

Mark Yang (Nov 19, 2016)

## HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE INDUCTIVELY

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” (2Ti 2:15 ESV)

[The NIV translation of this verse is ambiguous. It seems to describe in two aspects what is needed to be approved by God. One is “no need to be ashamed.” The other is “correctly handles the word of truth.” But in the Greek, there is just one aspect: one who rightly handles the word of truth is not ashamed. This verse is translated differently in each of the prominent Bible translations: “correctly handles the word of truth” (NIV), “rightly dividing the word of truth” (KJV), “accurately handling the word of truth” (NASB), “rightly explaining the word of truth” (NRSV).]

The key word in this verse is *handle*, which comes from the Greek word ὀρθοτομέω (*orthotomeo*). It is actually a combination of two Greek words: *orthos* (where we get the words *orthodox* or *orthopedic*), which means “straight,” and *temno* which means “to cut.” It was used in the first century to refer to cutting a path through a forest area. This verse is essentially saying that we should cut a straight path to the truth. In other words, we should give accurate instruction—to teach correctly or to expound rightly.

### • Introduction

The Bible is God’s word to us. God speaks to us, like a Father to his children, to guide us into an intimate relationship with him so that we may grow in his image. God loves us and he wants us to understand the way of salvation and how to live to please him. He wants us to find the way of blessing and to avoid the tragedy of going astray, so that we may have a happy, victorious and fruitful life.

Learning how to listen to God’s word properly is very important. In the Scriptures, we can find salvation and the way to a meaningful and fruitful life (2Ti 3:15). Bernard Ramm says, “Everything essential to salvation and Christian living is clearly revealed in Scripture.”<sup>1</sup> The biblical authors wrote in a straightforward and direct manner so that readers would understand their message and live accordingly. However, the Bible was originally written in foreign languages to people who lived a long time ago in different parts of the world with different ways of life. Statements that were quite clear to the initial readers may not communicate clearly to us at all.<sup>2</sup> We need spiritual insight and guidance to truly understand it.

The Bible has been read and studied by countless people for many centuries. There are many ways to study the Bible, and there are many excellent study aids available to help us with specific books of the Bible. But the most important thing is to read the Bible for ourselves first.

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Ramm 1970: 105.

<sup>2</sup> Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, Jr. 2004: 213.

We should first discover what the Bible truly says, what it means, and how we are to apply it to our life. The best way to do this is through the process called inductive study.

The main requirement in learning to study the Bible inductively is the willingness to slow down and accurately observe what the Scripture is saying. Inductive Bible study uses the Bible itself as the primary source of information about the Bible. Commentaries, books, tapes, and other information about the Bible are consulted only after we have made our own thorough examination of the Scripture.

- **What is inductive Bible study?**

There are two basic types of reasoning: deductive and inductive. Deductive reasoning starts with general principles and uses them to derive individual facts. Inductive reasoning begins by accumulating facts and, from there, develops general statements and conclusions. Both types of reasoning are useful. For example, Mathematics is based on deductive reasoning, whereas natural sciences like biology and chemistry should be inductive. The problem of the deductive approach in regards to Bible study is the danger of imputing a subjective meaning on the text which is not intended by the author. Many people approach the Bible subjectively, interpreting Scriptures in their own way. But the Bible is an objective body of literature; it contains objective meaning and truth waiting to be discovered. Drawing upon the Bible to reinforce your own ideas—even if those ideas are true—is a misuse of God’s word. The Bible warns us not to add anything to Scripture or to take away from it (Rev 22:18-19). The inductive method is a safeguard against subjective interpretation. Inductive study is the best way to approach and handle the Bible with respect, as the word of God. Inductive Bible study consists of three component parts: observation, interpretation, and application.

**Observation** asks, “What does the passage say?” Observation is simply the gathering of all the facts of who, what, where, when, and how. Careful examination of the facts is the foundation upon which we build accurate interpretation and proper application of God’s word. Careful examination of anything requires time and practice. The more time spent looking at the text itself, the more fruitful our study will be. On the other hand, hasty and poor observation leads to misunderstanding and causes serious problems. As we carefully observe Scripture, the meaning will become apparent. However, if we rush into interpretation without laying the vital foundation of accurate observation, our understanding will be colored by our presuppositions—what we think, what we feel, or what other people have said, rather than what God’s Word says. We can say that good observation is the beginning of good interpretation.

**Interpretation** asks, “What does the passage mean?” Interpretation flows out of observation. Interpretation is not necessarily a separate step from observation, for often, as we carefully observe the text, at that very moment we begin to see what it means. However, interpretation can also involve separate steps that go beyond merely observing the immediate text. Interpretation is both a science and an art. It is a science because it is done through a logical, orderly classification of the laws of interpretation. Interpretation is also an art because it is an acquired skill demanding both imagination and an ability to apply the “laws” to selected passages or books.<sup>3</sup> When we consider interpretation as both a science and an art, we can

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<sup>3</sup> Grand Osborne 1991:5.

interpret the Bible accurately. Biblical interpretation entails “spirals.” One spiral is from the interpreter to the text. As the interpreter encounters the text, the text affects the interpreter, thus enhancing his ability to interpret. This happens repeatedly as the interpreter continues to encounter the text and is enlightened until he or she comes to a correct understanding.<sup>4</sup> (See appendix I, figure 1.) Another spiral is from text to context, from its original meaning to its contextualization or significance for the church today.<sup>5</sup> In other words, once students move from observation to interpretation, they will see the need to correct some of the observations they have made and will make additional observations. When students move from interpretation to contemporary appropriation, they will recognize additional aspects of interpretation and correct some parts of their interpretation.

**Application** asks, “How does the meaning of this passage apply to me?” Application is the goal of Bible study. Application is not just a third step in the inductive process; it takes place anytime we are confronted with truth and decide to respond in obedience. It leads to a transformed life and a deep and intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. Bible study without application produces hypocrites. On the other hand, when we apply God’s word properly, we can be nourished and grow and be ready to serve. The Scriptures were given “for rebuke, correction, and training in righteousness, so that we may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2Ti 3:16-17).

## I. Observation

Observation is the act of regarding attentively or being alert. This action involves more than physical sight; it has to do with keen mental awareness. Through observation the mind encounters the primary data from which it draws conclusions.<sup>6</sup>

A. Requisites of observation are “will,” “exactness” and “persistence”.<sup>7</sup> Unwilling observation is boring and makes people sleepy. On the other hand, willing observation is full of discernment, and is continually making discoveries which keep the mind alert and interested. Exactness is the key to accuracy, penetration, and depth. We need persistence until we find treasure in the text (Mt 7:7-8).

There is a famous story about Louis Agassiz (1807-1873), professor of zoology at Harvard University and one of the most prominent natural scientists of the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> This story recounts the experience of Samuel Schudder when, as a beginning student at Harvard, he first met Louis Agassiz.

*A young man came to his lab and asked if he could begin to study insects. Dr. Agassiz said, “Very well.” Then he gave him a jar containing a fish. He said, “Take this fish and look at it, and then tell me what you have seen.” He was not allowed to use any instruments except his eyes. The student looked at the fish for about ten minutes, then went in search of Dr. Agassiz to tell him what he had learned. But Dr. Agassiz had left the lab and would not return for several hours. The student waited and waited. In his boredom, he picked up a pencil and started to draw a picture of the fish. Then he began to see countless details which he had overlooked before. The professor returned and asked*

<sup>4</sup> Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard 2004:166.

<sup>5</sup> Grand Osborne 1991:6.

