



# Bible Study Methods

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# Understanding The Bible

## The Source of the Bible

### *Revelation*

*Psalm 19:1-6, Genesis 1-3, John 1:18, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:21*

The Greek word for revelation is the word *apokalupsis*, which is translated as “disclosure”, or an “unveiling”. This is a great word for describing the purpose of the Bible. It must be clearly understood that the Bible was written as a communique, a letter of sorts, from God to mankind. This letter from God then, in simple terms, is the content of truth that God desired for us to know.

This letter has many purposes, from instructing on doctrine and practice, but the motivating purpose of it is to tell us about God. It is important to note that God does communicate to us through two primary ways: general revelation (unwritten knowledge of God), and specific revelation (written knowledge of God).

### *General*

Psalm 19:1-6 makes the case that creation itself testifies to us, communicates to us if you will, about the character and nature of God Himself. Although this passage is speaking directly about the nature of creation as a testifier of God, it also indirectly speaks about the nature of God. We understand this passage to be informing us about the person of God, specifically in relationship to His desire in relating to us. The theory would be that, if God didn't want us to know Him personally, then why would He create in such a way that it would “declare His glory”? The answer to this is simple, God does desire us to know Him, and He went to great lengths to insure that we would.

Consider the creation account (Genesis 1-3) of the first three chapters of Genesis. As we read about the initial creative plan of God, we find that the desire of God was to create beings that would be like Him and relate to Him in an intimate way. In the fall of Adam and Eve we discover that this was indeed the central point of God's creation, so much so that this relationship is precisely the thing that was broken due to their sin. In this way, even the fall of mankind into a state of sin and separation from God affirms the idea that God communicates with people in a personal, non-written way.

### *Specific*

We also read in the Bible that God specifically states that he is a communicative God through His Word. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul explains the spiritual back story to the Bible. He gives us an understanding of how the Bible came to us, namely that through various writers, over a span of

1400 years, there is actually only one author, God Himself. These verses provide for us a clear perspective on not only the importance of the Bible, but also the motivation behind it. We understand that all of the Bible is given by God and it has a number of foci: to teach, reprove, correct, and train in righteousness. The key phrase in this passage, related to the concept of revelation, is the phrase “God-breathed”. This is a unique phrase to the Greek new Testament and is a literal translation of the original language expression. Its imagery is quite vivid as it portrays God revealing Himself to us through His own word that literally comes up from within His very being.

2 Peter 1:21 also gives us a simple description of the process of specific revelation through human beings. This process is extremely important to understand as it explains the key components to understanding the doctrine of revelation:

- “not produced by the will of man” Of first importance in this verse is the notion that the Bible did not originate with people. Although people assisted God in the physical task of writing the Bible, the content (even the words themselves) came from God’s supernatural work in them.
- “men spoke from God” In this next clause we read that the physical process was through the avenue of people whom God selected and supernaturally empowered to communicate His very words and truths to all people.
- “carried along by the Holy Spirit” Lastly, this verse explicitly states that the Bible came through the empowering of the Holy Spirit, both in the sense that He gave content but also that He empowered the process.

### *Inspiration*

*2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:21, Romans 9:1-3*

To quote Paul Enns, “Inspiration is necessary to preserve the revelation of God. If God has revealed Himself but the record of that revelation is not accurately recorded, then the revelation of God is subject to question. Hence, inspiration guarantees the accuracy of the revelation<sup>1</sup>”. The primary concern in inspiration is the implementation and preservation of the content that God gave. Inspiration is a key to maintaining the authority of the Bible as the word of God because it anchors the revelation process in the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit to maintain its internal consistency and unity of message.

The challenge in understanding inspiration is in the union of God and man in the writing process of the Bible. One way to perceive this interaction is to view the Bible as a book with dual authorship. To prevent a potentially false conclusion in using this term, each “author” had a unique role in writing process. The role of God as the author of the Bible is exclusively in reference to the content of the Bible. The role of man as the author of the Bible is in the realm of style, expression, and explanation of the Bible’s content. In this sense, God maintains His rightful

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook Of Theology*

place as the source of the content and theological direction of the Bible, and mankind maintains his place as the one who was entrusted by God to express and explain the content that God originated. There is however a need to explore more deeply the means by which God insured that this “co-authorship” process would faithfully communicate His message.

### *Means And Message*

In the last clause of 2 Peter 1:21, Paul explains this work of the Holy Spirit as him “carrying along” the Bible writers in their process of writing the Bible. This is an important concept to understand as it speaks most prominently to the ultimate authority of the Bible in our lives. We must deeply consider this issue, and the internal claims that pertain to it, if we are to view the Bible correctly. This idea of being “carried along” by the Holy Spirit is God’s way of explaining to us the process by which the purity of the content of the Bible was maintained. In other words, for God to use human authors to physically write down His message, He had to have a process in place to insure the purity of the message. This is where the Holy Spirit came in, as he “carried them” and the process itself, along.

