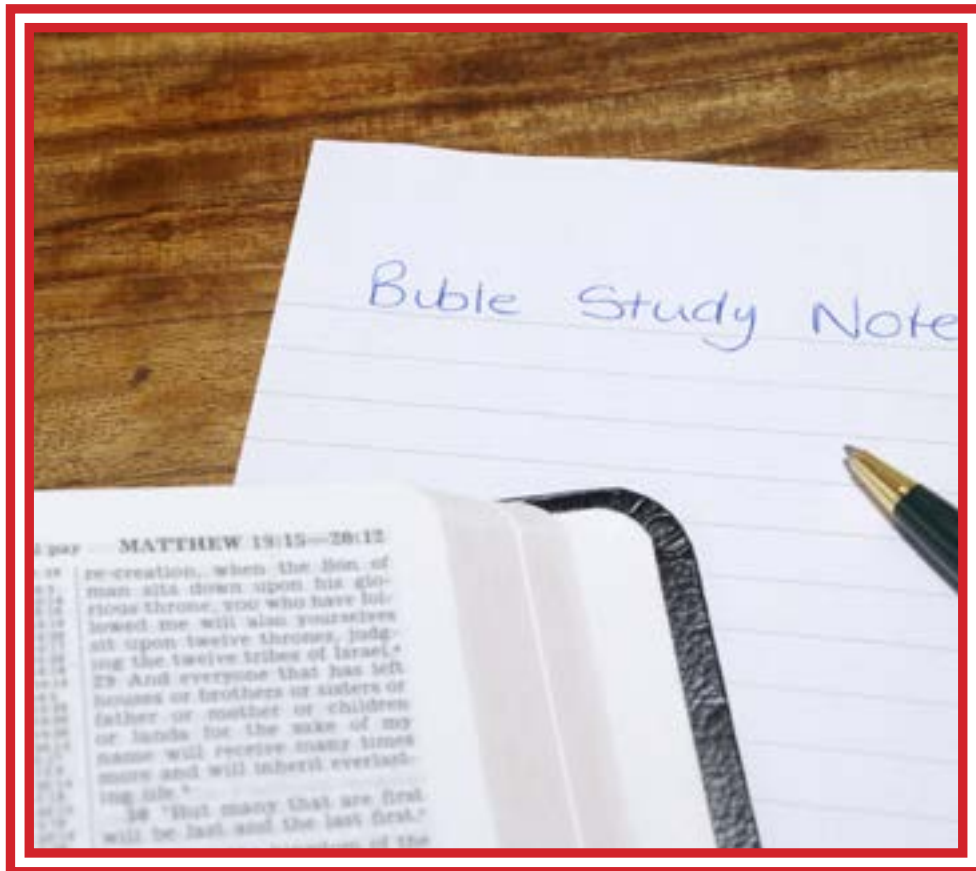


# METHODS OF BIBLE STUDY



## Part 1

### Course MB1

*(Complete)*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Student ID: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Methods for Bible Study

## *Understanding Bible Interpretation*

### Contents

Preface .....	3
Lesson 1 What Is Our Motivation? .....	5
Lesson 2 Dealing with Basic Issues .....	7
A. Why Study the Bible?.....	7
B. The Authority of Scripture.....	9
C. Equipping the Believer .....	9
D. Requirements of a Bible Student / Interpreter .....	10
E. Inductive vs. Deductive Study .....	12
F. Four Important Steps in Inductive Bible Study .....	12
Lesson 3 Why Is Accurate Interpretation Necessary?.....	15
Lesson 4 Apologetic Questions and Interpreting the Bible.....	18
A. The Text of Scripture: Its Trustworthiness.....	18
B. Unity of the Bible .....	19
C. Translations .....	20
Lesson 5 Approaches to Biblical Interpretation .....	27
Lesson 6 The Literal, Grammatical, Historical Method of Interpretation.....	34
A. The Intent of the Author .....	34
B. Understanding the Literal-Grammatical-Historical Method of Interpretation (LGH).....	35
C. Dealing with “Figurative” Language.....	38
Lesson 7 Four Critical Guidelines .....	41
Lesson 8 Putting It All Together .....	44
 <i>Appendices</i>	
Appendix 1 Detailed Course Instructions.....	48
Appendix 2 Examples for Lesson 8.....	50

# Sample Answer Sheet

_____	_____	<u>MB1a</u>	_____	_____
Your name	Student ID	Course number	Lesson number	Date

Question   Answer

---

---

© Copyright 2003 Chapel Library. Printed in the USA. Chapel Library does not necessarily agree with all the doctrinal positions of the authors it publishes. All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless noted otherwise. Permission is expressly granted to reproduce this material by any means, provided

1. you do not charge beyond a nominal sum for cost of duplication;
2. this copyright notice and all the text on this page are included.

Chapel Library sends Christ-centered materials from prior centuries worldwide at no charge, relying entirely upon God's faithfulness. We therefore do not solicit donations, but we gratefully receive support from those who freely desire to give.

**Worldwide**, please download material without charge from our website, or contact the international distributor as listed there for your country. This and hundreds of other books, booklets, and eBooks are available at *www.ChapelLibrary.org*.

In **North America**, for copies of Christ-centered materials from prior centuries, please contact

**CHAPEL LIBRARY**

2603 West Wright Street  
Pensacola, Florida 32505 USA

*Phone: (850) 438-6666 • Fax: (850) 438-0227*  
*chapel@mountzion.org • www.ChapelLibrary.org*

For information about other **Bible study materials** and correspondence courses (often based on texts from prior centuries), please contact

**MOUNT ZION BIBLE INSTITUTE**

2603 West Wright Street  
Pensacola, Florida 32505 USA

*Phone: (850) 438-1037 • Fax: (850) 438-0227*  
*school@mountzion.org • www.ChapelLibrary.org*

MZBI courses may be downloaded worldwide without charge from  
*www.ChapelLibrary.org*

# Methods for Bible Study

## *Understanding Bible Interpretation*

### **Preface**

Welcome to this course on *biblical interpretation and Bible study methods*. Its purpose is to bring glory to God by encouraging and equipping the follower of Jesus Christ to study God's Word for himself. To do so, basic to intermediate skills for both studying and interpreting the Bible are included. God's Word says: "*The works of the LORD are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein.*" (Psa 111:2). And again in Deuteronomy 32:47 (referring to God's Word or "Law"), "*For it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life.*" As some in church history have sought to declare, the Scriptures must have the first and last word on any given subject. The joyful obedience of the saints goes hand in hand with a clear and correct Word proclaimed. The desire here is for the Word of God to be for us a greater source of joy, treasure, and delight as we walk with God in obedience (Psa 19:7-11; 119:32, 46-47).

May your study be used for the glory of our God and King in the building up and equipping of His Church—the glorious Bride of Christ and the in-gathering of God's children from the four corners of the earth!

**Very Important Note:** We ask you to always use your own words in your answers. The answers to most questions are found in the reading portion, but please do not merely quote the text for your answer. Rather, read what the text says, think about the meaning of what it says, and summarize its meaning in your own words for your answer. In this way, you will learn much more than simply a "search/find/quote" method for answering the questions.

Welcome to this course on *Methods for Bible Study: Understanding Bible Interpretation*. This course deals with an introduction to *hermeneutics*, the process of interpreting and understanding the Scriptures. It is the framework for how to interpret what we find as we read and study the Bible.

May the God of all grace feed and strengthen your soul as you work through this course. May He cause His Word to be to you “sweeter than honey” (Ps. 19.10b) so that you might experience sanctification that comes through the Truth of God’s Word (Jn. 17.17).

### *A Word of Thanks*

I pray the Lord of all creation and majesty will continue to use this course toward the building up and equipping of His church to the praise of the name of Jesus, the Lamb of God, our conqueror and King! It is a privilege to “fulfill the work of your ministry” (2Tim. 4.5), which is to “equip the saints for the work of the ministry” (Eph. 4.12). By God’s grace, many people have built into my life over the years and as such I am in debt to them for the deposit of faith they have given to me.

My wife Anne deserves special thanks in her continued nurture and support of this cracked, clay vessel. Unfortunately I am far better at interpreting the Word of God than I am at applying, especially when it comes to loving her as Christ loves the church. May God help my application of Truth to equal my exegesis of it to the praise of His name!

Finally, I wish to dedicate this study to associates with *World In Need* like Ari, Ivan, Lloyd and others, including students and various leaders whose paths God has brought to cross with ours—much to our blessing and growth. These are but a few of the brethren from the “nations” whom we seek to serve.

*Paul Dreblow, August 2002*

*“But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.”—Isaiah 66.2*

# Lesson 1 What Is Our Motivation?

*“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth.”—2 Timothy 2:15*

Why do we have a course like this? How important is it? And if it is important, to whom is it important? In answering these questions, we will discover that this course is necessary for several reasons.

## ***A. Training and equipping people in the local church***

The Word of God is vital for the local church in the *calling out, training, and equipping of people* for works of service. Feeding and acting upon the Word is how the body is built-up and brought to maturity (Eph 4:11-16). Ultimately God’s design is for local churches to be the “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1Ti 3:15) in the communities in which God has placed them. Truth is a vanishing commodity in our day and age, but it is the Truth **Who** saves (Joh 14:6) and the truth **that** saves, sets people free, and sanctifies (Joh 8:31-32; 17:17).

## ***B. Our deep and lasting joy***

Directly related to sanctification is the *Word of God and our deep and lasting joy*. It would seem that God would desire His children to be like Jeremiah of old in our pursuit of pleasure in Him:

*“Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts” (Jer 15:16).*

It is not too much to say: “Help us, O God, to feast—lest we famine!”

## ***C. Equipping men for Elder-Pastoral leadership***

The building up and strengthening of the body entails the calling out and equipping of men for *Elder-Pastoral leadership*. Scripture clearly highlights the need for local church elders to be able to handle accurately the Word of truth. They are to deal with issues related to sound doctrine and discernment, and are to have the ability to confront and refute that which is false (2Ti 2:15, 1Ti 3:2, Ti 1:9; 2Pe 3:16). Every aspect of *every* elder’s ministry (and any other ministry for that matter) is dependent on a love for the truth and recognition of its centrality in all that we do (Deu 32:47; 2Ti 3:16-17).

### ***D. Absolute truth***

The belief in *absolute truth* is absolutely on the line in our day and age. Instead, in modern society, there is a prevalent acceptance of “postmodernism” as a cultural mindset. Postmodernism holds that all truth is relative—it depends on the situation and one’s own opinion. In fact, for many the *non-existence of absolute truth* is not even a significant question.

Is there such a thing as absolute truth—truth which is universal, applying in all situations and to every person without exception? Can we arrive at it? Is the Bible accurate, inerrant, and sufficient to deal with life (2Ti 3:15-17, Heb 1:1, 2Pe 1:21)? Can we deal with the attacks on the Bible by cults, culture, false religions, and secular “counseling” strategies? The Bible tells us the answer to the above four questions is YES!

