

The need for interpretation-There is no doubt that while the Bible has had a significant impact on our world, it is also unfortunately misinterpreted more than any other book in history. The plain meaning has often been obscured by those uncomfortable with the challenges contained within its pages. Those uncomfortable with a plain interpretation have reinterpreted historical passages as myth and allegory, cast doubt upon the divine inspiration of scripture and read meaning into passages that the authors never intended all in an attempt to make the Bible fit into a modern western cultural framework. While there may be some parts of the Bible that are better understood in light of ancient cultures the one thing that has not changed in thousands of years is human nature. Most of the messages contained within the Bible can be understood in any age or culture and applied to our lives. That being said, if you have a good translation that is easy to read you shouldn't need a degree in theology to understand it. The Bible was not meant only for philosophers and theologians. It was written for the average person. I hope that this booklet will be helpful for anyone who wishes to become a student of the scripture.

Choose a Bible version- The Bible has been translated into hundreds of languages. The translations are from Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek manuscripts. Translations into the English language usually fall into one of several categories. These are Formal Equivalence (Word for word) translations such as the King James Bible, The English Standard Version or the New American Standard Bible. The goal of these translations is to keep as close to the original words as possible. Another type of

Bible translation is the Dynamic Equivalence (thought for thought) Translation such as the New International Version or the New Living Translation. The goal of these translations is for easier reading so one can grab the idea of the passage. Today anyone with a computer or a smartphone has access to multiple versions of the Bible. My recommendation is that your main Bible is easy for you to read so that you will be encouraged to pick it up daily. You should also have a KJV Bible available as well. Many of the study aids are still keyed to the King James version.

You don't have to start at the beginning. Some people get discouraged because they want to read the Bible from the beginning but you have to realize that it is not one book but a library of translated manuscripts of history, poetry, genealogies as well as eyewitness accounts and individual letters. The collection has 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. It is best to start with the Gospels especially the gospel of John, Acts and then Romans. This will provide a good foundation for you as you begin the Old Testament.

We must interpret The Old Testament in the light of the New Testament. The Old Testament contains the promises from God while the New Testament speaks of Jesus as the fulfillment these promises. The Old Testament is also known as the Old Covenant. The New Testament contains the New Covenant which applies to the Church today. Why is this important? You will eventually run into some people who will tell you that you need to worship on Saturday or avoid eating certain kinds of foods. They are misapplying Old Testament laws that were meant to govern Jewish society.

To prevent this unfortunate trek into what's known as legalism, it is essential to study the book of Galatians written by the Apostle Paul. We are saved not by keeping of the Laws of Moses in the Old Covenant but by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and the work he accomplished by dying on the cross for our sins and rising again from the dead. To put our trust in trying to achieve holiness through the law is to say Christ work was not enough.

Does this mean we can discard all the instructions God gave in the Old Testament? No. The apostle Paul anticipated this misinterpretation of his writings when he wrote the following verses.

Romans 6:1–2 (ESV) What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

Civil, Ceremonial and Moral laws. When people place laws concerning sexual purity on the same level as dietary restrictions in an attempt to justify discarding God's moral imperatives they have made a grave error. There are three categories of laws or commands in Old Testament. Although some may argue that these divisions are artificial, they become clear as we read the New Testament. They divide into the following categories. First of all, there were Civil laws, which governed society and how to deal justly and settle disputes. We should consider that these laws were given after the Israelites had left Egypt. Without civil law, there would be chaos. Then there were Ceremonial laws which served two purposes. The ceremonial law governed how the priesthood operated and

sacrifices where to be done. They also included dietary restrictions, sanitation practice, and hygiene. These served to paint a prophetic picture of the work that would be accomplished through Jesus Christ and also provided a practical means of preserving the people through health practices that were ahead of their time. These two categories of law should not be confused with the third and most important type of commandment which is moral law. The moral law is based on the character of God and therefore eternal. The Moral law was long in effect before the Law of Moses had been introduced. God's moral standards can be found in Genesis. For example, Marriage is defined by the union of Adam and Eve as between a man and a woman. Jesus affirms this in the gospels. Cain killing his brother Able is recognized as murder. Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of sexual immorality and how they dealt with their poor. In the New Testament, we see these moral laws restated especially in Paul's letters to the churches. So, when the apostle Paul speaks in the book of Romans and Galatians of no longer being under the Law he didn't in anyway negate the moral code.

