



# How to Study the Bible

*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15*



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## General Introduction

In our world today, churches are finding many shaking foundations upon which they are presumably building the church. All over this planet, we are facing two threats that could destroy the biblical basis for ministry:

The first threat is that of pragmatism. Pragmatism is the philosophical system that assumes that every truth or idea has practical consequences and that these practical consequences are a critical test of its truthfulness. Some pragmatists add that there are not transcendental sources of truth therefore truth and values are relative to their usefulness to either individuals or societies. In essence we are talking about the elevation of methodologies as the basis for church growth and development. This philosophical approach to building the church may create large crowds, but it does not develop God-honouring, holy-living, biblically literate, Christ-centred, Spirit-led believers. The lure of numbers and recognition has a strong pull. The end result is not what God desires from our churches.

The second threat is that of syncretism. Syncretism is the attempt to assimilate differing or opposite doctrines and practices, especially between philosophical and religious systems resulting in a new system altogether in which the fundamental structure and tenets of each system have been changed. Syncretism of the gospel occurs when its essential character is confused with elements from the culture. In syncretism, the gospel is lost as the church simply confirms what is already present in the culture. One man has said that it is not a problem when the boat gets in the water; the problem is when the water gets in the boat. Syncretism comes from a movement toward tolerance and acceptance. These are biblical concepts to be sure, but if they are applied in a vacuum, without proper biblical truth, they become syncretistic in nature and we find the doctrines of repentance, grace, and salvation virtually non-existent.

No matter what culture you are part of in the world, you can see evidence of these two threats. Paul saw some of the same things happening in his day that we see happening in our day. His answer was to preach the word. God's word must be the only standard and foundation upon which base our ministry. John 17:17 tells us that His Word is truth. God's word is established in heaven. It provides us with a consistent, solid foundation.

But do we know the truth? The question must not be misunderstood as asking if we have the Bible. We definitely have the Bible. It is a book that has stood the test of time and has been proven time and time again to be



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inerrant and infallible. The real question then has to do with our knowledge of the Bible. Have we come to a place where our study and interpretive skills are developed enough so that we can confidently say that we KNOW the truth, which is the Word of God, which is the Bible?

The science of interpreting the Bible is known as *hermeneutics*. It comes to us from the Greek verb *hermeneuo* which means to interpret. Below are two terms which are closely related to the science of hermeneutics:

- Exegesis which comes from the Greek word *exegeomai* meaning to draw out or to lead out. Applied to the Bible it refers to the process of critical analysis of a given biblical text which produces direct logical conclusions. In exegesis, the passage speaks for itself and consideration of context, time and purpose of writing must be taken into account.
- Eisegesis comes from the Greek word *eisegeomai* describes the act of imposing a meaning onto a text. It is often described as reading “into” the text rather than getting the meaning “out of” the text.

## Hermeneutic Methods

The field of hermeneutics involves a few basic hermeneutic assumptions, approaches or methodologies:

### The Allegorical Method

- *History* - This method was used by many 2nd & 3rd century church fathers. It was established as the preferred method of interpretation by Augustine and was dominant in Catholicism throughout the Middle Ages.
- *Definition* - The literal meaning of the text is either, not the true meaning, or only one of many meanings. The elements of each passage have a corresponding spiritual reality which is the "real" or ultimate meaning of the passage.
  - Origen interpreted Noah's Ark to have 3 meanings (literal, moral, and spiritual) to correspond to man's body, soul and spirit: salvation from the Flood, salvation of the believer from a specific sin and salvation of the church through Christ.
  - Popes used this method to uphold papal supremacy. Innocent III taught that the two great lights in Gen. 1 refer to the order of authority on earth. Thus, the sun symbolized spiritual authority (i.e., the pope) and the moon symbolized civil authority (the emperor). Boniface VIII referring to Luke 22:38 taught that the two swords



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held by the disciples meant that the apostles were authoritative in both the secular and spiritual kingdoms.

- *Why This Method Is Unacceptable*
  - Since there is no objective standard to which the interpreter must bow, the final authority ceases to be the scripture and becomes the interpreter. Whose allegorical symbols are right? This question leads to the establishment of a church hierarchical authority which effectively replaces Scripture as the true locus of authority.
  - Allegorical interpretation is only rarely seen in scripture (Gal. 4:21-31; 1 Cor. 10:1-4). Parables are usually not allegories.
  - An even more extreme example of this kind of over-interpretation is numerology. In numerology, numbers in the Bible (whether actual numbers, or the number of letters in names and passages) are seen to hold secret symbolic messages. There is no warrant in the Bible for this kind of interpretation. It should be avoided at all times.

## The Literalistic Method

- *History* - This method was used by the Jews after the Babylonian Exile. It is also used by extreme fundamentalists and many cults (Children of God, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, etc.).
- *Definition* - Every word is taken absolutely literally including figures of speech and symbolism. Historical background is considered unnecessary and ignored. Any deviation from this rule is regarded as sacrilegious.
  - Mormonism teaches that God has a body because of references to God's "eye," "hand," etc. However, see Ps. 91:1-4. Does this mean He also has feathers and wings?
  - Roman Catholic interpretation of Lk. 22:19 leads to the doctrine of transubstantiation. However, does this also mean that Christ is a door (Jn. 7)?
  - Jehovah's Witnesses use Col. 1:15 to prove that Christ was a created being. But "*first-born*" was also used to refer to the inheritor of the family estate (Num. 21:15-17).
- *Why This Method Is Unacceptable*



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- Subscribers always use it selectively (see the above examples).
- It makes scripture unintelligible, contradictory, and unlivable (i.e., Lk. 14:26).

## The Naturalistic Method

- *History* - This system arose during the Enlightenment (18th century). It is used by old-line liberal theology as their basic hermeneutic.
- *Definition* - The naturalistic world-view (i.e. the universe is a closed system of cause and effect) is the standard by which scripture must be interpreted. Scripture becomes intelligible only as ancient man's attempt to explain nature. It also assumes that religion has evolved through several stages which can be used to date the material in the Bible. Miracles are rejected as primitive explanations or myths.
- *Why This Method Is Unacceptable*
  - It makes an unproved world-view the final authority.
  - The attempt to separate the historical from the “*legendary*” has been proven to be impossible.

## Devotional Interpretation

- *History* - This method grew out of the post-Reformation as a reaction against sterile creedalism. This is the system *unconsciously* used by most Christians today.
- *Definition* - The devotional method focuses almost exclusively on what is *personally applicable* and *edifying*. It tends to ignore context, historical background, and other important interpretive principles.
- *Why This Method Is Unacceptable*
  - Devotional interpretation can easily lead to uncontrolled allegorizing and inaccurate interpretation through *eisegesis*.
  - While the goals of this approach to Scripture are commendable, a critical analysis of the text has to precede the devotional question. Devotional significance must be



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based on an accurate interpretation of the word of truth, it cannot be the basis for that interpretation.