### ***E. The glory of God among the nations***

The ultimate goal of this (and all) equipping must somehow find itself expressed in *the glory of God among the nations*, beginning with our own neighborhood. There is something wrong with a devotional life that does not burst forth with JOY to tell others about the Good News—and the Good News Giver! There is a missionary purpose in all that we study and do, for our God is a missionary God in the sense that His highest desire is the *proclaiming of His name throughout all the earth* (Psa 67; Psa 96; Eph 1; and numerous texts that explain the God-centeredness of all God does).

### ***Study Questions: Lesson 1***

1. a. What are the five motivations for becoming better equipped in the study of God’s Word?
- b. *Making It Personal* Which of these is most motivating to you in taking this study? Why?

The answers to the *Making It Personal* questions are not found in the reading. These are designed to encourage application of the material to your own heart. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions; we are looking only for your own honesty and change in your own life.

2. Why is study of the Word vital for the well-being of the local church?
3. How is the Word of God related to our deep and lasting joy?
4. Why is knowledge of God’s Word necessary for elders-pastors to properly carry out their biblical functions?
5. a. Why is the truth of the Bible necessary for dealing with life’s questions?

### *Making It Personal*

- b. Do you believe in the existence of absolute truths?
  - c. Do you believe the Bible is the source of absolute truth?
6. What is the connection between Bible study and evangelism?
7. Open your Bible to 2 Timothy 2:15. Please answer the following questions.
- a. Who is Paul writing to here?
  - b. What is he asking the reader (and us) to do?
  - c. What are the requirements for becoming an “approved workman who does not need to be ashamed?”

## **Lesson 2 Dealing with Basic Issues**

In this lesson we want to understand the following objectives:

- Why study the Bible?
- What is the authority of the Bible?
- What is Truth?
- The clarity of Scripture
- What are some basic “requirements” of the Bible interpreter?
- Deductive vs. inductive study
- Four important steps

### **A. Why Study the Bible?**

Two obvious and very important questions to ask from the outset are “*why study the Bible?*” and “*can I study the Bible?*” When a person becomes a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, he often is disciplined in the basics of how to pray, how to witness, how to walk with God, even how to read the Bible, and so on. But very often we neglect the very important and fundamental passion and skill for *accurate and precise study of God’s Word*. How would a newborn infant grow without the consistent, ongoing nourishment from a mother’s breast? Soon thereafter we begin to teach a child how to feed himself; how to satisfy the hunger urge with good, nutritious food. Likewise the believer must be given first milk, then solid meat (1Co 3:1-3; Heb 5:11-12) from the storehouse of God’s Word—lest he find himself spiritually malnourished and oppressed in spirit. From the moment of spiritual birth, a babe in Christ must be fed from the bread of God’s Word that never grows stale, never corrupts, and always satisfies the soul!



We can also learn from the example of the plight of God's people in ages past. Time and again throughout the history of the prophets, we hear something similar to the resounding, "my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos 4:6). Later, after nearly 1,300 years of domination by the Roman church (with its false veneer of Christianity which led to a similar "lack of knowledge"), the reformers<sup>1</sup> triumphed under the battle cry, "*sola fidae, sola Christae, sola graciae, sola Scriptura*": faith alone, Christ alone, grace alone, Scripture alone. The printing press (invented by Johann Gutenberg, 1400-1468) by then had made possible the more rapid transmission of the Word of God along with other reformation writings. This was linked with a renewed emphasis on the doctrine of the priesthood of believers (1Pe 2:1-9) and with Martin Luther's<sup>2</sup> emphasis on the "perspicuity" of Scripture (clarity or simplicity (Psa 119:130, 2Ti 3:15-17, 2Pe 3:16). Together, these factors lead to a growing desire to see the Word of God "brought and taught" to the masses.

Of course the most important reason for studying God's Word is that *He has commanded it*. The Word of God is not a trivial, incidental matter; indeed, it is our "life" (Deu 32:47). The people of God are commanded to be

*"strong...that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law...turn not from it to the right hand or to the left...This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night" (Jos 1:7-8).*

Paul wrote to Timothy to be diligent in his laboring to study the Word of God in order to be an approved (and not ashamed) workman (2Ti 2:15). We know the Scriptures alone are "*given by inspiration of God, and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*" (2Ti 3:16).

Finally let us not forget the *true and abiding joy* that comes from the nourishment of God's Word:

*"Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors...My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes" (Psa 119:24, 48).*

---

<sup>1</sup> **Reformers** – 16th century Christians, such as Martin Luther (1483-1546), John Calvin (1509-1564), and Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531), who sought to reform the abuses of Roman Catholicism and restore the Bible as authoritative in Christianity.

<sup>2</sup> **Martin Luther** (1483-1546) – German monk, theologian, and university professor, whose ideas inspired the Protestant Reformation and changed the course of Western civilization.

## B. The Authority of Scripture

We live in a world that has little tolerance for the concept of “authority,” especially if that authority happens to claim sole or exhaustive authority above and beyond any other authority. Instead, the practice of “tolerance” dominates the cultural landscape of the West and elsewhere. No one can be seen as exclusive; it is “judgmental” to call anything always right or always wrong; to talk of sin is frowned upon; society demands that believers accept others’ views as equally valid with their own.

What do we mean when we speak of “biblical authority,” or the authority of God’s Word? Simply put, when we speak of biblical authority we are speaking of the fact that what the Bible teaches is indeed how we are to think or act. Furthermore, this Word is to be the rule and guide for all we do; we are to live in submission to it. It was Calvin<sup>3</sup> who said, “My conscience has been taken captive by the Word of God” (*Institutes in the Christian Religion*).

Biblically, we see this understanding of authority in the numerous times the prophets spoke “Thus says the Lord”—their words came directly from God. Then there is Moses, exhorting the people that (concerning God’s Law) “It is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life” (Deu 32:47). In the New Testament, we are told that “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2Ti 3:16). Since the Bible is the Word of God, we would expect that it would have authority over our lives, that it would inform and guide all of our thinking and action. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. There will always be those for whom the words and commands of God are not the authoritative source of joy, which the psalmist spoke of when he said, “I will delight myself in thy statutes” (Psa 119:16; cf. 24, 47-48 and many others). For those, God’s Word instead becomes a burdensome load. The latter may only serve to suggest where the love of God has grown cold (1Jo 5:3).

## C. Equipping the Believer

The goal of this course is to equip the believer for effective Bible study. The need everywhere is for Berean-like people who study the Bible for themselves (Act 17:11), and as a result can speak and teach confidently with authority from the Word of God. This can only take place when we are confident of the message we

---

<sup>3</sup> **John Calvin** (1509-1564) – the father of Reformed and Presbyterian theology. Calvin lectured to theological students and preached an average of five sermons a week during his 25 years serving in Geneva. Born in Noyon, Picardie, France.

have, and when the Bible is in fact studied and taught accurately. This requires that the body of Christ be equipped “for the work of the ministry” with Bible study and interpretive skills (Eph 4:12). Or, to put it into the words of Paul, we need to raise up a people who “needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2Ti 2:15).

## **D. Requirements of a Bible Student / Interpreter**

The following is a list of some helpful prerequisites for anyone wanting to handle accurately and faithfully the Word of God.

### ***1. Must be a born-again believer (the role of the Holy Spirit)***

Anyone can read and understand the structure, grammar, and even the meaning of an author. However, it is only believers (the elect, those who have received the Spirit via the new birth) who will be able to comprehend and spiritually discern, appreciate, and apply the Word of God to their life situation. In 1 Corinthians Paul writes

*“But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God...Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God...But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1Co 2:10, 12, 14).*

In order for a person to accept, spiritually discern, and apply the Word of God, the Holy Spirit must be residing within the person.

### ***2. Belief that the Bible is fully sufficient and authoritative***

If this is true (as we argued in Lesson 2 regarding the authority of Scripture), it will influence greatly how we set out to study the Word. If we believe the Bible is the Word of God, fully inspired, inerrant, and trustworthy, we will be more inclined to study carefully and order our lives around it. We will approach our study and reflection upon the text with greater care and concern, because we know we are handling the very words of God! We will also be more inclined to apply *in our own lives personally* what we are studying, learning, and teaching.

### ***3. Common sense***

While this may not sound very “spiritual,” it is amazing the amount of work we can save ourselves by simply using a little sanctified common sense. Probably 90% of what we read or study in Scripture means exactly what it says, just as it is

written; the meaning can be gleaned from a basic reading and study of the text. Much of the time we do not have to do a lot of “leg work” in seeking to understand the author’s intent. The other 10% of the time, we may need to do further in-depth study in order to come to a clear and succinct understanding of the author’s meaning and its application to life.

#### ***4. Awareness of presuppositions***

Everyone brings a certain set of prior beliefs or convictions to their study of God’s Word. For our purposes, we can call these “presuppositions” (or pre-understandings). Some of these may be more or less in line with God’s Word, but others much less so. When we sit down to engage the text in study, it is important to at least have in mind the possibility that our presuppositions may negatively affect our ability to accurately handle the Word of God. By “presupposition” we are referring to ideas, concepts, or biases that each of us carries into study of the text that will effect our ability to accurately interpret the text. The **core presuppositions** are:

- a. Who determines meaning: the author or the reader? As stated above, the conviction of many within fundamental evangelical circles (and of this course) is that *the author determines the meaning*. He knew what he intended to mean when he wrote.

Some presuppose that God communicates His mind directly to the reader, so that every person can have their own meaning! But this makes irrelevant the meaning that God, the author, intended when He wrote! God is a God of order (Col 2:5; Ti 1:5), and this presupposing of direct individual interpretation must be rejected as completely erroneous.

- b. Another core presupposition would involve one’s worldview,<sup>4</sup> especially in relationship to the supernatural.

On another level (what we might call the “cultural” or “personal” bias level), when reading a passage a person may think in the back of his mind, “Oh, those kind of people were always lazy”; or “*my* mother never stayed home to care for the kids”; etc. When reading a text related to these presuppositions, each of these ideas has the possibility of influencing one’s understanding of the author’s meaning in a way the author did not intend.

For example, let us say you grew up in a home where the father was clearly “in charge” and ruled with a rather heavy hand at times—failing to acknowledge his

---

<sup>4</sup> **worldview** – collection of beliefs about life and the universe, from which one interprets how the world works.

wife's feelings in various family situations. Now, years later as an adult, you come to the text, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands..." (Eph 5:22 ff). Your immediate mental image of "submit yourself" is based upon your early home life. This mental image is a presupposition. Most likely, the given example is not an accurate portrayal of the author's intended meaning regarding husband/wife interaction. At this point you must be careful not to read into the text *your presupposition* of what "subjection" (and the husband's headship-leadership) should look like. In the case of the text under consideration, the subjection of the woman is clearly voluntary and "as unto the Lord," with the husband loving and leading his wife in the same manner "as Christ also loved the church" (Eph 5:25-26). In order to understand God's true meaning, the biblical words demand our impartial study without presupposition.