Although God used human authors to write down his message, He did so in such a way that maintained the purity and consistency of the message. The Bible, for it to truly be the word of God, had to originate with God and be completely sourced in Him. Not only this, but God so chose to use the unique gifting, styles, and personalities of each Biblical author to convey the essential message that He was inspiring them to write. This is a profound concept to say the least, that God could both sovereignly source His message, but also sovereignly guide each writer to maintain unity of meaning across the broad literary landscape of the Bible. It is then, in this broad sense, that God “inspired” others to write down His words, thoughts, stories, and doctrines so that they would be compiled into one consistent and unified message for mankind.

### *Inerrancy*

*Romans 3:4, 2 Timothy 3:16, Genesis 1:27-31, Malachi 3:6, James 1:17, Psalm 11:4-6*

E. J. Young provides a suitable definition of inerrancy: “By this word we mean that the Scriptures possess the quality of freedom from error. They are exempt from the liability to mistake, incapable of error. In all their teachings they are in perfect accord with the truth”<sup>2</sup> This definition is comprehensive and touches on all of the significant components of the doctrine of inerrancy. These components are: 1) freedom from error, and 2) internally consistent with truth.

In Romans 3:4 and 3 Timothy 3:16, we see the Bible presented as an internally consistent message that has is born out of God who is the source of truth. This is a key internal claim of the Bible which impacts both our understanding of it and our hermeneutic. We can view the Scriptures as a trustworthy source of truth and we also can approach the study of it with an

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<sup>2</sup> E.J. Young, *Thy Word Is Truth*, pg. 113

understanding that it is internally consistent, not contradictory, in its revelation of and teaching in truth. This is a profoundly important issue in how we view and approach the Bible. Due to the link of the content with its source (God), we must understand that meaning can be found and must be consistent. This connection between book and source is the central issue in establishing the doctrine of inerrancy.

### *The Nature Of God*

At the heart of the issue of Biblical inerrancy is the nature of God Himself. In this perspective, we realize that God is the source of the Bible's content, therefore the veracity, consistency, and sustainability of the message of the Bible is inextricably linked to its author who is God. A few key verses speak to this issue and provide clarity and claim to it.

- In Malachi 3:6, God specifically states that He “does not change”, meaning that His very character is one of pure consistency.
- James 1:17 reads that there is no “variation or shadow due to change” with God. Not only does God not change, but there is no instance of variation or diversion of God from His character. This eliminates even the slightest shift in the consistency of the Bible's message. So even when we

### *Hermeneutic Considerations*

As we begin to grasp the issue of inerrancy, we start to realize that we must establish some practical understandings and applications of inerrancy in relationships to how we understand and interpret the Bible.

- Inerrancy includes various styles.
- Inerrancy includes variety of perspectives (i.e. in narrative accounts).
- Inerrancy does not always include every detail in all contexts or accounts.
- Inerrancy includes stylistic and personally defined quotations of others passages.
- Inerrancy cannot contradict itself.

These simple perspectives are important to recognize as you study and interpret the Bible. The conviction that we approach the Bible with is one of assurance in the inerrancy of it because of its origins in God Himself. That being said, we also must recognize these “challenges” to interpretation that provide opportunities for deeper study, but never do they expose a lack of consistency.

# The Text Of The Bible

## *Canonicity*

Canonicity is the process by which the various “books” of the Bible were determined to be sourced in God and considered as part of His complete message to mankind. Paul Enns writes, <sup>3</sup>“The word canon is used to describe the inspired books. The word comes from the Greek *kanon* and probably also from the Hebrew *qaneh*, signifying a “measuring rod.” This issue of canonicity is vital for a number of reasons, but two of them are uniquely significant in the life of a believer: 1) personal confidence in the authority of the Bible that we have, and 2) defending the Bible authenticity before the skeptical world. In the first area, canonicity provides a deep personal confidence and motivation to study and apply the Bible to our lives when we understand its veracity and authenticity as the word of God and not of man. In the second area, much of the world challenges the premise of God’s existence and authority over mankind due to their skepticism of the claims of the Bible as truly inspired by and maintained by God Himself.

## *Historical Development*

Much of the debate over the canon of the Bible developed over centuries, due to the slow process of the entire Bible itself (1,400 years, 40+ authors), but we can recognize a series of events that specifically led to the ultimate sealing of the Bible in its present state.