## Ideological Interpretation

- *History* - The "New Criticism" advanced in the 1940's began to focus on text and reader rather than on the author. The author has no more authority over the meaning of the text than anyone else because: 1) He didn't realize his own bias at the time he wrote, and 2) We have no way to read his mind and thus know his intentions.
- *Definition* - Ideological interpreters approach the Bible looking for material relevant to their ideology. They usually are open about the fact that they have an agenda, and usually claim they are correcting oversights from earlier years by focusing on their area of interest. Most ideological readers also entertain a reader-centred hermeneutic. They are sceptical about ever knowing what the author intended to say, and focus instead on how the text affects the modern reader.
  - *Feminist Theology* - seeks to study women in the Bible, and to demonstrate that the more enlightened speakers in Scripture were anti-patriarchy. In general, their studies are intended to explode the myth of patriarchy and to uncover cruelty to women. Some advance gender-neutral language in translation, including God as "she," sometimes based on lady wisdom Prov. 1:20ff.
  - *Marxist or Liberation Theology* - seeks to show that the true intent of God in the Bible is to teach that poor and oppressed classes should be liberated from their oppression by the love of God. Tends to interpret redemptive language in terms of economics and political power. They see class struggle in much of the conflict in the Bible.
  - *Deconstruction* - Postmodern readers see the *metanarrative* (overarching story that provides the basis of everything) of the Bible, not as teaching liberation, but as a tool used for exploitation. The Bible is propaganda intended to show why patriarchy is appropriate. The authors of Scripture sought to legitimize the status quo of society by teaching people to obey their authorities. They also sought to justify aggrandizement of the state of Israel and the subjugation of neighbouring peoples.
- *Why This Method Is Unacceptable*



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- Most systems seek to decrease reader bias through the application of rules. These rules introduce objectivity to the interpretive process, according to traditional methods. Ideological and reader-centred methods hold that objectivity is never possible, because the text was never objective in the first place. The first act of interpretation was the author's decision about what to include and what to exclude in his text. Also, the uncertainty of language means modern readers might as well supply their own interpretation, because we will never know what the "true" interpretation should be. To hold to such a thing as a "true" or "real" interpretation is naive, because such faith fails to take into account the arbitrary nature of language and the social forces which distort people's (both readers and author's) view of the world.
- Consequently, reader-centred theories are openly biased, but they hold that in this they are no different than other approaches except that they are more honest and less naive.
- The reader is not under the authority of Scripture. Scripture is pressed into the ideological mould of the reader, leaving the reader in authority.

## Grammatical-historical Method

I believe this is the most valid method of hermeneutics. It involves four guiding principles of interpretation:

1. *Interpret the Bible literally:*
  - a. Scripture should be understood in its literal, normal and plain sense. This is called *sensus literalis*, which is the Latin for literal sense.
  - b. While the Bible does contain figures of speech and symbols, even they were intended to convey a literal truth.
  - c. The Bible should be interpreted in its literal sense unless one or more conditions exist which indicate a figurative or symbolic interpretation.
2. *Consider the historical context of Scripture:*
  - a. This means that we interpret a passage in its historical context.
  - b. We ask what the text meant to the people to whom it was first written.
  - c. This way we can develop a proper contextual understanding of the original intent of Scripture.
3. *Understand the Bible grammatically:*





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- a. This means that we seek to understand the basic grammatical structure of the original text.
  - b. To whom do the nouns refer? What is the tense of the main verb?
  - c. When you ask simple questions like these, the meaning of the text immediately become clearer.
4. *Consider the whole of Scripture:*
- a. This is also called *analogia scriptura*, a Latin phrase which means the analogy of Scripture and refers to the fact that Scripture will not contradict itself.
  - b. Included in this concept is:
    - i. Scripture must be interpreted in light of Scripture.
    - ii. Scripture must never be set against Scripture.
    - iii. Scripture must be studied in light of what appears to be primary and plain.
  - c. If we arrive at an interpretation of a passage that contradicts a truth taught elsewhere in Scripture, our interpretation cannot be correct.
  - d. Associated with the concept of Scripture providing an analogy for itself, are the concepts of *intertextuality*, *inner-biblical exegesis*, and *sensus plenior*.
    - i. *Intertextuality* refers to the phenomenon that all texts are involved in interplay with other texts. The conclusion is that no text can be viewed as isolated and independent. This study pays close attention to the fragments or “echoes” of earlier texts that appear in later texts.
    - ii. *Inner-biblical exegesis* is an approach to the text that seeks to address the reinterpretation and reapplication of earlier biblical texts by later texts. Direct quotations are the most obvious application of this method. This approach shares some features the principle of *interpreting Scripture in the light of Scripture* but focuses more on the literary and historical relationships rather than the theological or spiritual ones.
    - iii. *Sensus plenior* is Latin for, “the fuller sense.” The phrase refers to the additional or deeper sense of a passage that the author may not have thought about but, in light of other biblical texts or doctrines, is most definitely intended by God (cf. 1 Pet. 1:10-12). In some cases, the author who quotes or applies this fuller sense goes beyond the literal application of the original Scripture. An example of this is in Luke



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4:18-21 where Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah, and applies the passage to Himself.

Our understanding and application of sound hermeneutic principles is directly related to our ability to fulfil the command given to us in 2 Tim. 2:15, “*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.*” The command of this verse urges us to “*be diligent to...*” the remaining phrases in the verse clarify the purpose or target of the command, our diligence is directed at three things:

1. *present our self approved to God* – this implies that we know what things are pleasing to the Lord (cf. Eph. 5:8-10; Col. 1:9-10).
2. *a workman who does not need to be ashamed* – shame comes from displeasing God and falling short of what He has called us to be and do (cf. 1 Cor. 6:5; 15:34; 1 Jn. 2:28)
3. *accurately handling the word of truth* – the Greek word translated *accurately handling*, literally means, “to cut it straight” – (cf. Prov. 3:6 [LXX]; 2 Cor. 2:17; Gal. 2:14).

God has given us His word. It is His *special revelation* to us designed to communicate His redemptive plan. He spoke it in language we can understand and through the help of the Holy Spirit and our diligence in applying sound principles of interpretation we can know and understand this most precious gift to us.

## **An Introduction to Studying the Bible**

The Bible is a unique book. It is a collection of sixty-six documents inspired by God. These documents are gathered into two Testaments, thirty-nine in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New Testament. Prophets, priests, kings, and leaders from the nation of Israel wrote the Old Testament books in Hebrew (with two passages in Aramaic). The apostles and their associates wrote the New Testament books in Greek.

The Old Testament record begins with the creation of the universe and closes about four hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ.

The flow of history through the Old Testament moves along the following lines:

- Creation of the universe
- Fall of man
- Flood over the entire earth



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- Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel – father of the chosen nation)
- The History of Israel
  - Exile in Egypt (430 yrs.)
  - Exodus and wilderness wanderings (40 yrs.)
  - Conquest of Canaan (7 yrs.)
  - Era of Judges (350 yrs.)
  - United Kingdom – Saul, David, Solomon (110 yrs.)
  - Divided Kingdom – Judah & Israel (350 yrs.)
  - Exile in Babylon (70 yrs.)
  - Return and rebuilding of the land (140 yrs.)

The details of the history are explained in the thirty-nine books divided into five different categories:

- The Law – 5 books (Genesis – Deuteronomy)
- History – 12 books (Joshua – Esther)
- Wisdom – 5 books (Job – Song of Solomon)
- Major Prophets – 5 books (Isaiah – Daniel)
- Minor Prophets – 12 books (Hosea – Malachi)

After the completion of the Old Testament, there were four hundred years of silence during which God did not inspire any Scripture or record any prophecies through his prophets. That silence was broken by the arrival of John the Baptist announcing that the promised Saviour had come. The New Testament records the rest of the story from the birth of Christ to the culmination of all history and the final eternal state; so the two Testaments go from creation to consummation, eternity past to eternity future.

While the thirty-nine Old Testament books major on the history of Israel and the promise of the coming Saviour, the twenty-seven New Testament books major on the person and work of Christ and the establishment of the church. The four Gospels give the record of His birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Each four writers view the greatest and most important event of history, the coming of the God-man, Jesus Christ, from a different perspective.

Matthew sees Him from the perspective of His kingdom; Mark from the perspective of His servanthood; Luke from the perspective of His humanity; and John from the perspective of His deity.