## **E. Inductive vs. Deductive Study**

There are two broad methods or approaches for reading and studying the Word of God. The *inductive approach* begins with the text itself. It looks carefully at word order, sentence structure, and context to understand clearly what the author was communicating, and then seeks to explain and apply that idea. By its very nature, this approach tends to be more "textual," and tends to deal largely within the realm of "discovery."

The *deductive approach* on the other hand, begins by making an assumption or proposition that is believed to be found in Scripture. It then seeks to undergird that assumption by finding support in various texts of Scripture. By its very nature it tends to be more "topical" and to deal largely in the realm of "proof." For our purposes, we will be setting forth the inductive approach to Bible study, though admittedly at times there will be an interchange back and forth between the two methods.

## **F. Four Important Steps in Inductive Bible Study**

Before embarking on any study of the Word of God, it is important to keep the following four steps in mind.<sup>5</sup> Every time we study the Word we want to do these four things.

---

<sup>5</sup> These are derived and adapted largely from Earl Morey's *Search the Scripture* (Agape Ministry, Inc.; Vienna, Virginia); not available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

### **1. Observation**

Look at the text, examine, read, ask questions of the text (who, what, where, when, why, how), take notes, and anticipate the questions and objections raised by your target audience. Probe, probe, probe! Compare and contrast! Notice as many facets in the text as possible.

### **2. Interpretation**

What do these words mean according to their definitions? What did the author mean when he wrote these words? Your goal is to get at the author's intent or meaning.

### **3. Application**

How might these words be applied? Of what significance are they? What practical difference does this text make in life? What areas in my own life need to change in order to conform more completely to the meaning of the text?

### **4. Proclamation**

Closely related to application, proclamation answers the question: "How can I share this teaching?" What are the cultural or societal issues that may be addressed by this text? Who do I know that needs to hear this? How can my family benefit? To do this well, we need to be able to understand both the culture and our audience.

## ***Study Questions: Lesson 2***

### ***A. Why Study the Bible?***

1. Why is it important for the believer to learn how to interpret the Word of God?
2. Describe two historical events that helped put the Bible back into the hands of the common person.

### ***B. The Authority of Scripture***

3. What role does "tolerance" in a culture play in not only understanding but also living out the doctrine of authority?
4. a. What is meant by "biblical authority?" (Please realize that this is a significant step beyond believing simply that the Bible is true.)  
b. Explain why the Bible is authoritative.

#### ***Making It Personal***

- c. Do you believe the Bible is authoritative over your own life?

- d. If so, please give one recent example of how you personally submitted to the authority of the Bible.
5. *Making It Personal* Can you, like John Calvin, say “my conscience is taken captive by the Word of God?” Please explain your answer.
6. Which of the Scripture passages (mentioned in this lesson up to now) best speak to you of the authority of God’s Word? Choose two of them and note the reference (book, chapter, and verse). Write out the key phrase in each. Note: by key phrase we mean the phrase in the verse (not the whole verse) which clearly carries the main thought as it relates to the question at hand. In this case, the key phrase in each verse will be that phrase which speaks to the authority of God’s Word.

### ***C. Equipping the Believer***

7. What was characteristic of the Bereans (Act 17:11)?
8. As described by 2 Timothy 2:15, what is cause for a person to feel shame?

### ***D. Requirements of the Bible Student / Interpreter***

9. List the four prerequisites to be an interpreter of the Word of God. In your own words, write a one-sentence summary next to each.
10. For the first prerequisite, the role of the Holy Spirit, describe the ability of an unbeliever to study, understand, and apply the Word of God.

### ***E. Inductive vs. Deductive Method***

11. Explain in your own words the difference between the *inductive* method and the *deductive* method of Bible study.

### ***F. Four Important Steps***

12. Please memorize the “four important steps” for Bible study. List them here from memory. Briefly describe the meaning of each.
13. *Making It Personal* Write a short prayer which expresses your own desire for how your life might change from working through this course. Use some biblical texts in your prayer.

## Lesson 3 Why Is Accurate Interpretation Necessary?

*“And he said unto them, Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this law. For it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life: and through this thing ye shall prolong your days in the land.”*

—Deuteronomy 32:46-47

*“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth.”—2 Timothy 2:15*

*“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”—2 Timothy 3:16-17*

*“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”—Matthew 5:17-20*

*“For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”—Hebrews 4:12*

The Word of God comes from God (2Ti 3:16-17; 2Pe 1:20-21). As such it has been given to us for His glory and our joy (Jer 15:16; Psa 119:47-48). God’s Word is not a trivial or small thing; in every aspect it is our “life” (Deu 32:46-47a). The mind and thinking of God on a given subject flows from the Word—is it any wonder the psalmist cries out,



*“I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O LORD, thou knowest” (Psa 40.9).*

There is a godly health and prosperity that issues forth from our taking God at His Word and feasting upon it in our mind/heart. Why is it that time and again throughout history the people of God are warned or encouraged to *listen and take heed* because there was a *lack of knowledge of God* in the land (i.e., faith in God and submission to His Word)? This was the core problem for wayward Israel and Judah; it therefore forms the heart of prophetic rebuke (see Jer 6:10-11).

The journey of faith and growth in sanctification takes place as God’s people take seriously the entirety of God’s Word. Obedience is *not optional* (Jos 1:7-9; Psa 119; Joh 14:21, 23; 17:17; 1Jo 2:3, 5:3; etc.). Most, if not all, of the problems God’s people have encountered throughout the ages have been either directly or indirectly the result of not knowing the mind or Word of God on a given subject (Jer 6:10, Amos 5:10), or, knowing it but failing to *heed* it! We must embrace the Word in our heart (Psa 40.8), speak forth the Word boldly, and stand firm upon it!

But this all presupposes that we know and understand the Word, i.e., what the text is actually saying. The “accurate handling” of God’s Word is a great task, one in which in a very real sense the spiritual life of people is at stake (Jam 3.1)! Knowing this ought to cause us to take pause and ask ourselves: *Am I willing to invest the time, energy, and passion it takes to be a deep and precise “surgeon” of the Word (2Ti 2:15)?*

Am I willing to lay aside carnal and trivial pursuits that may eat away precious time, in return for that which is NOT trivial but in fact is my *life* (Deu 32:46-47)?

Do I tremble before and beneath the awesome reality that the Word which I am about to read, study, speak, or pray over is saturated with Holy Ghost, God-breathed, and grace-filled LIFE?

Do I live in the reality that, as a student with ready access to God’s Word, in some way I will be held accountable to a higher standard (Jam 3:1)?

Do I recognize that every time I go to pick up the Bible, I am in fact laying hold of the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17)?

Do I recognize that this Word is “living and active,” and that it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (Heb 4:12)?

If we can answer these questions in the affirmative, then when called upon we can “give an answer [from God] to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1Pe 3:15). This becomes doubly important when we recognize that the cults and false religions will typically seek to deceive, mislead and enslave people based upon a mixing of truth with error. That this is the case is evident from most of the problems encountered in the New Testament Church, as well as

many other historical occurrences over the centuries (see 1Ti 4:1, 2Co 11:1-15). We must not allow our culture's fascination with pragmatism<sup>6</sup> and ambiguity to deter us from the high and holy calling of accurate study, lest we be labeled among those who "need to be ashamed."

### ***Study Questions: Lesson 3***

#### ***1. Making It Personal***

- a. Where is your passion in regard to the reading and study of God's Word? Use the Scriptures at the beginning of this lesson to describe the importance of Bible study accuracy, especially as it affects your own devotional and ministry life.
- b. What steps might God be asking you to take to "remedy" anything lacking in this area?

2. The most important place to start when seeking to develop an interpretive or hermeneutical mindset is with Scripture itself. In this way we can develop an awareness of the essential nature of hermeneutics as defined in the Scriptures.

The following are several passages that give us some hermeneutical or interpretive "indicators." Read through each of these. On your answer sheet, please write the verse reference and the *key phrase* from each that speaks to reading and understanding the Bible.

*Note: do not merely quote the entire verse, but identify the key phrase that speaks specifically to reading and understanding the Bible.*

- a. Nehemiah 8:8-10
  - b. Luke 24:32
  - c. Luke 24:45
  - d. 1 Corinthians 2:10-15
  - e. John 10:6
  - f. Acts 8:30-31
  - g. 2 Timothy 2:15
  - h. Hebrews 4:12
3. From this brief survey, what conclusions can you form about how the Bible itself describes the general area of reading, studying, understanding, and interpreting Scripture?

---

<sup>6</sup> **pragmatism** – philosophy where "the end justifies the means"; mindset where all value is on the end result, while compromising principles in order to achieve it.

## Lesson 4 Apologetic Questions and Interpreting the Bible

Apologetics is the practice of explaining and defending the faith. In order to productively study and interpret the Word of God, it is important to have a solid understanding of a few areas of apologetics and how they may relate to the whole process of Bible study and interpretation. We will deal with three different concerns: the trustworthiness of the text, the unity of the Bible, and a basic understanding of different translation styles.

### A. The Text of Scripture: Its Trustworthiness

While the assumption is made that the true believer trusts and believes in the historicity and reliability of the Word of God, there are many whom we may encounter as we share and teach who might not agree. We will not exhaustively deal with all the issues involved. But here are some basic factors to keep in perspective when questions arise.<sup>7</sup>

Normally we speak of the Bible's authority being based on three "I"s.

**Infallible:** This word refers to the Bible's not being capable of error; it is not able to mislead or deceive. This is reasoned deductively from the fact that the Bible derives from God Himself, Who by very definition (of perfection) cannot and does not sin or deceive (2Sa 7:28).

**Inerrant:** This states that the Bible is free from error or mistake due to the verbal-inspiration of the Scriptures (in their original autographs<sup>8</sup>) from God Himself (see Psa 119:160)

**Inspired:** This refers to the understanding that it is God Himself Who "authored" the Scriptures using a variety of human authors over a period of approximately 1,600 years.

This process normally is referred to as "verbal plenary" inspiration, meaning that all of Scripture is "God breathed" (2Ti 3:16-17), word for word, in its entirety (see also Deu 18:18; Jer 1:9; 2Pe 1:20-21). "Verbal" and "plenary" are added for clarification. In this age of skepticism, we must work hard to communicate what we mean when we speak of God's Word:

---

<sup>7</sup> For further study on the text of the New Testament and textual transmission, see Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament* (Oxford University Press; New York, New York; 1964); not available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>8</sup> **autographs** – manuscripts written by the author himself in his own handwriting.

