



# Understanding From Where The Bible Came

Joe R. Price

The Bible is not the product of man, but of God. Skeptics have ridiculed it, modernists have assailed it, the worldly-minded have reviled it, and false teachers have twisted it. Still, it stands as the Book of Books, God's library of truth and refuge of hope for a lost world. "Let Your mercies come also to me, O Lord—Your salvation according to Your word" (Ps. 119:41). The Bible lights our way of escape from the darkness of sin and death (Ps. 119:105). God in his mercy has revealed his mind and will to mankind. We hold forth the Bible as the only source of communication from God to man.

## The Bible Is Revelation From God

A revelation uncovers or unveils something. In our study, that which has been revealed is the mind of God. Without divine revelation man

would be left to wonder, guess, and speculate about God's will. One person's conclusions would be as good as another, and every conclusion would be unreliable. But, God has not left man to grope in uncertainty and doubt. God wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:3-4). He has made known his mind through the procedure we call *revelation*. "But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God" (1 Cor. 2:10-12). Simply put, divine revelation is how God communicated his mind to his prophets, who then taught it to others (Eph. 3:3-5). The Bible is the revelation of God's dealings with man and of God's precepts for man. Both the Old and New Testaments have been revealed by God. While God used various ways and means to reveal himself during Old Testament times, he has now spoken to us in his Son Jesus (who is "The Word," Heb. 1:1-2; John 1:1-3, 14-17). The gospel which the apostles of Jesus Christ preached was made known to them by revelation, not by human genius, cunning or craft (Gal. 1:11-12; 2 Pet. 1:16).

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# Attitudes Essential To Bible Study

Rick Christian

The Bible, God's book, is emphatic in instructing us to study. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). There must be a constant hungering and thirsting (Matt. 5:6) after the perfect law of liberty (Jas. 1:25) that we may grow spiritually (2 Pet. 3:18). The motive for such diligent effort is the salvation of our souls ("Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls" — Jas. 1:21), and recognition that in the final day I will be judged by Jesus' words ("He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" — John 12:48).

What a noble example we find in the Bereans who ". . . searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). They respected the word of God enough to spend time in the open word. Oh for such reverence and respect today such as prompted the people of Ezra's day to stand up when the book of God was opened in their presence in Nehemiah 8:5. This kind of action recognizes the word as to its origin, from God, and who we are in relationship to it. David said in Psalm 136:23, speaking of God, "Who remembered us in our low estate. . . ." That's why he could say in Psalm. 56:4, "In God I will praise his word, In God I have put my trust."

Sadly, not everyone handles aright the word of truth. By this there are found hindrances in their study. Some, for example, may read but don't study. They may very well have read the Bible from cover to cover several times. But, to ask them about what they read, they don't know. Why? They didn't study. Some get the Bible and read but they don't ever intend on understanding anything they read. Jesus said in John 8:32, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Jesus said you can know what the truth is! Paul said in Ephesians 3:3, 4, "How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)." The apostle Paul said we could understand. Thus, God expects us to understand his word! "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17). There may be others who read the Bible but with the wrong attitude. Let's examine some essential attitudes to proper Bible Study: *Honesty, Sincerity, Submissiveness, Application To Self, and Open mindedness.*

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# The Theme of the Bible

Leon Mauldin

Before the creation of the heavens and the earth, before time began, God had a plan. He planned to create this universe and the earth to be inhabited by man (Isa. 45:18). He designed a plan by which man could be saved; that plan was the redemption that would be in his Son Christ Jesus. Though all have sinned, and the wages of sin is death (separation from God), the sinless Son of God would die on the cross as a sacrifice for all of us. Although God's plan was complete, much time would pass after the creation before Jesus would come to this earth. His coming, and the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, is the theme of the Bible.

"But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son . . ." (Gal. 4:4). Time was required for God to prepare man for the coming of his Son. Time was needed to teach that sin is not to be treated lightly, that it is ugly, destructive, and costly. This was seen in the continual shedding of blood of the animal sacrifices during the Old Testament period. Since God's plan called for Jesus, who was Deity, to become flesh, time was required to develop a nation, and a lineage, through which Jesus would be born.

As you study each book of the Old Testament, keep in mind that God never lost sight of his purpose. If you are studying the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph), these are not merely interesting stories. Throughout this period God was looking ahead to the coming of his Son. These men are in the Bible because they had an important role in God's plan.

The following outline demonstrates the flow and continuity of Scripture:

- Creation (and Pre-flood)
- Flood (and Post-flood)
- Patriarchal
- Egyptian Bondage/the Exodus
- Wilderness Wanderings
- Conquest
- Judges
- United Kingdom
- Divided Kingdom
- Judah Alone
- Captivity
- Return (and Rebuilding)
- Silent Years
- Life of Christ
- Establishment and Growth of the Church
- Letters

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# How To Study The Bible

## Introduction

Donnie V. Rader

These pages comprise a special issue of *Truth Magazine* on “How To Study The Bible.” Being convinced that most people in the religious world as well as some among us don’t really know *how* to study, some instruction is helpful. These pages are not presented for the benefit of the scholar. However, the “average” Christian who desires to improve his Bible study will appreciate the following material.

A profitable study of God’s word must begin with the proper concepts about and attitudes toward the Bible. Our first two articles address those. The next three articles deal with things one needs to know before beginning a serious study of a chapter or verse (the theme, context, and setting of the Bible). Two articles deal with the language of the Bible. Is it necessary (and if so, when) to know the Hebrew or Greek works? How do I know if figurative language is being used? Some helpful material is presented here to answer both of these questions. A method of study has to be chosen before we begin any study. One article deals with the various methods of studying the word. One article deals with how an outline is helpful in understanding and teaching the text. Two articles address the respect we should have for the authority of the word.

The study closes with some suggestions for good Bible study aids.

Read this material carefully. Then delve into a study of God’s word!

Genesis lays a foundation for what is to follow in the rest of the Bible, Old and New Testaments. In six literal days God created the earth and all things in it. Man was created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26). God gave Adam and Eve a law, which prohibited their eating of a certain tree. When they yielded to temptation and violated that law, sin entered the world, and consequently they were banished from the presence of God (Gen. 3:23-24).

The ray of light that shines in that dark picture is God’s statement to Satan: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (Gen. 3:15). This is so important because it is the first promise of Christ! He is the seed of woman (born of the virgin Mary), who would “bruise the head” of Satan (see Heb. 2:14). Again, a long time would pass, and many events would occur, before that promised Seed would come.

Genesis 5 lists the generations from Adam through Seth down to Noah, because that is the lineage through which Jesus would come. The flood occurred because the point was reached that every intent of the thoughts of man’s heart was only evil continually (Gen. 6:5). Genesis 11 records the descendants of Noah through Shem down to Abraham.

This brings us to the patriarchal period of Bible history. Abraham was given three important promises: that God would make of him a great nation (the Israelites), that he would give to that nation the land of Canaan, and that through his seed (Jesus) would all the families of the earth be blessed.

The remainder of Genesis is concerned with how God developed that promised nation, through Abraham, his son Isaac, Isaac’s son Jacob, and his twelve sons. After Joseph was elevated to being ruler of Egypt, Jacob, his sons, and their families moved to Egypt, and from that family, God developed that promised great nation. But first Israel underwent a period of slavery in Egypt. At God’s appointed time he chose Moses to lead his people out of Egypt. To accomplish this it was necessary first for God to send the ten plagues. This was done to let Pharaoh and the Egyptians know that the Lord was the true and living God, and that he was all-powerful (Exod. 7:5). Also, these plagues were judgments against the gods that the Egyptians worshiped (Exod. 12:12).

Israel left Egypt, and made their way to Mount Sinai. It was here that they actually entered into covenant relationship with God, to be his people, and to obey his law (Exod. 19-24). The tabernacle, which was central to their worship, was built. The Aaronic priesthood was established (Leviticus). Then the march began toward Canaan. At Kadesh-Barnea, just south of Canaan, the people became fearful and rebelled (Num. 13-14). This began the next pe-



riod of forty years of wilderness wandering, during which all of the soldiers, except Joshua and Caleb, died.

Joshua then led Israel across the Jordan to receive the promised land. A key verse is Joshua 21:43: "So the Lord gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it." As time passed the Israelites were influenced by and attracted to their immoral neighbors. They soon forsook God, and worshiped the Baalim and Asherah. God would punish them by allowing an enemy to oppress them. When Israel would cry out to God, he would raise up a judge, who would deliver them. There would be peace during his lifetime, but after the judge died, this cycle would start again. This is the message of the book of Judges.

The events narrated in the book of Ruth occurred during the judges (Ruth 1:1). The book reinforces what we have seen about the theme of the Bible as the conclusion reaches back to Judah's son Perez, and traces the lineage through which Jesus would come through Boaz, and his son Obed, who was the father of Jesse, the father of David (Ruth 4:18-22).

Samuel's judgeship marked the transition to the United Kingdom, with three kings, Saul, David (of the tribe of Judah), and Solomon (David's son), each of whom reigned forty years. A key passage is 2 Samuel 7:11-13, where God promised to raise up David's descendant and establish his kingdom. This was a promise of the Christ who was to come, and of his kingdom. Peter refers to this promise in Acts 2:30-31, and emphatically affirms the fulfillment in Christ.

Solomon's apostasy is described in 1 Kings 11:1-8. Consequently, the kingdom divided at his death into Israel to the north, with Jeroboam as the first king, and Judah to the south, with Solomon's son Rehoboam reigning. Jeroboam made many unauthorized changes in worship: the time, the object, the place, and the persons who officiated as priests. That false system of worship would continue in Israel until its destruction in 722 B.C. by the Assyrians. This portion of Biblical history is not only the record of the kings, but this is also the history of the prophets. 1 Kings 18-25 continues with the record of Judah alone. Then Judah was destroyed in three successive invasions by the Babylonians, and was taken captive (seventy years).

The prophets had also foretold of the return to the land of Israel. The first was under Zerubbabel — 536 B.C. (Ezra 1-6). It was during this time that the temple was rebuilt. The second return was under Ezra in 458 B.C. (Ezra 7-10). Nehemiah led in the third and final return from the Babylonian captivity, in 444 B.C. The Old Testament closes in anticipation of the coming and work of John the Immerser, who would herald the coming of the Lord (Mal. 3:1; 4:5).

This brings us to the silent years, the intertestamental period. Though no additional Scripture was being revealed, remember that God rules in the kingdoms of the world (Dan. 4). Daniel gave very specific prophecies of the Medo-Persian, Grecian and Roman powers. He, more than any book in the Bible, deals with that period of history between the Old and New Testaments. These nations would all make contributions to a state of readiness for Christ's coming.

The New Testament record takes up right where the Old Testament leaves off. Luke tells of the announcement, which broke the silence, that aged Zacharias would have a son, John, who would "make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17). Months later, the same angel told Mary that she would miraculously conceive a son, Jesus, the Son of God.

The ministry of Christ divides into seven periods. These are: (1) Preparation, (2) Early Ministry, (3) Great Galilean Ministry, (4) Retirement, (5) Perean, (6) Final Week, (7) Post-Resurrection Appearances. This is the record of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

The book of Acts takes up where the Gospel records leave off, with the carrying out of the Great Commission. The hope of all the ages was to be realized. Salvation had been brought down! Acts 1:8 concisely foretells the path the Gospel would take: the apostles would be witnesses first in Jerusalem (Acts 1-7), Judea and Samaria (Acts 8-12), and to the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 13-28). Wherever the Gospel went, the message was the same. Men were declared to be sinners, and Jesus Christ was held up as their only hope. Those who obeyed from the heart were saved from sin, and added by the Lord to his church (Acts 2:26-47; Rom. 6:17, 18).