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The book of Acts tells the story of the impact of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ – from His ascension, the consequent coming of the Holy Spirit, and the birth of the church, through the early years of gospel preaching by the apostles and their associates. Acts records the establishment of the church in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and throughout the Roman Empire (see Acts 1:8).

The twenty-one epistles were written to churches and individuals to explain the significance of the person and work of Jesus Christ, with its implications for life and witness until He returns.

The New Testament closes with Revelation, which begins by picturing the current church age and culminates with Christ's return to establish His earthly Kingdom, bringing judgment on the ungodly and glory and blessing for believers. Following the millennial reign of the Saviour the last judgment will occur leading to the eternal state. All believers from all history finally enter the eternal glory prepared for them; and all the ungodly are consigned to hell to be punished forever.

To understand the Bible, it is essential to grasp the sweep of that history from creation to consummation (see Timeline of Biblical History on next two pages). It is also crucial to keep in focus the unifying theme of Scripture. The one constant theme unfolding throughout the whole Bible is this: God for His own glory has chosen to create and gather to Himself a group of people to be the subjects of His eternal kingdom; to praise, honor, and serve Him forever; and through whom He will display His wisdom, power, mercy, grace and glory. To gather His chosen ones, God must redeem them from sin. The Bible reveals God's plan for this redemption from its inception in eternity past to its completion in eternity future. Covenants, promises, and epochs are all secondary to the one continuous plan of redemption.

There is one God. The Bible has one Creator. It is one book. It has one plan of grace, recorded from initiation through execution to consummation. From predestination to glorification, the Bible is the story of God redeeming His chosen people to the praise of His glory.

Everything revealed on the pages of both the Old Testament and New Testament is associated with five general categories. Scripture is always teaching or illustrating:

- the glory of God demonstrated in His character and attributes
- sin and disobedience as a violation of God's holy standard and the cause for death entering the world



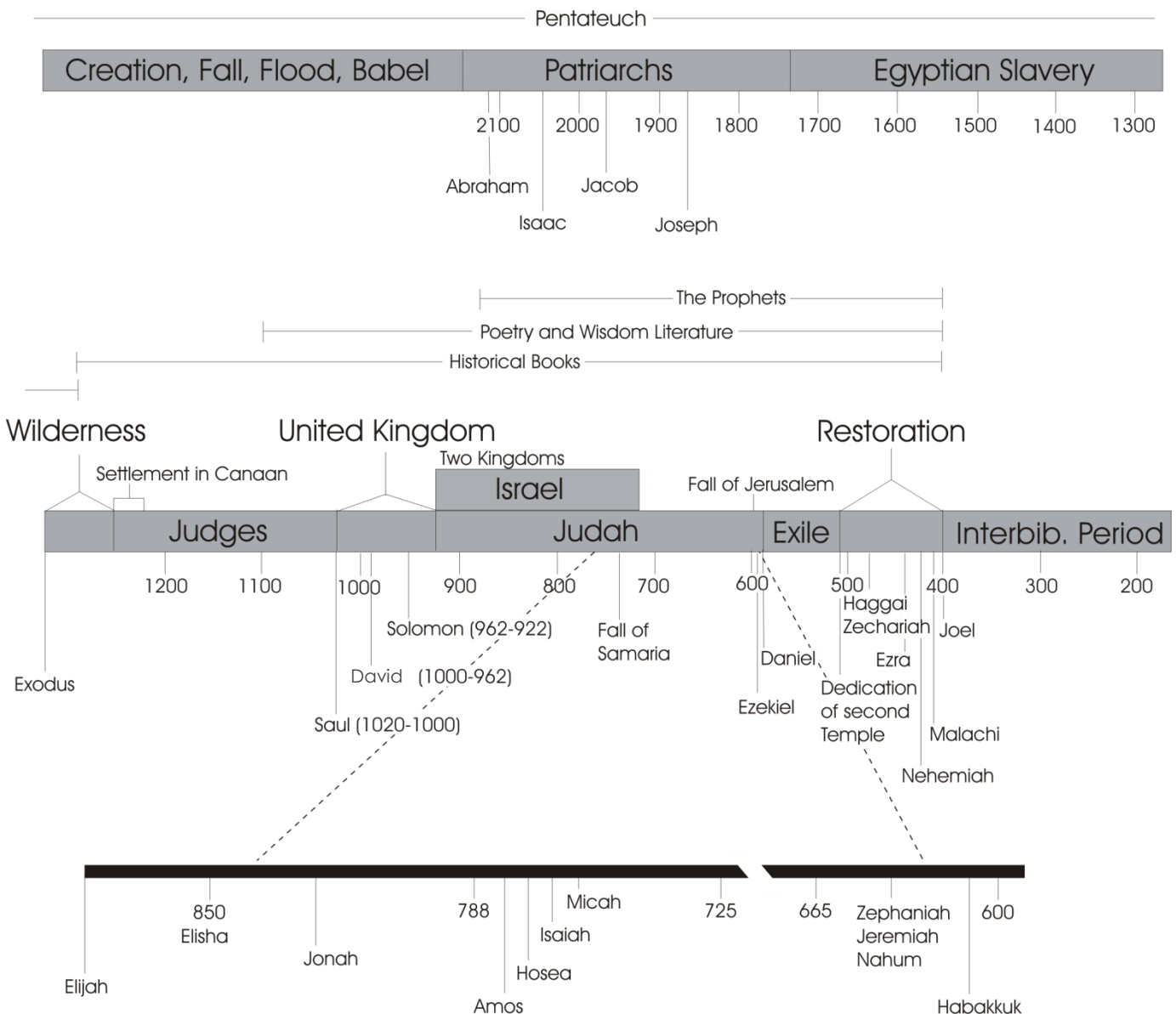
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- the blessings of faith and obedience to God’s standard
- the need for a Saviour by whose righteous substitutionary death for sinners establishes redemption and forgiveness by His blood that we might be declared just, transformed, and enabled to obey God’s standards
- the ultimate glorious end of redemptive history in the Lord Saviour’s earthly kingdom and the subsequent eternal reign and glory of God and Christ