1) *verbal* – the words themselves (the Bible is inspired in its actual words, not is some hidden meanings).

2) *plenary* – all the words (every word of the Bible is inspired, not just some of them).

So if we are going to be complete and accurate, when describing the text of Scripture we would say it is *infallible, inerrant, and verbally and plenary inspired,*

Because the Holy Scriptures were inspired by God Himself, and because He is perfect and incapable of error, we must see the Bible in the same light. We must conclude that it is wholly authoritative for our lives.

As we submit ourselves to God, we must understand that living under biblical authority (living in submission to and seeking to obey the teachings of Scripture) is not presented as a burdensome duty, but as a means of true joy and gladness. The psalmist wrote, “And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved. My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes” (Psa 119:47-48). John also writes, “This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1Jo 5:3). Recognizing and living under the Bible’s authority as a believer is indeed the pathway to true joy and pleasure!

## **B. Unity of the Bible**

When we talk about the unity of the Bible we are referring to the fact that the Bible contains an amazingly harmonious message—one without actual contradiction. Its sixty-six books (39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New) were written over a period of approximately 1,600 years by some 40 different authors. It was written in Hebrew and Greek, with a little bit of Aramaic in a few places in the Old Testament (Jesus also spoke Aramaic). Combine this with the fact that those 40 authors came from various and diverse backgrounds, including the priesthood (Zechariah), a farmer/rancher (Amos), and a tax collector (Matthew). As a result, you have an amazing testimony to the power of God at work in *communicating and preserving* the Word of God over the centuries. Left to the normal course of mankind, portions of it would not have survived, and what did survive would have had many differing versions

Given that God has preserved the unity of the Bible, how would you describe the Bible’s central message? While there are possibly many ways to state this, the underlying unifying theme that runs throughout the entirety of the Word of God focuses on the revelation of 1) *the glory of God* and 2) *His purpose in exalting His Glory through Jesus Christ*—through creation, the redemption of the elect of

mankind, and the defeat of evil (see Isa 43:6-7, 48:9-11; Jer 13:11; 2Sa 7:23; Eph 1:6, 12, 14).

## C. Translations

### 1. *Textual criticism*<sup>9</sup>

There are two standard Greek texts of the Bible used today. The KJV and NKJV use the historic *Majority Text*, whereas almost all the other modern translations use a different Greek text, called the *Westcott-Hort Text*. The great question of textual criticism is: Which Greek text best represents the original autographs?

The *Majority Text* is a text that includes the Hebrew *Masoretic Text* for the Old Testament and the Greek *Textus Receptus* for the New Testament, which means “the received text” in Latin. The name is given to the Greek New Testament manuscript produced by the Elzivir publishers in 1633, where they carefully reviewed more than a dozen complete manuscripts and hundreds of fragments surviving from antiquity to remove minor variations and establish one reliable and authoritative text. The Hebrew *Masoretic Text* of the Old Testament was established as a standard during the sixth to the eleventh centuries by scholarly review of all the existent manuscripts of the time (the Masoretes were a school of Jewish scholars who devoted themselves to preserving the Hebrew text accurately during this period).

In 1881, two Cambridge scholars named Westcott and Hort created a new “Westcott-Hort” Greek text to replace the *Textus Receptus*. Both were Anglicans with mostly orthodox theology, but they also were evolutionists who denied biblical inerrancy. They based their new text on two manuscripts found in the 1800s, one in a back room of the Vatican, and the other in a back room of a monastery on Mt. Sinai. The *Westcott-Hort Text* is also known as the *Alexandrian Text*, because evidence points to both of its source manuscripts originating from a manuscript in Alexandria, Egypt. However, there are many places where the two source texts disagree with each other and with the *Textus Receptus*.

The *Westcott-Hort Text* has been used as the basis for most modern translations because the two foundational manuscripts seem to date from the fourth century, whereas the oldest of the many manuscripts used in the *Textus Receptus*

---

<sup>9</sup> This entire section is added by CHAPEL LIBRARY. Comments here are abstracted from “A Creationist’s Defense of the King James Bible,” Henry M. Morris (Institute for Creation Research; El Cajon, California; 1996), 11-13. See also Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, “Textual Criticism” (Ambassador Emerald International; Greenville, South Carolina; 2002), 449-480.

date from the eighth century. Is older better? At first thought it would seem so: the oldest manuscript is closest to the original autographs (the documents first written by the inspired authors) and therefore should contain less copying errors. This would be true, unless the older Westcott-Hort manuscripts were set aside because of errors! The older accurate manuscripts would have been actively used for copying and thus would have worn out!

There is much more that can be said about textual criticism, but it quickly becomes an intense scholarly debate that is beyond our scope here. Here is an overview:

*Number of large manuscripts (with most Bible books):*

- Textus Receptus: about 14
- Westcott-Hort: 2

*Variations (differences among the source manuscripts):*

- TR: ~1,000 among thousands of manuscripts and fragments.
- WH: ~5,000 among a few manuscripts

*Earliest date of the large manuscripts:*

- TR: eighth century
- WH: fourth century

*Example of notable word change:*

1 Timothy 3:16 is one of the wonderful verses establishing the deity of Christ. The TR has the Greek word *theos*, which means “God.” The WH has only the masculine pronoun.

KJV: “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.”

RSV: “Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit...”

NIV: “...he appeared in a body...”

## **2. Translation styles**

The process of translating the Greek and Hebrew texts into another language requires the translators to employ a “philosophy,” style, or theory of translation. Theory of translation pertains to the trade-off between

- 1) a word-for-word accuracy between the “receptor” language and the original, and
- 2) overall readability using familiar modern expressions.

The more “literal” the translation, the more closely the words and sentence structure reflect the original (this is called “form” equivalency). The more “readable” the translation, the more the phrases vary from the original, but the ease of understanding is increased as the resulting text more closely matches current usage (this is called “function” or dynamic equivalency). The problem in making the translation more readable in modern language is that it requires the translators to do far more interpreting of what the author meant. The reader is no longer reading the author’s words (as much as possible), but rather the translators’ interpretation of the author’s words. For this reason, literal translations are recommended for understanding and studying the Word of God.

The KJV and NKJV are considered literal translations. All others mentioned here are considered “dynamic equivalent” translations. Dynamic equivalency manifests itself in choices regarding readability (or natural flow of language), grammatical construction, archaic words, archaic usage of words, weights and measures, and specificity.

There are three larger categories of translation style (or theory); they are literal, dynamic-equivalent, and free (or paraphrase).

#### *a) Literal translations*

Literal translations include the KJV (King James Version), NKJV (New King James Version), ASV (American Standard Version of 1901), and NASB (New American Standard Bible). A **literal translation** is one that seeks to keep the translation clearly rooted in a word for word format and will tend to therefore maintain the “**historical distance**”—referring to the differences (in reference to culture, words, grammar, etc.) between the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek terms and the “receptor” language. The words will be translated “as is” even though now in the “receptor” language that word does not necessarily carry the same exact meaning. These translations can at times be cumbersome to read due to their commitment to literal, word for word renderings. The benefit is that they have a minimum of interpretation built into their translated words. (*Note: the ESV translation calls itself “essentially literal.”*)

#### *b) Dynamic equivalent translations*

**Dynamic equivalent** translations include the NIV (New International Version) and NAB (New American Bible). These attempt to bridge the gap between the original and receptor languages, thus arriving at a word or thought that is closer to what is perceived to be the author’s original intended meaning. These translations follow a “thought for thought” format, translating the words and grammar of the original language into “equivalent meaning” (according to the view of the interpreter/translator) in the target or receptor language. Here the historical dis-

tance will be kept in areas like geography, history, and factual matters, but will attempt to *update or revise* areas related to language, style, and grammar. Dynamic equivalent translations will include modern phrases that capture the understood intent of the author. But in doing this, the translators not only translate the words, but also first add their own interpretation of the author's intended meaning.

### *c) Paraphrases*

Finally, the more modern **paraphrase** (or "free") style of translation is normally the work of one man and aims for a more general flow of thought. Exact word for word translation is not the goal in this style. Examples here include "The Message," "Phillips," and "Living Bible." While the prior two styles can provide a foundation for serious study (and especially one from each group), the paraphrase is not recommended for the serious student of the Word.

### **3. Translation examples**

In each of these examples, the KJV and NKJV represent the literal translation style, and all others represent the dynamic equivalent style.

#### **Readability:** 2 Corinthians 5:16

The context of this verse is the believers' new life in Christ.

KJV: "Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more."

NKJV: "Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer."

RSV (1947): From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer.

TNIV: "So from now on, we regard no one from a worldly point of view"

#### **Grammatical construction:** Romans 12:20 (Greek: "fire's coals")

KJV: "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head."

RSV: "No, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head."



**Archaic:** “Quit ye like men” 1 Corinthians 16:13

KJV: “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.”

NKJV: “Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.”

RSV: “Be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong.”

**Specificity:** 1 Corinthians 7:36 (Greek: virgin, deliberately left so in the Greek)

The translators who used dynamic equivalency deliberately made a choice of interpretation, and they each chose a different interpretation!

KJV: “and if any one doth think it to be unseemly to his virgin, if she may be beyond the bloom of age, and it ought so to be, what he willeth let him do; he doth not sin—let him marry.”

NKJV: “If any man thinks that he is behaving improperly toward his virgin...”

NASB (1960): “If any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter...”

TNIV: “If anyone is worried that he might not be acting honorably toward the virgin he is engaged to...”

NEB: “If any man has a partner in celibacy and feels that he is not behaving properly towards her...”

Specificity: “flesh” (sarx)

The Greek word meaning “flesh” is used in a variety of different ways in the New Testament. By using different words to relate which meaning in context, the dynamic equivalent translations eliminate the reader’s ability to find the original usage of the word “flesh.”

*Romans 8:4* The context is established in verse 1: “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.”

KJV: “...who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

WEY (1912): “...For our lives are regulated not by our earthly, but by our spiritual natures.” [“WEY” stands for Weymouth, one of the first dynamic equivalent translations, produced in 1912.]

NIV: “who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit”

Note here the loss of the contrast between “the flesh and the Spirit” in the dynamic translations.

*Romans 1:3*

KJV: “Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh”

WEY: “who, as regards His human descent, belonged to the posterity of David”

NIV: “who as to his human nature was a descendant of David”

*Colossians 1:21b-22*

KJV: “Yet now hath he reconciled In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight”

RSV: “he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him”

WEY: “He has now, in His human body, reconciled to God by His death, to bring you, holy and faultless and irreproachable, into His presence”

NIV: “But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death, to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.