In terms of the practical process that was followed in determining the authenticity of a particular book of the Bible, there were a series of tests that were administered. These tests were primarily applied to the ultimate canonization of the New Testament books, but also apply in principle to the Old Testament. The four primary tests were authorship (OT prophets/NT apostles), acceptance, content, and inspiration.

- Authorship. In the Old Testament, each section (Luke 24:44) of Bible had to be affirmed by its respective author(s) (i.e. The Law was written by Moses, the Prophets were written by affirmed prophets of God, the Psalms/Writings were written by God appointed authors). In the New Testament, the author had to be an apostle or have a connection with an apostle (i.e. Mark wrote under Peter’s authority, and Luke wrote under Paul’s authority).
- Acceptance. A book that was to be accepted as from God and canonical had to be accepted by the church at large.
- Content. The book must reflect consistency of doctrine with what has been established in other Bible contexts and in orthodox teaching.
- Inspiration. The book must reflect the quality of inspiration, meaning that it should bear evidence of high moral and spiritual values that would reflect a work of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook Of Theology*

## *Modern Confirmation*

There has indeed been much “ancient” scrutiny and testing over the canon of the Bible. Although much was settled in the first 400 years of the church, this testing process has continued throughout the ages until the present. Due to the ever increasing doubt of the world over the veracity of the Bible, the church has been forced to continue to consider this matter in greater detail. This present day challenge has been primarily focused on the issue of the original source texts that were the original Bible and the preservation of the central message of those texts over thousands of years. “The work of copying the ancient manuscripts was a tedious exercise, but the Jews very early developed strict rules for their work. Rules regulated the kind of parchment, the number of lines to be written, the color of the ink, and the manner of revision. When parchments began to show wear, the Jew reverently buried the manuscripts. As a result, until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran, the oldest extant manuscripts were dated from a.d. 900.”<sup>4</sup>

In the Old Testament, there are four major categories of manuscripts that have been uncovered and constitute its base.

- Dead Sea Scrolls (125 BC) The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, provided manuscripts one thousand years older than previously available. Their discovery and subsequent comparison with previous manuscripts concluded that there was no significant difference between the Isaiah scroll at Qumran and the Masoretic Hebrew text dated one thousand years later.
- Septuagint (250 - 150 BC) The Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament to accommodate the dispersed Jews who had lost the Hebrew language. It is based on a Hebrew text one thousand years older than our existing Hebrew manuscripts.
- Samaritan Pentateuch (Fourth Century BC). This translation of the books of Moses was made to facilitate the worship of the Samaritans at Mount Gerizim (as a rival to Jerusalem). Minor differences with the Masoretic text are present, related only to matters of grammar and spelling.
- Aramaic Targums. Following Israel’s return from captivity in Babylon, the Jews had abandoned Hebrew for Aramaic. Thus the Scriptures needed translated into Aramaic for the Jews. These Targums (meaning “translations”) were the result. They are a loose retelling of the biblical accounts, but still provide a valuable background for the study of the NT besides witnessing to the text of the OT.

In the New Testament, there are also four major categories of manuscripts and full texts that help validate the long standing Bible that we use today.

- Papyrus Manuscripts (AD 200’s) These manuscripts are old and an important witness. For example, the Chester Beatty Papyrus dates from the third century.

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook Of Theology*.

- Uncial Manuscripts (AD 300-600). Approximately two hundred forty manuscripts are called uncial manuscripts and are identified by capital letters. Each Codex (“book”) contain parts, and in some cases, nearly the whole of the New Testament Greek text.
- Minuscule Manuscripts. There are some twenty-eight hundred minuscule manuscripts that are not as old as uncial manuscripts.
- Versions (AD 100-400s). A number of early versions of the New Testament exist that have been translated into various languages (Syriac, Coptic, Latin).

In all of these cases, and with the ever growing field of textual archeology and preservation, we continually find ourselves with an even more consistent message, validated throughout millennia and preserved by the hand of God. We can truly be confident that the Bible we use today, is in fact the original message of given by God through his messengers and directed at all of mankind.

