or she wants.

2. The exact meaning of a specific passage of Scripture is normally controlled by the passages that precede and follow it. This is called context.
3. **Historical context** determines what was going on in the history of the readers whose thinking (as is ours) was deeply influenced by the circumstances of their day. Is there war going on? Against whom? Is there economic depression or drought?
4. **Cultural context** of Biblical times was very different from ours, and its writings must always be considered in light of its culture. Cultural behavior is usually never explained because the readers were knowledgeable of social customs.
5. **Literary context** asks questions such as: What was the basic purpose of this writing? What is the flow of thought? What comes before it and what follows it? What type of writing is it?
6. **Basic context is the entire book**, letter or passage. Why was it written? What is its basic message? When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, he did so to answer a call for help because of serious problems. When he wrote 1 Timothy he was dealing with false teaching in the church at Ephesus.
7. **Similar words may not always have the same meaning.** An example is the word "mystery" in Ephesians 3:3-6 refers to the relationship of Jew and Gentile as "one new man," while "mystery" in Colossians 1:25-27 refers to "Christ in you." For example, what does the word "flesh" mean in Romans 8:12-13 and Philippians 1:22-24?

8. **Learn to recognize topical groupings.** List the groups in Luke 16:14-18.

BIBLE STUDY HELPS

1. **Study Bibles** - Spirit Filled Life Bible, Life Application Bible, Thompson Chain Reference, The Comparative Study Bible (A Parallel Bible).
2. **Bible Handbooks** - Eerdman's Handbook To The Bible, Hayford's Bible Handbook, Talk Thru The Bible (Wilkinson and Boa).
3. **Concordances** - Strong's Concordance, Young's Analytical Concordance, The NIV Complete Concordance.
4. **Bible Dictionaries** - Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, The New Unger's Bible Dictionary.
5. **Word Study Books** - Vine's Expository Dictionary Of Biblical Words, The Complete Word Study Of The Old And New Testaments (Zodhiates).
6. **Cross References** - Nave's Topical Bible, The Treasury Of Scripture Knowledge (Torrey).
7. **Theology Books** - Foundations Of Pentecostal Theology (Duffield & Van Cleave), Foundations of the Christian Faith (Boice).
8. **Jewish Life** - Jesus The Messiah (Edersheim), The Complete Works Of Josephus.
9. **General Books** - How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth (Fee and Stuart); Understanding Scripture (Mickelsen and Mickelsen); How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth (Fee and Stuart); Exploring the Old Testament (Schultz and Smith).

BIBLE STUDY WORKSHEET

Following is a basic worksheet you can use when studying the Bible:

1. Bible Study Worksheet for (write out):
2. Did you pray for the Holy Spirit's understanding?
3. What type of literature is it?
4. **Describe the cultural and historical contexts.** (What is going on at the time of writing or what is the context in light of the culture?)
5. **Observation.** What does it SAY?
Describe what is happening, who the characters are, where the events occur and why do the events occur.
6. **Interpretation.** What does it MEAN?
What is the writer saying and why did he say what he did?

7. **Correlation.** How does it RELATE?

Where is the message stated in other books of the Bible? Link the message of the passage to major themes and teachings of Scripture and give Scripture references.

8. **Application.** How does it APPLY?

What are the important applicable truths? Are there commands to obey? Are there errors to avoid? Are there sins to forsake? Are there promises to claim? What does this passage suggest I should be or do as a believer in Christ?

Using this type of format, do the exercise below on separate sheet of paper...

INTERPRETING THE LETTER TO PHILEMON

Background - Philemon is a letter from the apostle Paul to Philemon, a man converted under Paul's ministry (Philemon 19) possibly when Paul ministered in Ephesus (Acts 19:10), and written from prison in Rome about 60 AD. The letter was carried by Onesimus, a slave who had run away from Philemon and converted under Paul, whom Paul was sending back to his owner. Paul asks Philemon not to punish Onesimus and seems to suggest that Philemon send Onesimus back to Paul to work with him. Accompanied by Tychicus (Colossians 4:7), Onesimus returned to his master, and carried with him the letter to the Colossians as well. This is the shortest of Paul's letters. After you read the entire letter, answer the following questions.

1. Who is the author and who are all the recipient(s)?
2. Describe the occasion of the letter.
3. Describe the author's attitude.
4. Summarize in one sentence what each paragraph is about (Translations may differ in number of paragraphs)
5. What points can we apply to ourselves today?

EXERCISE Use your Bible and concordance, locate the following stories and passages and write the Scripture reference(s)...

1. The fall of man.
2. The first promise of the Coming messiah.
3. The call of Abram.
4. The story of Joseph.
5. The story of the Passover.
6. The Ten Commandments.

7. The story of Samson.
8. The story of David and Goliath.
9. Elijah's ascent into Heaven.
10. Daniel in the lions' den.
11. The Beatitudes.
12. The disciples' prayer pattern.
13. The parable of the ten virgins.
14. The story of the prodigal son.
15. Jesus explaining the two greatest Commandments.
16. *...by his wounds we are healed.* (Old and New Testaments)
17. *You must be born again.*
18. *...so far has He removed our transgressions...*
19. *And without faith it is impossible to please God...*
20. *All these blessings shall overtake you...*
21. A man reaps what he sows.

QUESTION: *What do you expect to receive from this course?*