<sup>6</sup> Bauer and Traina 2011:75.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Traina 1980:32-33.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

*him what he saw, and he recited a number of facts. Dr. Agassiz frowned and said, "Look again, look again," and left for the day. That student stayed awake all night thinking about the fish, looking it over in his mind, and the next day mentioned a few more things. Dr. Agassiz said, "Look more! Look more!" For three days, the student was forced to sit at the table doing nothing but looking at the fish. On the fourth day, Dr. Agassiz brought out another fish of the same group, and told the student to find the similarities and differences between the two fish. After a while, he brought out another fish, and then another. This went on and on. After eight months, Dr. Agassiz finally put the fish away and allowed him to begin work on what he wanted to do, the study of insects. Samuel Schudder never forgot what he learned from Dr. Agassiz about the importance of careful observation.*

We need to apply those same principles of observation to Scripture. We should be an explorer of the text or a miner looking for diamonds or like CSI (Crime Scene Investigation) detectives, searching for clues that will unlock the mysteries of the Bible.

**B. Observation begins with reading the book:** We need to take time to read the text. The more we read the book, the more familiar we will become with it. The first time we read through the book, we may come across some things which puzzle us. However, the more we read, the more we will figure them out. We should read it over and over again—not once or twice but a hundred times to gain insight. If we read entire books at one sitting, this helps us grasp a big picture. Reading requires patience. We tend to expect results instantly and effortlessly. But there is an old saying that nothing good happens fast. The fruit of the Word takes time to ripen. We should be patient with the text, and be patient with ourselves. As we dive into the Word for ourselves, we need to relax and enjoy the experience. God's truth is there.<sup>9</sup>

Try to learn from the text without prejudice or preconceived ideas. As seasoned Christians, it's easy to hold a biased view of the text. We need to put aside our past knowledge and experience. Being completely free of presuppositions, or being entirely impartial is almost impossible. Nevertheless, we should do everything possible to be aware of our prejudices in reading the text. The appropriate approach is to try to read the text as though we are reading it for the first time. The question is how? The best way is to make a detailed factual study (See appendix II). Through factual study we try to find the key idea and the key verse of the book.

**C. Identify the type (genre) of literature:** The type of literature determines the way you will handle the text. For example, the historical books (such as Kings and Chronicles) are different from the poetic (such as the Psalms), and the epistles (such as Romans), both in style and content. History books give background and tell of real events and how God dealt with real people, but we cannot build doctrine on historical events. Most doctrine is contained in the epistles. So, recognizing the type (genre) of literature we are studying is important. Is it historical? Is it biographical? Is it poetic? Is it proverbial? Is it prophetic? Is it an epistle? Is it a combination? (Some books are a combination of different types of literature. For example, the book of Daniel is both historical and prophetic.)<sup>10</sup>

**D. Discover the facts: ask the 5 W's and an H:** Observing the whole involves discovering the facts in a passage. These facts can be gathered by answering key questions.

**Who** wrote it? **Who** said it? **Who** is the main character? **Who** are the people mentioned? **To whom** is the author speaking? **About whom** is he speaking?

<sup>9</sup> Howard and William Hendricks, 2007:83-93.

<sup>10</sup> Kay Arthur, David Arthur, Pete De Lacy 2010: 26-27.

**What** is happening? Is the passage about events or ideas? What is the main subject, and what are the key words? What is the main teaching? What are these people like? What is his purpose in saying this?

**When** was it written? When did this event take place? When did he or she say it? When did he or she do it?

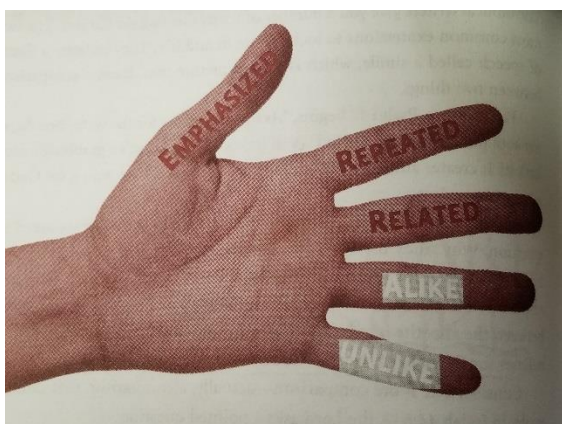
**Where** was this said? Where was this done?

**Why** was this written? Why was this mentioned? Why was so much or so little devoted to this particular event or teaching?

**How** is it done? How did it happen?

These questions are the building blocks of precise observation.

E. The five things to look for: There is a helpful method for observing a Bible text which involves the thumb and fingers of the hand. Things that are emphasized are represented by the thumb, things repeated by the index finger, things related by the middle finger, things alike by the ring finger, and things unlike by the little finger.<sup>11</sup>



(1) *What are things that are emphasized?* When we study the bible, we need to look for what is emphasized. What ideas or events or people or other material are emphasized? A book can emphasize something by devoting a large portion of space to it.

For example, Genesis has 50 chapters. The first eleven cover the creation, the Fall, the Flood, the tower of Babel, and other details. By contrast, the author devotes chapters 12-50 to the lives of four ancestors: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. The most important thing in this book is Abraham's family that God chose to be His people. Among them Abraham's story is told in chapters 12-25.

Another way the author may emphasize his points is by telling the purpose of his writing. We see a prime example in John 20:30-31: "Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples...But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the

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<sup>11</sup> Howard and William Hendricks, 2007:147-168

Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” By choosing where to locate people, events, ideas, and so on, the author can call attention to something.

(2) *What are things that are repeated?* These are words that are used frequently in the Bible. There’s probably no means of teaching more powerful than repetition. Repetition reinforces. Scripture constantly repeats terms, phrases, and clauses to emphasize their importance.

For example, in Psalm 136 we read, “Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good. His love endures forever.” The psalmist repeats “His love endures forever” no less than twenty-six times. Why? He was emphasizing the fact that God’s love endures forever. In Hebrews 11, the phrase “by faith” appears eighteen times. The author talks about different people living in different times under different circumstances. But all of them were living “by faith.” “Abraham! Abraham!” (Gen 22:11) “Samuel! Samuel!” (1 Sam 3:10) “Saul, Saul,” (Ac 9:4) “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit” (Jdg 17:6; 18:1; 19:1 21:25). Often the repetition is intended to build to a climax. Repetition is the way of pointing out matters of crucial importance.

(3) *What are things that are related?* Things that are related have some connection and some interaction with each other.

- This is the relationship between the whole and its parts, between the big picture and the details. For example, Genesis 1:1 gives us an overview: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” And then, the rest of the chapter fills in the specifics.
- Questions are followed by answers. Paul asks in Romans 6:1: “What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?” He answers, “By no means!” Then he goes on to explain why in verses 2-14. Again, he uses a rhetorical question: “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?” The answer is “By no means!” and he goes on to spell it out in detail.
- In Scripture, we can find many kinds of cause-effect relationship. Acts 8:1: “On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.” But 8:4 says, “Those who had been scattered went about preaching the word wherever they went.” The persecution was the cause, and the preaching was the effect.

(4) *What are things that are alike?* In Scripture, we can find a number of terms that flag similarities, including similes and metaphors.

- Similes: The two most common expressions to look for are *as* and *like*. They indicate a figure of speech called a simile, which is a word picture that draws a comparison between two things. For example, 1 Peter 2:2 says, “*Like* newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.” Peter draws a comparison between the appetite of a baby for its mother’s milk, and the appetite of the believer for the nourishment of God’s Word. Jesus also used a simile in order to explain why he had to die on the cross. “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up” (Jn 3:14).