How to Study a passage of the Bible

Using the acronym P.O.I.N.T, you can study any passage in the Bible.

Pray- Pray for God to bring understanding to your mind about what you study.

Observe- ask yourself "What does the passage say?" We must investigate the scripture like a detective. How many of you

watch crime shows like CSI? They have detectives investigating a murder. What do they do? They collect evidence; they look for clues, they interview witnesses. They are looking for who committed the crime, how they did it, why they did it. What was the motive? Bible study is a lot like being a detective.

Who What Where How When Why. These are six questions you can apply to every line of text in a passage that you read. You don't have to use them all. They are just tools available to you.

Interpret- Ask yourself "what does the passage mean?" An interpretation is not an opinion but the result of the investigation of the text. It is your conclusion about what the text means.

Need to do – Ask yourself what this passage is requiring of you as a Christian. This is the application stage. What does this look like when carried out in my life?

Take action – This last step is the most important. You have to take faithful steps to obey what is revealed to you by the scripture. God will speak, but you have to follow. A lot of people have incredible knowledge of the scriptures, but not all obey.

Keep it in context- It is far too easy to take a single verse or even several verses out of context and misapply the scripture. Let's look at a Bible verse that is often taken out of context in our day. *Matthew 7:1 (ESV) "Judge not, that you be not judged."*

Just by reading that verse it sounds like I shouldn't judge others period. But is that what it means? If I am not to judge then how

do I know what is right or wrong? If we read the rest of the passage, it sheds some light on the subject.

Matthew 7:1–5 (ESV) "Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure, you use it will be measured to you. 3 Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but does not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

The commandment has to do with hypocritical judgment. How can I comment on someone else's sin or give them advice if I haven't taken care of that issue in my own life? It's like the person struggling with their marriage giving marriage advice to someone else. Notice however that we are not to say "ok I'm not going to judge that person because I also have sinned." We are called to address the "log in the eye." Jesus uses some humor to tell us it is good to help out another person if you see them doing wrong or being self-destructive. But before you take on that mission perhaps you should reflect on your own life and then maybe you can help your brother out.

Tools for Study- There are tools that are available to help a person study the Bible today. When you want to go deeper in your understanding of what the Bible has to say about a particular topic, it will be essential to get a hold of some of the following study aids.

A Bible Dictionary or Encyclopedia – lists persons, places or subjects from A-Z. For example, if you would like to know more about the Apostle Paul, you will find him under Paul, Apostle of Christ which will be followed by an article describing his life as well as the books he wrote. If you look up marriage, there will be a description as well as verse references starting with what the Old Testament teaches on the subject and then what the New Testament shows as well. The ISBE or International Standard Bible Encyclopedia is an excellent resource. A less expensive option might be a Nelsons Bible Dictionary. The articles are not as exhaustive as the ISBE, but it is still a valuable study aid.

A Concordance – is a cross-referencing tool that lists every word in the Bible from A to Z in the order in which it occurs from Genesis to Revelation. While some Bibles include a short concordance in the back, The Strong's Exhaustive Concordance has long been the standard for Bible study and also consists of a Hebrew/Greek Dictionary that uses the Strong's Number System. The numbers are next to each verse and are keyed to the word. This will show you how different words are translated into English. Strong's Concordance uses the KJV or NASB versions of the Bible so it would be good to have at least one of these Bibles available for study.

An Interlinear Bible- Is an English Bible with the Hebrew and Greek Words printed underneath. This indeed gives you an appreciation for the work of Bible translators and can help you to see how the various translations differ and where words may have been added to make the English easier to read.