**Measurements:** Mat 18:24, 28

Here the original Greek words were “talent” (a large sum) and “denarius” (a measure for about one day’s pay for manual labor). The most literal approach to handling weights and measures that no longer exist in our society is to transliterate the word into English, i.e., to replace each Greek letter with the corresponding English letter. In this case, all translations use the transliteration for “talent.” For “denarii,” the NKJV uses the literal transliteration, and the KJV translators opted for a bit of functional equivalency by using “pennies.”

KJV (1611): “And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.”... “ But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.”

NKJV (1982): “And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.”...“But that servant went out

and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took *him* by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’”

WEY (1912): “But as soon as he began the settlement, one was brought before him who owed 10,000 talents,”... “But no sooner had that servant gone out, than he met with one of his fellow servants who owed him 100 shillings; and seizing him by the throat and nearly strangling him he exclaimed, ‘Pay me all you owe.’”

## ***Study Questions: Lesson 4***

### ***A. The Text of Scripture: Its Trustworthiness***

1. Name the three foundational “I” truths (i.e., these words begin with the letter “I”) that undergird the doctrine of the Bible’s authority and trustworthiness, and give the meanings of each.
2. What are the two additional clarifying words used to describe the scope of the Bible’s trustworthiness, and to what do they each refer?
3. What is the relationship between living under submission to biblical authority and the believer’s hope and joy in the Lord?

### ***B. Unity of the Bible***

4. How would you change or add to the author’s stated “central unifying message”?

### ***C. Translations***

#### *Textual criticism (1)*

5. What are the two standard Greek texts of the Bible that are used as the sources for Bible translations?
6. What is the difference between the *Majority Text* and the *Textus Receptus*?
7. Why do so many modern translations use the *Westcott-Hort Text*?
8. Why do some consider the *Textus Receptus* the preferred source text for New Testament translation?

#### *Translation styles (2)*

9. a. What are the three primary translation styles? List them and *briefly* describe each.
- b. What is the major difference between the three?

10. Place the following Bible translations into the proper category below: NIV, NASB, KJV, ESV, NKJV, Phillips, “The Message.”
- a. Literal
  - b. Dynamic Equivalent
  - c. Free

## Lesson 5 Approaches to Biblical Interpretation

There must be an attempt to formulate a consistent hermeneutic. Hermeneutics is the study of Scripture interpretation; a consistent hermeneutic is that which allows us to understand the Scripture’s true meaning as accurately as possible. The history of Christianity reveals the following approaches used over the centuries.<sup>10</sup>

### ***A. Allegorical Interpretation***

The allegorical approach seeks through symbolism a deeper meaning than the literal and ordinary usage of the language. Any such meaning is only in the mind of the interpreter. Such allegorizing of Scripture is necessarily arbitrary, fanciful, and often irrational.

This approach began with the Greeks and their ancient writings. It entered into early Christianity through Alexandrian Judaism, and especially the writings of Philo the Jew, who sought to synthesize Greek philosophy and the Hebrew religion by allegorizing the Old Testament Scriptures. This approach became the predominant method of interpretation until the Protestant Reformation. It was largely an attempt by the early Church Fathers to make the Old Testament a

---

<sup>10</sup> This section is excerpted from *Sola Scriptura* by Pastor W. R. Downing (Sovereign Grace Baptist Church of Silicon Valley; 271 W. Edmundson Ave.; Morgan Hill, California 95037); not available from CHAPEL LIBRARY. For more information regarding an historical overview of hermeneutics, the reader is encouraged to see Milton Terry’s (1840-1914) *Biblical Hermeneutics* ((Zondervan Publishing; Grand Rapids, Michigan; 1964; reprint: Great Christian Books, Rotolo Media; Lindenhurst, New York; 2014), 163ff; not available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

“Christian Book” by spiritualization, and so confused Old Testament typology<sup>11</sup> with allegory.<sup>12</sup>

Farrar points to the first instance in the Patristic writings: “Clement of Rome [c. A.D. 90-100]. This ancient bishop...is the first...who endows Rahab with the gift of prophecy, because by the scarlet cord hung out of her window she made it manifest that redemption should flow by the blood of the Lord to all them that believe and hope in God. As the pictorial fancy of a preacher, such an illustration would be harmless; but when it is offered as the explanation of an actual prophecy, it is the earliest instance of the overstrained allegory, which was afterwards to affect the whole life of Christian exegesis.”<sup>13</sup>

The Church Fathers consist of the leaders in the Christian Church during the first centuries after Christ. Their writings have left us some insight into Christian thought during the formative stages of Christianity. The development of the allegorical approach may be noted in examples taken from the Church Fathers, who finally applied it to the New Testament as well.

Clement of Alexandria (c. A.D. 155-220) taught that there are at least five possible meanings in any given passage:

- 1) The historical sense, or actual and literal.
- 2) The doctrinal sense, or moral, religious, and theological.
- 3) The prophetic sense, or prophetic and typological.
- 4) The mystical sense, or the symbolism of deeper truths.
- 5) The philosophical sense, or finding meaning in natural objects and historical persons, following the psychological method of the Stoics.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> **typology** – system of biblical Old Testament types (symbols) representing something or someone with some of the same characteristics, as New Testament antitypes, the fulfillments or manifestations of the symbols.

<sup>12</sup> For further understanding of the allegorical method, you are encouraged to read E. D. Hirsch, *Validity In Interpretation* (Yale University Press; 1967), or chapter one in Robert Stein’s *Playing By the Rules: A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible* (Baker Academic; Baker Publishing Group; Grand Rapids, Michigan; 1994) 17-36; neither title available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>13</sup> **exegesis** – biblical explanation that establishes the meaning of a passage, using the literal, grammatical, and historical method of interpretation.

F. W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation* (1885) (reprint: Baker Book House; Grand Rapids, Michigan; 1961), 166; not available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>14</sup> **Stoics** – Greek school of philosophy, founded about 308 B.C., believing that human beings should repress emotion, be indifferent to pain or pleasure, and should accept calmly all occurrences as the unavoidable result of divine will or of the natural order.

An example of Clement's approach to Scripture is noted in the following: "[Clement,] commenting on the Mosaic prohibition of eating swine, hawk, eagle, and raven, observes: 'The sow is the emblem of voluptuous and unclean lust of food...The eagle indicates robbery, the hawk injustice, and the raven greed'...Clement of Alexandria maintained that the laws of Moses contain a four-fold significance: the natural, the mystical, the moral, and the prophetic."<sup>15</sup>

Origen (c. A.D. 155-254) held that, as the nature of man is composed of body, soul, and spirit, so the Scriptures possess a corresponding three-fold sense: the literal, the moral, and the spiritual.

Augustine (A.D. 354-430) "justified the allegorical interpretation by a 'gross misinterpretation' of 2 Corinthians 3:6. He made it mean that the *spiritual* or *allegorical* interpretation was the real meaning of the Bible; the *literal* interpretation kills."<sup>16</sup> He was forced into such an approach by his polemic<sup>17</sup> encounters with the Manichaeans and the Donatists.<sup>18</sup> Thus, he justified the use of force by the civil authorities to "compel" dissenters to return to the Catholic Church by interpreting the parable of the great supper to the "Church" (cf. Luk 14:16-24, esp. v. 23).

Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) typifies the Medieval approach of his time: "The author of Holy Writ is God, in whose power it is to signify His meaning, not by words only (as man can also do), but also by things themselves. So...that the things signified by the words have themselves also a signification. Therefore that first signification whereby words signify things belongs to the first sense, the historical or literal. That signification whereby things signified by words have themselves also a signification is called the spiritual sense, which is based on the literal and presupposes it. Now this spiritual sense has a threefold division...the allegorical sense...the moral sense...the anagogical<sup>19</sup> sense. Since the literal sense is that which the author intends, and since the author of Holy Writ is God, Who by one act comprehends all things by His intellect, it is not unfitting, as Augustine says (*Confessions, XII*), if, even according to the literal sense, one word in Holy Writ should have several senses."<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 163-164; not available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>16</sup> Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Baker Book House; Grand Rapids, Michigan; 1969), 35; not available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>17</sup> **polemic** – controversial; argumentative; refuting.

<sup>18</sup> These were two third century sects. The Manichaeans emphasized asceticism versus Bible study. The Donatists opposed forgiveness for those who had denied their faith during persecution, leading to splits in the church.

<sup>19</sup> **anagogical** – from the Greek *anago*: to lead or bring up; relating the sacred text to eternal life.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Part 1, Question 1, Article 10.

To sum up, Alan Cairns says the following: “The most serious misuse of allegory is found in the alleged fourfold sense of Scripture, The four senses attributed to a passage are the literal, the allegorical (or analogical), the moral, and the anagogical. The place of each is summed up in the saying, ‘the literal shows things done; the allegoric, what you should believe; the moral (or topical), what you should do; and the anagogical, what you should hope (referring to eternal life).”<sup>21</sup>

### ***B. Mystical Approach***

In the mystical approach to Bible interpretation, “manifold depths and shades of meaning are sought in every word of Scripture.”<sup>22</sup> This approach not only characterized most of the allegorists, but included the Medieval mystics and such later heretical writers as Jakob Boehme (1575-1624) and Immanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), with his three-fold sense of Scripture—the natural or literal, the spiritual, and the celestial.

The mystics often add to the meaning of Scripture by “finding” additional meanings “hidden” in subtle observations about the passage. They claim these meanings are “revealed” to them directly by God. But there are problems in this: who decides which claims for newly revealed meanings are valid when they are conflicting or unusual? And, when he is having a new message, how does one discern if it is from God or from the imaginings of his own mind?

### ***C. Pietistic or Devotional Approach***

Pietism was a reaction against the neo-scholasticism<sup>23</sup> and cold theological dogmatism that followed the Protestant Reformation. It approached the Scripture in a very practical and subjective way for personal edification. Such an approach characterized the ministry and writings of such men as Philip James Spener, A. H. Francke of Halle, and such groups as the Moravians and Quakers. Some Pietists and the Quakers claimed to be guided by an “inner light” in their interpretation of Scripture—an extreme view of 1 John 2:20. Such an approach tends toward confusion, irrationalism, and a subjective approach to Scripture, wherein the use of the rational mind is rejected in favor of mystical “impressions.”

Much modern so-called “devotional” use of Scripture violates basic and consistent hermeneutical principles, such as a complete disregard for the grammar or context of Scripture. For example, Genesis 31:49 is used as a benediction, when

---

<sup>21</sup> Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, “allegory,” 15.