- Metaphors: A device related to the simile is the metaphor, where comparison is made without using *as* or *like*. Jesus says, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener” (Jn 15:1). Jesus illustrates his relationship to the Father, and to believers as well by means of a metaphor. Again, when Jesus talked with Nicodemus regarding being born again, he made a comparison: “Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again’” (Jn 3:6-7). By means of both simile and metaphor, the author is trying to communicate with the readers through the effective tool of comparison.

(5) *What are things that are unlike?* The flip side of comparison is contrast. This has to do with opposites.

- But: The word *but* is a clue that a change of direction is coming. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus repeatedly says, “You have heard that it was said...*but* I tell you” (Mt 5:21-22,27-28,33-34,43-44). The risen Jesus said to the apostles: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. *But* you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth.”
- How much more: Paul says in Romans 5:15: “But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, *how much more* did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!”
- There is a sharp contrast between the list of attributes that describe the sinful nature (Gal 5:19-21) and the list of fruit of the Spirit that follows (Gal 5:22-23).

F. Get a big picture: We need to get a bird’s-eye view before getting a “worm’s-eye view.” In other words, if we grasp a sense of the whole, we can understand the details of the text better. One of the best ways of getting a big picture is to make a chart or draw a picture (See the appendix III).

A chart or a picture is like a map to the Bible students. This is helpful in our visually oriented culture. A chart or picture can show the relationships between verses, paragraphs, sections, and even books. By using a chart, we can comprehend the purpose and structure of a text at a glance. A well-constructed chart is memorable. A chart can highlight the important ideas or characters. It can demonstrate comparisons and contrasts. It can point out key terms and phrases. Most importantly, it can sketch out the structure, which is crucial to the author’s purpose.<sup>12</sup>

Thus far, we have learned how can we observe the text. Now we need to move on to the next step. Professor Agassiz (1807-1873) trained his students in the method of discovering facts and their orderly arrangement, but he was never content to leave it there. “Facts are stupid things,” he would say, “until brought into connection with some general law.”<sup>13</sup> Once we’ve seen what the text says, we are ready to ask, “What does it mean?”

<sup>12</sup> Howard and William Hendricks, 2007:185

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.194.

## II. Interpretation

- **Qualifications of an Interpreter**

Although everyone can read the Bible for themselves, not everyone is qualified to interpret what it means. An interpreter must have the Spirit of God who inspired the Bible. Marcus Dods says, "In order to appreciate and use the Bible, the reader of it must himself have the same Spirit which enabled its writers to understand their revelation of God and to record it. The Bible is a record, but it is not a dead record of dead persons and events; it is a record inspired by the living Spirit who uses it to speak to men now... It is the medium through which the living God now makes himself known."<sup>14</sup> Several things characterize those who have the Spirit of God.

**A. The person is born again.** Natural, fallen people have a carnal mind which is hostile toward God. So, they cannot possibly interpret Scripture correctly. Only those who are born again by the work of the Holy Spirit can interpret the Bible correctly.

- John 3:3: "Jesus replied, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.'" Unless a person be born again spiritually, he or she cannot see—can neither understand the nature nor share the blessedness—of the kingdom of God.
- 1 Corinthians 2:14: "The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit."

**B. The person has a passion to know God's word.** The Bible is a book of hidden treasures (Mt 13:44). However, these treasures are not reserved for special people with special knowledge. Anyone can find these treasures if they have a passion to know the truth, like the Ethiopian eunuch (Ac 8:26-38), and the noble Bereans (Ac 17:11). We can say the Bible is an "open secret." Jesus told those who asked the meaning of his parables, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you" (Mk 4:11a).

- Matthew 13:44: "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field."
- Acts 17:11: "Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."

**C. The person has a deep reverence for God.** When we study the Bible, we need deep reverence for God which is characterized by meekness, humility, and patience. God's thoughts and God's ways are higher than our thoughts and ways, as the heavens are higher than the earth (Isa 55:8-9). We must constantly empty ourselves to be open to God's thoughts and ways. Though we cannot understand the deep meaning of God's words immediately, we should not find fault with God or his word. Rather, we should patiently and prayerfully try to understand until God helps us to do so.

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<sup>14</sup> Marcus Dods, *The Nature and Origin of the Bible*, p. 102; Bernard Ramm 1970:12-13.



**D. Spiritual purity.** Sanctified, Spirit-filled living is vital for anyone who wants to interpret the Scriptures. The greatest hindrance to proper interpretation is sin in one's heart. Sin's aim is to put out the Spirit's fire. Sin that is not confessed and repented of undermines the dynamic of the Holy Spirit and will hauntingly follow us and rob us of our power. Sin should grieve us because it grieves the Spirit of God who lives within us. On the other hand, purity should motivate our every decision because we are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1Co 6:19).<sup>15</sup> And we also should grow in the image of Christ. The more I grow in Christ, the more my understanding of the Bible grows.

- **General Principles of Interpretation**

Now that we know who is qualified to interpret the Scriptures, we can consider the general principles that interpreters should follow.

***Principle 1: Depend on the Holy Spirit: Pray for the Spirit's illumination:***

*A. The Bible is both a human book, and a spiritual book.* As a human book, it must be studied intelligently like any other form of human communication. This requires us to apply the natural principles for gaining knowledge. As a spiritual book, the Bible is God's revelation, written under divine inspiration. As such, it must be understood with the Holy Spirit's illumination.

- John 16:13a: "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will **guide you into all the truth.**"
- Through the Bible, God speaks directly to us and to our specific life situation. The Spirit's work in our hearts is subjective and unique to individual believers. However, that subjective aspect can never replace the objective meaning of Scripture. We must recognize that as the Holy Spirit illuminates people, he does not contradict Scripture. So, no one should insist on a private understanding of Scripture which is in conflict with the generally understood objective meaning. We need to be patient. The Holy Spirit guides and illumines individual believers step by step until they come to a full understanding of the truth which is universally applicable to all people. We should trust God who will make everything clear (Php 3:15).
- It is helpful to understand the difference between inspiration and illumination. Oftentimes, we use these words interchangeably, and that is acceptable. However, when we want to understand the process of Bible interpretation better, we should distinguish between them. The Bible is the word of God which is fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, and this process of inspiration has been completed (2Ti 3:16; 2Pe 2:21). On the other hand, there is a continuing work of the Holy Spirit to illumine individual believers step by step until he guides them into all the truth. "Inspiration" in a certain sense belongs only to the original authors of the Bible. When we say that we are inspired by the words of God it is more properly understood as "illumination." We desperately need this illumination because we are sinful, fallen, and fallible human beings.

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<sup>15</sup> Greg Heisler 2007:83.

*B. We can discover God's wisdom only by the Holy Spirit, not by human wisdom.*

- The Holy Spirit is the only one who can prove God's Word is true and He does this as He works in the heart and mind of the Christian whom He indwells.<sup>16</sup>
- 1 Corinthians 2:14: "The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit."
- Horace Bushnell said, "The worldly spirit shuts out the Bible; the Spirit of God makes it a fire, flaming out all-meaning and glorious truths."<sup>17</sup>

*C. Since truth must be revealed by the Spirit of God, it follows that prayer must be an integral part of Bible study.* Prayer is crucial to Bible study. To interpret the Bible well, we need to pray for understanding. Charles H. Spurgeon said that when he faced those things which he could not understand, it seemed to him as though God had set a chair there for him to kneel down and worship.<sup>18</sup> Prayer should not be done only in the beginning and at the end, but throughout the entire process.

"Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law." (Psalms 119:18)

***Principle 2: Interpret the Bible literally, not allegorically or mystically:***

Though inspired of God, the Bible was written in human language and within human cultures. The Bible is literature. The subject of literature is human experience—not abstract ideas or propositions, but experience. The knowledge or truth that literature gives us is an awareness of reality or truth as it is actually experienced.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the words should first be understood in their historical context, having the intended meaning in the usage of that day. The Bible should not be primarily understood mystically. We should, first of all, take the Word of God at face value, in its natural, normal sense. In general, the most accurate meaning of a text is the most obvious one. The Bible simply means what it says.