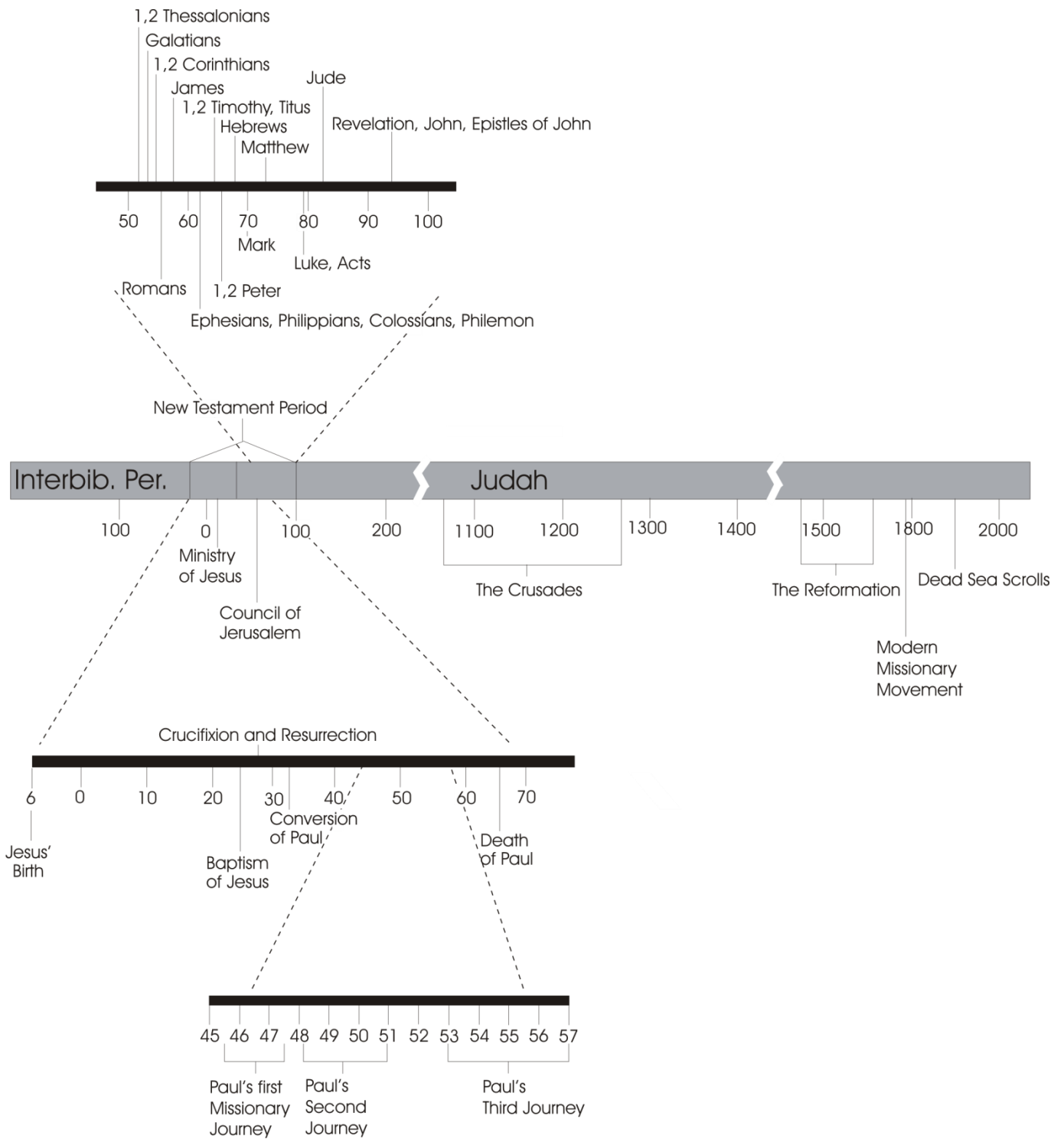
As an added visual aid to our understanding, below there is provided a brief timeline of biblical history.

## Timeline of Biblical History





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## The Steps in Bible Study

Now let's get into studying the Bible.

## OBSERVATION

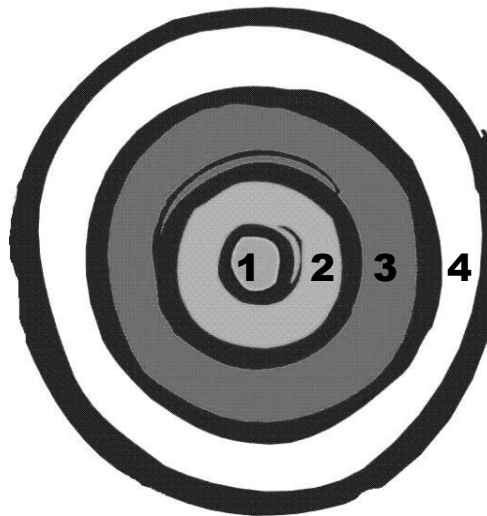
It is in this step of Bible study that you will determine what the author is saying.

### OBSERVATION STEP ONE: PRAY

John 16:13 says, *“But when He, the Spirit of truth comes He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.”*

### OBSERVATION STEP TWO: READ THE CONTEXT

- One of the most important principles of handling the Word of God is to interpret Scripture in light of its context.
- The word context is from two Latin words:
  - “con” – means “with”
  - “textus” – means “woven”
  - “that which goes with the text” or “that which is woven together with the text”
- Note the different levels of context:
  1. The passage you are studying.
  2. The verses before and after the passage.
  3. The chapter in which the passage appears.
  4. The book in which the passage appears (some authors will give the purpose of the book – Eccl. 12:13; Lk. 1:1-4; Jn. 20:30-31).



### OBSERVATION STEP THREE: READ WITH PURPOSE

Here are some things you will want to observe and take note of as you read the text:



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- **Who** wrote it? Who said it? Who are the major characters? Who are the people mentioned? To whom is the author speaking? About whom is the author speaking?
- **What** are the main events? What are the major ideas? What are the major teachings? What are the people like? What does he talk about most? What is his purpose?
- **When** was it written? When did this event take place? When will it happen? When did he say it? When did he do it?
- **Where** was this done? Where was it said? Where will it happen?
- **Why** was there a need for this to be written? Why was this mentioned? Why was so much or so little space devoted to this particular event or topic? Why was this referenced mentioned? Why should they do such and such?
- **How** is it done? How did it happen? How is the truth illustrated?

In addition to the above questions, observe the following:

- Statements
  - Be on the alert for the admonitions which a writer gives: the advice, the exhortations, the warnings, and the things which he tells us to do.
  - Also note the promises and the encouragements.
  - A clue to this observation is to look for imperative verbs.
- Series of statements
  - When you observe admonitions, see if the writer gives you some reason for his advice.
  - Take note if the author sets forth a cause and effect relationship. i.e. If you do this then that will happen.
  - Make special note of the way a writer uses contrasts, comparisons, illustrations to bring out his ideas.
    - *Comparison* is the association of things that are similar.
    - *Contrast* is the association of things that are opposite, often introduced with “*but*.”
  - Also be on the alert for repetition of ideas and statements. This will often give you a clue as to the author’s purpose in writing the passage.





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- Take special note of lists. See if there is any apparent order of significance.
- Be aware of questions.
  - They may be used to introduce an idea.
  - The question may be rhetorical.
- Overall tone and manner
  - Look for the atmosphere. Is the author angry, sad, concerned, thankful, etc.
  - Are there any emphatic statements that reveal the feelings of the author?
  - What is the literary form? Is it discourse, narrative, poetic, dramatic, parabolic, prose, or apocalyptic?
  - What is the general structure? In other words, can you identify how the ideas in this passage are arranged and organized?

## OBSERVATION STEP FOUR: ANALYSE THE WORDS

- Observe key words
  - Confirm the appropriate part of speech for each word:
    - Noun – is the name of anything: *boy, Mary, loveliness, sun, beauty, hatred, boredom*. It names a person, place, thing, idea or quality.
    - Pronoun – is a word that that is used as a substitute for a noun: *he, she, it, which, that, these, those*.
    - Adjective – is a word that describes (modifies) a noun: *pretty girl, dusty road, sunny day, great excitement*. Note the term *modify* in grammar means “to qualify, limit, or restrict”. A modifier usually narrows the conception of the thing modified.
    - Verb – is a word (or phrase) that expresses action, being, or state of being or occurrence: *birds fly, I am, I become, he seems, she died*.
    - Adverb – is a word that describes or modifies a verb, an adjective, or another adverb: *work hard, drive carefully, too ill, drive very carefully, she is extremely patient*.
    - Preposition – is a word used with a substantive (noun or pronoun) to show



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relationship and comes in the form of a phrase, called a prepositional phrase: *in the dark, up the stairs, across the street, without a doubt, toward me.*

- Conjunction – is a word that joins one element in a sentence with another. A conjunction may join words, phrases, clauses or whole sentences: *The wind blew **and** the rain fell. Jim may come **if** he secures a ticket.*
- When you first read a passage, look for the key words, those words which you think are important in the passage. *Repetition of words will sometimes give you a clue.*
- Look for non-routine and routine words.
- Observe special clues
  - Connectives are very important in revealing key ideas and relationships. Be on the alert for some of the following:
    - *but* – introduces a contrast
    - *if* – introduces a conditional clause
    - *for, because, therefore* – introduces reasons and results
    - *in, into, with* – important connectives that introduce relationship
    - *in order that* – sets a purpose

Before moving on to the next step in Bible study, take a few moments to read the Bible passage on the next page. Between the lines and in the margins, record some of your observations.