<sup>22</sup> Milton S. Terry, *Loc. cit.*

<sup>23</sup> **neo-scholasticism** – contemporary application of scholasticism to modern problems and life, based chiefly on the authority of the Church Fathers, and of Aristotle and his commentators; characterized by marked formality in methods.

it was actually a covenant between two deceivers who did not trust each other, and so they called upon God to watch the other! In Psalm 118:24, the indicative “rejoice” is changed to the imperative mood and given as an exhortation. If one changes the grammar of the Scripture, he necessarily changes the meaning, and so speaks or writes without scriptural authority. Psalm 2:8 has been used as a missionary text, but the context (vs. 6-9) refers this to the reign of the Messiah-King, Who shall *judge* the nations! Care must be taken to make the absolutely necessary distinction between *interpretation* and *application*.

#### ***D. Liberal or Modernistic Approach***

The liberal approach denies the inspiration of Scripture, and reconstructs the contents and teachings of the Bible on a mere naturalistic foundation. It includes the following approaches.

In the *rationalistic approach*, the Scriptures are interpreted by unaided human reason, with a denial of the supernatural and the role of the Holy Spirit in illumination. Destructive, rationalistic criticism of such men as F. C. Baur and the Tübingen school, Julius Wellhausen, and K. H. Graf, et al.,<sup>24</sup> contributed to the rise of this approach.

The *moral approach* was that of Immanuel Kant, who held that the Scriptures were given for their practical and moral value alone.

The *mythical approach* held that the historical truth of the Scripture must be freed from the alleged “myths and legends,” i.e., its supernatural element. This is characteristic of such rationalist-critical scholars as David Friedrich Strauss and Rudolf Bultmann.

In the *accommodation theory*, the supernatural element was actually an accommodation to the primitive or superstitious nature of the peoples and cultures of that time. The originator of this type of liberal approach was J. S. Semler.

#### ***E. Apologetic, Polemic, or Dogmatic Approach***

This approach is generally synonymous with the proof-text method of Bible interpretation, by which various passages are asserted to teach or buttress a given opinion or theological position. Such an approach can be readily noted in any religious dispute concerning Christianity.

It is historically prominent in such controversies as the Romanist-“heretical” debates of the Middle Ages and the Romanist-Protestant disputes of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is also featured in the Calvinist-Arminian debates (which continue still to this day), the polemical disputes between *paedo* [infant] baptists and Baptists over

---

<sup>24</sup> **et al.** – *Latin*: “and others.”



the mode and subjects of baptism, and the disputes among evangelicals over the “invitation” or “altar call” system, revival and revivalism, etc.

### ***F. Neo-Orthodox Approach***

In neo-orthodoxy, the Scriptures are viewed as a *record* or *witness* to divine revelation, and not the very revelation or Word of God. God is *encountered* in or through the Scriptures in a dramatic and personal crisis experience. According to this approach, the Scriptures are neither the inspired Word of God nor is there propositional revelation in Scripture; God allegedly reveals Himself in an existential<sup>25</sup> way. In this approach, what is true and useful for shaping your knowledge about God is not what the Bible says about Him, but rather what you have personally experienced with Him.

The problem, of course, is that all Christians still are encumbered by the flesh, which is capable of being deceived at any moment. It causes us to seek after emotional highs that can be very deceptive. In addition we have an enemy, the devil, who seeks to distort God’s truth and throw us off track in any way he can. The neo-orthodox approach, as with most all the approaches, exalts our own fleshly capabilities and impressions to a level equal to or above Scripture itself. This leads to great error.

### ***G. Literal-Grammatical-Historical Approach***

The literal-grammatical-historical approach is the only valid, consistent, and reasonable method of biblical interpretation. It is the interpretation that is necessitated by and in accordance with the rules of grammar, the definitions of words as used in the language, and the facts of history. It is common-sense interpretation: it seeks no spiritual or hidden meaning unless necessary in the normal figurative, symbolic, idiomatic, or typical expression of the given language, culture, or historical context of a given passage. It presupposes that God has given His revelation in an intelligent and understandable form. It is the method we will develop in this course, and if you are to be a serious student of God’s Word, it must be your method of Bible study throughout the course of your life.

#### *Typology*

Typology in the Old Testament is a legitimate use of symbolism, and is retained even in the LGH method. “A type is a shadow cast on the pages of Old Testament history by a truth whose full embodiment or antitype is found in the New Testament revelation.”<sup>26</sup> Types are true historical Old Testament people or things. They only can be interpreted confidently with New Testament spiritual

---

<sup>25</sup> **existential** – pertaining to mere existence.

<sup>26</sup> *Baker Dictionary of Theology*.

applications when the New Testament itself speaks to the Old Testament type. Importantly, we must realize that we cannot make further spiritual applications than what the New Testament has pointed to. The following are some examples of types.

The experience of Jonah (Jon 1:17) typified the resurrection of Christ after three days, because Christ Himself told us so (Mat 12:40). However, we must not attempt to derive what Christ's experience during the three days was like based on Jonah's experience.

In Luke 17:26, Jesus tells us that Noah's day was similar to His day, and He tells us how in vs. 27. Noah is a type in that judgment was at the door (Gen 7:21-23), and people chose to ignore it.

In John 3:14, Jesus tells us that the bronze serpent in the wilderness (Num 21:8) typified the saving power in His own crucifixion.

### ***Study Questions: Lesson 5***

1. What is the basic problem with the *allegorical* method?
2. Why should we be cautious about the *mystical* approach?
3. a. How did the *pietistic* approach develop?  
b. In what ways is it prone to error?
4. Briefly, describe in your own words the four approaches which are mentioned within the *liberal* approach.
  - a. the *rationalistic* approach
  - b. the *moral* approach
  - c. the *mythical* approach
  - d. the *accomodation* theory.
5. a. How does the *apologetic* approach use various passages?  
b. *Making It Personal* Have you observed the error of this approach being used in Bible teaching today?
6. a. What is the problem in the *neo-orthodox* approach?  
b. *Making It Personal* Do you believe your own "flesh" is capable of being deceived at any moment? Why or why not?
7. a. What are the key elements in the *literal-grammatical-historical* approach?  
b. Why is this approach said to be "the only valid, consistent, and reasonable method of biblical interpretation"?

## Lesson 6 The Literal, Grammatical, Historical Method of Interpretation

### A. The Intent of the Author

When we set out to read a passage from the Word of God, we want to ask the question: “What is our primary, most basic goal or task?” The answer to this question is of immense importance. More than likely, if you start out with a wrong or misguided primary goal, you will end up with a similarly wrong or misguided conclusion—or, in this case, interpretation.

Many people have had the experience of being at some kind of a small group Bible study. A passage of Scripture is read and the leader asks, “*OK, let’s think about this passage and ask ourselves, what does it mean to me?*” This question is not bad if it has the intent: “How does the literal meaning *apply* to me personally?”

But, most often the question is asking something altogether different: “What is my personal opinion of what the passage means?”—which unfortunately often is based on a distinct *lack* of Bible study. People will then go around and try to explain “what I think it means...” This question is *wrong and misguided* on two points:

1. It places the Bible in a position where human speculation and wisdom (or worse: the pooling of group ignorance) is at the forefront, instead of the Word of God being seen as authoritative, to be understood, and to be submitted to. Unwittingly we open ourselves up to a subjective-relativistic approach to the study and interpretation of the Word of God.
2. It places the listener or reader in the position of the one who determines the meaning of the text, rather than seeking the meaning intended by the author.

The “cure” for this is singular: *understand that the intended and only correct meaning resides with the author.* The primary goal of our reading or study of God’s Word is to understand the author’s intended meaning. In order for there to be any objective and verifiable way to arrive at meaning and understanding (and application to life), we must seek to understand what the author (or “speaker” in the case of personal discourse or narrated dialogue) means.

## B. Understanding the Literal-Grammatical-Historical Method of Interpretation (LGH)

Now that we understand the primary goal in Bible study (to understand the author's intended meaning), we want to ask the question "*What is the best approach for arriving at the author's intended meaning?*" Is there a primary method, indicated by Scripture itself, by which we are to accurately understand and interpret the Word of God? The answer to this question is "yes."

That method is the **Literal-Grammatical-Historical** (LGH) method, a biblical-based way of interpreting the Holy Scriptures (hermeneutic). This is its key principle: when we come to a text, we should have the general attitude that all Scripture is to be taken and interpreted literally (and applied specifically)—unless we are given reason to believe otherwise from the context.

*"The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold,<sup>27</sup> but one), it must be searched by other places that speak more clearly."<sup>28</sup>*

Following this approach insures that we take the author/speaker's words seriously as they are written/spoken in their original *historical-cultural-geographical setting* and according to their *grammatical-syntactical design* as originally inspired by the Holy Spirit

### ***1. How does the literal-grammatical-historical method work?***

As stated above, this method depends upon the idea of author-centered interpretation. That is, the meaning of a text is what is meant by the words the author uses.

But how do we understand the author's one true meaning when, in the case of the Bible, thousands of years have passed, and the words on paper could be interpreted several different ways? This is the beauty of the LGH method. By using four different perspectives, we can narrow the possible meanings in almost all cases to *one*. And because these perspectives match the author's perspectives, we can be sure that the one meaning we interpret is the one meaning intended by the author.

What are these four perspectives?

---

<sup>27</sup> **manifold** – of many kinds, numerous and varied.

<sup>28</sup> *Westminster Confession* (1646) or *London Baptist Confession* (1689), chapter 1, paragraph 9. The LBC is available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

### *a. Context*

The perspective of context tells us that the words are to be taken literally *according to their context*. For example if a person were to say to you, “I am going to fly from here to Boston,” what would that mean? Does it mean that he is going to sprout wings and fly over to Boston? No. Using the LGH method would mean that the words refer to exactly the idea the author intended to communicate, as if he were taking them literally according to normal word usage *in context*. “Flying” to Boston could have two modern meanings depending upon the context: 1) if you were in Texas at the airport, it would mean traveling via an airplane to Boston; 2) if you were in New York standing next to your new Ferrari at midnight, it might mean something else!

Here is a biblical example of the importance of context. Revelation 3:20 is often quoted as a part of an evangelistic appeal: “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” Those who use it that way understand its meaning to be that Jesus Christ is knocking at the door of the lost sinner’s heart. The lost sinner must open the door to invite Jesus into his life, and Jesus promises to come into his heart and save him. However, in context we see the actual literal meaning of the verse in 3:19, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.” Jesus is speaking to *believers* who have sinned and need to be restored to believer’s fellowship with Him. He “comes in” for fellowship with his repentant believing child. The verse has nothing to do with evangelism!

### *b. Literal meanings of words*

The perspective of *literal* tells us that the words should carry their meaning from the normal use of language at the time, and not from some other imposed perspective. They mean what they mean in the normal use of the words themselves, and not some imagined meaning not intended by the author. The layman can use Strong’s Concordance and various Greek or Hebrew Lexicons to find the definition of each word.