Romans through Revelation were letters, written to individual Christians and churches, with instructions regarding all things that pertain to life and godliness. Those who had been saved from past sins were told how to maintain their salvation, and ultimately to receive that salvation which is ready to be revealed at the last time (1 Pet. 1:5). That is the theme of the Bible. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

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# Considering Historical Background And Setting

Daniel H. King

## **The Bible And History**

The Bible is a literature which is filled with written depictions of occurrences which are said to have happened along a time line from the very beginning of the universe through the first century A.D. Those events which are recorded in the Old and New Testaments may be reckoned as being either truly historic happenings, or imagined and mythical in their essential nature. While some moderns consider a few of the incidents which we read about in the Book of Books to be imaginary, most will admit that almost all that we find therein is historical. And even those parts which they question are suspicious only because they may not be otherwise established to have occurred other than the fact that they are found in this particular literature. (Moreover, this particular literature is always more suspect than any other.) The same may be said of many ancient documents which have not been, and may never be, validated by external proof. The interesting fact is that many historical incidents which are claimed to have happened in biblical time, and are recorded in the Bible, have now been externally attested by the study of ancient Near Eastern documents uncovered through the activities of modern archaeologists. They are attested as genuine history by contemporary documents, most often from non-Israelite sources.

So, the material which we discover between the covers of this Book claims to be thoroughly historical in nature. This basic fact of the biblical writings is extremely well recognized, as the following quotations show: "For what is the OT from the Christian point of view — and from no other point of view can it be rightly understood — but the record of God's gradual revelation of himself to Israel in his purpose of redeeming love with a view to the establishment of his universal kingdom? The Incarnation was to be the culminating point of that revelation and that purpose" (A.F. Kirkpatrick). "The Bible is through and through of historical nature and spirit" (G.H.A. Ewald).

The book of Hebrews commences with the following "history-centered" words: "God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." The revelation of God happened in time, that is, in real history. And because the sum and substance of this literature claims to be the revelation of God, the nature of this history is particularly important. As one writer put it: "Unless the Bible is infallible, there can be no moral obligation to accept the facts which it records; and though there may be intellectual error in denying them, there can be no moral sin" (Froude, *Theological Difficulties*). Taking the opposite angle from Froude, since he denies the infallibility of Scripture, but accepting his line of reasoning, we would suggest the following: Since the Bible is infallible (cf. John 10:35), there is a moral obligation to accept the facts which it records, and there is moral sin associated with denying them. So, the Scripture rather naturally makes demands upon its readers, and such demands as may not easily be ignored! The historical element of the Bible is both quintessential proof of its infallibility and often its greatest liability, to some the reason for questioning its infallibility, for like any other ancient document it provides a record of many events which may not otherwise be capable of external validation.

## **Encounter With God**

There is one more important element present in this idea of the revelation of God in history. It is that the Bible does not represent mere history, or "naked" history. Scripture portrays the meeting of man with God in time. Men like Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah and Paul, meet God in the biblical narrative as it were "face to face." Emil Brunner compared God in the act of revelation to "a tall man, (who) stoops down to a little child and lowers Himself upon His knee, so that the child may look into His face" (*Offenbarung und Vernunft*, 413). Ultimately, of course, this is illustrated in the appearance among the sons of Adam, of God in the person of his Son Jesus Christ: "He that hath seen me hath

seen the Father” (John 14:8, 9; cf. 2 Cor. 4:6; Col. 2:9). The Bible is the ultimate historical meeting between man and God, not just of Abraham and God, or of David and God, but of you and God, and me and God. We meet with God in our own historical setting and cultural milieu, through the retelling of our spiritual ancestors’ experience as it is recorded in the Book.

Some modern scholars have attempted to study the biblical materials as pure history, and subtract from it the spiritual dimension. This is so because they view themselves as secular historians and the Bible as part of that history which they wish to study and to comment about. But what they seek to do is impossible. The Bible is not secular history. The remarks of Floyd Filson are helpful in this regard: “The commonly accepted procedure in writing history is to describe the human situation in the light of the natural world. This method recognizes that man is more than an animal; he is gifted with intellectual and spiritual capacities that make him truly human. But history on this view is the story of human experience, and religion is described as man’s experience in the observable world of nature. All of this is undoubtedly an integral part of history, but it is a question whether this is the whole of it. Our story deals mainly with Biblical material, and for the Biblical writers, God is the chief actor in history; his will and action are decisive. Can we do justice to the Bible history if we reject or ignore or are neutral toward its central faith and outlook? Can we adequately describe Biblical history in a way that excludes God’s role?” (*A New Testament History: The Story of the Emerging Church* xi).

These things being true, it is most important indeed to appreciate both the nature of the Bible as essentially religious and historical, and the nature of the history itself as real and understandable. As we suggested earlier, part of it is even verifiable by means of external sources. The Bible is no more entirely religion than it is entirely history. It is tragic, therefore, when we do not value this historical element in the Bible and see how indispensable to the revelation it is, and how inescapable a study of it is to the fullest comprehension of the message of the Word of God. It truly brings to life the ancient writings and makes them seem “contemporary.” It makes of the biblical world a real place peopled by flesh-and-blood individuals like ourselves, with their hopes and dreams, anxieties and fears. The stories come alive on the page and teach us lessons that are eternal in both their application and their importance.

A word of caution must, however, be always in the mind of the student of the historical aspect of the Scripture. As a discipline it should not be pursued in its own interest or for its own sake. It needs to be remembered that the definitive purpose of the Bible is not to recount history but to bring man into an encounter with God. That is what the Book is about. So long as history and the historical in Scripture

is studied as an adjunct and aid to the most complete appreciation and discernment of the principal message, then it is kept in its proper place and is valuable. The study of Greek is precisely parallel. The student of Greek who specializes in the Koine language of Scripture, but who in the course of his concentration upon the linguistic nuances of the NT literature — misses the opportunity to know Jesus of Nazareth — he has failed entirely. This is true of every other academic pursuit which deals with what is in the Bible. The principal purpose and the principal Person of this Book is so crucial to one’s own soul and the very reason for his being that a purely scholastic or pedagogic approach to it is a relative waste of time.

### **A Few Historical Illustrations From the Old Testament**

The people of Israel constituted a covenant community based on God’s acts in history. The tie that bound this people together had deep roots in history and specially as God had dealt with certain personages of her historic past. It was not merely a history of great ancestors in whom they could take pride. Rather, it was a history of God’s relations with these men and women. God had chosen, redeemed, judged, disciplined, forgiven, taught, and trained them. All this was done in history, with all the events connected therewith occurring in real historic circumstances, and set in a cultural and historical “background.”

Most of such things may not be “essential to salvation,” that is, the things which it brings out or sheds light upon may not be matters upon which our souls depend, but they are certainly important for deeper appreciation of what is going on in the text and what may be described in the text. That said, we reiterate our belief that an appreciation for the historic implications of what we read in the Bible, and an understanding of antiquity, particularly Near Eastern antiquity, is essential to the fullest enjoyment of Scripture. How could it be otherwise?

A few brief illustrations of how history and the general background and setting of Scripture may illuminate the Word of God, will prove helpful for those who may not otherwise understand. We shall enlist the aid of several cases which have proven helpful and interesting to this author in his own study of the book of Genesis.

The period of the patriarchs, described in the book of Genesis, has always proven challenging to the modern Bible student. During that period the characters did a number of things which have left us shaking our heads and wondering, “Why?” Archaeological work in one of the cities of the ancient kingdom of Arrapkha, called Nuzu, between the years 1925-41, yielded large numbers of literary texts which bore directly upon many of the interesting customs of the patriarchal age. The people of Nuzu were Hurrians, the Horites of the Bible. Several parallels came immediately to the attention of the researchers.



First, there was the biblical story of Abraham's adoption of his slave Eliezer as his heir (Gen. 15:2-3). At Nuzu it was a custom for a childless couple to adopt a son to serve them as long as they lived and bury and mourn over them when they died. In exchange for these services, he was designated as heir of all their possessions and lands. The Lord says in Genesis that Abraham and Sarah are to have a legal heir instead of the slave (15:4). This also coincides with Hurrian law, which states that if the adopter should beget a son after the adoption, the adopted must yield to the real son the right of being the chief heir.

Second, there is Sarah's strange act of providing her husband with Hagar in her barrenness (Gen. 16:2), as well as Rachel's giving of Bilhah to Jacob for the same reason (Gen. 30:3). Hurrian marriage contracts found at Nuzu actually require that the wife who fails to bear children, provide her husband with a handmaid who will bear them. When Sarah wanted to cast out Hagar from Abraham's household, the Bible says that the patriarch himself hesitated to do so (Gen. 21:10-12). In fact, this was expressly forbidden under Hurrian marriage law.

Third, Esau's sale of his birthright to Jacob (Gen. 25:30-34) has always appeared to be a very strange idea when considered from a modern standpoint. At Nuzu, however, there are several examples of contracts involving the sale of birthrights to others. On one tablet, an individual named Tupkitilla exchanges his inheritance share for three of Kurpazah's sheep. He got a much better price than Esau!

Fourth, in Genesis 31, Laban insists that Jacob take no wife in addition to his daughters (v. 50). This prohibition against a bridegroom taking another wife was often found in the marriage contracts discovered at Nuzu. Evidently many fathers-in-law had precisely the same concern for the welfare of their daughters as did Laban. Laban's gift of a handmaid to each of his daughters at the time of their marriage (Gen. 29:24, 29) is also paralleled in the Nuzu texts. Apparently this was done in the event that the daughter could not provide children for her husband. Jacob's servitude to Laban in exchange for his daughter's hand in marriage is also paralleled in Hurrian society. One contract at Nuzu shows a man who sells himself into slavery to the master if he will provide him with a wife. In his instance, Laban had to be satisfied with a mere seven years for each of his daughters. Rachel's theft of her father's gods was never fully understood until the Nuzu material was interpreted. Under Hurrian law, the possession of the family gods carried with it more than a mere religious significance. It also signified leadership of the family with respect to the ancestral estate. In essence, it was comparable to a modern deed of ownership to the family property! This is what Rachel had stolen when she took the household gods, and this explains Laban's relentless pursuit and eager search for his most treasured possessions.

These four examples are indicative of the nature and importance of the thousands of other comparably illumined texts from Genesis and the rest of Scripture. Old Testament study has been enriched greatly by the historical studies which have arisen out of discoveries from the Egyptian Execration Texts, the Mari Texts, Tell el-Amarna, Ras Shamra (Ugarit), and numerous cities in Palestine. Entire books have been written on each of these areas of investigation, along with many more like them, which have shed enormous amounts of light upon incidents which are related in the course of telling the story of the Hebrew people. With our space limitations we cannot go on relating them, even though it is our inclination to do so. This field is so rich in resources that no student can ever take in all there is to learn!

What is the importance of all this? Does it actually have application for the understanding of the text of Holy Scripture, or is it simply academic exercise? G. Ernest Wright, biblical archaeologist and Old Testament scholar, made the following observation: "It is very likely that the exposition of the Bible by a person widely trained in the literatures of the ancient Near East will differ in perspective rather markedly from the exposition by one who knows nothing of the biblical environment. . . . The type of literature, its authorship, its historical setting, its personality interaction within history, and above all a sensitivity for the biblical world which produced the literature all these are necessary if we would really understand the Bible" ("Historical Knowledge and Revelation," in *Translating and Understanding the OT*, ed. by H.T. Frank and W.L. Reed, 292, 300). This being true, it is important that we have a grasp of this field and do sufficient study in the area to understand at least the more significant instances of historical illustration of the biblical text.