A Bible Commentary- My recommendation is that this is the last resource that you consider purchasing. Not that Bible commentaries aren't useful and helpful, but they can short-circuit the process of your own personal Bible study. Commentaries generally fall into one of two different categories a technical commentary will help you with the original language and the grammar as it is used in the passage of scripture. The other type of Commentary is more of a sermon in print form. I have found that one must be very careful in selecting a suitable commentary as they tend to carry with them the theological leanings of the author. For example, some commentaries are written by those who doubt that Daniel wrote Daniel or that Isaiah had two authors and so on. In my opinion, it is best to stay clear of these types of commentaries. Before you buy a commentary check out the author and his views on the Bible. Find out his views on Biblical authority. This will tell whether you should spend the money on the commentary or not.

A Study Bible- is a Bible with multiple tools. Some of the good ones are The Life Application Study Bible, The Apologetics Study Bible, and The Spirit-Filled Study Bible. Study Bibles include charts, maps of the land during Bible times, a concordance, short articles, images and a cross-referencing system.

Hermeneutics- Herman who? Hermeneutics is the art and science of Biblical interpretation. There are some general guidelines to follow when interpreting the Bible that will help you stay on the right path and not fall down into the valley of

legalism, lawlessness or any other heresy in between. Let's take a look at some of these.

Authors intent- What was the author of the text communicating? Have you ever commented on social media and been misunderstood? Did someone not understand the intent of what you wrote? It doesn't feel right, does it? And yet that has not stopped people over the years from completely reinterpreting the scriptures in ways they were never intended to be read. Always read with this goal in Mind. Resist the urge to find hidden meanings or make fuzzy what is being said plainly.

Literal vs. figurative- Some say "you can't take the Bible literally." What is meant by this statement varies depending on the person's actual knowledge of the Bible. The Bible contains both Literal and figurative language. When Jesus mentions in John 15 that he is the vine and we are the branches that is figurative of our connection to him. When he expects his followers to obey him, that is to be interpreted quite literally. What is usually meant by this broad statement is that "you don't have to take the Bible seriously." This is due to a low view of scripture or a belief that it isn't the actual Word of God but the word of mere men trying to understand God. But the Apostle Paul was very clear that it did Come from God (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Just because Jesus didn't mention, it doesn't mean its ok. This has become a recent argument by those who disagree with the writings of the Apostle Paul especially in regards to issues of sexuality and gender. There are three reasons why this is a very

bad idea. First, it is an argument from absence. Just because Jesus isn't recorded as addressing a particular issue doesn't mean that he approved of the action. For example, He didn't mention anything about spousal abuse, but we would never assume that Jesus said its okay to abuse your spouse. The second issue is one of scriptural authority. By lifting Jesus words above all other voices and not considering the Apostle Paul as authoritative, some hope to eliminate some of the teachings of the New Testament that make many in our modern culture uncomfortable. The problem with that is even the apostles themselves that walked with Jesus like Peter considered Paul's writings as scripture. (2 Peter 3:15-16). Third, by not recognizing Paul's writings on the authoritative level of Jesus teachings we also eliminate the teachings of Salvation by grace through faith. That we are no longer under the law but live by the Spirit, as well as many other lessons that form the foundation of the church itself. So, if someone wants to use one of Paul's teachings to say we are saved by grace, not by our good works and then turn around disagree with what Paul said on another subject such as sexuality they have placed themselves on shaky ground.

The first 11 chapters of Genesis are not allegory or myth but actual historical events. This statement might shock you if you grew up in a church that taught that Adam and Eve and Noah weren't real people. Perhaps you were taught the ark that was built by Noah was just a story. Here is the problem with that view. Jesus and the Apostles all spoke of them as real people that existed and the flood as an event that happened in history.

Matthew 24:37–39 (ESV)

37 For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, 39 and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

This presents us with a problem. Jesus is speaking of Noah and the Ark full of animals and a flood that destroyed the ancient world as real people and a real event. The only option, other than believing that Noah was real, is to believe that Jesus never said these words which presents a whole host of other problems. If you begin to doubt he said these words what other words did he not say? Some believe that this contradicts what science tells us. That is not true. It might contradict certain origin stories that scientist believe. But there is no contradiction between observable science and the history of Genesis.