## **The Preservation Of The Bible**

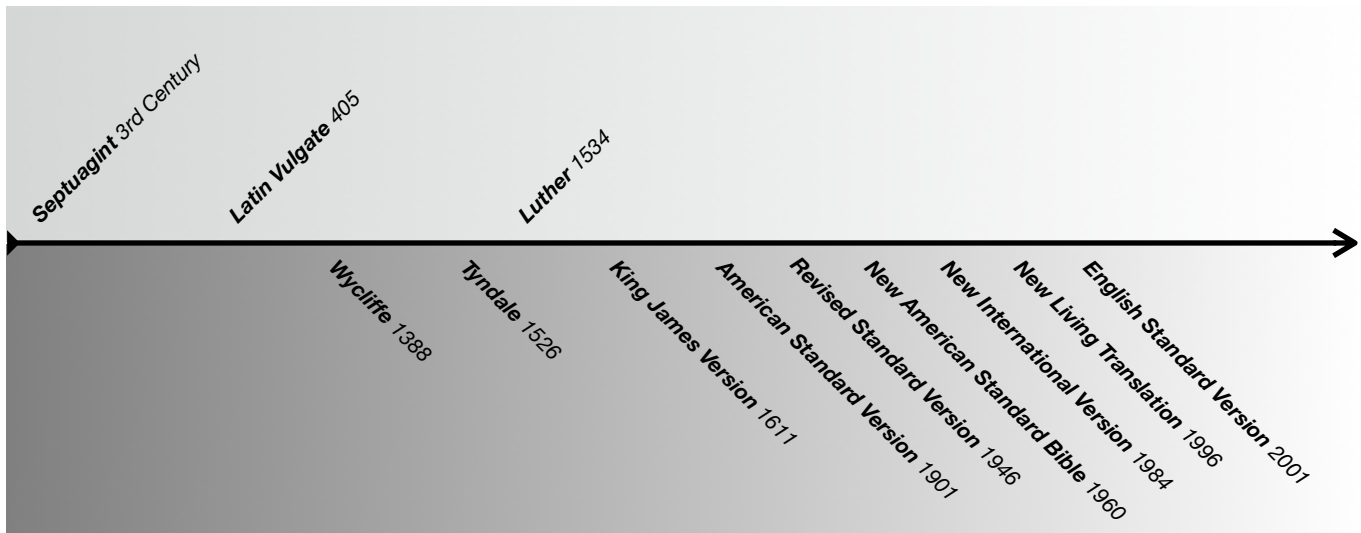
### *History Of Translation*

The history of Bible translation is rich and dates back to the the 3rd century BC when Greek translators began to translate the Old Testament Hebrew scriptures into the Greek language. John Wycliffe was the first translator of the original language manuscripts into the English language in 1388.

The fundamental aim of Bible translation has always been the accessibility of the Bible to all people. The conviction comes from a true understanding of Biblical revelation, and a desire to see all people interact with God through His word. In the days of Wycliffe, this came at a great cost because it was in direct opposition to the fundamental structure and authority of the Catholic church. Many early Bible translators faced great persecution and even gave their lives for this cause.

The translation of the Bible into many “vulgar” languages was triggered most significantly by John Wycliffe, a fourteenth century philosopher, priest, and theologian who began to question the Catholic church’s fundamental division between clergy (professional priests) and laity (volunteer members) of the church. The distinction they drew was that only clergy could actually, interpret, and ultimately apply the bible to people’s lives. This struck a chord of dissent not only in Wycliffe, but in many of his contemporaries and also those who followed in later years. This disagreement over the propagation and engagement with the Scriptures, by ordinary people, would be the wellspring of the Reformation.

Beginning with Wycliffe and continuing on for generations, the charge of making the Bible accessible to everyone continued for centuries and still continues to this day. Of the 6,800 distinct language groups in the world, 1,534 already have portions of the Bible in their native languages. Currently 2,658 more language groups have new translation projects in progress. Although these statistics are encouraging,



### *Translation Methodology*

Bible translation is a very detailed process that is aimed at the effective re-expression of biblical truth from one language to another. When you consider the vast differences in structure, syntax, and vocabulary from language to language, you begin to realize the immense challenge of translating effectively. It is due to these complexities that the translation process requires a series of detailed steps to insure the accurate transmission of meaning from one language to another.

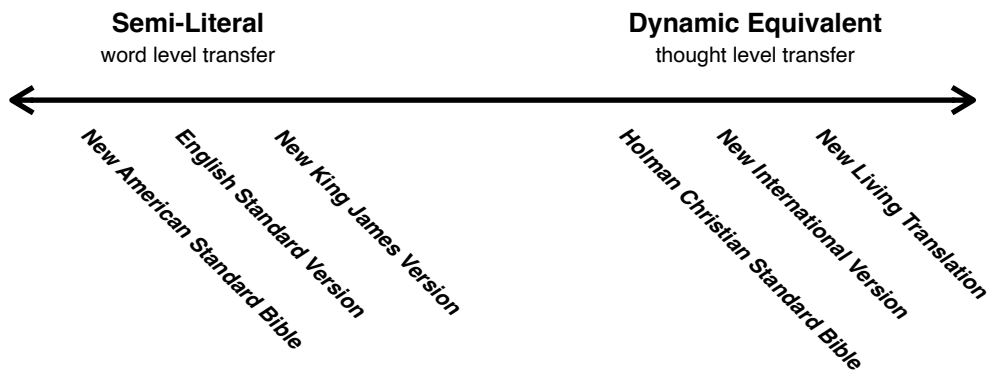
The translation process requires a number of basic steps to insure the faithful transmission of the Bible into a new language:

1. **Exegesis** of the passage in the source language (Greek/Hebrew/Aramaic) and other semi-literal English language translations. Although this step addresses and defines key terms and concepts, it is primarily for the purpose of determining the meaning of the passage on the complete thought (proposition) level. Exegesis also focuses on how the complete thoughts relate to each other and how the flow of thought moves from one complete thought to another (discourse).
2. **Re-Expression** of the passage into the target language.
3. **Context check** of the translation to insure that none of the central components of the translation content is missed in the re-expression step.
4. **Revision** by native speaker of the target language through listening, correcting grammar and style, so as to maintain effective communication into the target language.
5. **Checking** of the translation with various native speakers which focuses on insuring effective communication of the truth to various listeners.
6. **Detail check** of the content, grammar, and expression of the translation.

# The Translations Of The Bible

## *Choosing A Translation*

In the scope of Bible translations there is a range of styles, from the more semi-literal translations to the more dynamic equivalent ones. In the English language there are hundreds of translations, landing on every spot on this continuum. Because of the large number of options for the English speaker, it is important to think through which translation might be best for the various purposes of spiritual life.



We recommend that you select an essentially literal translation as your primary translation for studying the Bible. This will insure that your study is least affected by the nuanced theological bent of some of the more dynamic equivalent translations. It is the expressed purpose of these semi-literal translations to stick to the original language as much as possible in terms of the words used, which ends up helping you better understand what was actually said and allows to decipher the intended meaning. The best semi-literal translations are the English Standard Version (ESV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), and the New King James Version (NKJV).

We also recommend that you employ at least one additional dynamic equivalent translation as part of your reading and study process. To better grasp the overall flow of thought and “spirit” of the passage, it is very helpful to read the passage often from a dynamic equivalent translation. The best dynamic equivalent translations are the New Living Translation (NLT), the New International Version (NIV), and the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB).

# Theory Of Interpretation

## Introduction

As we consider the topic of biblical hermeneutics, it is important for us to realize that there are a number of different approaches to how we interpret the text that we have been given in the Bible. In this course, we will first briefly address both the posture of hermeneutics, and the most significant methods of Bible interpretation. We will also conclude by presenting a basic description of our chosen hermeneutic, which we believe is practical, sensible, and Biblically consistent. As a follow up to this, we will also present instruction on some practical steps that best lead us into the practice of this hermeneutic as we engage the Bible in study.

Another important thing to understand is we look at these different ways of interpreting the Scriptures is to realize that each one of them is formed from a certain set of presuppositions, or pre-determined conclusions that people bring to the way that they interpret the Scriptures. We readily acknowledge that presuppositions are not only present but required when we study the Bible, so it is important for us to note what some of those presuppositions which helps us determine which hermeneutic approach is more biblically founded and supported.

## Exegesis vs. Eisegesis

From a philosophical standpoint, it is important to note that one's hermeneutic (means of interpretation) can be broadly categorized by one of two words: exegesis or eisegesis. We will define the terms briefly and explain how these two postures affect our hermeneutic.

Exegesis is the posture that the meaning of a passage is derived, or "mined out", from within the text. Exegesis views the passage as the container of the intended meaning of the original author (God through men), of which we as readers are meant to discover from within the text. With an exegetical posture, we assume our humility under the author's intended meaning and we seek to uncover it, understand it doctrinally, and apply it personally and contextually.

Eisegesis is the view that external presuppositions and knowledge are brought into the passage in order to come to an understanding of the meaning and application of a particular passage. To put it simply, eisegesis reads the meaning into the text. With an isegetical posture, we assume authority and freedom as the reader to bring our own cultural and contextual assumptions to interpretation and we seek to validate those personally held presuppositions from the text.

## Comparing Hermeneutic Approaches

Biblical hermeneutics is a very old science, with a plethora of unique approaches, established

over centuries. General speaking though, most of these approaches fit into one of two hermeneutic “families”, either the Allegorical or the Literal-Historical-Grammatical hermeneutic. We will briefly explain both in order to provide an adequate backdrop for presenting our chosen method of interpretation.