### New Testament History

As to the New Testament, we are confronted with the identical challenge. Because we want to know what Scripture meant to those to whom it was first given, we make a great effort to learn all that we may about those to whom it was first given. This way we may make the proper application of the principles and teachings of the text of Scripture to our own daily lives and our contemporary situation. As Dr. Alan Johnson has written, "Historical/Cultural matters take us into a wide variety of areas and details. In the NT alone matters of political, economic, social, geographical, religious, and philosophical background, and a great many details of culture, such as clothing, homes, and food, clamor for attention as we assess the precise intent of the biblical materials. No one person could possibly master all the background materials now available; and even if one could, he would have to admit that there are gaps which perhaps never will be filled in" ("History and Culture in NT Interpretation" in *Interpreting the Word of God* 129). We must make some time for general reading in the introduc-

*continued bottom of next page*



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# Looking At The Context

Bobby Witherington

“. . . how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I wrote before in a few words, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)” (Eph. 3:3, 4). “Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Eph. 5:17). “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

These Scriptures are a few among so many which stress the fact that it is possible for one to “understand” the will of God, or that it is possible for a person to “know the truth.” However, even among those who regularly study the Scriptures, there are multitudes who do not know the truth. In fact, there are vast numbers who are described by 2 Timothy 3:7, “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Moreover, the apostle Peter alluded to the writings of the apostle Paul, some of which is “hard to understand,” concerning which he said “those who are untaught and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures” (2 Pet. 3:16).

Hence, on the one hand, we have the plain affirmation by Paul that we can know what he knew if we read what tority works of this field, or else we and our hearers will be the poorer for it!

## What A Wonderful Time To Be Alive!

There is so much to learn! Never has there been, in the history of Bible investigation, such riches of knowledge at the behest of the eager Bible scholar! Let us enjoy the fullest appreciation of Holy Scripture and the fullest possible understanding of its message, by the thoughtful study of the historical and cultural aspects of biblical backgrounds. But, let us ever keep in mind that the purpose of this revelation is not the mere collecting and admiring of what is ancient, even if it has a direct bearing upon the Bible. It is rather to learn of “Him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth . . .” (John 1:45). Let us never fail of this purpose!

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he wrote and, on the other hand, Peter stated that some who read what Paul wrote “twist” those “things . . . to their own destruction.” Moreover, as we have just documented, Jesus said, “You shall know the truth,” and Paul said some are “never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

Rest assured, in these verses, Peter, Paul, and Jesus did not contradict one another! By reading the Scriptures, we can come to a knowledge of the truth, but many who continually read the Scriptures never come to a correct understanding of the same. Of course, there are many reasons for this, one being the fact that some simply do not “love” the truth (2 Thess. 2:10), and therefore read the Scriptures in order to prove their own presumptions — not with a fervent desire to actually learn what the Bible teaches.

However, in the judgment of this writer, most people who read and yet fail to come to a knowledge of the truth are not intellectually dishonest. But clearly there is something terribly lacking in their method of Bible study! It is one thing for an intelligent person to read the Scriptures, and it is something else for a person to read the Scriptures intelligently. If it is to be understood, the Bible, like any other book, has to be studied intelligently. Regardless of the curriculum, certain common-sense principles of interpretation must be utilized — one of which is “the law of context,” sometimes called “the law of frame of reference.”

## But What Do We Mean By “Context?”

“Context” is defined as (1) “the parts directly before and after a word or sentence that influences its meaning . . .” (2) “. . . the immediate environment, attendant circumstances or conditions; background” (*World Book Dictionary*). Hence, generally speaking, “context” denotes the “immediate environment” in which a Scripture appears — especially, the verses which precede or follow a particular verse. Moreover, “context” may also include the paragraph, or chapter, or the overall subject matter of the book in which a Scripture appears. Also, the broader context may very well include the particular covenant of which a reference is a part, and

on occasion may even be affected by the prevailing culture at the time a given Scripture was penned. In other words, “context” may include the “immediate environment” (the Scriptures before and after), or it may include a much broader background. However, most of our difficulties in understanding a given text are due to a neglect to properly analyze its “immediate environment.” And this is the area which will receive the greater emphasis in the remainder of this article.

### Examples Which Illustrate the Value of Context

1. Mark 10:9: “Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.” Based on this Scripture, a mother of Siamese twins reportedly refused to allow surgery to separate the children, and she justified her refusal by citing this passage! However, in context, the Lord was referring to “a man” whom God has “joined to his wife” — this is the union which Jesus said “let not man separate.” This verse, taken out of context, could be misused so as to prohibit surgery to separate Siamese twins, or even splitting wood with which to build a fire!

2. Matthew 19:14: “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” A large number of people cite this reference when they are called upon to justify infant baptism. However, “baptism,” either for infants or adults, is not mentioned even once in this entire chapter. What is mentioned is the fact that some brought “little children” to Jesus that he might “put His hands on them and pray.” In this case, neither the text nor the context says a word about infant baptism.

3. 1 Corinthians 1:17: “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel . . .” Baptist preachers (and others) often cite this verse in order to prove that baptism is not a requirement for salvation. However, the purpose of baptism is not the object being considered in the “immediate environment” (context) of this passage. Contextually speaking, there were “contentions” among some at Corinth, some saying “I am of Paul,” or “I am of Apollos,” or “I am of Cephas,” or “I am of Christ.” Paul knew that the validity of baptism is not determined by *who* does the baptizing, and he did not want to be a party to their partyism. Moreover, Paul’s principle mission was “to preach the gospel” — it was not to baptize. He had baptized “Crispus and Gaius” and “the household of Stephanas,” but he was thankful that he had personally baptized only a few at Corinth, “lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name.” However, the fact remains that all who obeyed the gospel at

Corinth had heard, believed, and were baptized (Acts 18:8)! Moreover, even in the context of 1 Corinthians 1:17 Paul revealed that in order for one to be “of Christ” (a Christian!) two things had to occur: (1) Christ had to be crucified for that person, and (2) that person had to be baptized in “the name” of Christ. Hence, the seven verses before 1 Corinthians 1:17 gives the context for that verse, and they also necessarily infer that one must be baptized!

4. Matthew 5:48: “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” Some read this verse and conclude that the Bible contradicts itself. They point us to Romans 3:23 which says “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” and to 1 John 1:8 wherein we are told that “if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” They then tell us that “no one is perfect,” so they conclude that Jesus either commanded the impossible or else the Bible is self-contradictory! However, this is another instance in which context is ignored. Granted, each one of us should strive for sinless perfection. But sinless perfection is not the subject under consideration in the context of this verse. Go back to verse 43 and you will note that Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’” However, in contrast to what others had “said,” Jesus said, “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to them who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” (v. 44). Then in verse 45 we discover the reason for such admonition, it being “that you may be the sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” You see, contextually speaking, the perfection herein required is that we develop the quality of *love* which God possesses — the kind whereby we are able to love both our neighbors and our enemies.

### Concluding Thoughts

There are many other verses which could be readily cited — verses which are taken out of context and used to teach error. Without further comment, we could cite Acts 16:31 from which some mistakenly conclude that one is saved by faith only, or Acts 2:29-31 which certain false teachers use to teach the doctrine of premillennialism concerning the reign of Christ, or Galatians 6:10 which some brethren misuse to teach local church support of human institutions. And the list goes on.

Someone has observed that “a text considered apart from its context becomes a pretext.” And so it does. God’s “word is truth” (John 17:17), but truth handled inaccurately (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15) results in error believed, preached, and practiced. Hence, we conclude by urging one and all to examine every passage in the light of its context. In view of the length of eternity, and the value of souls, too much is at stake for anyone to do otherwise!

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# Understanding Figurative Language

Ronny E. Hinds

Among the very first books I bought, over forty years ago, was Alexander Campbell's *Christianity Restored*. I must confess the reason I bought it was for the articles contained in the latter two-thirds of the book. But, through the years that has not been the reason I have gone to it many times. The first one hundred pages contain an excellent discussion on principles of Bible interpretation, especially figurative language. The discussions are usually brief, with numerous Bible examples.

What Campbell understood is important for us to understand when we are reading and studying Scripture. Campbell said, "*God has spoken by men, to men, for men*. The language of the Bible is, then, *human* language. It is, therefore, to be examined by all the same rules which are applicable to the language of any other book, and to be understood according to the true and proper meaning of the words, in their current acceptation, at the times and in the places in which they were originally written or translated. If we have a *revelation* from God in human language, the words of that volume must be intelligible by the common usage of language . . . by the use of the dictionary and grammar. Were it otherwise, and did men require a new dictionary and grammar to understand the book of God — then, without that divine dictionary and grammar, we could have no *revelation* from God: for a revelation that needs to be revealed, is no revelation at all" (22). I suggest you read again those words and thoughtfully reflect on their implications about our personal, individual responsibility and capability of understanding Scripture. "Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17).

The Bible never calls itself "The Bible." It calls itself "Scripture." Jesus said, "*Have you never read in the Scriptures?*" (Matt. 21:42). This is important. Scripture refers to *written*, not spoken, revelation from God. What God first spoke through men he has caused to be written so we

could know with certainty (Luke 1:1-4; 1 Cor. 14:37-38; Rev. 21:5) what he expects of us. "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 complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17; note: the ASV and NASB use the words "*sacred writings*" in verse 15). The value of written revelation is obvious. It can be studied, examined, researched, and reviewed again and again. The Bereans "*searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so*" (Acts 17:11). Unlike the spoken word, which is forever absorbed into the atmosphere never to be heard from again, Scripture remains forever as the precise expression of God's eternal words and will. Jesus said, "and the Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35).

All words of human communication are to be understood either literally or figuratively. By literal I mean their original, natural, ordinary, simplest meaning. Literal means, "being actually such" (*Random House Unabridged Dictionary* 836), with no allusions suggesting other meanings. It is usually the first thought that enters our minds upon reading or hearing a word. By figurative I mean there is an additional meaning, where words "are diverted to a meaning which they do not *naturally* denote" (*Horne's Introduction*, T.H. Horne, I:322). But, and this is important, the diverted meaning still has a connection to the original, natural meaning. The *American Heritage Dictionary* uses the word "resemblance" in defining figurative. Figurative language involves a comparison being made, where something is like what it literally is, but something else is being implied. Let me illustrate. "That argument doesn't hold water." "I jumped out of my skin." "Stand up for the Word of God." Each of these sentences are obviously figurative yet we cannot correctly understand them if we do not first have a literal understanding of what it means to "hold water," "jump out of" and to "stand up."

It is important to understand that identifying a word or words as figurative does *not* mean we are saying something is not real. There is a tendency in all of us to think that figurative language does not speak with the same force or validity as literal language. That is not so! Figurative language teaches literal truth! I do not think it is an overstatement to say that figurative language teaches literal truth with greater force and strengthened validity. E.M. Bullinger in his book *Figures of Speech* says figurative language is designed “to increase the power of a word, or the force of an expression” (V). He explains: “We may say, ‘the ground needs rain’; that is a plain, cold, matter-of-fact statement; but if we say ‘the ground is thirsty,’ we immediately use a figure. It is not true to *fact*, and therefore it must be a figure. But how true to *feeling* it is! How full of warmth and life! Hence, we say, ‘the crops suffer’; we speak of a ‘a hard heart,’ ‘a rough man,’ ‘an iron will.’ In all these cases we take a word which has a certain, definite meaning, and apply the name, or the quality, or the act, to some other thing with which it is associated, by time or place, cause or effect, relation or resemblance” (XV). Without using figurative language our human communication would remain ordinary, limited, and often dull.

*Basic Bible Interpretation*, by Roy B. Zuck, offers the following reasons for using figures of speech:

1. They add color or vividness. Psalm 18:2, “*The Lord is my rock and fortress.*”
2. They attract attention. Philippians 3:2, “*Beware of dogs*”; James 3:6, “*And the tongue is a fire.*”
3. They make abstract or intellectual ideas more concrete. Deuteronomy 33:27, “*The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.*”
4. They aid in retention. Hosea 4:16, “*For Israel is stubborn like a stubborn calf*”; Matthew 23:27, “*For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.*”
5. They abbreviate an idea. Psalm 23:1, “*The LORD is my shepherd.*” Multiple ideas are in “*shepherd.*”
6. They encourage reflection. Psalm 52:8, “*But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God*”; Isaiah 1:8, “*So the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard, as a hut in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city.*”

As we think about this, the question inescapably comes, how do we know when we are reading literal or figurative language? Since Scripture is written in human language the same rules (if that is what you want to call them), that govern the discerning of literal and figurative language in our human literature should be used to understand the language of God’s literature.