## **Matthew 6:25-34**

**25** “For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing? **26**

Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not



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worth much more than they? **27** And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his life's span? **28** And why are you anxious about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, **29** yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these. **30** but if God so arrays the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more do so for you, O men of little faith? **31** Do not be anxious then, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'With what shall we clothe ourselves?' **32** For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. **33** But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you. **34** Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

## INTERPRETATION

This is the step that seeks to **discover what the passage means**. Note that any passage of Scripture can only have one meaning, but many potential applications.

In this area of Bible study, scholars have developed guidelines to insure that people will objectively study God's Word. These guidelines come in the form of Principles of Interpretation. Let's examine the list in no special order...each of the principles should receive an equal amount of consideration.

### (1) The Bible is to be read like any other book.

- This rule is simply the application of the principle of *sensus literalis*. In other words, in the Bible a verb is a verb and a noun is a noun, just as in any other book.



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## (2) Historical narratives are to be interpreted by the didactic.

- The term didactic comes from the Greek word which means to teach or instruct.
- Essentially this rule says that we must not take doctrine from historical narrative. We can only take doctrine from didactic or instructive passages.
- The purpose of historical narrative is to communicate events and stories. There is no desire in this as to the veracity of the rightness or wrongness of the characters in the story; the only concern is the facts of the story.
- In the Gospels, we have many occasions where didactic is given alongside of the historical narrative.

## (3) The implicit is to be interpreted by the explicit.

- Another way to say this is that we must allow the obvious teaching of Scripture to instruct us as to the proper understanding of the obscure passages of Scripture.

## (4) Determine carefully the meaning of words.

- Words mean things...if we therefore have the wrong definition of a word, we will undoubtedly have the wrong interpretation of a passage of Scripture.
- Many words have more than one meaning and must be defined in the context of usage by the author.
- There are two basic methods by which words are defined:
  - Etymology – is the science of word derivations. i.e. if we know Greek then we know that the word *hippos* means horse and the word *patamos* means river, thus the word hippopotamus means river horse. Or the word glory in the Hebrew means weightiness or significance.
  - Customary usage – This is the understanding of the word in the context of the time it is being used. For example, the word cute in the Elizabethan period meant simply bowlegged. Thus when we call a girl cute today, we can only hope she is not a Shakespearian actress. The definition of scan in English dictionaries for years has meant to read carefully, but our more modern dictionaries define it, to skim over lightly.
- Here are some helpful tools to use when seeking to define words:



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- Robertson's
- Vincent's
- Spiros Zodihates
- Kittel (abridged version)
  
- Internet resources:
  - [www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org)
  - [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)
  - [www.biblestudytools.com](http://www.biblestudytools.com)
  
- As you seek to understand the meaning of words you will undoubtedly need to know the tense, voice and mood of the word. In this section I will give you some brief explanations of the tenses, voices and moods of Greek verbs, as a means of equipping you to more accurately study God's Word.

**Tense** – shows kind of action

Greek verbs differ from English verb tenses in that the kind of action portrayed is more significant than the time the action actually took place.

The six tenses of Greek verbs are as follows:

- Present Tense – denotes continuous action. This is primarily progressive or linear action, showing the action as ongoing. The usual usage of the present tense shows an action as being initiated in the present and continuing on into the future.
- Imperfect Tense – denotes continuous action in the past time. The idea of the imperfect tense is that the action began in the past time but has yet to be completed. The Greek idea of perfect is mature, or complete, thus the uncompleted action is imperfect.
- Perfect Tense – is a completed action in past time with continuing results in the present time.
- Pluperfect Tense – is a completed action in the past, with continuing results that have also ended in the past time. Both the perfect and pluperfect are very specific and enlightening tenses.
- Aorist Tense – simply stated it denotes punctiliar action. The aorist tense does not make any reference to the duration of the event, only that it took place and was completed sometime in the



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past. The action could have taken two seconds or two years and the aorist would make no distinction.

- Future Tense – indefinite action to occur in the future. This tense does not make a distinction between punctiliar or linear action, it simply states that the action will occur at some time in the future.

**Voice** – shows how the subject is related to the action.

There are three voices in the Greek:

- Active Voice – indicates that the subject produces the action.
- Passive Voice – indicates that the subject is being acted upon.
- Middle Voice – indicates that the subject initiates the action and also participates in the results of the action. Another way to put it is that the subject acts in behalf of or for him/herself. This voice is unique to Greek.

**Mood** – shows how the action is related to reality from the speaker's perspective. Below are four of the Greek moods.

- Indicative Mood – the declarative mood, or the mood of certainty. This is a statement of fact which assumes reality from the speaker's perspective. This mood simply states things as being a fact.
- Imperative Mood – usually a command or entreaty. It is the mood of volition or will. The imperative mood in the Greek makes a demand on the will of the reader to obey the command; it is used to indicate prohibition and authority.
- Subjunctive Mood – is the mood of probability or potentiality. This implies some doubt regarding the reality of the action from the speaker's perspective. It expresses uncertainty or an action which may or should happen. This is the mood used for conditional clauses, strong suggestions, or "polite" commands. NOTE: That the aorist subjective prohibition is a warning or an exhortation against doing something that has not yet begun.



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- Optative Mood – is the mood of possibility. This mood presents no definite anticipation of realization but merely presents the action as conceivable from the speaker’s perspective. This mood is used less often in the New Testament than the other moods.

## (5) Note the presence of parallelisms in the Bible.

- In ancient Near Eastern languages this is a very common and relatively easy to recognize literary device.
  - *Synonymous Parallelism* – occurs when different lines or parts of a passage present the same thought in a slightly altered manner of expression. (Psalm 84:2-3; Proverbs 19:5)
  - *Antithetic Parallelism* – occurs when the two parts are set in contrast to each other. They may say the same thing but say it by way of negation. (Proverbs 10:4; 13:1)
  - *Synthetic Parallelism* – is a bit more complex than the other forms. Here the first part of the parallel creates a sense of expectation which is completed by the second part. It can also move in a progressive, “staircase” movement to a conclusion in a third line. (Psalm 92:9)

## (6) Note the difference between proverb and law.

- A common mistake in biblical interpretation and application is to give a proverbial saying the weight and force of a moral absolute.
- Proverbs are catchy little couplets designed to express practical truisms. They reflect principles of wisdom for godly living.
- They do not reflect moral laws that are to be applied absolutely in every conceivable life situation.

## (7) Scripture has only one meaning and should be interpreted literally unless a figurative interpretation is required by one of the following conditions:

- (a) When it involves impossibility or an absurdity (Rev. 1:16; cf. Eph. 6:17).