## **The Allegorical Hermeneutic**

The allegorical hermeneutic primarily sees the Bible as a grouping of writings that present general ideas, and not as historical events and interactions between human beings at actual points in time and space. This method although it sounds very negative much of it is indeed used by more liberal veins of what we would call the Christian religion and they use this very loose method of interpretation to support their various claims about what God can and indeed should do for us. This approach is certainly supported by those who would promote a much more man-centric view of the Christian faith and use it to support the various things that they desire for God to accomplish for them.

When we consider the presuppositional perspective of the allegorical method of Bible interpretation, we recognize that this view does not perceive the Bible as literal nor does it represent the actual facts of human history. This presupposition leads to a very loose conclusions as to the specific and particular meaning of a given passage. Because of this fact, much of the use of the allegorical method leads to very undefined and unverifiable conclusions and applications of what the Bible is speaking about. It is this approach then that is most easily associated with the hermeneutic posture of eisegesis.

## **The Literal-Historical-Grammatical Hermeneutic**

The second broader category of Bible interpretation is known as the literal-historical-grammatical method. This method employs a more of a plain sense assumption that the Bible, believing that it means precisely what it claims, in that it represents actual recorded events and interactions of people in real space and time. It also assumed these stories literally represent the presence and interaction of God with humans history. Because of this fact, the literal hermeneutic not only permits but promotes a much more disciplined and structured method of Bible interpretation. It forces the student to come to consistent conclusions about what the meaning of a particular passage is and also provides boundaries for the potential application of the meaning of that passage.

With this in mind, we acknowledge that the student of the Bible brings this presupposition to their study of the Bible and it leads them to pursue that study with certain values and restraints. These values are:

- Uncovering the authors original intended meaning.
- Considering the application of the meaning to the original audience.

- Using a “principled” view of these conclusions as we consider the personal application of the meaning to our lives today.

## **Hermeneutical Blending**

We must acknowledge that in the broader Christian community, there is much blending of these two methods of interpretation that does occur. For example, we know that there are those in the Reformed community that would support a more literal method of interpretation, however when they come to the doctrine of the end times and the future revealing of the kingdom of God, they would tend to employ a more allegorical method of interpretation. Because of this, we must approach others with grace as we engage the scriptures together, but we must also strive to maintain as consistent a method as possible when it comes to the study of the Bible, no matter the context in the Bible that we find ourselves studying.

As we consider these two methods of Bible interpretation, it is our conviction to hold to the Literal-Historical-Grammatical method. We believe that this approach is most inline with the concept of revelation (God communicating to mankind), considers the grammar and language used, and provides the most consistent way to understand and apply the principles of the Bible as God intended us to. The next section of this course will outline some practical steps that be taken to employ Literal-Historical-Grammatical method to interpreting the Bible.

# Practical Steps

## Observation

One of the most challenging aspects of being new adult or adolescent believer is learning how to read and study the Bible well. Most are intimidated by the Bible and have been led to believe that they incapable of doing it at all. This is not true.

In this first section of the Hermeneutics course, we introduce you to the basic knowledge of, and practical steps for, learning how to read the Bible for comprehension.

Prior to applying the steps of Bible study to a specific passage of the book you are studying, take the time to immerse yourself in the overall context of the entire book. Read the entire book, twice, in two different translations (ESV and NLT).

### *Steps*

1. Turn off all devices, remove all influences for at least 5 minutes prior to beginning
2. Pray to clear your mind, connect with God relationally, and set your thoughts on Him, His Word, and His intent for you in your study.
3. Read the passage in the ESV
4. Read the passage in the NLT
5. Listen to an audio recording of the passage.
6. Write down the essential details of the passage that you remember.
7. Note if there are any details that you are forgetting and immediately return to the text and write down the details that you forgot.
8. Write down any additional questions and observations.

## Interpretation | Narratives

It is important to understand that studying narrative literature must be approached with a clear understanding of the nature of narratives. Narratives are stories, written to illustrate what individual people have acted upon, in real life scenarios, with the truth of God. Many people misunderstand the doctrines and instructions of God by improperly concluding that God instructs on doctrine through narrative accounts. As we seek to study narratives effectively, we must do so by studying the illustrative nature of the them, and seek to learn from these accounts as we establish the appropriate doctrinal basis for them in the Epistles.

1. Scenes: mark with a line and number each of the different scenes of the story.

2. **Spiritual Concepts:** For each scene of the story, record your thoughts about what the scene is communicating about the nature of mankind, the character and work of God, or how people are to relate to Him. Note any cross-references that correspond to the spiritual concepts that you have identified in the scene.
3. **Summary:** write a one sentence summary of each scene that succinctly details what you believe to be the main point of that particular scene.
4. **Principle:** Develop a principle for the entire chapter. Remember that the principle should answer the question, "What is the spiritual lesson that we learn in this chapter?"