*A. Understand in light of literary genre.* The Bible is composed of various kinds of literature: narrative, history, poetry, parables, prophecy, wisdom, and so on. Each kind of literature should be interpreted according to the rules for that genre. For example, Jesus' parables usually have just one clear and main point. If we try to interpret various details mystically, we can lose sight of the main point. So, we should keep in mind the principle that parables generally have one main point. (For a comprehensive treatment of literary genre see the appendix IV.)

*B. Avoid allegorical interpretation without context.* Parables, types, allegories, symbols, figures of speech, myths and fables presume that there is a spiritual meaning to a text. But we should not try to understand this meaning without first understanding the context of a passage. The parable of the sower is understood within the context of literal "agricultural" language. The symbolism of a lion is based upon what is asserted about lions in literal speech. Incense as a symbol of prayer is understood within the context of the use of incense in daily life and expressed in the literal language of daily conversation. Even the allegorical way Paul speaks of

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<sup>16</sup> John MacArthur 1980:43.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Traina 1980:13.

<sup>18</sup> Irving Jensen 1980:74.

<sup>19</sup> Leland Ryken 1984:17.

Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar in the book of Galatians is based upon the historical and factual statements about these people which in turn reflects the literal stratum of language.<sup>20</sup>

*C. Literal interpretation is not the same as letterism which exalts the very letters of Scripture.* To interpret Scripture literally is not to practice “letterism” nor to neglect the nuances of language. Rather, it is to understand a document the best one can in the context of the normal, customary, tradition range of designation which includes “facit” understanding.<sup>21</sup> Or stated differently, the literal should be plain-literal and figurative-literal. For example, “The eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him” (Ps 33:18) would be a figurative-literal sentence. It should be interpreted to mean God’s omniscience. However, according to the Alexandrians the literal meaning of this sentence was an actual eye of God.<sup>22</sup>

*D. Historical errors of allegorical interpretation.* As we study the history of Bible interpretation, we find some interpreters were erroneous in their basic principles. For example, those in the School of Alexandria misused the principle of allegorical interpretation. Their motive was to show the superiority of the Scriptures over Greek philosophy. But they tried to do this with a Greek mindset. They thought that the Bible speaks to us only in a language of symbols. And its interpretation requires a gift of divine grace. In their zeal, they often gave allegorical interpretations which were unrelated to the plain meaning of the text. They seemed to have a Scriptural basis for doing so.

Their representative scholar, Origen, interpreted Proverbs 22:20-21 in light of 1 Thessalonians 5:23 to advocate a three-fold analysis of human personality. Proverbs 22:20-21 says, “Have I not written thirty sayings for you, sayings of counsel and knowledge, teaching you to be honest and to speak the truth, so that you bring back truthful reports to those you serve?” 1 Thessalonians 5:23 says, “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Then he applied this to the interpretation of Scripture to justify a “bodily” or literal sense, moral sense, and “spiritual” or allegorical-mystical sense to every Bible passage. On this basis, they could interpret Bible verses to mean just about anything. For example, they interpreted the tables of the Law to be symbols of the universe, and Sarah and Hagar as symbols of wisdom and pagan philosophy, respectively.

In this way, the Alexandrines deprived the whole biblical history of its reality. Adam was not really Adam; paradise was not really paradise; the serpent was not a real serpent. Since there are no real events—since Adam was not really disobedient—how did death enter the world, and what meaning does our salvation have? The apostle Paul surely believed in the reality of the events he describes in Romans 5:18f and 2 Corinthians 11:3. The School of Antioch opposed the School of Alexandria, and insisted on the historical reality of the biblical revelation. This School had a great influence on the reformed scholars. This historical example demonstrates the importance of interpreting the Bible literally, not allegorically.

### ***Principle 3: Interpret the Bible in its Context:***

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<sup>20</sup> Bernard Ramm 1970:124.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.121.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

*A. The meaning of a passage must be viewed within the setting of the book.* Since we normally communicate by a series of related statements, each sentence must be understood in light of the other ideas expressed in the context—in terms of the writer’s train of thought.<sup>23</sup> When we understand the structure and message of the book as a whole, the meaning of the individual parts becomes more clear. The most common reason people misunderstand, misinterpret, and, therefore, misuse Scripture is because they fail to study a passage in the context of its entire surroundings.<sup>24</sup> The surrounding verses (the paragraphs before and after, the chapter before and after, the whole book) help us understand it. The smaller the passage being studied, the greater the chance of error. Short texts usually contain very little information about the general theme of the larger passage.

For example, Romans 8:28 says, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” If someone were to interpret this verse apart from its context in Roman 8 and the entire letter, he or she might incorrectly use it to convince a parent whose child has just died that the death was a good thing. However, death is not good, but God will accomplish his salvific purpose (which is good) for his people, even though they suffer greatly. Larger passages provide more facts about the meaning and thus give the interpreter a clearer perspective for understanding each statement within it. To interpret a passage correctly we must examine different circles of context: 1. Immediate context. 2. Entire book context. 3. Context of the Bible.<sup>25</sup> (See appendix I, figure 2).

*B. Words and sentences occur in the context of a conversation, in the context of language, and in the context of a culture.* For example, the word “salvation” has a different meaning in the context of each passage. It can be salvation from enemies (2Sa 3:18; Ps 44:7), trouble (Jer 30:7), disease (Isa 38:20), temptation and the evil one (Mt 6:13), or sin and death (Lk 1:77; Heb 5:7). We need to discover the exact meaning from the context.

When we try to understand what the author is saying and why he is saying it, we are faced with a couple of barriers: a language barrier and a cultural barrier. The goal of interpretation is to understand what the original author meant. The Old Testament was written primarily in Hebrew, and a few sections were written in Aramaic. The New Testament was written in Greek. However, most of us don’t read Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek. We don’t need to master these languages in order to study the Bible deeply. The Bible has been translated by many scholars in various ways. Some translators emphasize faithfulness to the original text. Others emphasize accuracy in contemporary language. A comprehensive study of several versions will give us a thorough understanding of the original text. For example, KJV, ESV, NASB and others strive to be faithful to the original text. The NIV, on the other hand, gives more weight to making a translation that is easily readable in modern language. Other versions, such as the New Living Translation, the Message and the Amplified Bible include more descriptive words to make the meaning of the original more fully understandable. Some software, such as Logos and Lumina, provide tools that allow someone who does not know the original languages to study the original words and how they are translated into English. If one is committed to digging out the meaning of the original text, they can do so by means of these tools without having to study Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek.

<sup>23</sup> Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, Jr. 2004: 215.

<sup>24</sup> Hans Finzel 2003:91.

<sup>25</sup> Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, Jr. 2004: 218-219.

*C. A cultural barrier is huge.* Bernard Ramm says, “People of the same culture, same age, same geographical location understand each other with facility... But when the interpreter is separated culturally, historically, and geographically from the writer...the task of interpretation is no longer facile. The greater the cultural, historical, and geographical divergences are, the more difficult is the task of interpretation... The most obvious divergence is that of language...There is also the culture-gap between our times and Biblical times.”<sup>26</sup>

In the first century AD, Paul spoke of women needing to wear head coverings to church. They weren’t to come for worship without it. If a woman were to read that passage today, she might think, “I need to wear hats for worship.” Ramm goes on to say, “Agricultural methods are different. Legal systems are different. Military systems are different...And then there’s geography. The understanding of most passages of Scripture is dependent on some understanding of history. If geography is the scenery of Scripture, history is the plot of Scripture.”<sup>27</sup> We need to become thoughtful students of linguistic and cultural contexts in the Bible. Fortunately, as we have stated above, there are many tools available to help us interpret the Bible.