First, as a basic, general rule “an expression is figurative when it is out of character with the subject discussed, or is contrary to fact, experience, or observation” (Zuck, 145).

The language of the Bible is, then, human language. It is, therefore, to be examined by all the same rules which are applicable to the language of any other book, and to be understood according to the true and proper meaning of the words, in their current acceptance, at the times and in the places in which they were originally written or translated.

The literal should always be assumed first, but if that raises difficulties in our comprehension then consider a figurative usage. An obvious example. When John saw Jesus he said, “*Behold! The Lamb of God*” (John 1:29). Certainly, because it raises an impossibility, a contrary to fact situation, an absurdity, no one would understand Jesus was a literal lamb. But, in using that word, Scripture is intending for us to transfer to Jesus certain qualities (demeanor, behavior, sacrifice) that belong to a lamb. Such language immediately gets our attention and vividly reveals ideas we are to believe concerning Jesus. Literal language could do this, but not as pointedly and with as much interest. Other examples. God said he had made Jeremiah “*a fortified city and an iron pillar, and bronze walls*” (Jer. 1:18). Isaiah 55:12 says, “*the mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing before you, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.*”

Second, we must watch for literal interpretations that would put us in conflict with other texts, or involve us in doing things we know Scripture says is wrong. John 6:53, “*unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you*” compared to Acts 15:29, “*abstain . . . from blood.*”

Third, study the word’s or verse’s context for qualifying, explanatory adjectives or phrases. John 6:32, “*bread from heaven,*” and “*the true bread.*” 1 Peter 2:4, “*a living stone.*” First Thessalonians 4:13, “*those who have fallen asleep*” are explained as “*the dead*” (4:16). Ephesians 2:1, the “*dead*” here are “*dead in trespasses and sins.*” Obviously, “*the dead*” in “*let the dead bury their own dead*” (Matt. 8:22), could not be literally dead or else how could they bury them?

Fourth, on some occasions the text itself tells us we are reading figurative language. John 2:19-21, “*Jesus answered . . . ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ . . . But He was speaking of the temple of His body.*” Revelation 1:1, “*The Revelation of Jesus Christ,*



which God gave Him to show His servants . . . And He sent and signified it . . .” Galatians 4:24, “which things are symbolic.”

I remember well my first “conflict” with someone over literal and figurative language. I had preached on the Lord’s supper and made the statement “the bread represents the Lord’s body.” A visitor, as we shook hands, was quick to correct me that the text did not say “represents”; it said, “this is My body.” What followed was a brief discussion of literal and figurative language. I told him it had to be one or the other. If the bread did not “represent” Christ’s body then it was literally his body. Such was impossible because Jesus had personally taken, blessed, and broke the bread. Furthermore, if he believed the bread he had eaten that morning was literally Christ’s body he was a believer in the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. His mistake was failing to see the figurative use of language and it led him to a false idea.

We all must be exceedingly careful when discerning (Heb. 5:11-14) between literal and figurative language. It can reach out and snag any of us. Zuck (146) in explaining that we should always take a passage in its literal sense unless there is a good reason not to, uses the numbers 144,000 and 12,000 from Revelation 7 as an example of “no reason not to take those numbers in their normal, literal sense.” Apparently, his premillennial views have blinded him to the figurative use of those numbers. Think! If the numbers are literal then why not those whom the text says compose those numbers — “all the tribes of the children of Israel” (7:4). If so, then only literal Jews, no Gentiles, make up the 144,000. Furthermore, according to Revelation 14, this is a male only group, virgins everyone, with the Father’s name written on their forehead (vv. 1-4). Professor Zuck has ignored his rule number three: “The figurative is intended if the literal meaning is an absurdity” (146).

Understanding literal and figurative language is really at the heart of the discussion over what Scripture means by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we speak of it as direct or indirect. No one I know would argue that Scripture teaches the Holy Spirit does *not* dwell in us — “the Holy Spirit who dwells in us” (2 Tim. 1:14). The question, which is usually never asked, is, does he dwell in us literally or figuratively? How are the texts that speak of the Holy Spirit being given to us, abiding in us, etc., to be understood? Literally or figuratively? Those who believe in a personal, direct, actual, physical indwelling must argue from literal explanations or else they are without any supporting texts. But if they are right, then explain the texts that speak of the Holy Spirit as “on” someone? John 1:33, “the Spirit . . . on Him”; Luke 2:25, “the Holy Spirit was upon him”; Luke 4:18, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me.” Also, consider 2 Samuel 23:2, “The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue.” Where exactly were the Spirit’s

words? A personal, direct, literal indwelling is not the way we understand the indwelling of God the Father and Jesus the Son, nor (think about this!) our indwelling them (1 John 4:15; Col. 1:27; Gal. 3:27; Rom. 8:9). I am afraid some have been influenced by denominational doctrine more than they like to admit when dealing with this issue. We cannot rightly say, as so many do when discussing this, “that is just what it says and I believe it.” Scripture also says mountains shall sing and trees shall clap their hands (Isa. 55:12)! Such an attitude is not “rightly dividing” the involved texts (2 Tim. 2:15). The question is, are the texts speaking with literal or figurative language?

Much more could be said about this topic because human language (and so Scripture), is filled with figurative usage — more than we realize at first glance. We could attempt to discuss all the various kinds of figurative language; but I have no desire for such. Bullinger’s book has a table of contents of 28 pages with over 200 categories! Besides, in my opinion, determining the kind of figure we are dealing with is really not necessary to understand the text. It might be interesting and reveal some additional ideas, but practically speaking, unnecessary for an accurate, understandable explanation of the text. Sometimes we can make things too complex, losing the basic message that God is seeking to reveal. Keeping things simple and understandable must be always kept in mind.

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# Making And Using An Outline

Donnie V. Rader

**A**n outline serves as a good *preview* and *overview* of a chapter before a detailed study is made. It likewise serves as a *review* and a good way to summarize when the study is finished.

I am convinced that an outline of a text is half of the work of interpretation. That is, of course, if the outline harmonizes with the text. By now, most who hear me preach or read my material should know that I strongly believe that an outline is essential to a good study of any text or topic.

It will be helpful (particularly in the New Testament) if those who teach (and those who want to be effective students as well) learn how to outline a text. I promise you, if you learn to do this, your study of the text will be most enjoyable. Outlining a book or chapter is one of the most effective ways of getting the grasp of a book or text.

Organization is the key to almost anything we do. Thus, to get the greatest benefit from your Bible study it will help to know something about the principle of outlining. Those wanting to make their own outlines of a book or chapter may find this information about how to outline useful.

Let's take a look at what an outline is, how to make one and how to use it.

## What Is An Outline?

An outline is "a summary of a written work or speech, usually analyzed in headings and subheadings" (*The American Heritage Dictionary Second College Edition* 882). It is "a short summary of the main topics or principal ideas of a written work or

speech" (*World Book Encyclopedia*, 1989, Vol. 14, 887).

Outlining is a way of organizing ideas or thoughts. A writer may make an outline (an organized collection of what he wants to say) from which he will write his article or book. This takes the ideas from an outline to a written document. This can also be done in reverse: taking the thoughts or idea from a written document to an outline. This is what we do when we outline the writings of the New Testament.

An outline shows the breakdown of the author's thought patterns.

## Types Of Outlines

There are *informal* and *formal* outlines. An *informal* outline is merely a rough "skeletal" outline which may only have three or four points that are not developed in the outline.

A *formal* outline will contain more information and will organize the points showing the relationship of main topics to supporting ideas. In formal outlining there are *topic* and *sentence* outlines. (1) "A topic outline presents information in parallel phrases or single words" (*Harbrace College Handbook*, 1984, 448). This method summarizes the chief points and sub-points in brief phrases. (2) A sentence outline uses complete sentences for each point. Most of the outlines that I do are topic outlines.

Now, let us consider various ways

to outline a text of the Bible. One method is to make an expository outline by listing some practical points from a section of Scripture. For example, one may take 1 Peter 2:8-9 and build a five or six point sermon outline on the duties of a Christian. This is a good sermon outline, but it does not tell us much about the flow of the chapter.

A second method is to make an expository outline by listing some practical lessons from an entire chapter. For example, Titus 2 could be used to list a number of qualities of the children of God. Again, this is a good study, but this method does not give the reader an analysis of the flow of the context.

A third method is to outline the points of the chapter and add explanations and passages that deal with the same subject. For example, as one would outline 2 Thessalonians 2 (concerning the apostasy that would occur before the second coming) he might add Acts 20:28-32 and 1 Timothy 4:1-3 in the outline. This type of outline might also have some explanation of the various idea of who the “man of sin” is.

A fourth method simply follows the flow of the context as it was intended for the original readers. This method seeks to fit every verse and thought in the chapter into the outline. This attempts to make an outline as if it were the outline from which Paul (or any other writer) wrote. This is the method that is generally followed in my outlines. Two things are done with this type of outline: (1) It shows how the writer’s thoughts develop. (2) It shows how the different parts of the chapter or book fit together.

The outlines that I use do not attempt to analyze each verse, but they give an overall preview of each chapter.

### How To Outline

The following is a step by step

procedure for making an outline of any chapter of the Bible. To say the least this is how I have gone about making the outlines that I have used. Let’s take 2 Thessalonians 1 as an example as we discuss each of these simple steps.

1. *Read and reread the chapter* — three or four times.

2. *Watch for thought patterns to develop.* Get a piece of paper and begin notation of these patterns. If it appears that verses 1-4 deal with one thought and 5-10 with another, write that down. Keep in mind that your first concept about the thought patterns may not even resemble your final outline.

In the case of 2 Thessalonians 1 it seems that verses 1-4 may be one thought (about thanksgiving to God) and verses 5-10 deal with another (about the judgment) and verses 11-12 deal with a prayer for the Thessalonians.

3. *Check commentaries, introductions to the New Testament and Bible handbooks to see how others have outlined the chapter.* With some chapters you will find that nearly all outline it alike. With others, there are no two outlines similar. Not all commentaries give an outline of the chapter. *Barnes Notes*, the *Gospel Advocate* series, Benson and others will usually give a brief outline of each chapter. Also the New King James Version has a good system of paragraph divisions and section headings that are helpful.

In our model chapter (2 Thess. 1) Barnes suggest the following divisions: 1-2, 3-4, 5, 6-10, 11-12. Benson divides the chapter this way: 3-4, 5-10, 11-12. The GA commentary (Lipscomb) only has two divisions: 1-2, 3-12. After considering these and other outlines, we will compare them with each other and with our own notes that we made earlier seeing which one(s) best analyzes the chapter. Our final outline may borrow

a little from each one of these or it may ignore most of them.

4. *Find the major divisions of the chapter.* Set them on a piece of paper using Roman numerals. Try to make sure that all major points are of equal importance. The same would be true for sub-points. That is, do not list as a sub-point a statement that does not have any bearing on the major point. When trying to fit every verse into an outline this is not always easy (or even possible in some cases) to do.

In our sample text (2 Thess. 1), I would put these major divisions down on my paper.

I. Greetings (vv. 1-2).

II. Thanks to God for the Thessalonians’ faithfulness and endurance (vv. 3-4).

III. Looking toward the judgment will help you endure (vv. 5-10).

IV. Prayer that the Thessalonians will continue to endure (vv. 11-12).

Obviously, the general theme of the chapter is enduring persecution. All of the major divisions (with exception of the greetings) have an equal bearing on the theme.