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- (b) When it involves a contradiction or inconsistency (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29; Mal. 3:6; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18; cf. Gen. 6:6; 18:22-33).
  - (c) When it involves an immoral conclusion (Mt. 6:14-15; cf. Eph. 1:7; Titus 3:5).
  - (d) When it is otherwise implied by the context of the passage (Rev. 1:12-16; 9:1-11- note the appearance of the word “like” which introduces a simile).
  - (e) When it is clearly stated to be figurative or allegorical (Gal. 4:21-31; especially vs. 24).
  - (f) When it is more appropriate to be figurative for the reason of sheer common sense (2 Chr. 16:9; Ps. 34:15; 36:7; cf. Jn. 4:24).
- The following are types of figurative language:
    - Parable – comes from the compound Greek word *parabole*. *Para* means alongside and *bole*, from *ballo* means to cast. So a parable is a simple, normal, real life story or illustration used to present some moral or spiritual truth. The two are laid down alongside each other for a specific purpose (Mt. 13).
    - Fable – similar to a parable, but made up of a fictitious or imaginary story (Jgs. 9:7-15).
    - Simile – a thing or action that is said to be “like” or “as” something of a different kind or quality (Rev. 1:12-16).
    - Metaphor – a word or phrase which is said to be something else because of a likeness involved (Lk. 22:19; Jn. 15:5).
    - Allegory – a metaphor extended into a complete story to illustrate some truth (Gal. 4:24-31).
    - Riddle – an analogy written up as a puzzle. To unravel it will produce some truth (Jgs. 14:12-19).
    - Hyperbole – an exaggeration of some statement for the purpose of emphasis (Mt. 23:24).
    - Irony and sarcasm – a sharp remark uttered in contempt or ridicule. These two words are basically the same, the latter being more severe in degree and intensity (1 Cor. 4:8).
    - Interrogation – to question for effect often not seeking an answer (Rom. 6:1-2).





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- Metonymy – to substitute one word for another because they are related (Mk. 1:5).
- Personification – a figure where inanimate objects have personal attributes (Isa. 55:12).
- Anthropomorphism – the ascribing of human forms or attributes to God (2 Chr. 16:9).
- Synecdoche – a more inclusive term is used for a less inclusive term or vice versa. A part for the whole or the whole for the part (Jer. 25:29; 3 days in the tomb).
- Ellipsis – a word or words are omitted which are necessary for grammatical purposes but not necessary for sense (Mt. 14:19 – *gave* is omitted; Mk. 16:16; cf. 1 Cor. 7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1).
- Pleonasm – an apparent redundancy of words in a sentence though the sense is grammatically complete without them (Num. 19:2; Dan. 12:2; Rom. 1:23 – *image in the form*; Eph. 4:23).

There are three keys to interpreting figures of speech:

1. Note precisely the point or purpose of the trope:
  - *Comparison* – simile, metaphor
  - *Addition* – pleonasm, hyperbole
  - *Relation* – synecdoche, metonymy
  - *Contrast* – irony
  - *Omission* – ellipsis
2. Find other passages where this same figure has been employed and compare the usage and legitimacy of the figure in these instances (by the same author if possible): note the use of *sleep* – 1 Cor. 11:30; 15:51; 1 Thess. 4:13-15, 16; cf. Acts 7:60.
3. Consult guides on figures of speech to avoid interpretive difficulties with regard to meaning and impact.

## 8) Interpret words in harmony with their meaning in the time of the author

- What is its use by the author in the passage and in other passages by the same author?
- What is its relation to its immediate context?
- What is its current use at the time of writing?
- What is its root meaning?



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**9) A word used more than once in the same context will have the same meaning each time it is used in that context.**

- See John 3:16-20 - “world”
- See 1 Peter 1:2, 20 - “foreknowledge”

**10) Interpret the words of the prophets in their usual, literal and historical sense, unless the context and manner in which they are fulfilled clearly indicates they have a symbolic meaning.**

- Most prophecies are written to address an immediate problem faced by God’s people. While many have symbolic meaning in their fulfilment, we should always see them in light of their literal understanding.

**11) Though God’s revelation is progressive both Old and New Testaments are essential parts of this revelation and form a unit that must not be taken separately.**

**12) You must understand the Bible grammatically before you can understand it theologically.**

**13) Scripture will never contradict itself.**

- If an apparent contradiction appears, we can know that it is not real and thus launch us into further study to seek understanding of the truth.
- This principle is based on the inerrancy and infallibility of God’s Word. As we approach Bible study, we must believe in the veracity of God’s revelation.

**14) Let Scripture interpret Scripture.**

- Interpret John 15:7 in light of 1 John 5:14 and James 4:3
- Interpret Isaiah 53:5 in light of 1 Peter 2:24
- Interpret Genesis 12-1-3 in light of Galatians 3:7-29

## SUMMARISATION

This step, to a certain degree, will naturally be practised as part of both observation and interpretation.

Here we are trying to crystallise the major teachings found in the passage. It is time when you consider what you have observed, and taking into



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account the principles of interpretation, you provide a properly organised summary of what the Bible passage teaches.

I have found an excellent way to summarise the text is to create an outline of the passage. Below is a brief look at principles of outlining.

## GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF OUTLINING

Details may vary, but the form of an outline follows these general principles:

- Main topics are the central ideas.
    - They should be briefly and clearly stated and should not be too numerous.
    - If you are outlining an entire book, the main topics will probably be the chapter themes.
    - If you are outlining a chapter, they will probably be the paragraph themes.
    - The main topics are usually denoted in the outline by using Roman numerals: I, II, III, IV, etc.
  - Subtopics are the points that explain the main topics.
    - In an outline of a book, these would be the paragraph themes.
    - These are usually denoted by capital letters: A, B, C, D, etc.
  - Subpoints are the points that explain the subtopics.
    - These are denoted by Arabic numerals: 1, 2, 3, 4, etc.
    - If further subdivisions are needed, they should be noted in progression as follows:
      - a.
        - 1)
          - a)
            - (1)
              - (a)
- Capture the logical flow of the author.
  - To be sure that your outline truly captures the logical flow of the author, the subdivisions should do at least one or more of the following:
    - Clarify or explain the main point of the previous larger subdivision.



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- Classify points of the larger subdivision into categories.
- Define what the larger subdivision means.
- Serve as examples of the larger subdivision.
- Illustrate the large subdivision.
- Each subdivision must have at least two points.
  - If there is a I, there has to be a II.
  - Here is an example of what I mean:

## I. Main topic

### A. Subtopic

### B. Subtopic

#### 1. Subpoint

#### 2. Subpoint

## II. Main topic

### A. Subtopic

#### 1. Subpoint

##### a. Subpoint

##### b. Subpoint

#### 1) Subpoint

#### 2) Subpoint

#### 2. Subpoint

### B. Subtopic

Now that you have seen how to outline, take a look at this example of a simply outline of 2 Timothy.

- I. Greeting and Thanksgiving (1:1-5)
- II. The Perseverance of a Man of God (1:6-18)
  - A. The Exhortation (1:6-11)
  - B. The Examples (1:12-18)
    - 1. Paul (1:12-14)
    - 2. Onesiphorus was not ashamed (1:15-18)
- III. Entrust to faithful men (2:1-26)
  - A. Paul (2:1-2)
  - B. A Soldier (2:3-4)
  - C. An Athlete (2:5)
  - D. A Farmer (2:6-7)



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- E. Jesus (2:8-13)
- F. A Worker (2:14-19)
- G. A Vessel (2:20-23)
- H. A Servant (2:21-26)
- IV. The Perils of a Man of God (3:1-17)
  - A. Facing Apostasy (3:1-9)
  - B. Defeating Apostasy (3:10-17)
- V. The Preaching of a Man of God (4:1-5)
  - A. The Charge to Preach (4:1-2)
  - B. The Need for Preaching (4:3-5)
- VI. Concluding Remarks (4:6-18)
  - A. Paul's Triumph (4:6-8)
  - B. Paul's Needs (4:9-18)
- VII. Paul's Farewells (4:19-22)

## EVALUATION

Now that you have you have asked and answered questions, it is helpful to consult other sources to compare your findings with the findings of others.