***Principle 4: Let Scripture interpret Scripture: Correlation.***

This is the first tenet of the Reformation, known in Latin as *Sacra Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*, “Sacred Scripture is its own interpreter.” It means that the Bible does not contradict itself; it is internally consistent in its teaching. The Bible is a unity of revelation, internally evidencing a supernatural inspiration of its writing and a supernatural superintendence in the preservation and canonization of its integral parts. The Bible has one divine author, the Holy Spirit, and His message is coherent and harmonious.<sup>28</sup> When we are deriving the meaning of a passage we cannot just look at one passage or an isolated verse. We need to understand the passage across the entire story of Scripture, comparing with other relevant passages to ensure that we are understanding the text correctly. No verse in the Bible is isolated. No truth stands by itself. Just as the diamond in a ring has a setting, so every verse of Scripture has a broader context. By comparing one Scripture with other Scriptures, and the verse with other verses, we gain a deeper understanding of what it means.

For example, in John 15:7 Jesus says, “...ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” Does this mean that we can ask anything at all from God and He will give it to us? The answer is no! The Bible has much more to teach about prayer than just one statement. 1 John 5:14 says, “...if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.” James 4:3 says, “When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”

For this, it is helpful to use cross-references found in the margins of many Bibles to compare the verses we are studying with related passages found elsewhere in the Bible. Also, we need to use a concordance to look up similar teachings or topics mentioned in other places in Scripture.

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<sup>26</sup> Bernard Ramm 1970:4-5.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>28</sup> Hans Finzel 203:56.

Correlating Scripture is invaluable. When we carefully compare one Scripture with others, we are accurately handling the Word of God. God's Word correlated with God's Word keeps us on the straight and narrow path of correct thinking and righteous living.<sup>29</sup>

**Principle 5: Interpret the Bible through Christ:**

The Bible is the book of salvation (2Ti 3:15). Jesus Christ is the central figure of the Bible. The Bible is divided into two parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The unity of the Bible is Christological. The Old Testament tells us what Christ is and the New Testament who he is; thus we have a complete picture of Christ in the Bible.<sup>30</sup> The bond between the Old Testament and the New Testament is prophecy (predictive and typological) understood in terms of (1) progressive revelation, and (2) the literal and historical exegesis of Messianic passages.<sup>31</sup> For example, God gave many promises to Abraham, such as "I will make you into a great nation...I will make your name great," and, "...to your offspring I will give this land..." (Gen 12:2-3,7). Yet, as Paul explains in Galatians, these promises all converge into one: "...through your offspring, all nations on earth will be blessed..." (Gen 12:3; 22:18). Paul says that "offspring" is not plural but singular, and refers to one person, who is Christ (Gal 3:16). In giving his promise to Abraham, God looked forward to Christ. It was the promise of the gospel of grace to all nations.

In the Old Testament we can have the shadow preceding Christ, and in the New Testament we can meet with the body which cast the shadow. Colossians 2:17 says: "These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ." Types are pictures or object lessons by which God taught His people concerning His grace and saving power.<sup>32</sup> Types are persons (such as Adam, Melchizedek, Joseph, Moses, Joshua the priest, Zerubbabel...), events (such as Exodus, provision of Manna and water, wandering in the desert, bronze serpent...), and institutions (such as Tabernacle/temple, sacrificial system, covenant and law, festivals, Jubilee, Sabbath, the Davidic kingdom...). For example, the Exodus from Egypt is as a type of the redemption of a sinner from the bondage of Satan. The people of Israel were delivered by the blood of the Passover Lamb which symbolizes Christ (1 Co 5:7). The bronze snake Moses lifted up in the wilderness is the type of the cross of Jesus who was lifted up for our sins (Nu 21:8-9; Jn 3:14).

The Old Testament contains the old covenant and foretells the coming of Christ through promises, prophecies and types. The New Testament reveals a new covenant and shows how Christ fulfilled all the promises, prophecies and types of the Old Testament. Thus, Christ made the old covenant obsolete (Heb 8:13). So, we don't need to observe many of its elements, such as dietary laws, keeping the festivals, sacrificing animals, perpetuating the Aaronic priesthood, and temple worship. The book of Hebrews tells us how the Old and New Testaments are related to each other and how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament by becoming the perfect sacrifice, our everlasting high priest, and the new and living way opened to God.

So, in interpreting the Bible we must keep our eyes focused on its main figure: Jesus Christ. "Christ is the point in the circle from which the whole circle is drawn."<sup>33</sup> Otherwise, we

<sup>29</sup> Charles Swindoll 2016: 143,151.

<sup>30</sup> Grand Osborne 1991:280.

<sup>31</sup> Bernard Ramm 1970:50.

<sup>32</sup> J. Edwin Hartill 1947:48.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Grant and David Tracy 1984:94; quoted by K. Fullerton, "Luther's Doctrine and Criticism of Scripture" (1906),p.8.

risk missing the point. Jesus said to the Pharisees: “You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life” (Jn 5:39-40). Jesus said to his disciples, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms” (Lk 24:44). Hebrews 1:1-2a is a sweeping view of God’s redemptive history. It teaches us that in the past, God spoke to mankind through the prophets at many times and in various ways. But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son Jesus Christ, who is the final and complete revelation of God to us.

But there are dangers of the Christocentric interpretation. We must not allegorize or spiritualize every part of the Bible to fit preconceived “types of Christ.”<sup>34</sup>

### III. Application

The Bible was written not to satisfy our curiosity; it was written to transform our lives. God intends to conform us to the image of Jesus Christ (Ro 8:29). The question is this: Even if people did read and study God’s Word faithfully, what would they do about it? What practical difference would they let it make in their lives? We can apply God’s Word to our personal lives, family lives, church lives and our work lives. There are many ways to internalize the words of God in every area of our lives.

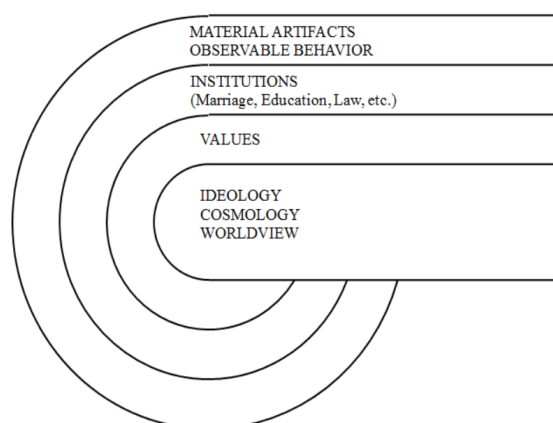
*A. We need to examine ourselves before the Word of God:* James 1:23-24 says, “Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.” Paul says, “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves” (2Co 13:5a). David says, “You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways” (Ps 139:1-3). God knows everything about everyone and everything. He is everywhere at one time and at the same time. David describes God’s omniscience and the omnipresence of God. The Lord looks at the heart (1 Sam 16:7). Nothing is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare (Heb 4:13). Every time we look into a passage of the Bible we need to think of each page as a mirror. God’s Word convicts us of our sinful habits and leads us to repentance, and enables us to live a new life through the Holy Spirit. In fact, the Word of God is the ultimate mirror, because it is the mirror with the power to transform. The Word of God not only reveals truth, it activates truth when the Holy Spirit uses it in a person’s life. If we look into the Word with sincerity, we will be changed.<sup>35</sup>

*B. It is important to find the root cause of our problems:* We try to change our bad habits or behavior. But usually it doesn’t work. We need to look deeper than behavior to see our value system and world view. These should be transformed by the blood of Jesus. Only the blood of Christ has transforming power to redeem us from the empty way of life handed down to us from our ancestors (1 Pe 1:18-19). Then our behavior, habits, relationships and lifestyle will be changed. Look at a diagram of “layers of culture” by G. Linwood Barney.