5. *Reread each major section and watch for thought patterns within the major divisions.* These will be your sub-points. Put these on your paper by indenting below your major point and use capital letters to identify your points. Then divide any sub-points by indenting and using Arabic numbers. Any divisions beyond that should use lower case letters and then Arabic numbers in parenthesis.

Back to our model text. As I reread verses 3-4 I see three things for which Paul was thankful. I list these as the sub-points.

A. Faith grows exceedingly (v. 3).

B. Love abounds (v. 3).

C. Patient in persecution and tribulation (v. 4).

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# The Value Of Looking Up The Hebrew And Greek Words

Rick Duggin

After a frustrating and unprofitable study with *Watchtower* representatives, a young Christian mourned that if only she had known the Greek, she could have refuted their assertions, and possibly could have converted them. Since she did not know Greek and did not have time to learn it, she did the next best thing — she called in a “hired gun” to lead the next discussion. The ability to read Greek, in her opinion, was a intimidating weapon with which she could silence every objection of her opponents.

There are several misconceptions in this thinking. (1) It implies that if we do not know Greek and Hebrew, we cannot know the Bible as we should. (2) It tends to exalt the person who is acquainted with biblical languages, and to discredit all who lack this knowledge. (3) It gives a wrong message to those whom we are trying to teach. Our next door neighbor may already believe that the Bible is hard to understand. If we strengthen this impression by implying that he must learn the original languages to understand God’s truth, we may discourage him from further study.

## Some Dangers To Avoid

**1. The average person who knows nothing of the original languages can understand the Bible.** Roman

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The same must be done for each major division.

## The Value Of Outlining

An outline helps the reader to see the structure of the author’s argument or point. Consequently, it serves as a good *preview* and *overview* of a chapter before a detailed study is made. It likewise serves as a *review* and a good way to summarize when the study is finished.

Outlining serves as an *aid to interpretation*. The outline helps the reader to see the context in which the verse(s) set. If there is a difficult verse in the chapter, I can know that

Catholics wrongly claim that the “Church” is the official interpreter of Scripture. We must not turn language scholars into our official interpreters. Most Christians do not know Greek or Hebrew, but their study of the English translations can equip them to know God’s will (Eph. 3:3, 4; 5:17). The most celebrated Greek and Hebrew scholars of our day do not understand God’s plan of salvation, the work of the church, or how to worship him in spirit and in truth.

**2. Christians who have no knowledge of Greek or Hebrew can teach Bible classes effectively.** Denominations often require their preachers to spend a few years studying the original languages in seminaries, but this knowledge does not necessarily improve their ability to teach, and it certainly does not enable them to teach the truth. Some of the best Bible teachers that I have ever heard knew little or nothing about Greek and Hebrew.

**3. Though he does not know the original languages, the studious child of God can refute false doctrines.** Curtis Porter knew only enough about the Greek alphabet to use a lexicon, but I know of no one who had more skill in refuting unscriptural arguments than he had. C.R. Nichol, on the other hand, was a good student of Greek, and he

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whatever it means it has something to do with the topic or theme of that particular section. *One-half* of the job of interpreting a passage is accomplished when you have completed your outline.

These outlines can serve as *reminders* of what each chapter is about. I have put each of these outlines in the margin of my Bible so that anytime I turn to a passage I can see the chapter title, key verse, and the divisions of the chapter at a glance. This is very helpful when I have to deal with a passage that I may not have studied for a while.

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had many debates, but he did not parade this knowledge to impress his listeners. In one debate he allowed an opponent to draw him off into a discussion of Greek in every speech except the first and last ones, and he was disappointed with every speech except these two. Since his audience had not studied Greek, they could not know whether brother Nichol or his opponent was right. Whenever we base an argument solely on the original languages, most people in the audience must take our word for it.

**4. There is no substitute for studying the context of a passage.** It is not wrong to quote Greek and Hebrew words while teaching a Bible class — the biblical writers themselves quoted foreign languages (see Mark 5:41; 15:34, and many others). The issue is how valuable this information will be to you or to your class. Suppose you are studying to teach a class on 1 Kings 12, and you want to know more about the “young men” who gave advice to Rehoboam. When you locate this word in a lexicon, you may be frustrated to learn that the word *yeled* means “child, young man, son, boy, fruit.” You have merely exchanged an English word for a Hebrew word that means the same thing. In this instance, a study of the context would have proved more profitable to you and the class than the ability to recall the Hebrew word.

**5. The study of biblical languages must not become an end in itself.** An old Scottish proverb says, “Greek, Hebrew, and Latin all have their proper place. But it is not at the head of the cross, where Pilate put them, but at the foot of the cross, in humble service to Christ.” We must guard against any attempt to display our knowledge. Preaching and teaching must not become an ego-trip that focuses attention on the speaker. Whether the language is Greek, Hebrew, Latin, or English, before we pronounce an impressive array of words, we should first decide whether our purpose is to please God or to impress men.

**6. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing.** The average man can learn how to perform an appendectomy in about ten minutes. If something goes wrong, however, he will need at least four more years of complex study to handle the emergency. Most people would not allow even the most talented medical student to operate on them. A little knowledge is too risky.

In a few moments, the average man can learn the Greek and Hebrew alphabets, and this knowledge gives him access to lexicons. This can be dangerous. We have often heard someone quote Thayer to prove a point, only to find that he was quoting Thayer’s *comments* instead of his *definitions*. When a lexicographer assigns a particular definition to a word, that is one thing; when he says that it means a certain thing in a particular passage, be careful. At this point he has stopped giving definitions and has started making comments.

The 1952-1974 editions of the Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich lexicon include this definition of *psallo* — “. . . our lit., in accordance w. O.T. usage, *sing (to the accompaniment of a harp)*. . .” (899). This is commentary, pure and simple. Bauer’s original German edition translated *psallo* as *sing*. Arndt and Gingrich added the phrase, “to the accompaniment of a harp.” This biased addition caused such a protest that Danker, to his credit, omitted the phrase in the 1979 edition of Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich-Danker.

Though students of Classical Greek highly value the lexicon by Liddell-Scott-Jones-McKenzie-Barber, they nevertheless view it as a form of commentary. Why? Because the meaning of a word depends on its context, and the only way for classical students to be sure of its definitions is to spend years reading the original texts of Plato, Aristotle, Thucydides, and many others. Few students have the time and determination to reach this level of scholarship, but the fact that they put so much effort into reading multitudes of original texts, and not in merely quoting from lexicons, should tell us something. In one way, the good Bible student has an advantage over classical scholars. We have a relatively small amount of material to understand — the Old and New Testaments — and we can read the material again and again in reliable translations, thus seeing for ourselves how God uses words in their context. This does not imply that lexicons are generally unreliable, but it does admonish us to exercise great care when using them.

### Is There No Value In Looking Up Hebrew and Greek Words?

If our preceding remarks have persuaded you that word studies and lexicons can be dangerous, you may be planning to include your word study books in your next yard sale. Before you do, let’s consider the other side of the issue. My purpose in the first part of this article is *not* to discourage the use of lexicons altogether, but rather to warn against some common abuses of them. While we would not allow a medical student to operate on us, our society does encourage average, non-medical people to learn first-aid. Why do we do this? Because it is better to know a *little* than to know *nothing at all*. The same principle is true of lexicons. There are times when the use of biblical lexicons can be very rewarding.

**1. A word study can help to explain a passage to a Bible class.** When Daniel explained the handwriting on the wall (Dan. 5) to King Belshazzar, why did he use *upharsin* in verse 25 and *peres* in verse 28? The “u-” of the first word means “and.” The “-p” becomes “-ph” when following the conjunction “and.” The “-in” is simply the plural form of the word. Thus the consonants are the same in both words — *prs*. While this is not absolutely essential to understanding the narrative, it may answer a few questions.

**2. There are times when lexicons can help to refute false doctrines.** Visitors from the Watchtower Society often portray themselves as skilled students of biblical languages, and they often seek refuge from difficult questions by misrepresenting both the definitions and the grammatical rules of Greek and Hebrew works. This refuge often backfires. For example, they teach that death is annihilation, and often base their position on the word *apollumi*, which is translated “destroy” in such passages as Matthew 10:28. They claim that *apollumi* teaches annihilation. They also teach that the earth will endure forever. But in Hebrews 1:11 the word *apollumi* refers to the heavens and earth. It requires a great deal of talent to stretch the definition of a word so far that it can include something that is *annihilated* in one verse and something that *endures forever* in another verse.

**3. It can shed light on passages.** When I first learned that the “simplicity” that is in Christ (2 Cor. 11:3) does not refer to the fact that the gospel is written in simple language, but to that which is single or sincere, in contrast to duplicity, I was forced to rethink an expression that I had heard and used for several years. (The gospel *is* written in simple language, but *this* is not the word or the place to prove it.)

It is enlightening to study the King James Version’s “Easter” in Acts 12:4. The word *pascha* occurs about thirty times in the New Testament, and in every case it is translated “passover,” except in Acts 12:4. All other versions that I have checked, including the New King James, consistently translate it “passover” in every passage.

Once I sat in a Bible class once where some were wondering if the “governor” of the feast (John 2:8, 9) was different than the “ruler” of the feast (John 2:9, KJV). A good concordance shows that the original uses the same word each time. The New King James Version uniformly translates it “master” of the feast.

Another passage that may seem confusing is Galatians 1. Paul refers to “another” gospel (v. 6) which is “not another” (v. 7). The original uses two different words. *Heteros* of verse 6 refers to a gospel of a different kind than Paul preached, while *allos* of verse 7 refers to a gospel of the same kind. False teachers wanted to substitute another (different) gospel for the one that Paul preached.

### How Do I Find Words In A Lexicon?

There are several ways to look up words in lexicons, but we will limit our discussion to the two easiest.

**1. Use Strong’s Concordance.** First, find the word that you want to research. Second, locate the number that Strong’s assigns the word. If the number is in italics, the word will be found in the Greek dictionary in the back of Strong’s; otherwise it is Hebrew and will be found in the

Hebrew dictionary. Third, find Strong’s number in one of the lexicons that is keyed to this concordance. For example, the word *love* in 1 Corinthians 16:22 is numbered 5368. Thayer’s lexicon is now coded to Strong’s numbering system, enabling someone who possesses no knowledge of Greek to find words just by matching the numbers in the two volumes.

This procedure is especially helpful in the study of Hebrew words. The word *love* in Psalm 119:97 in Strong’s Concordance is number 157. Using this number, we can turn to the Index of the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, or to The New *Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon*, both of which are keyed to Strong’s, and easily obtain definitions that were once restricted almost entirely to those who knew Hebrew.

The King James Version of Deuteronomy 22:19 uses the obscure word “amerce.” While you could check the New King James Version to learn that it translates this word by “fine,” as in a financial punishment, this would not tell you if the Hebrew word behind the translation occurs only here, or if it can be found in other passages as well. Noting that Strong’s assigns number 6064 to this word, you turn to Brown-Driver-Briggs, see that it discusses the Hebrew word *anash* on pages 778-779, and learn that it occurs in about seven other places in the Old Testament, though it is not translated by the word “amerce.” In this way, the lexicon serves as an abridged concordance.

**2. Use Young’s Concordance.** Many people find that Young’s Concordance is easier to use than Strong’s. This book classifies the biblical words of the King James Version in groups, each of which is based on the original Hebrew and Greek words. For example, the word “love” in John 21:15-17 can be found under two entries in Young’s — Number 5 which gives the references for the verb *agapao*, and Number 7 which gives those for the verb *phileo*.

After looking up “amerce” in Young’s, and seeing that it comes from the Hebrew word *anash*, you may turn to the index-lexicon to the Old Testament in the back of the book, find ANASH (in upper-case English letters), and learn that the second form of the word is translated in the King James Version in the following ways — amerce, 1; condemn, 2; punish, 1; be punished, 1, etc. This is a very helpful tool that will pay rich dividends to the serious student of God’s holy Word.