### *c. Grammar*

The perspective of *grammar* tells us that the parts of speech of the language employed (mood, verb tense, etc.) carry the sense of the words used. We identify who is doing the action by the *subject*, what action by the *verb*, and who receives the action by the *direct object*, etc. We identify a command vs. a question, a polite request vs. a statement of fact, etc. The author’s grammar tells us a lot about his intended meaning.

### *d. History*

The perspective of *history* tells us the situation in which the author lived. Much of what the author refers to is explained by understanding the history and culture of the times. “Threshing grain” might make as little sense to someone born and raised in New York City today, as “downloading from the web” would make to someone who lived in Jerusalem in the first century. To understand the meaning, we have to understand the cultural frame of reference of the author in his time of writing.

Of course, there are some Bible passages that are difficult to interpret. A large group of even the best LGH interpreters might have trouble agreeing on the one meaning intended by the author. But these passages are very few and, importantly, none of them relate to the fundamental doctrines of the faith.

## ***2. Why is this method the only valid way?***

This is the only valid way to interpret Scripture because it is the only objective way to understand language. In following this method, we recognize the purpose of language is to communicate the meaning of ideas through an objective, recognized group of “word symbols,” which we call nouns, verbs, articles, conjunctions, and other parts of speech. We also recognize that, as people who are created in God’s image, we are given the ability to think and speak rationally—in ways that can and need to be understood.

Without understanding speech in the plain and literal sense, our ability to communicate intelligibly breaks down, or even ceases to exist. Others could interpret our words in any way *they* chose. The meaning would be derived by the hearer/reader, and not by the speaker/author. But in order to protect us from this confusion, our God gave us rational minds to use in communication. The hearer/reader can understand the author’s intended meaning by studying (if necessary) his words.

## ***3. To summarize***

We desire to practice the **L**iteral/**G**rammatical/**H**istorical method of interpretation because it reinforces our first and most important principle: that *meaning resides with the author*. When someone speaks or writes, he has only one meaning in mind. Historically this has been referred to by the Latin phrase, *sensus unum* (one sense or meaning). Though the text may have several points of application or contact with the reader, it has only one meaning.

The LGH method specifically corrects the error in allegorizing Scripture, where the interpreter’s imagined hidden figurative meaning replaces the literal meaning intended by the author. The LGH method tells us that a text cannot:

- Mean what the author did not intend it to mean.

- Mean two things at the same time.

For example, please read Genesis 2:10-14, and ask yourself what is being described.

*10 And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads.*

*11 The name of the first is Pison: that is it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold;*

*12 And the gold of that land is good: there is bdellium and the onyx stone.*

*13 And the name of the second river is Gihon: the same is it that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia.*

*14 And the name of the third river is Hiddekel: that is it which goeth toward the east of Assyria. And the fourth river is Euphrates.*

Now go back and look at this from the mind of Philo of Alexandria, one of the early church fathers and a proponent of *allegorizing*. Philo suggests that what is *represented* in the four rivers are the virtues of prudence, temperance, courage, and justice. Each of these derives from the great river (v. 10), which stands for “goodness.”

This is but one example of the error of allegorizing. It allows the interpreter to “find” meanings that go far beyond the intention of the author.

## **C. Dealing with “Figurative” Language**

### ***1. What is figurative language?***

In stating the above caution, this does not mean that the interpreter does not recognize the use of *figurative language* in the Word of God. By “figurative” we are referring to symbolic or non-literal understanding of words and phrases. We use figurative language almost every day. For example, which of the following do you take figuratively?

- a. He ran as fast as a rocket.
- b. He ran about 10 miles an hour.

Obviously we take the first one in a figurative, non-literal sense. The use of “as” tells us we are comparing a man’s speed to that of a rocket. The common sense understanding of “rocket” would necessitate that we take it in a non-literal sense, since no one can run nearly as fast as even the slowest rocket flies! Howev-

er, it is entirely possible for a well-conditioned runner to run at the speed of 10 miles per hour for short distances.

Various sections or parts of God's Word are more likely than others to contain figures of speech, but figurative language can be found in almost any book of the Bible.

## ***2. An important principle related to figurative language***

Use of figurative language does not require us to abandon the LGH method and use allegorical interpretation instead. Figurative language and allegorical interpretation are two different things entirely, as illustrated by the following examples. Figurative language still refers to a specific meaning that originated with the author.

And figurative language does not mean "false" language or referring to that which is not true. When someone uses figurative language, they are not making false or misleading statements. They are not telling fictional stories. Though we do not take the specific linguistic device itself "literally," read in context we acknowledge the truthfulness of the statement being made and the role the literary device plays in making the author's meaning more clear, forceful, or descriptive. Here again we must refer back to the necessity of common sense as a basic pre-requisite for the interpreter of God's Word.

Here are but a few of the figures of speech that are used in Scripture.

- "As the hart [deer] panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God" (Psa 42:1).  
- This is a **simile**; see also Rev 1:14, Isa 1:18.
- "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman [vinedresser]" (Joh 15:1).  
- This is called a **metaphor**; see also Psa 35:2, 44:19; Eph 6:14-17.
- "Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets..." (Pro 1:20).  
- This is called a **personification**; see also Num 16:32, Psa 96:11-12.
- "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, Thou wilt revive me: thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me" (Psa 138:7).  
- The use of "hand" in reference to God is called an **anthropomorphism**; see also 2Ki 19:16 in the use of "eyes" and "ears." An anthropomorphism is



a description of God in human terms, so that we might relate to His infinity and perfections in terms we can understand.

Here is a good point to observe a necessary *caution*. Beware of cults and false teachers who twist and distort Scripture (2Pe 3:16-17) by taking what is meant to be understood literally and giving it some esoteric, figurative meaning. Here are some “helps” in distinguishing figurative from literal language.

- a. Understand what type of biblical literature, or “genre,” you are reading (i.e., poetry, prophesy, history, epistle, or narrative, etc.). Some genre (or types) of biblical material are more apt to have figurative language (poetry for example).
- b. Note the language and style of the author—do the words depart from his normal usage?
- c. Is there biblical precedent for calling this figurative?
- d. Is there something in the historical-cultural background that would make this a particularly good figure of speech?
- e. What does common sense indicate?

While communicating to us in a non-literal sense, we nevertheless still can understand the authors meaning in the words he actually used. Figurative language can assist the author to communicate more clearly. We understand the author’s meaning without resorting to allegorical interpretation, by understanding the use of the figure of speech in the history of that time.

## ***Study Questions: Lesson 6***

### ***A. The Intent of the Author***

1. Why is it wrong and misguided to ask “what does this passage mean to me?”

### ***B. Understanding the Literal-Grammatical-Historical Method***

2. Please write out the key principle in the LGH method.
3.
  - a. *Briefly and in your own words*, how does the LGH method work?
  - b. List the four main perspectives and what they each tell us.
  - c. Why is having more than one perspective helpful?
4. *Making It Personal* Do you have confidence that using the LGH method, you can know the one true meaning intended by the author? Why?

5. Why is the LGH method “the only valid way to interpret Scripture”?

### ***C. Dealing with Figurative Language***

6. List some of the figures of speech that are included in Scripture.
7. Look up the following Scriptures. List the figurative metaphor used in each passage, and what Jesus meant by it.
  - a. John 4:10-14
  - b. John 6.35
  - c. John 10:7-9
  - d. John 10:11-16
8. Explain some of the principles that assist us to distinguish when language is used figuratively or literally.
9. How is interpreting figurative language using the LGH method different from using the allegorical method?

## **Lesson 7 Four Critical Guidelines**

We conclude this course by discussing four interpretive guidelines that are integral to the Literal-Grammatical-Historical method, and that have stood the test of time. (These are given in no specific order.)

### ***A. We must allow Scripture to interpret Scripture.***

We must allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. We interpret the part in view of the whole, and the whole in view of the part. In Reformation times, a principle arose that came to be known as the “analogy of faith.” It was instrumental in coming against the age-old practice of Roman Catholicism, which interpreted the Bible by the traditions of the church (known as the “rule of faith”). But as Grant Osborne suggests, it might be better yet to call this the “analogy of Scripture.”<sup>29</sup> By this we mean that we want to *let Scripture interpret Scripture*. Understanding the Bible as a unified whole means that when we come to a difficult text, we seek to understand that text in light of other, related texts and the entirety (hence the “whole”) of Scripture. Another way to look at this is to say we want to strive to interpret that which is *implicit* (or not clearly stated) *by that which is clearly or explicitly stated elsewhere in Scripture*. This will help to keep us from stating 1)

---

<sup>29</sup> Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Intervarsity Press; Downers Grove, Illinois; 1993), 11; not available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

more than a text actually says, or 2) more than what can be supported when taken in conjunction with other texts on a given topic.

### ***B. Scripture presents a unified “picture.”***

Scripture presents a unified “picture” or revelation. Scripture will not contradict Scripture. This principle speaks for itself, and it is related to the above principle and to the “three I’s” and “unity” sections (studied under Lesson 4, parts A and B). Based upon the fact that God is perfect and cannot sin or deceive, we conclude that His written revelation is incapable of the same. That is to say there can be *no real contradiction*, though at times it may seem there is an apparent contradiction. The Bible is an amazingly unified message with a common thematic thread: the revelation of God’s glory in creation and redemptive history. Within this unity there is also diversity: the kind of literature, the author’s emphasis, the theological thrust, and so on. Yet even with diversity, the message remains an amazingly consistent unified whole.

Therefore, in the event that we end up with two seemingly contradictory statements or interpretive conclusions, we acknowledge the problem to be with the interpreter and not the author—who is ultimately God! Tensions will exist in Scripture. We do not want to fail to acknowledge there are some doctrinal assertions that will forever remain a mystery in terms of our ability to fully or satisfactorily explain. Since we, mere finite mortals, are dealing with an infinitely wise, holy and perfect God, this is to be expected.

### ***C. Scripture has come to us in “progressive” stages.***

We call this the progressive nature of revelation. We are referring to the fact that the Word of God came to us originally over the course of several centuries of God’s working out of history. Revelation and redemptive history as revealed in the Scriptures move along a historical framework. Covering a period of 1,500 to 1,600 years (more if we include references to the onset of creation), the Bible comes to us as a unified message. The message develops out of the successive stages of history as God reveals the outworking of the purpose of His will (Eph 1:11).

So we have the Law, which reveals God’s will for covenant community. After this we find the writings of the historical books, which reveal the chronological development of history and the implementation (or lack thereof) of the Law of God. Then we see prophets, who were raised up to call the covenant community back to faithful love and obedience to the Word of God. Then we have in the Gospels the “revelation” of Christ (the One to Whom all the Law and prophets “point,” Luk 24:27, 44). The next portions describe the establishment of the New Testament Church and the proclamation of the Gospel through it. Then the epistles deal specifically with the problems and issues that arise out of the expansion

and development of the Church, laying down both doctrine and the correction of false doctrine.