- It is best to consult conservative commentaries which support a high view of Scripture and a literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutic.
- While considering what other scholars have said about the text, you may find it helpful to ask the following questions:
  - Is there misinformation? Was any information factually mistaken?
  - Is there lack of information? Was important elements in the text skipped or omitted from the research?
  - Are there any inconsistencies? Are there contradictions or internal consistencies in the presentation of facts?
  - Is the overall handling of the passage incomplete? Are conclusions made without enough supporting data?
  - Are there misinterpretations as a result of faulty assumptions or procedure?
    - Do you notice any presuppositions or preunderstandings that may have coloured the author's conclusions about the text?
    - Is there any indication that the steps of exegesis were not followed diligently?
  - What are the most valuable contributions in this writing?

At this point, new observations may arise that need further research.



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- Acknowledge any uncertainties you have about the text.
- Identify any ambiguities in your conclusions.
- Record any lack of knowledge and/or your need to gather more information.
- Take the necessary steps to gain the information you lack.

## APPLICATION

This step in Bible study answers the following questions:

- How does the meaning of this passage apply to me?
- What truths am I to embrace, believe, or order my life by?
- What changes should I make in my belief and/or in my life?

2 Timothy 3:16-17 provides us with an outline for how we are to make application of the meaning of Scripture to our everyday lives.

*“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”*

- Thus we must apply Scripture in light of its teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness.
  - Teaching – (doctrine) is what the Word of God says on any particular subject. That teaching is always true. Therefore, everything that God says in His Word about any given subject is absolute truth and a standard to live by.
  - Reproof – exposes areas in our thinking and behavior that do not align with the truth of God’s Word. Reproof is finding out where you have thought wrongly or where you haven’t been doing what God says is the right thing to do.
  - Correction – is the next area of application and often is the most difficult. Many times you can see what is wrong but perhaps you are reluctant to take the necessary steps to correct it. In this stage of application, you must ask yourself, “What steps do I need to take in order to come in line with God’s Word?” After you answer the question all that is left to do is make a commitment to change.
  - Training in righteousness – Although God’s Word is profitable for reproof and correction, the Bible was also given to you as a



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handbook for living. As you spend time studying His Word God equips you through:

- Teachings
- Commands
- Promises
- Exhortations
- Warnings
- The lives of biblical characters
- Accounts of God's dealings with man

The end result of excellent observation, accurate interpretation and honest application is that the servant of God will be adequate, equipped for every good work.

The following general questions may help you in application.

- *What does this passage teach?*
  - Is it general or specific?
  - Does it apply only to specific people? To a cultural problem of the day? To a certain time in history?
  - Has it been superseded by a broader teaching?
  
- *Does this section of Scripture expose any error in my beliefs or in my behavior?*
  - Are there any commandments that I have not obeyed?
  - Are there any wrong attitudes or motives in my life that the Scriptures bring to light?
  - What is God's instruction to me as His child?
    - Are there any new truths to be believed?
    - Are there any new insights I am to pursue?
    - Are there any promises I am to embrace?

When applying Scripture, be aware of the following:

- Applying cultural standards rather than biblical standards.
- Attempting to strengthen a legitimate truth by using Scripture incorrectly.
- Applying Scripture out of prejudice from past training or teaching.
- Applying Scripture in a way that violates the basic meaning of the text.



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The goal of all Bible study is to know the truth, and that truth will make you free and transform your life. The more you study, the better you will become. Your skills will sharpen. Your ability to observe will increase and the accuracy of your interpretation will lead to better application and in the end more spiritual growth. In the next section, I have provided you with some helpful information that will assist you in some of the skills required for excellent Bible study. God bless you as you continue to grow in this never-ending classroom of Bible study.

On the following pages, you will see many charts that are designed to help you have a quick reference to the elements involved in Bible study. As you begin to develop your Bible study skills, keep these charts at hand and refer to them often. Over time, you will find yourself needing to refer to them less and less.





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## Procedures in Bible Study

1. <b>OBSERVE</b> exactly what the author is saying.	This is the most important step in Bible study and must come first. The more careful and thorough your observations, the more meaningful will be your interpretations, the fairer will be your evaluations, and the richer will be your applications.
2. <b>INTERPRET</b> objectively what the author has written.	After you have observed carefully what the author is saying, determine what he really meant by what he said. You are to try to discover the thoughts, attitudes, emotions, purpose of the author.
3. <b>SUMMARISE</b> concisely the key ideas in a passage.	While summarisation is listed as Step 3, it really is a process which should be done in connection with both observation and interpretation. Try to summarise the facts you observe and then the meaning of the facts.
4. <b>EVALUATE</b> fairly what the author has written.	Not until you have a clear concept of what the author has written. And what he meant by what he wrote can you honestly judge the validity of the passage. Thus evaluation must come after observation and interpretation. For whom is this true and in what sense?
5. <b>APPLY</b> personally the message revealed.	While application is listed fifth in the process, this does not mean that it is fifth in importance. Application is the fruit which will come forth through the other processes. Application is a growing process, not superimposed in a superficial way, but rising out of all the other processes.
6. <b>ACTUALIZE</b> your convictions.	Someone has said, "Don't just study the Bible, do something." Too often Bible study is mainly intellectualizing and emotionalizing the truths, but no actualizing—actually doing what the Lord revealed to us.



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## Specific Things to Observe

<p><b>Key words</b></p>	<p>When you first read a passage, look for the key words, those words which you think are important to the message of the text. Repetition of words will often give you a clue. Underline them in your Bible. Look mostly for nouns and verbs. Look also for routine and non-routine words.</p>
<p><b>Advice</b> <b>Admonitions</b> <b>Warnings</b> <b>Promises</b></p>	<p>Be on the alert for the admonitions which a writer gives; the advice, exhortations, warning and the things he tells you to do (look for imperative verbs). Also, note promises and the encouragements.</p>
<p><b>Reasons</b> <b>Results</b></p>	<p>When you observe admonitions, look to see if the writer gives you some reason(s) for his advice. Note also if he sets forth a cause-and-effect relationship (i.e., if you do _____, then this _____ will happen). Often when a writer gives a warning, he will also give the possible results if the warning is not heeded.</p>
<p><b>Contrasts</b> <b>Comparisons</b> <b>Illustrations</b></p>	<p>Make special note of the way the author uses contrasts, comparisons and illustrations to bring out his ideas. Comparison is the association of things which are similar. Contrast is the association of things that are opposite, often introduced with the conjunction, “but”.</p>
<p><b>Repetition and progression of ideas</b></p>	<p>Be on the alert for repetition of words, statements and ideas. This will often give you a clue as to the author’s intended main idea in a passage. Take special note of lists of items or ideas. Compare the items to see if there is any significance in the order. Do the ideas progress toward a climax of some sort?</p>
<p><b>Questions</b></p>	<p>Be on the watch for the use of interrogatives. Does the author use questions to introduce an idea, summarise a series of ideas, or just to challenge thinking? Does he expect an answer? Does he ask the question and then provide the answer himself?</p>
<p><b>Important connectives</b> prepositions conjunctions</p>	<p>Connectives are very important in revealing key ideas and relationships between grammatical elements within the text. Be on the alert for some of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>but</i> – introduces a contrast</li> <li>• <i>if</i> – introduces a conditional clause</li> <li>• <i>for, because, therefore</i> – introduce reason and results</li> <li>• <i>in, into, with</i> – important connectives showing relationship</li> <li>• <i>in order that</i> – sets forth a purpose</li> </ul>
<p><b>Grammatical connection</b> verbs nouns pronouns adverbs adjectives</p>	<p>Although the term “grammar” frightens the average person, it is important to note that the grammatical construction of a sentence is key to understanding the meaning. Be on the alert for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>verbs</i> – words expressing action</li> <li>• <i>nouns</i> – a person, place, thing, idea or quality</li> <li>• <i>pronouns</i> – take the place of a noun (i.e., him, she, them, etc.)</li> <li>• <i>adverbs</i> – modifies verbs</li> <li>• <i>adjectives</i> – modifies nouns</li> </ul>



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<b>Atmosphere Overall tone</b>	Note the general tone of a passage. It may be characterised by the mood of joy, thanksgiving, concern, humility, zeal, anger, caution, etc. The tone of a passage may vary as an author moves from one idea to another. The mood of a writer is often revealed by the way he addresses his readers.
<b>Emphatic statements</b>	Also note the use an author makes of emphatic statements, words and phrases to reveal his feelings.
<b>Literary form</b>	Always note the literary form of a passage. Is it discourse, narrative, poetry, drama, parable, prophecy, apocalypse? Remember to discern if the author is using a figure of speech.
<b>General structure</b>	Note the arrangement of the ideas in a text and the relationship of verses to each other. Sometimes the author makes a general statement, and then explains it with examples. Other times he may list a series of ideas and then summarise with a general statement.