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# Methods Of Bible Study

Steve Curtis

The purpose of this article is to examine a few methods of Bible study. One may not consciously recognize different methods of study, but may have used different methods in his own personal study or in preparation for and participation in Bible classes. In discussing these methods, our focus will be on three things: (1) techniques of different study methods; (2) advantages and disadvantages of each study method; and (3) study methods in relationship to personal study and Bible classes.

I would like to thank brother Donnie Rader for asking me to contribute to this special issue. In no way do I claim to be an authority on methods of Bible study. Everyone does not use the same methods and techniques. However, this article contains personal observations and is written in hopes that some might benefit.

## Survey Study

The purpose of this method is to get an overall view of a subject. This may mean getting a broad view of the Bible as a whole, a broad view of a particular book of the Bible such as Genesis or Acts, or a broad view of a particular period of the Bible such as surveying the prophets, the kings, the life of Christ, or the epistles of Paul. It is easy to find good outlines in each of these areas that will help an individual.

Can you imagine working a thousand piece puzzle without knowing what the finished product looks like? Just taking one piece, it would be difficult to get a general idea of where it fits into the picture. Does it go in the top or bottom, left or right? Without any idea of the finished product, would you pick up a piece and examine it for every detail to place it where it belonged exactly? Or, would it be easier to put all the pieces with a flat edge together, all the blue pieces together, etc.? By getting a general idea of each piece, eventually one could put all the flat pieces together to form the border, all the blue pieces together to form the sky, and so on. Eventually, by taking a general observation of each piece, one could have an overview of the whole picture. Now, imagine the difficulty someone

with no overview or broad picture of the Bible would have trying to take one piece and understand the whole.

The advantage of surveying a subject would be getting a broader picture. To get a broader view of the Bible, reading is essential. Read to get a general idea as opposed to understanding every detail and remembering every fact. In Acts 7, we find one of the longest recorded sermons. Stephen preached this sermon to the Jews. His main point, found in verse 51, is “You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you.” How does he develop this point? Starting back in verse 2, Stephen uses an overview of the history of the Jews to show their fathers had rejected deliverers such as Joseph and Moses just as they had rejected Christ, the Son of God. Without his audience having an overall view of their history, Stephen could not have made his point as forcibly as he did. Think about how difficult it would be to understand the book of Hebrews without any idea of the tabernacle, the sacrifices, and the function of the priests under the law of Moses. Having an overview of the entire Bible will assist one in understanding biblical principles and contexts of Scripture.

No one method discussed in this article can stand on its own. The disadvantage to this method, if taken alone, would be a lack of knowledge concerning terms and principles contained within the context of Scripture. With just an overview of the Bible, one might believe the Ten Commandments are applicable today. One might believe instrumental music is acceptable in worship because king David used it. Terms, verses, contexts of Scripture, and Biblical principles can be greatly abused when one is satisfied with just a general picture of the Bible.

Individually, each person will have to determine how in-depth his survey will be. One might consider his knowledge of the overall Bible and the amount of time to invest in the survey to determine how in-depth the survey would be. This method of study will be a good means by which to build and fortify one’s foundation of faith. In a Bible class



environment, the class needs to understand the purpose of the survey and the amount of time to complete it. A disciplined teacher will keep the class on track and focused on the broad picture and overall view. Examining every detail may cause the class to miss the forest for the trees.

### Detailed Study

The purpose of this method is to examine each detail to have a fuller understanding of all that God has to say. Using this method, one may consider several factors. If one were going to do a detailed study of the book of James or the book of Joshua, factors such as authorship, date of writing, reason for being written, who is being addressed, and their home life should be considered. Also, one should include consideration of political, social, economic, and geographical settings. If one were to do a detailed study on marriage, it would be important to consider all of God's word on that subject. Factors such as how the term is used in the Old Testament and New Testament would be important. Defining the term as it is used in its different forms and in its original use would be important to a full understanding.

The advantage of using a detailed study is being able to achieve a good understanding concerning all God has to say on a particular subject or in a particular context of Scripture. For example, a detailed study avoids taking a subject like the Ten Commandments or instrumental music out of context. The disadvantages of this method would be the self-discipline involved in such a committed effort, the time required, and the necessity of having a good library with at least a Bible dictionary, commentaries, concordance, and some type of Bible encyclopedia. Some may find it is hard to make time for such a study and may not have access to good library materials.

For the individual who would use this method, time allowing for thorough investigation of those factors mentioned above is important. With the proper attitude, this method will help to build upon the foundation of our faith. In a Bible class environment, students must be willing to invest the amount of time and effort at home to participate and fully benefit from such a Bible class study. Only well prepared teachers can bring each detail to light.

### Verse By Verse

The purpose of this method is to examine the whole

context of a particular book of the Bible. This provides a wonderful opportunity to consider every aspect of God's word. Certainly detail is an important aspect of this method. One may consider comparing several translations of the text, defining important words and key passages within the text and examining what commentators have written. After such, it is important to organize information and thoughts into an outline so that each verse, each sentence, each paragraph and chapter are understood in relationship to the whole book.

The advantage of such a study is that it equips the individual not only with a thorough understanding of God's word, but also assists one in understanding words and verses within the context of their use. Most of us have probably experienced studying with someone who jumps around the Scriptures, taking words and passages out of their context to support some false idea. Some denominationalist may read Acts 16:15, which tells us that Lydia and her household were baptized, as proof for infant baptism. Some of our liberal brethren may take passages like Galatians 6:10, "do good unto all men," and James 1:27, "pure and undefiled religion . . . is to visit the orphans and widows," out of

**Think about how difficult it would be to understand the book of Hebrews without any idea of the tabernacle, the sacrifices, and the function of the priests under the law of Moses. Having an overview of the entire Bible will assist one in understanding biblical principles and contexts of Scripture.**

context for authority for the church to show benevolence to non-saints or for working through human institutions. Some brethren might read Acts 11:20 concerning the Christians "preaching the Lord Jesus" as proof that they did not preach the church, but the Lord. A good verse by verse study of these passages in their context would help avoid some misunderstandings. One disadvantage a person might consider when using this method is that information from the study might not be profitable without understanding it in relationship with the

broader overview of the Bible. Therefore, some may not find such a study interesting.

Individually, one can select a particular context that he does not fully understand or has not studied in detail. Taking good notes as the study progresses, one could eventually have his own personal commentary. Consideration for the age and maturity of students should be considered in a Bible class environment. Again each student must put forth effort at home to benefit from such a study. The teacher should not allow the study to become so detailed that the class loses interest.



### Topical Study

The purpose of this method is to examine a word or subject comprehensively. This method of study might begin by using a concordance to locate as many passages as possible that refer to the subject of interest. Study each passage within its context to determine which passages contribute insight into understanding the subject or topic. The goal would be to learn everything possible God has said on a particular subject.

The advantage of a topical study is that it enables one to examine and understand all that God has said on a particular subject. This is an asset in personal work, teaching Bible classes, delivering sermons, extending invitations, etc. For example, take the topic of baptism. Using a topical study, we find that the Bible teaches that baptism is essential unto salvation (Mark 16:16; 1 Pet. 3:21). Baptism is for the remission of sins and follows repentance (Acts 2:38). The action of baptism for the remission of sins involves a burial (Rom. 6:4). What type or kind of burial is baptism? It is a burial in water (Acts 8:38). If all one knew about baptism was from Mark 16:16, how would he be able to know that baptism for the remission of sins is immersion in water? How would one be able to teach others all that God has said on the subject?

Any one of these methods by itself is not sufficient. This method becomes a disadvantage if there is no understanding of how the topic fits into the broader scope of the Bible. If one only has a topical knowledge of the Bible, he does not have a full understanding of God's word. Many are probably familiar with the story of the six blind men who

were asked to identify an elephant. Each man was given a different part. If each man's idea of an elephant was only as extensive as the part he held, we know he would not fully understand what an elephant is.

Individually, anyone interested in teaching must have some topical knowledge of basic Bible subjects. Since everyone is to "always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason of the hope that is in you," it will do us well to equip ourselves with such knowledge. One might start with a subject he lacks knowledge of or he may choose some subject that will assist him in studying with a particular individual. Unfortunately, some never consider all the Bible has to say on a particular topic. Therefore, it is an effective means of teaching in a Bible class. It would be wise for the teacher to have studied the topic comprehensively to avoid seeming contradictions and taking passages out of context.

### Conclusion

As mentioned before, I do not claim to be an authority in this area and now you know I have not lied. Hopefully, these observations will make us more consciously aware of different methods of study, see the importance of each, and the necessity of not being satisfied with just one approach in Bible study.

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# How To Establish Bible Authority

Mike Webb

There is no more important question to ask when studying the Bible than “how do we establish Bible authority?” It is a question about which there is much disagreement in the modern religious world including the Church of Christ. In this article we simply want to look at the Bible to seek the answer to this most important question.

## The Need for Bible Authority

1. *We are commanded to do everything in the name of Jesus Christ.* The apostle Paul wrote in Colossians 3:17, “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” To do everything in the name of Christ means to do everything by his authority. In a similar passage the apostle Paul told the Corinthians to be careful “not to think beyond what is written” (1 Cor. 4:6). Both of these passages suggest the great importance of having Bible authority for what we practice in religion.

2. *Examples that suggest the importance of having authority for what we do.* There are many examples of men in the Bible who acted without having authority from God and they paid the price for their disobedience. One such example is Cain. Cain and his brother Abel both offered sacrifices to God (Gen. 4:3-4). God accepted Abel’s sacrifice, but he rejected Cain’s sacrifice (Gen. 4:4b-5). The reason God accepted Abel’s sacrifice was that it was offered by faith (Heb. 11:4). This means that Abel obeyed God’s instructions for offering the sacrifice. Cain did not follow God’s instruction and his sacrifice was rejected. Nadab and Abihu also acted without God’s authority and were destroyed. The text says that they offered “profane fire which the Lord had not commanded” (Lev. 10:1). These are just a couple of the examples that suggest the importance of having authority for what we do.

## Ways We Don’t Establish Bible Authority

1. *We don’t establish authority by the silence of the Scriptures.* Some believe that one way to establish authority is by the silence of the Scriptures. Some have said that where the Scriptures are silent that we are free to act. Some have written tracts and delivered sermons on what to do when there is no pattern. We must understand, however,

that the silence of the Scriptures is not a means by which we establish authority. The silence of the Scriptures is not permissive. The Hebrew writer argued that Jesus could not serve as a priest under the law of Moses, not because the Scriptures said that he couldn’t, but because it never authorized it. Listen to the words of the Hebrew writer, “For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning the priesthood” (Heb. 7:14). Some of our brethren today still act like the silence of Scripture is permissive. I hear brethren asking questions like “where does the Scripture say that we can’t do this or that?” When we ask questions like this we are asking the wrong question. We need to be asking “Where does the Scripture authorize it?”

2. *We do not establish authority by expediency.* Some of our institutional brethren want to list expediency as a means for establishing authority. An expedient is simply a means or method that one may use to accomplish a goal. We must recognize that for a thing to be an expediency it must first be lawful or authorized. Paul made this point in 1 Corinthians 6:12 when he said, “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.” We cannot claim an addition to God’s word or a substitution for God’s way as an expedient and think that it is then authorized.

3. *We do not establish authority in a way different from first century Christians.* Many of our liberal brethren are now calling for a new hermeneutics. We are told that the old hermeneutics is outdated and we need one for the twentieth century. We must recognize that Jesus and God have not changed (Heb. 13:8). We must establish authority today in the same way that the first century Christians did.