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<sup>34</sup> Osborne, p. 280.

<sup>35</sup> Howard and William Hendricks, 2007:300.



The deepest part is composed of one's concept or view of the universe and the world. The second sector comes from the first part, and it is one's value system. The third sector comes from the first and second sectors, and they include one's views on marriage, education, law and so forth. The third sector leads to fourth sector, represented in physical buildings and visible behavior. The surface of the third sector can be easily described and used by others. The inner part of each sector is more complicated and conceptual.<sup>36</sup>

When we apply the Scriptures, reflect on what is going on in our lives. We may be worried about something. We may be struggling with insecurity. We may find it difficult to get along with someone. When we begin to think about our life, we need to face reality as it is. Look within, and be honest with yourself and God. We cannot hide from God. God knows everything. We must acknowledge that we have sinned and done wrong. And we must ask God for help.

*C. Here are some helpful guidelines to apply the Scriptures:*

(1) Memorize and write Bible verses: This is one of the best ways to internalize the words of God. It is especially important for children whose hearts are pure—like a blank slate. Whatever is impressed in their hearts remains throughout their lifetimes. Deuteronomy 6:7-9 tell us to constantly engage with the word of God, wherever we are, and whatever we are doing. Not only children, but all of us should memorize the gospel key verses. When we have the treasure of God's Word in our hearts, we will find that light penetrates the darkness of our surroundings. The word of God protects us from temptations. We will be given a shield against the dangers around us. God's Word will rescue us from despair, and will turn discouragement into encouragement and give us hope and vision.

(2) Meditate on the word of God day and night: Meditation is to take time to reflect on God's Word and let it soak into our hearts. It is like a cow chewing cud. After that we can reflect what we learned and share it with others. Sharing, witnessing, and teaching are some of the best ways of learning.

- Psalm 1:1-2: "Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked...but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who *meditates* on his law day and night."

<sup>36</sup> Taken from "A Study on Effective Communication for Conflict Resolution Between Korean UBF Missionaries and Leaders of UBF America" by Dr. Mark Yang. Please see Chapter 4, particularly the David J. Hesselgrave part.



- Psalm 19:14: “May these words of my mouth and this *meditation* of my heart be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.”
- Psalm 119:15: “I *meditate* on your precepts and consider your ways.”
- Acts 1:8b: “...you will be my *witnesses*...”
- Acts 13:20: “...some of them, however, began to speak to the Greeks, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.”

(3) Put them into practice: There is a saying, “Offense is the best defense.”

- Galatians 5:16-17: “So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.”
- Romans 6:13: “Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.”
- 1 Timothy 6:11-12a: “But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life...”
- Matthew 6:33: “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”
- John 13:34: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”
- Colossians 3:13: “Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”

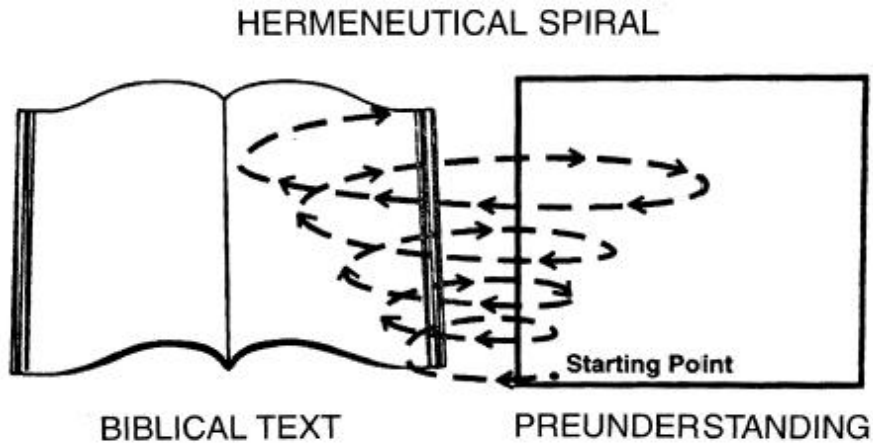
What is the process of life-change all about? It begins with the Word of God. The Bible is God’s divine means of bringing change into our lives. But notice, the Word must first change my life. Then it can begin to change my world. When God’s truth changes my life, I can become a change element in my sphere of influence. How can I bring about change in my society? The only way to bring about permanent and significant change is by changing individuals.<sup>37</sup> (See the appendix V)

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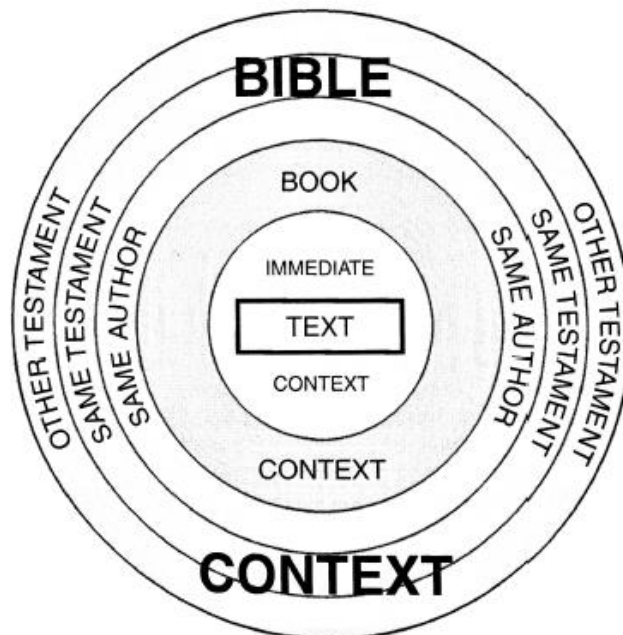
<sup>37</sup> Howard and William Hendricks, 2007:317.

## APPENDIX I

- Figure 1: Hermeneutical Spiral  
(Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, Jr. 2004:166.)



- Figure 2. Circle of Context. (Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, Jr. 2004: 219)  
1. Immediate Context 2. Entire Book Context 3. Context of the Bible



## APPENDIX II

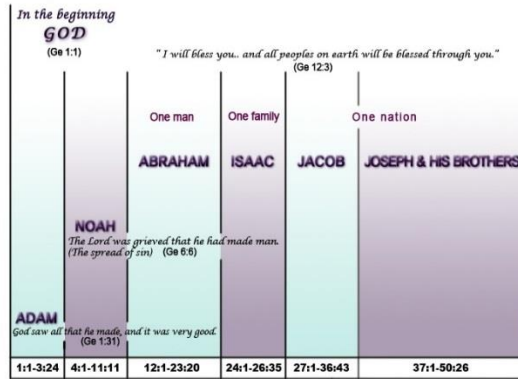
### Detailed Titus Factual Study (From: UBF HQ Bible Study Committee)