Know your Genres. The Bible is a collection of different kinds of genres including narrative, poetry, wisdom, prophecy, gospels, epistles and apocalypse. Why is this important? Because We cannot read the poetry of the Psalms the same way that we read the instructions in the epistles.

The Epistles- These are letters in the New Testament written mostly by the Apostle Paul as well as Peter, James, John, and Jude. They are occasional documents which mean that they were usually responses written to particular church plants or to be read to a group of churches in the city. Some examples of these letters

are Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians. These are very helpful in that they addressed issues that had arisen within the early churches. Many of these issues we can relate to today directly because they speak of loving one another, bringing correction, not being proud, etc. a few passages are a little tricky because we lack some of the cultural contexts of the situation they were addressing. An example of this is 1st Corinthians 11 when it speaks of "head coverings" during worship. Due to a lack of historical information about this passage, we must be careful in trying to find an equivalent modern-day application. The Epistles give us great encouragement and instruction for Christian living. The book of Romans gives us the incredible theology of salvation by faith. Galatians warns us not to be caught up in the Old Covenant as a means of achieving righteousness. The Epistle to the Philippians encourages the Christian who is anxious and going through difficulties. The main thing to remember about reading the Epistles is to read them in context. Make sure that you read the entire Epistle to understand the whole picture rather than pulling out your favorite verses and applying it in a way it was never intended to be used.

Old Testament narrative- When we read the historical accounts in the Old Testament, we cannot understand them the same as an epistle. These are stories of flawed human beings that just because they may have been blessed by God or used by him does not mean that God endorsed their lifestyle or every choice that they made. We also cannot assume because God has a prophet record a particular historical account that God approved of everything that happened. This is not the case.

I am sure if God included a story about your life in the Bible there might be some embarrassing parts that you would rather leave out. But the Bible gives us the person's story the good, the bad and the "what were they thinking" moments of their lives. King David, for example, committed adultery and got his good friend's wife pregnant and then tried to cover it up by having her husband killed and marrying her even though he was already married. He was supposed to be a man after God's own heart, but he fell into sin. He repented of this sin and wrote a tearful poem about the ordeal, but it affected his family and the politics of Israel for years. We look at a story like David's, and we can see ourselves. We can see a time where we were doing ok and then times where we messed up. The Bible shows us stories of people that we can all relate to on some level and know that if God used them than he can certainly use us. These stories stand out from other ancient sources in that the Biblical accounts are brutally and often embarrassingly honest about the mistakes of men and women that God entrusted with great tasks. But the practice of the other ancient cultures such as the Sumerians and the Egyptians were to erase the embarrassing parts of their stories to make them look better than they were. These stories are often lessons of what not to do as much as they give us examples of great faith and courage. The general rule when reading the stories in the Old Testament is that they are not an endorsement for everything those people did but they are testimonies to God's faithfulness being displayed among ordinary people.

The Acts of the Apostles- often referred to as the book of Acts is the highlight reel of the first 25 years of church history. From Luke's writings, we learn about how the Holy Spirit revealed himself in the church, spiritual gifts were displayed, the struggle between the Jewish and Hellenistic Christians had to be worked out and how the gospel of Jesus Christ reached all the way to Rome.

The Gospels- are eyewitness testimony of the life of Jesus. They consist of the Synoptics Matthew, Luke and Mark (Which was Peters Account) and John. They each have a different angle at which they view Jesus like cameras on a movie set. When one reads them, it is apparent there was no conspiracy to get the stories to line up because they each remember details the others might leave out which is what you would expect when interviewing witnesses to an event or those recalling the life of a friend. The gospel of John is very different in that John focuses much more on Jesus words and the person of Jesus and his relationship to the Father and the Holy Spirit. There is much theology in John which has led some scholars to suggest it was written by a group of Christian leaders much later on. But that is an idea that one can easily refute as most scholars now know that John was written early like the other gospels. Not only that but he was the last apostle to die and had been around long enough to validate if this was his writing or not. There is a copy of a fragment of John that dates to at least 125 A.D. The writing of these gospels, by most serious Bible scholars accounts, is before 70 A.D. before the temple of Jerusalem was destroyed. None of these gospel accounts speak of the temple in the past tense.