## Three Ways to Establish Bible Authority

1. *Direct Command.* The first way that we can establish Bible authority is by direct command. This is when the Bible directly makes a statement or a positive command. One example of a direct command would be the apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost. Peter directly told the people to “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the

name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). All three ways to establish authority can be illustrated by the Lord’s supper. The observance of the Lord’s supper is authorized by direct command or precept. Jesus directly commanded the observance of the Lord’s supper in Matthew 26 when he said, “take eat; this is My body” and “drink from it, all of you.” Paul also directly commanded the observance of the Lord’s supper in 1 Corinthians 11:25. We can also find all three ways of establishing authority illustrated in the controversy of Acts 15 over circumcision. James in discussing the subject of circumcision of Gentiles appealed to a direct statement of Scriptures. He quoted from Amos 9:11-12 (Acts 15:16-17). After appealing to direct statement James had established that “we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God” (Acts 15:19).

*2. Approved Example.* The second way we want to look at to establish authority is by an approved example. We are not talking about establishing authority by an example but by an *approved* example. By approved example we mean an example where the people were acceptable unto God.

Approved example can also be illustrated by the Lord’s supper. We know the time of its observance because we have an example of early Christians observing the Lord’s supper. In Acts 20:7 Luke records, “and upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread” (Acts 20:7). We do not have a direct command telling us to take the Lord’s supper on the first day of the week, but we find this example of early Christians coming together on Sunday for that purpose. We also find an approved example appealed to in Acts 15 to help solve the circumcision problem. Peter and Barnabas “declared how many miracles and wonders God had worked among the Gentiles” (v.12). This is a case of establishing authority by an approved example. God had approved the work of Paul and Barnabas in converting Gentiles by the miracles and wonders he performed through them. These examples proved that God approved the salvation of the Gentiles and that circumcision should not be bound on them.

*3. Necessary Inference.* The third and final way of establishing authority we want to discuss is necessary inference. This is not the establishing of authority by an inference but by *necessary* inference. By necessary we mean that no other conclusion can be drawn from the text. The frequency of the observance of the Lord’s supper is established by necessary inference. We read in Acts 20:7 where the disciples partook of the Lord’s supper on the first day of the week. By necessary inference we infer that since every week has a first day that they partook every single week.

Necessary inference is also found in Acts 15. Peter related to the brethren at Jerusalem how God had acknowledged

the Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit (v. 8). Peter then concluded or inferred that God “made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith” (v. 9). These are the only three ways that we can find in the Scriptures for establishing Bible authority.

### **Two Kinds Of Authority — Specific And Generic**

*1. Specific Authority.* Specific authority is when God has specified what he wants us to do, or the method we are to use in obeying him. Specific statements exclude everything outside of that which is specified. The silence of God prohibits the use of anything other than that specified. The silence of God does not permit. The type of wood that Noah was to use in building the ark is an example of specific authority. God specified gopher wood and that excluded the use of any other kind of wood (Gen. 6:14). The elements of the Lord’s supper is another example of specific authority. God has specified the elements of the Lord’s supper are to be unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine. This excludes the use of any other elements on the Lord’s table. The New Testament specifies that we are to sing in worship to God (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Since God specified singing this excludes any other kind of music like instrumental music or humming.

*2. Generic Authority.* Generic authority is when God has not specified the action or method by which we are to obey a command. In the case of generic authority we may use any action or method that comes within the realm of the general command. The most common example of generic authority is the command to go teach the world (Mark 16:16; Matt. 28:19-20). In the great commission God commanded us to go and teach the world, but he did not specify the method we are to use when we go. Therefore, we are free to use any method that falls within the general command to go. We may go by car, airplane, bus, or we may walk. All of these are authorized because they are all means of going. God commanded us to sing in worship (Eph. 5:19). God did not specify what part we are to sing or whether we are to sing by book or from memory. We are, therefore, free to choose what part we are going to sing and whether or not we are going to use a book, or what book we are going to use. When we make these decisions, we are still obeying the command to sing. This is not parallel to instrumental music. God specified singing, and instrumental music is another kind of music.

### **Conclusion**

There is no more important question than “how do we establish Bible authority?” We need to be sure that we are teaching the younger generations these basic principles. I believe that most of the doctrinal problems in the Lord’s church could be solved if we simply learned how to establish Bible authority and then learned to respect what God authorized.

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# The New Hermeneutics and New Testament Bible Study Methods

Chris Reeves

(Note: This article was taken from material in a larger outline entitled “Out With the Old and In With the New: The Cry of the New Hermeneutic” by the same author. This thirty page outline has many useful quotes and references about the New Hermeneutics, a refutation of each of the main points of the New Hermeneutics and a large bibliography. This outline can be ordered from Truth Bookstore.)

Over the past ten to fifteen years we have seen a new theory being promoted among some of our brethren regarding the study and interpretation of the Bible. This theory has been called the “New Hermeneutics” (hereafter, NH). Hermeneutics is a big word but it simply means “interpretation.” Hermeneutics is the process of interpreting the Scriptures. According to the NH, the old way of interpreting God’s word must be abandoned for a new and improved method of Bible interpretation. What is the “old way” or the “old hermeneutic”? For starters, NH advocates say that using commands, examples and necessary inference to establish Bible authority is an old, man-made tradition dating back to the days of Alexander Campbell and this method must go. In addition to this, NH advocates want to abandon any method of Bible interpretation that seeks to find a pattern of truth in a fixed body of first century teaching (the New Testament), in order to apply that pattern of truth to the 20th century church. In short, we are told by these NH advocates that we should abandon any rational, “systematized” method of Bible study for an “existential” (emotional) experience with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. A good example of the current and typical NH approach to a study of God’s word is found in an article by John Allen Chalk entitled, “My Life with the Bible: A Meditation on Hermeneutics” (*Wineskins*, January/February 1994, 20). In this article he writes:

As a child the Bible was a gargantuan intellectual challenge grasped only by the Olympian personalities who came to my little country church and were entertained and hosted by my family. The Bible in those days was a battleground site, a textbook, an anthology of proof

texts, understood correctly by a few, misunderstood by most (especially outsiders). The Bible in those days could be contained in a syllogism or a series of syllogisms by which all arguments could be won and all disputes settled quickly and cleanly.

As a young preacher and throughout my full-time ministry years the Bible for me changed slowly through painfully intense study from a sermon text source to a variegated but coherent guide for God-given life shaped by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and actualized in the personal presence of the Holy Spirit. This was a private, intimate, and often troubling journey about which I could say nothing that would belie my confident pulpit pronouncements. In these years I discovered a personal walk with God centered in daily devotional Bible study (as opposed to technical Bible study for sermons and classes which I was compelled to pursue). The controversy in Churches of Christ over the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit erupted in the 1960s just as I emerged from several years of personal search through the Bible for authentic spiritual and moral power. This quest inescapably led me to a new existential decision about Jesus as the living Word of God and a new personal relationship with God’s Holy Spirit.

The Scriptures must be interpreted (Neh.8:8; Luke24:27, 45). The question is, “Which hermeneutic will we use to interpret the Scriptures?” The one set forth by Jesus and the New Testament church, or the NH set forth by some of our brethren in recent years? Instead of looking to a NH to interpret God’s word, why not look to the New Testament? What does the New Testament itself say concerning the proper use of Scripture? We should let the New Testament determine how we ought to interpret the Scriptures. There is much to be said against the NH. (See the thirty page outline mentioned above, or the article entitled, “The New Hermeneutic,” *Guardian of Truth*, October, 6, 1994.) Since this special issue of *Truth Magazine* is devoted to the topic of how to study the Bible, this article will focus on the New Testament Bible study methods that NH brethren want to abandon. Not only can we learn something about



the NH, but we can also learn how to study the Bible along the way by looking at some New Testament examples of Bible study. The best manual on hermeneutics is the New Testament itself.

*NH advocates want to abandon the use of the New Testament as a pattern or blueprint.* They say that the New Testament was never intended by God to be a “pattern” or “blueprint” that we must follow today. They do not believe the Bible is “propositional revelation” (revelation that sets forth a definite, certain statement of truth that must be understood and obeyed), and they say we should not study the Bible to find truths to obey. They claim that “pattern theology” or “pattern hermeneutics” is an invention of the 19th century church. The New Testament on the other hand teaches us that we must follow it as a pattern. Paul wrote to Timothy and said, “Hold the pattern of sound words which thou hast heard from me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 1:13). When each New Testament Christian began his new life in Christ, he first obeyed the “form (pattern) of teaching” (Rom. 6:17) found in the gospel, and then he continued on by following the pattern of the apostles’ teaching (Acts 2:42) and the teaching of Christ (2 John 9). A good Bible study method begins with the approach that the New Testament is a pattern for my life and I’m going to search out what that pattern is, follow it and hold it fast.

*NH advocates want to abandon the practice of establishing Bible authority by the use of direct statements (or commands), approved examples, or necessary inference.* The NH advocates tell us that the “tri-fold hermeneutics” (command, example, inference) is a man-made tradition of the last century and it should be rejected. They claimed that the New Testament does not teach us anything today by apostolic examples or necessary inferences. These examples and inferences are not binding today — explicit statements alone are authoritative. Christ alone is our example. “We are Christo-centric!”, they say. We are told to go to the gospels for our examples, not to Acts or the Epistles. The topic of how to establish Bible authority is covered elsewhere in this issue but a couple of observations are in order here. First, God is the one who has used these three methods throughout time to teach his will. Looking for direct statements, examples, and inferences did not originate in the last century. Long before the 1900s God was using these three methods to teach his will. God teaches by means of these three methods and man learns God’s will by studying what God has said directly, what he has implied (inferences) or by his approved examples.

Second, learning God’s will in this way is not a man-made tradition. We have divine approval from God for this method because this is the very method used by Jesus and the New Testament church. I encourage you to study the following passages and others like them and see how

authority for a practice is established by this method: direct statements (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10; 15:1-9; 19:16-23; 22:34-40; 28:18-20; John 12:28; 14:15; 1 Cor. 14:37; 1 Pet. 3:1-2; and 1 John 2:3-5); approved examples (John 13:15; Acts 20:35; 1 Cor. 4:6, 16-17; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 4:9; 1 Thess. 1:5-7; 2 Thess. 3:7-9; 1 Tim. 1:16; 2 Tim. 3:10,14; Heb. 13:7); and implication/inference (Matt. 12:23-47; 16:5-12; 22:23-33, 41-46; Luke 4:25-30; 1 Cor. 1:13; Heb. 4:6-9; 7:1-17). In one passage alone (Acts 15), we find Christians learning God’s authoritative answer to the question over circumcision by Peter’s implications (vv. 7-11), Paul’s examples (v. 12) and James’ direct statements from the prophets (vv. 13-19). New Testament Christians followed the direct statements, approved examples, and implications given to them by God. We should do the same if we want to truly be New Testament Christians! We should study our Bibles looking for God’s will found in direct statements, indirect statements (implications/inferences), and approved examples.

*NH advocates want to abandon making the silence of God prohibitive.* The Scriptures teach that if God is silent on a matter, we are not allowed to act in that area; that is, his silence prohibits us from acting. But NH advocates say that when God is silent we have permission to act. They say that God did not intentionally remain silent. God simply didn’t get around to talking about various things in the Bible, therefore, God gives us the freedom to do those things that he did not talk about. However, many times in Scripture we are told that we are to act by the word of God, not by the silence of God. Paul said, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Think about it. There is no “hearing” in silence; no “word of God” in silence; hence, no “faith” in silence. When men act upon the silence of God, they are not acting by faith! Silence does not express God’s authority or God’s approval. We cannot determine what God wants for us by what God does not say. Study the context of the following passages which teach that God’s people are not to act if God is silent: Exodus 14:13-14; Leviticus 10:1-3; 24:12; Numbers 9:8; 15:34; 20:8,11; 1 Samuel 13:12; 1 Chronicles 13:1-14; 15:13; 2 Chronicles 26:18; Jeremiah 19:5; 1 Corinthians 4:6; Acts 15:24; Galatians 1:6-9; Hebrews 1:5, 13; 7:11-14; 2 John 9-11. When we study God’s word we need to spend our time studying his word, not his silence. We engage in “Bible study,” not “silence study.”