- 1:1—Paul's identity and content of his ministry
- 1:2–3—the hope of eternal life revealed
- 1:4—Paul's greetings to Titus
- 1:5–9—appoint qualified elders/overseers
  - 1:5 Paul left Titus in Crete to appoint elders in every town
  - 1:6 elder's family life
  - 1:7–8 overseer's blameless character
  - 1:9 overseer's holding the trustworthy message and teaching sound doctrine
- 1:10–16—description of false teachers in the Cretan church
  - 1:10–11—rebellious false teachers, their influence and motives
  - 1:12–13a—Cretan tendencies
  - 1:13b–14—Titus' mission to rebuke false teachers
  - 1:15—the pure versus corrupted people
  - 1:16—they deny God by their actions
- 2:1–10—teach doing what is good, in order to uphold the gospel teaching
- 2:1–2—teach older men to be good examples
- 2:3–5—teach older women to be good role models and teachers for younger women
- 2:6–8—set a good example for young men in life and teaching
- 2:9–10—teach slaves to be submissive and trustworthy
- 2:11–14—the grace of God changes us
  - 2:11—God's grace for all people
  - 2:12—God's grace teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness, but "Yes" to godliness
  - 2:13–14 Jesus' sacrifice and Second Coming enables us to be eager to do good
- 2:15—encourage and rebuke with all authority
- 3:1–11—teach believers how to live in society
  - 3:1—be subject and obedient to rulers and ready to do good
  - 3:2—be peaceable, considerate and gentle
  - 3:3—we used to be just as wicked as anyone else
  - 3:4–7—how God saved us because of his mercy
  - 3:4—God's kindness and love appeared in Jesus
  - 3:5—he saved us, by his mercy, through the work of the Holy Spirit
  - 3:6—the Holy Spirit is poured out on us generously through Jesus
  - 3:7—we are justified by grace and are heirs of eternal life
  - 3:8—stress these things so that people may be careful to do what is good
  - 3:9—avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, arguments, quarrels
  - 3:10–11—how to deal with a divisive person
- 3:12–15—final remarks
  - 3:12—come to me at Nicopolis
  - 3:13—help Zenas and Apollos
  - 3:14—Christians should devote themselves to doing what is good
  - 3:15—greet those who love us in the faith

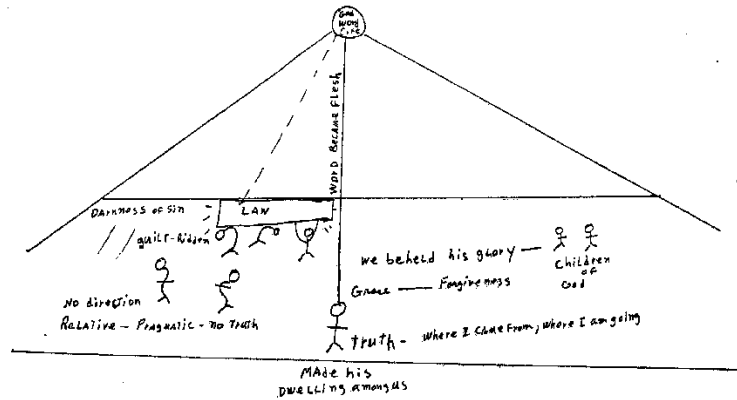
#### Outline of Titus

- I. Introduction and Greetings (1:1–4)
- II. Appoint Qualified Elders/Overseers (1:5–9)
- III. False Teachers in the Cretan Churches (1:10–16)
- IV. Doing What is Good, to Uphold the Gospel (2:1–10)
- V. The Grace of God Transforms our Practical Lives (2:11–15)
- VI. Teach Believers How to Live in Society (3:1–11)
- VII. Final Remarks (3:12–15)

APPENDIX III



(Genesis chart by Mother Sarah Barry)



(John's gospel picture by Mother Sarah Barry)



(1 Timothy diagram by UBF HQ Bible Study Committee)

## APPENDIX IV

**Guidelines of interpretation for five categories of biblical literature**

One of the beauties of the Bible is its diversity of literature. There are many different types of literature, written by 40 different kinds of people in vastly different settings and for different reasons. To interpret each kind of literature we need to take a distinctive approach.

“The fact that biblical literature is an anthology results in a remarkable variety of forms and styles. Literary forms represented in the Bible include the story of origins, heroic narrative, epic, parody, tragedy, lyric, epithalamion (wedding poem), encomium (high praise), wisdom literature, proverb, parable, pastoral, satire, prophecy, Gospel, epistle, oratory and apocalypse.”<sup>38</sup> God has chosen to use many different and creative ways to communicate His message to us, Scholars typically divide the different types of biblical literature into five major categories: narrative, epistle, wisdom literature, poetry, and prophecy.

*Narrative:*

Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 and Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Ester, Daniel, Jonah, Haggai

New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts

More than half the Bible is narrative. Over 40 percent of the Old Testament and 65 percent of the New Testament is stories. What is narrative? Narrative is material that relate the history of an era in a narrative manner—telling how God worked in a certain time and allowing us to hear the characters of history speak. For example, the Gospels present the historical account of the incarnation, ministry, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. The Book of Acts deals with the birth of the church.

In their book *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart summarize what biblical narratives are and what they are not.<sup>39</sup>

1. Old Testament narrative are not just stories about people who lived in Old Testament times. They are first and foremost stories about what God did to and through those people. In contrast to human narratives, the Bible is composed especially of divine narratives... Characters, events, developments, plot, and story climaxes all occur, but behind these, God is the supreme “protagonist” or leading decisive character in all narratives.
2. Old Testament narratives are not allegories or stories filled with hidden meanings.
3. Old Testament narratives do not always teach directly. They emphasize God’s nature and revelation in special ways.

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<sup>38</sup> Leland Ryken 1974:15.

<sup>39</sup> Fee and Stuart 1981:75-77.

4. Each individual narrative or episode within a narrative does not necessarily have a moral all its own.

Historical narrative is nearly half of the Old Testament. One historical book in the New Testament is Acts. Historical narrative is mostly characterized by accounts of people involved in events at certain places and at certain times. They were real people in real places, and the events were real. A real human author under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit recorded these words for our benefit. They aren't myths, fables, or fairy tales, and they aren't even secular history. Rather, they are God's holy Word, and they reveal God's relationship to these people and events. Following are guidelines:<sup>40</sup>

1. *Focus on observing the people and events.* History is about people or characters and what they do. We discern principles to live by as we observe these events and notice how they relate to God. Is God pleased or displeased? How does He respond to what people say or do? In the Bible, God is the main character.
2. *Pay attention to time.* References to time are often keys to understanding a narrative. For example, the books of Kings and Chronicles tie events to the reigns of the kings to establish the historical context. Historical books also refer to the annual sacred or civil calendars in use at the time of the writing. Learning the months of the Jewish calendar and the religious festivals will help you feel more at home in the narratives.
3. *Keep up with location.* Historical narrative often moves from location to location. If you get a mental picture of distances and directions, many of the time references will make more sense, and you'll feel even more a part of the accounts. Reference works that explain geography, topography, and climate can also help you understand stories. Reference works that explain cultural manners and customs from the period can also be a great help in understanding the significance of some things that are foreign to our own culture and time.
4. *Look for what is revealed about God.* Find out what you can about God's character, attributes, and nature. Discover what you can about His ways—how He operates and interacts with people. What does He do and why? What principles of life are revealed in the records of his relationship with people?

*Epistle:*

Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, Jude

Epistles were written as ordinary correspondence to first-century Christians. They address specific concerns and needs (typically some doctrinal error or practical behavior) requiring immediate attention. They are unique letters in that the Holy Spirit inspired them to be written. God worked through the apostles to pen letters that would not only guide first-century

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<sup>40</sup> Kay Arthur 2010:105.

believers in the faith, but us as well. The Epistles are full of God's design for Christian faith and practice.<sup>41</sup> General guidelines are:<sup>42</sup>

1. Try to distinguish between what is cultural and therefore belongs only to the first century, and what transcends culture and therefore applies to all people everywhere. For example, Paul instructs Timothy to bring him his cloak from Troas (2 Ti 4:13), but common sense tells us that this instruction does not apply to us today. For example, in 1 Corinthians 8:10, Paul addresses the issue of food sacrificed to idols. It is unlikely that we will ever be in a situation where we will face this same concern that confronted the believers of the first century.
2. A passage cannot mean now what it never meant to the original audience. This is why the first step of inductive Bible study is observation,
3. Where we share comparable life situations with those of the first century, God's Word to us is the same as it was to the original audience.