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## Parts of Speech

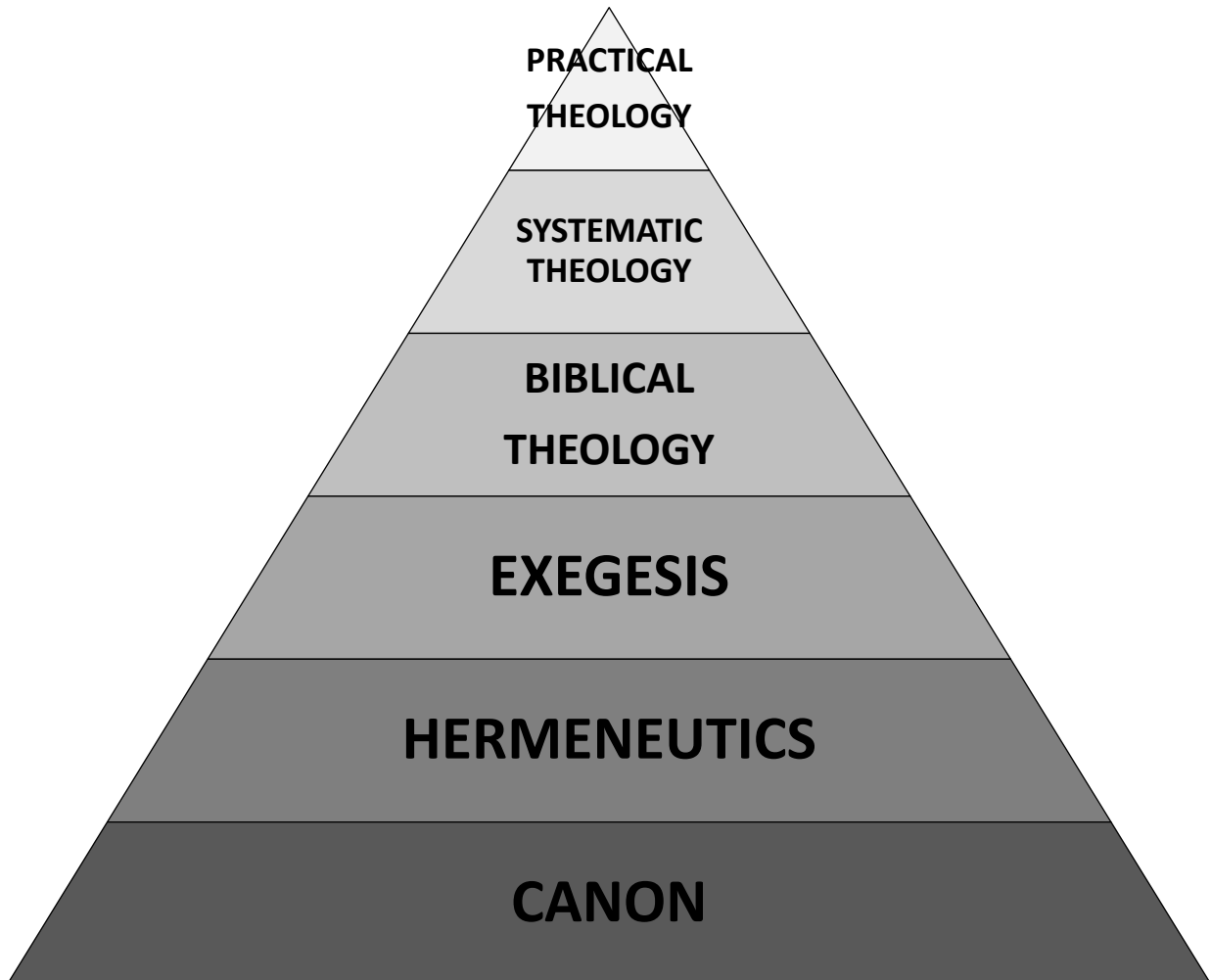
<b>Nouns</b>	A Noun names people, places, things, ideas or qualities (boy, Mary, loveliness, sun, beauty, hatred, boredom, etc.).
<b>Pronouns</b>	A pronoun is a word used as a substitute for a noun (he, she, it, which, that, this, those, these, etc.).
<b>Adjectives</b>	<p>An adjective is a word that describes (modifies) a noun (<i>pretty girl, dusty road, sunny day, great excitement, etc.</i>).</p> <p>Note that the term <i>modify</i>, in grammar means <i>to qualify, limit or restrict</i>. A <i>modifier</i> usually narrows the conception of the thing modified.</p>
<b>Verbs</b>	A verb is a word (or phrase) that expresses action, being, and/or a state of being or occurrence (birds <i>fly</i> , I <i>am</i> , I <i>become</i> , he <i>seems</i> , she <i>died</i> , etc.).
<b>Adverbs</b>	An adverb is a word that describes or modifies a verb, an adjective, or another adverb (work <i>hard</i> , drive <i>carefully</i> , too <i>ill</i> , drive <i>very</i> carefully, she is <i>extremely</i> patient, etc.).
<b>Prepositions</b>	A preposition is a word used with a substantive (noun or pronoun) to show relationship and comes in the form of a phrase, called a prepositional phrase ( <i>in</i> the dark, <i>up</i> the stairs, <i>across</i> the street, <i>without</i> a doubt, <i>toward</i> me, etc.).
<b>Conjunctions</b>	<p>A conjunction is a word that joins one element in a sentence with another. It may join words, phrases, clauses or whole sentences (The wind blew <i>and</i> the rain fell. Jim may come <i>if</i> he secures a ticket.).</p> <p>Here are a few more helpful definitions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <i>Phrase</i> – a group of words that functions as a part of speech and does not contain both a subject and a verb.</li><li>▪ <i>Clause</i> – a group of words that functions as a part of speech containing both a subject and a verb.</li><li>▪ <i>Sentence</i> – a group of words that make up an independent grammatical unit comprising of a subject, verb and expressing a complete thought.</li></ul>



# How to Study the Bible

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## Theological Pyramid



1. **Canon** – speaks to the inspiration, inerrancy, authority, and sufficiency of Scripture.
2. **Hermeneutics** – approaches Scripture from the grammatical-historical method of interpretation.
3. **Exegesis** – deals with elements of translation, vocabulary, form, genre, syntax and grammar.
4. **Biblical Theology** – addresses and summarises the propositional statements and doctrines found in Scripture.
5. **Systematic Theology** – is the unifying fruit of biblical theology.
6. **Practical Theology** – answers questions of application and how to change and grow spiritually.