## **Interpretation | Epistles**

The study of epistles is a more technical process than the study of other types of New Testament literature. The technical nature of epistles can prove to be intimidating for most people, but with a clear understanding and practical steps to follow, anyone can learn how to faithfully study epistles.

Unlike narratives, epistles exist for the expressed purpose of instruction in the doctrines of God. Oftentimes an epistle will include practical applications and exhortations that are personal in nature, but they are primarily written to explain and teach a specific set of truths from God. It is for this reason that we must take our time and patiently observe, carefully interpret, and faithfully apply the truth of what we discover in them.

1. **Pray.**
2. **Prepare:** copy and paste the ESV version of the passage that you are studying into your word processor, removing all formatting (paragraph breaks, section headings, etc) from the text.
3. **Complete thoughts:** break the passage into the complete thoughts, one per line, in your word processor. A complete thought is not a sentence per se, because sentences can be made up of many complete thoughts.
4. **Outline:** all the complete thoughts in the passage. Start at the beginning of your passage with the first complete thought you come across and leave it at left most margin of your document. Continue to the very next complete thought. At this point ask, "Does this second complete thought support/define/explain/modify in some way the previous complete thought?" If the answer is yes, then indent it to show the supporting relationship to the previous complete thought. If it does not support/define/explain/modify the previous statement, then you leave it directly under the previous one, but not indented. This simply shows that the second statement simply carries on the flow of thought and is not modifying the previous one.

As you outline and make decisions as to the relationships between the complete thoughts, make sure that you strive to define the meaning of each one. Usually the defining of each

complete thought takes place as you consider what each individual complete thought says, and how it relates to the others around it.

During the outlining process, it is very important to return to those transition words that you marked earlier during the observation step. Identifying the purpose of each transition word can greatly help you determine how each complete thought relates to the others around it. Here are some helps:

- “And” This means that the new material is simply being added to the previous material. (Normally do not indent)
  - “But, Now” These words signal a new related point to the theme line that has already been established. (Normally do not indent)
  - “Therefore, Then, So” These words continue, in some way, the main point that was already stated by introducing a response or action to be taken. (Normally do not indent, but certain contexts can support the use of these words as supportive or descriptive of the previous content)
  - “For” This word signals that the material that follows it is still part of the same point previously mentioned and it merely strengthens it in some way. (Normally indent)
5. Step away and pray: in order to develop the principle well, it is advised that you take some time away from the formal process of bible study in the passage (from a few hours to even one day). Reread the passage again in a different translation than the one you outlined it in (NLT, NIV, etc). See if this “fresh” reading helps you to better grasp the overall flow of the passage in relationship to your outline. Pray specifically for God to give you insight and direction in summarizing the meaning of the passage. Pray for clarity of thought as you seek to re-express the meaning of the passage in terms of its ultimate purpose in your life.
6. Main Principle: develop a main principle from the outlining of the complete thoughts. A biblical principle by definition is a fundamental conclusion that connects or is demonstrated by the flow of thought in the text. Discovering and expressing these principles in the passage will come as you reflect on and summarize the conclusions from your outline. In every portion of scripture there is a main principle or conclusion but there can also be various secondary principles as well. Note: The main principles throughout the book will ultimately connect to develop the overall flow of the book.

Here are a few practical questions that you can ask to help uncover the principles of a passage:

- Looking at your outline and seeing the relationships of the complete thoughts in it, which complete thought seems to be the main ones?
- Do most of the complete thoughts modify or explain one main one?
- How could you restate a summary principle with consideration to the most important complete thought and the major supporting ones?

7. Study Worksheet: is a summary of the outline, principle and other conclusions you have made about the passage you are studying. It should include these items:
- Finalized outline.
  - Main Principle.
  - Support. List any support in the passage and outside the passage for your conclusion of what the main principle is.
  - Context. Note any observations or considerations of how this passage connects to the previous context or passage in the book of the Bible that you are studying.
  - Mission. Explain how you see the principle of the passage in relationship to the mission of God.
  - Inconsistencies. Write down specific areas of your thinking and lifestyle that are inconsistent with the main principle that the passage is addressing.

## **Application**

1. Consider areas of your thinking that contradict with the principles you have uncovered.
2. Consider areas of your lifestyle and actions that contradict with the principles you have uncovered.
3. Consider avenues of change that you could embrace which would better align your thinking and actions with the principles you have uncovered.

## **Teaching Others**

### *General Principles*

As you begin the process of teaching others to study the Bible, it is important to have a few guiding principles in mind or else you might lose interest from your disciples, or worse yet, unintentionally discourage their efforts.