#### *Wisdom Literature:*

Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes

#### *Poetry:*

Psalms, Song of Solomon

The book of Psalms is a handbook of prayer. Psalms seem to express in such a rich way what we're feeling, whether it's joy or sorrow, hope or discouragement, trust or doubt.

Wisdom has been defined as "the discipline of applying truth to one's life in the light of experience." Advice being given is from a wise man. In Hebrew culture, three types of leaders influenced the people's behavior and taught them how to relate to God: prophets, priest, and wise men. Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes are collections of the sayings of those wise men of Israel.

A proverb is "a brief, popular epigram or maxim." It is a general truth, recognized by all, and concisely like "a rolling stone gathers no moss." Proverbs tend to use figurative language and express things suggestively rather than in detail.

Wisdom literature uses a variety of literary devices other than the proverbs to teach general truths. These devices include:<sup>43</sup>

- Parallelism: the use of two statements side by side to present a general truth in different ways. There are two kinds of common parallelism: Antithetical parallelism and Synonymous parallelism. Antithetical parallelism is that the second statement expresses the antithesis or opposite of the first statement. Ex. Proverbs 21:1, "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but whoever hates correction is stupid." Synonymous parallelism is that the second statement repeats the sense of the first

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<sup>41</sup> Hans Finzel 2003:110-111.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>43</sup> Morris A. Inch and C. Hassel Bullock, *The Literature and Meaning of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), p. 65.



statement in slightly different words. Ex. Proverbs 12:14, “From the fruit of their lips people are filled with good things, and the work of their hands brings them reward.”

- Comparison: the association of like things. Ex. Proverbs 12:9, “Better to be a nobody and yet have a servant than pretend to be somebody and have no food.”
- Metaphors and similes: using figurative language to compare one object or idea with another. Ex. Proverbs 12:4, “A wife of noble character is her husband’s crown, but a disgraceful wife is like decay in his bones.”
- Portraits: extended pictures that represent a type of person. Ex. 31:10-31 is the portrait of a wise and mature woman of God.
- Brief Narrative: a brief description of an event or experience. Ex. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon includes several brief descriptions of his search for the meaning of life.
- Morris and Hassel explain: To interpret wisdom literature, one must understand the cultural situations in which it arose. Probably the two key areas were the royal court and the teacher-pupil relationship. From the Old Testament it is clear that wise men, as well as astrologers and soothsayers, flourished in the courts of Egypt and Babylon.

#### *Prophecy and Revelation:*

Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel

Minor Prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

A prophet is “one who speaks directly for God.” Throughout the Old Testament there were prophets who spoke for God. Generally, we know more about what these prophets did than what they said, and what they said was placed very specifically in the context of their times. But in the prophetic books, our attention is turned away from the messenger and onto the message. When studying prophetic books, we need to understand why they spoke, when they spoke, and what they spoke.

Revelation: Because of the unusual character and complexity of the Book of Revelation, there have been four main ways of interpreting it. One’s understanding of the events of the book and when they come to pass depends on which school of interpretation one follows.<sup>44</sup>

1. *Preterist*. This is from the Latin word meaning “past.” This view denies the future predictive quality of most of Revelation holding that the events have already been fulfilled in early church history. Preterists see Revelation 5-11 as the church’s victory over Judaism, chapters 12-19 as its victory over pagan Rome, and 20-22 as its glory because of those victories.

2. *Historical*. This view holds that the prophecies of Revelation have been in the process of being fulfilled throughout the Christian era. According to this view, the various symbols

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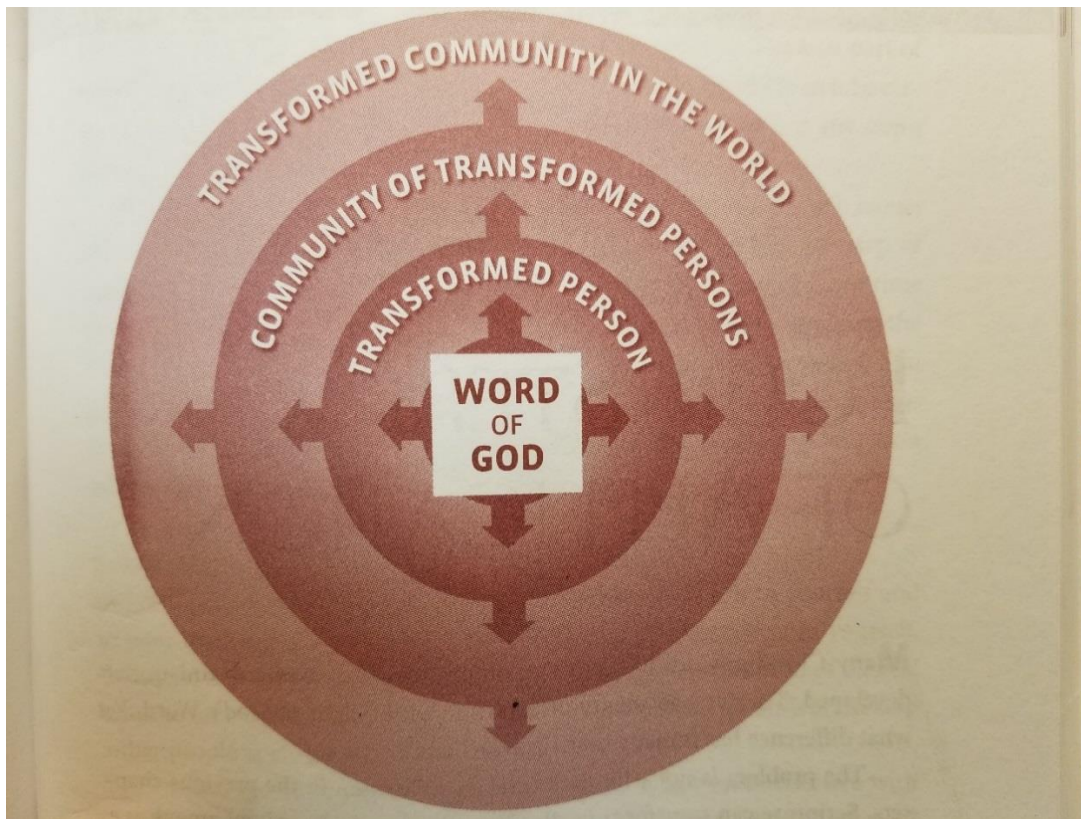
<sup>44</sup> Hans Finzel 2003:158-159.

in the book point to the rise of the papacy, the corruption of the church, and various church wars throughout history.

3. *Allegorical*. This interpretation grew up in the Alexandrian school of theology in the third and fourth centuries. It views Revelation as an unfolding picture of great principles in constant conflict. It spiritualizes and allegorizes the text, and does not link the events of Revelation with specific historical events.

4. *Futurist or plain interpretation*. This is the view adopted by most conservative and premillennial scholars who believe chapters 4-22 of Revelation deal with events yet to come. Futurists believe that chapters 4-18 describe the last seven years preceding the second coming of Christ, chapter 19 the second coming, chapter 20 the Millennium, and chapters 21-22 the eternal state.

#### APPENDIX V



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