#### ***D. Suffering as an interpretive framework***

Though somewhat more “subjective” in its scope, suffering as an interpretive framework, or “grid,” is nonetheless significant. John Piper brings out this remarkable aspect of Martin Luther’s life. Martin Luther alluded to this in reference to three methods for studying theology. One of these was “affliction” (or in Latin, “tentatio”). Luther began by drawing from Psa 119:67, 71, as follows:

67 *“Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word.*

71 *It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.”*

Luther concluded, “the devil will afflict you, will make a real [theological] doctor out of you, and will teach you by his temptations to seek and to love God’s Word.”<sup>30</sup>

Thus it is often quite true that the best learning and loving (interpreting) of the Word often comes in the midst of trials and tribulation.

#### ***E. Summary***

These lessons have found us wrestling with introductory yet very critical *foundational issues* regarding motivation for studying the Word of God. These include understanding both biblical authority and the unity of the Bible, as well as a few other apologetic issues. We looked at the role of the author, what “meaning” is, and why we must seek to interpret and apply the Scriptures in such a way as to preserve the author’s intended meaning. We investigated issues related to language, both literal and figurative.

Having explored basic issues of apologetics and the historical reliability of the Scriptures, we have come to see the Bible is clearly the Word of God, spoken through various authors. It is our ultimate source of wisdom, knowledge, and instruction, i.e., “*For it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life*” (Deu 32:47)!

After working through this material, it is our desire that you will be better equipped to read, study, and interpret the Word of God with a view toward understanding and *application to life*. It is our prayer that the ultimate result will be not only a more clear “intellectual” grasp of sound hermeneutical methodology in studying the Word of God, but also a fresh and more vibrant love for the Lord and His glory—as revealed in all the Scriptures!

---

<sup>30</sup> John Piper, *The Legacy of Sovereign Joy* (Crossway Books; Wheaton, Illinois; 2000), 104; not available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

## ***Study Questions: Lesson 7***

### ***A. We must allow Scripture to interpret Scripture***

1. Why is it important to allow Scripture to interpret Scripture?
2. How do we do this practically in Bible study, when we come to two texts that seem to be saying something slightly different about the same thing?

### ***B. Scripture presents a unified picture***

3. What must we conclude when two texts seem to say something that could be considered contradictory?

### ***C. Scripture has come to us in progressive stages***

4. Explain what is meant by the “progressive nature of revelation.”

### ***D. Suffering as an interpretive framework***

5. How is suffering a framework for growing in understanding of the Bible?

## **Lesson 8 Putting It All Together**

The following is a practical exercise designed to help you apply many of the principles learned in the preceding lessons. Follow the questions in order and attempt to formulate your own answer using your own words. Some example answers are given in Appendix 2 in order to help you through, should further examples be of assistance. If you reference the appendix to see some further examples, please do not quote from it word-for-word in your own answers.

Imagine you have been given the invitation to teach Ephesians 2:1-3 to a particular group of people, many of whom are believers, some of whom may not be. Answer the following using Ephesians 2:1-3 as your text.

- 1 And you hath He quickened,\* who were dead in trespasses and sins;*
- 2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:*
- 3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. (KJV)*

*\* Note: the King James Version and New King James Version show English words in italics that have been added to the Greek text. These words normally should be ignored in arriving at the author's intended meaning, as they do not appear in the original Greek text.*

## **Study Questions: Lesson 8**

1. a. Describe what specific “presuppositions” you personally bring to this text. *Please review Lesson 2 and the four basic “Requirements of the Bible Student/Interpreter.”*
  - b. What presuppositions might your audience have?
2. a. Who is the author of this letter?
  - b. Who is the author specifically addressing in vs. 2:1-3?
  - c. What is different about 2:1 from the verses in chapter one?
3. Now we want to continue to make further “observations.”
  - a. What specific questions do you think need to be answered in order to accurately interpret this text?  
*Remember, this is the basis for observations: they ask questions that arise naturally from a reading of the text (who?, what?, where?, when?, why?, how?). Observations are the answers to the questions that so arise.*
  - b. What objections/questions do you think might be raised by your audience?
4. What key words do you need to define better?  
*Remember, a key word is a word which is used repeatedly, indicating a main subject or emphasis of the author. Or, it may be the main subject or verb in a sentence, which influences the entire meaning of the sentence.*
5. Read at least one other *literal* translation. Are there any significant differences between the two translations? If so, note them briefly.

If you do not have another literal translation available, you may use one of the following literal translations.

*New American Standard Version of 1960:*

*1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,*

*2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience,*

*3 among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. (NASV)*

*New King James Version of 1982:*

*1 And you He made alive,\* who were dead in trespasses and sins,  
2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience,  
3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. (NKJV)*

*\* Note: the King James Version and New King James Version show English words in italics that have been added to the Greek text. These words normally should be ignored in arriving at the author's intended meaning, as they do not appear in the original Greek text.*

*Young's Literal Translation of 1898:*

*1 Also you—being dead in the trespasses and the sins,  
2 in which once ye did walk according to the age of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience,  
3 among whom also we all did walk once in the desires of our flesh, doing the wishes of the flesh and of the thoughts, and were by nature children of wrath—as also the others. (YLT)*

6. Is there any indication that anything in these three verses is to be taken other than literally? If so, please note the phrase and why you think so.

*Remember, it is normally best to read the author's words as he intended them—to convey a straight-forward literal meaning, unless there is indication otherwise (as in a figure of speech).*

7. Looking at the guidelines in Lesson 6, what other Scripture verses would help to interpret this particular passage? (These are the “cross-references.”) List the verse reference and key phrase in several verses that relate.

8. As best as you are able using your own words, briefly describe the main point of these three verses.

*This is where you review your observations, key words, other translations, and cross-references to put it all together—to arrive at the meaning intended by the author, as best you understand it.*

*Making It Personal*

9. *Application* How can these verses apply to your life, i.e., what impact should these truths make on how you live?
10. *Proclamation* Who do you know that needs to hear this message? Will you tell them what you have learned?
11. What have you learned in this course? How has it changed your view of Bible study?

*Thank you for taking this course.*

*Please write now for your next course: MB2.*

We suggest reviewing these lessons regularly for the coming two weeks in order to help in remembering what you have learned. Choose another Bible passage (one to three verses), and use the same questions in Lesson 8 to come to a good interpretation of the *meaning intended by the author*.



# Appendix 1 Detailed Course Instructions

## **1. Procedure for Taking the Course**

- a. The reading material for this course consists of the reading text printed at the beginning of each lesson of this study guide.
- b. Before beginning to read, please pray for God's enabling to learn spiritually.
- c. Before you begin a lesson, please read the reading text completely.
- d. After reading the text, answer the related questions in this study guide. The lessons in this course are "open book," which often enhances learning by removing unnecessary pressure. In addition, some questions ask for a *personal response*, where the answer will not be found in the reading material. In this case, we ask only for your honesty and best effort.
- e. The questions are designed to be carefully thought through. Several of the questions are sensitive; they have to do with your heart attitudes. So please do not rush, or you will be defeating the purpose of the course! Answer all of the questions as honestly as you can. The answers are confidential.
- f. Do not go to the next question until you have answered the previous one.

## **2. Answer pages**

Try to *be concise* and as clear as possible in your answers. Please write or type your answers on regular 8.5 x 11 inch (A4 metric) paper, or on the preprinted answer sheets if provided. Please write clearly and neatly, and if possible print. Note each page with Lesson #, each answer with Question #, and skip a line between questions

## **3. Supplies**

Paper, pen, and Bible are needed to complete your assignments. The King James Version is quoted, but you may use another version if you do not have a KJV.

## **4. Completion of Assignments**

- a. If taking this course with a local coordinator, please follow their instructions.
- b. If you are taking this course as **individual independent study** (non-graded), save your answer sheets for future reference. (*Skip the below instructions 5 & 6*).

## **5. Only if Correspondent Study**

- a. Three months are allotted for the completion of this course. You may be granted an extension by contacting your course coordinator.
- b. Mail your answer sheets (and not the study guide) to your course coordinator after completing lessons 1 to 8. Your lessons will be reviewed and returned as soon as possible, by regular mail. *Please make sure you write your name, student ID, course title, and lesson number on each answer sheet. (See sample page 2.) Headings should be in the following format:*

*Your name   student ID   course MB1a   lesson number*

## **6. Written Feedback (only if correspondent study)**

Spiritual success is not measured by high grades, but by growth in a holy life and Christ-likeness, to God's glory. Therefore, the prime motivation in taking this course is to see God change your life. There are no letter or number grades such as "A" or "100" to be earned. The grader will offer comments or suggestions from Scripture in response to your answers. Some answers will have no comments because the answer is correct or of a personal nature.

## Appendix 2 Examples for Lesson 8

The following are simply suggestions intended to serve as further examples of the possible answers that may be given. If you can answer the study questions without referring to these, please do so. In any event, please write your own answers in your own words; do not quote these answers.

1. a Your answer will be personal to your own background, training, and experience.  
b You should know your audience well enough to be able to discern what these might be. This will help you in your explanation as to what specific questions you need to address.
  
2. a The apostle Paul is the author.  
b The author is addressing the Ephesian believers as they used to be—before God saved them by grace.  
c The difference is noted in 2:1 when it says, “who were dead...” (*past tense*). Chapter one, on the other hand, deals with the outworking of salvation *in the present*.
  
3. a Answers may vary. You will probably need to understand the following...
  - how these verses relate to chapter one and what follows in chapter 2:4-10.
  - what kind of “death” Paul is describing (2:1).
  - how the different terms “world” (2:2), “prince of the power of the air” (2:2), and “flesh” (2:3) relate to each other.  
b Some objections may be raised once people understand what Paul is referring to by being “dead in trespasses and sins.” Also, some may not truly believe in the existence of the devil, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

4. Key words which need to be defined would include...

- “death” (2:1)
- “world” (2:2)
- “prince of the power of the air” (2:2)
- “flesh” (2:3)

Also, you will want to understand the following words/phrases...

- who is it that lived “in the lusts of our flesh?” (2:3)
- who are the “children of disobedience?” (2:3)
- what does the word “wrath” relate to? (2:3)

5. The answers will vary here depending on translations.

6. No, everything here is to be taken literally according to the LGH method.

Some may suggest allegorical variations, but there is nothing in the text or surrounding context to support this idea!

7. Other related passages might include: Psa 53:1-3, Col 2:13, Rom 2, 3:10-18; 7:9, Eph 2:10, 4:17, 5:2.

8. Paul is referring to the former spiritual status of the reader (past or present) who, before God gave spiritual life (as described in ch. 2:4-10), lay dead in their sins—unable in any way to come to God. From every perspective (the world, the flesh, and the devil), mankind (apart from God) stands condemned for his sin and under the just wrath of God.