1. Go slow
2. One idea/process at a time
3. Model it for them
4. Practice it together with them
5. Ask them to model it
6. Encourage and Enjoy

### *Reading*

It is vital to note that this process of more in-depth Bible study is built on a lifestyle and commitment to Bible reading. We strongly urge that you teach, model, and disciple your friends in this step prior to engaging in this content.

### *Observation*

Due to the importance of good observation in the Bible study process, it is important to explain, model, and provide ample time for people to improve in their observation skills. If you are teaching these principle to larger groups, consider breaking into smaller groups to teach these steps. The more practically that you can model and interact through these steps, the better.

1. Pray for patience and awareness of others as they learn this phase.
2. Read the entire section, two times (ESV & NLT), from start to finish, uninterrupted.
3. Listen to an audio recording of the passage.
4. Note the actors (Who is doing the action and who is receiving it?) and the actions (What is being done?). Encourage each individual to develop a system of noting these things that can be consistently used throughout their study of the Bible.
5. Write down any questions and general observations.
6. Write a one sentence summary.
7. Provide a context to share observations and questions.

### *Interpretation*

This is the specific part of Bible study that intimidates most people. With that in mind, we suggest a strategy that will slowly introduce your friends to the concepts within it. The steps listed below are not be understood as principles that need to be entirely covered in one sitting. They should be drawn over a number of gatherings, giving plenty of time for your friends to observe, ask questions, and try it themselves. Be patient, very encouraging, and have fun during this phase. Remember that we are not only trying to inform them of how to do this, but modeling the joy and reward of Bible study.

1. Pray for clarity of mind, both for yourself to communicate these concepts, and for your friends as they learn them.
2. Explain the process of interpreting from a theoretical standpoint. Do not call it “outlining”. Explain that you are simply taking a closer look at what the author wrote by slowing down and considering each statement in relationship to the statements around it.
3. For the sake of ease and confidence building, just break up the statements using the commas that already exist in the text. No need to initially go any deeper than that.
4. Model it yourself as they watch.
5. Do it together, asking their input as you work through each statement.

6. Ask one of them to take your place and lead through the process.
7. Ask each individual to bring their own conclusions.
8. Bring back their questions from the Observation stage and see if any of them have been answered or if there is a new perspective that helps.

### *Warning*

As with all the other phases, we suggest that you not press into life actions/application too soon without proper observation and interpretation being done first. Deeply and personally considering the learned truths is vital if there is to be ultimate life change.

1. Pray for insight into other's thinking, helping them to delve more deeply into their thinking and lifestyle.
2. Ask your friends to summarize their conclusions about the passage.
3. Explain the crucial necessity of deeply and personally considering the new truths that they are learning. (Moving from concepts to convictions, thinking to character)
4. Prepare critical questions to prompt more personal interaction with the truths learned.
5. Model it by taking ample time to pray together about the learned truths, specifically asking God to expose areas of your thinking and lifestyle that are not consistent with it.
6. Give them the opportunity, in time, to lead the group discussion of this phase.

### *Application*

Beginning to see lives changed through study and consideration of the Bible is our ultimate aim. In reality, this can take much more time than we would like to give. We must

1. Pray for patience and discernment in leading others into this phase.
2. Ask your friends which truths have been the most convicting during your study.
3. Ask your friends if they have noticed God's prompting to either address areas in their life that are inconsistent with, or step out by faith in new areas of lifestyle, that are consistent with the truths that have been learned.
4. Discuss how those steps might be taken to pursue a lifestyle that is more consistent with the truths that have been learned.
5. Pray together about those steps. Pray for wisdom to walk in the truth, and boldness when the walking might be challenging.
6. Plan follow-up discussions to check on progress in the given areas that were discussed.

# Additional Resources

## Internet Tools

1. Bible Gateway ([www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com))
2. The Bible Project (<https://thebibleproject.com/explore/>)
3. Google Docs (<https://www.google.com/docs/about/>)
4. iCloud Pages ([www.icloud.com](http://www.icloud.com))

## Books

1. The Essential Evangelical Parallel Bible (<http://a.co/d/f8nOTCn>)
2. IVP Bible Background Commentary Series (<http://a.co/d/eH1zjKT>)
3. Grace New Testament Commentary (<http://a.co/d/fEfyXj>)
4. Bible Knowledge Commentary (<http://a.co/d/7t9ggzh>)
5. Living By The Book, Howard Hendricks (<http://a.co/d/fADzZ6O>)
6. New Testament Exegesis, Gordon Fee (<http://a.co/d/0Mba7Ww>)
7. Scripture Journals, Crossway Publishing  
(<https://www.crossway.org/articles/introducing-esv-scripture-journals/>)