*NH advocates want to abandon the use of the New Testament as a book of case law or as a constitution.* These advocates believe that the New Testament is not a book of law, but rather a collection of “love letters.” These casual love letters “dashed off by an apostle to a church” were not meant to be used as law for a rigid guideline, but they should be viewed more as good “take-it-or-leave-it” suggestions for modern man. The New Testament does not so teach. It does not claim to be a collection of “love letters.”

The New Testament is the “new covenant” law of God (Jer. 31:31-33; Heb. 8:10; 10:16), the “law of Christ” (1 Cor. 9:22; Gal. 6:2) and the “perfect law of liberty” (Jas. 1:25; 2:8, 12). Remember on Pentecost (Acts 2), it was “the law” of Jehovah that went forth from Jerusalem (Isa. 2:1-3). And keep in mind that if there is no “law,” there is no sin (Rom. 4:15; 1 John 3:4). The New Testament is our law book. Just as we would sit down and study various laws to see how we must live in our community (traffic laws, tax laws, zoning laws, etc.), so we must sit down to a study of God’s word looking for the laws by which he governs every aspect of our life (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

*NH advocates want to abandon the use of deductive reasoning and logic when trying to learn God’s will.* Again, their argument is that our current hermeneutic is a man-made tradition carried over from the “Restoration Movement” of the last century. They say we use deductive reasoning and logic today to study the Bible because Alexander Campbell and others were fond of this method. According to them, anyone today using reason and logic in their study of God’s word is a member of the “Rationalist / Inductive School.” They say that emotion, not reason, is what is important in Bible study. But what does the New Testament say? First, let’s define a few terms (all definitions are taken from the *Webster’s New World Dictionary*). Don’t be scared by the words being used here. “Reason” simply means “the ability to think, form judgments, draw conclusions, etc.” “Logic” is the use of “correct reasoning.” “Deduction” means “the act or process of deducing; reasoning from a known principle to an unknown, from general to the specific, or from a premise to a logical conclusion.” “Rational” means “of, based on, or derived from reasoning.” “Inductive” means “reasoning from particular facts or individual cases to a general conclusion; the conclusion reached by such reasoning.” We must remember that God has given each of us mental capabilities and he expects us to use them. These varied mental capabilities, in part, are what separate us from the animal kingdom.

When we search the Scriptures we find that God approves of, and demands the use of reasoning in the teaching and learning of his word (Isa. 1:18; 41:21; 1 Cor. 10:15; Rom. 12:1 (KJV); 1 Pet. 3:15). Jesus (Matt. 22:15-46), Philip (Acts 8:35), Paul (Acts 17:2-3, 17; 18:4, 19; 24:25; 26:24-25; Rom. 2:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:12-19), Apollos (Acts 18:28) and the author of Hebrews (3:4; 7:1-17) all used reasoning, logic, rationality, deduction, and induction to teach God’s word. We should use the same mental powers to study it. Take for example the need to become a Christian. The whole question of becoming a Christian involves rationality, reasoning, logic, deduction and induction. Nowhere in the Bible does my name, “Chris Reeves,” appear. No verse in the whole Bible says something like, “Chris Reeves do this . . .” How then do I know that any part of the New Testament gospel is for me, “Chris Reeves,” if

my name is nowhere mentioned? Very simple. I conclude that I too, must become a Christian by reading the facts, principles, cases, and examples found in Scripture. Yes, emotion is important in our Christianity, but so also is a rational sound mind. God expects both (2 Tim. 1:7). A very important study method that must be used each time we sit down to study God’s word is the “inductive method.” First, gather all the Bible information on a topic (observation). Second, learn what that information means (interpretation). Third, draw a conclusion about that information (deduction/induction). Finally, obey what that information teaches (application).

*NH advocates want to abandon any claim to know the truth.* We cannot know the truth or have the truth, they say. The wholeness of truth lies beyond the grasp of the human mind, and they say that “truth” is not fixed, but ever-changing. They conclude that since we cannot know everything, we cannot know anything for certain. The Bible teaches differently. We can know the truth (Prov. 23:23; 1 Tim. 4:3; 2 Tim. 1:12; Heb. 10:26; 1 John 2:21; 5:18-20; 2 John 1). Jesus said, “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). God’s word is truth (John 17:17; 1 Thess. 2:13). The truth can be heard (Eph. 1:3), obeyed (1 Pet. 1:22) and followed (2 John 4). The church is the “pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). We must defend the truth (Jude 3; 1 Pet. 3:15) and speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). If we do not know the truth, we will be punished (2 Thess. 1:8). We do not know all there is to know, but what God has revealed to us is truth, and we can know it and respond to it (Deut. 29:29). While it is true that many do not know the truth in the Bible, it is not because the truth is unattainable. It is because these people do not love the truth (2 Thess. 2:10), nor do they want the truth (2 Tim. 3:1-7). When we study the Bible we should study to find God’s truth, and then apply that truth to our lives to make us better people. Bible study is not to be purely academic. It is supposed to be practical.

*NH advocates want to abandon the approach that all Scriptures are equally important.* NH advocates criticize us for having a “flat” Bible where all truths are held equally important. NH advocates talk about the “core gospel,” the “fundamentals of the faith” or the “seven essential items of Christian faith” (as per Eph. 4:4-6). Misusing Matthew 23:23, NH advocates say that there are “weightier” matters of the gospel upon which we all must agree (like the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ), and the “less weightier” matters of doctrine are mere opinions upon which we all agree to disagree (like the work, worship, and organization of the local church). This is similar to the “gospel-doctrine distinction” made by some brethren a few years ago. Of course, the NH advocates cannot tell us exactly what the “core gospel” is. They have been adding to it and taking from it for years, and they cannot agree among themselves what it should include. The truth is that

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# Good Bible Study Aids

Donald P. Ames

In Ecclesiastes 12:12, Solomon wrote, “Of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.” He did not mean that one should choose therefore to be lazy and excuse himself, but rather that he needed to select his goals and study aids carefully. I suppose every preacher asked would have certain books and aids he would recommend, and maybe few would pick the same ones all the way through. Yet we do recognize they can, in their proper role, be a great asset in helping us learn what others have also spent much work on to accumulate. In looking at such, though, let us always remember that they are the works of men, and therefore are not infallible. They are *aids* to help us in our search for truth, and should not replace the study of God’s word itself!

First and foremost, one of the best aids to good Bible study you can have is a good Bible! If you can find a good Bible with a concordance, maps, cross references, and perhaps notes in it, this alone can be a tremendous help. You must beware, of course, in selecting a good Bible in that many of those with notes therein on the market today are tainted with premillennialism and the notes are designed

to teach this false doctrine. But, having secured a good Bible, next learn to make notes in it. Some people are afraid to write anything in it because it is “God’s book.” But if you are going to study and make it useful, you are going to have to be willing to highlight and make notes on difficult passages, as well as cross-references of your own to other key passages. As you begin to master the things found in a good Bible, you will have much of what you are looking for to get started. It is not an easy search, but the key to beginning.

The second thing I would recommend is to learn to make notes from sermons, bulletins, and tracts that you can refer back to. These are usually free within your local congregation. Maybe even the preacher will provide you with a copy of his outline on special lessons (some churches put such lessons also on cassette for members to listen to). Good study aids do not have to cost you an arm and a leg if you but utilize the opportunities in front of you. Set up a file of topics, and file these notes under those topics so you can refer back to them later on. Now you have a start.

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all of God’s word is equally important and all of it must be used as a basis of fellowship (2 John 9-11). “All things” that Christ has commanded must be observed (Matt. 28:20; cf. Acts 3:22). “All Scripture” (2 Tim. 3:16-17) and “all wisdom” (Col. 1:28) is necessary to make us complete. When you study your New Testament, don’t study looking for what is and is not essential, picking and choosing what you think is important and is not important.

“Out with the old and in with the new” is the cry of the NH. But for those of us who are interested in pleasing God, let us be content to use the Scriptures in the way that Jesus and the New Testament church used them. We do not need a NH. We need the hermeneutic of Jesus and

the New Testament church. Let us not abandon what is clearly established in God’s word. Let us study the Bible to (1) examine the pattern and hold it fast, (2) receive our authority from God’s direct statements, implications and approved examples, (3) hear what God says, not what he does not say, (4) learn the law of Christ and abide by it, (5) draw conclusions about what God wants for our lives today, (6) hear, understand and obey God’s truth, and (7) find and obey all things that God requires for our lives as Christians. I appeal to all brethren to follow the example of Jesus and the New Testament church, as they seek to study the Bible and handle accurately the word of truth today.

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However some are interested in getting a library of their own started, and are seeking recommendations on good books. May I suggest before you start spending a fortune on books, look around. Sometimes the preacher, elders, or other teachers may have them in their library already. If so, pause and take a look at them — they may or may not be what you are looking for, and this can help you make that determination. Some have sought *Thayers Greek Lexicon* in the belief a little knowledge of the Greek would help — not realizing they would have to first of all know the Greek before they could even use such a book. I would *not* recommend it to the average Christian seeking to get a few good books for his library. If you really want a book that can tell you a little about the Greek, I would recommend *Vine's Expository Dictionary of N.T. Words*, which tells you the different Greek words and their meanings from various English words you look up. But too often we think the Greek is the answer to everything, when in reality a good understanding of the English is what we need.

As a basic starting place, there are certain books I feel ought to be in a Christian's library that can be a big help to them. A good concordance (I like *Young's*) can assist you in looking up many passages you might want to find and can't. Also a good Bible Dictionary can fill in the background to many ideas, customs, and meanings. Davis is a good one, so is the *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*. Another excellent help, still very useful, is the *Pocket Bible Encyclopedia* by C.R. Nichol. Here are many references, and well arranged, without heavy investing. Next, I would recommend a good Bible atlas. There are several on the market, but one that can really make it all come to life is *History and Geography of the Bible — A Study Manual* by Bob and Sandra Waldron. The Senior High *Truth In Life* series (Yr. 2, Bk. 4) can also be an excellent selection to provide basic information for many.

Commentaries should be approached with caution. Many get all excited about getting a "quality" set, little realizing how much they cost and how infrequently they may be used. The *Truth Commentaries* are an excellent set I would recommend, but to the average person just beginning to put a library together, they may seem "out of the question." If you want a good basic set, therefore, I would recommend the *Zerr Commentaries*, recognizing you will probably decide to add individual ones on special books as you advance in learning and study. The *Bible Study Textbooks* by GOT can be a very good, inexpensive, simple starting point that can fill that answer for many as a starter — especially on books you do not need greater depth on or study too frequently. To that, I would add *Answers For Our Hope* by Marshall Patton and the books of R.L. Whiteside (*Reflections, Doctrinal Discourses, Kingdom Of Promise And Prophecy*). Whiteside's books are especially useful to the beginner in that they not only deal with many topics of interest, but contain a Bible index in the back of every

passage referred to in the book, hence serving as a sort of commentary as well. They ought to be in every library!

Roy E. Cogdill's books *The New Testament Church* and *Walking By Faith* are two excellent books to be included. To that I would also recommend the *Cogdill-Woods Debate* on the problems of institutionalism. Many times debates on special topics can be excellent choices if you have the patience to read and digest the arguments and wish to see and examine both sides of the reasoning. Some do not care for this method of study though (regretfully), preferring to study it from a thought-out one-sided presentation instead. Individual topics would thus have to be weighed. A few I recommend are: *The Holy Spirit: His Person And Work* (Tuten), *The Gospel Plan Of Salvation* (Brents), and *Biblical Criticism* (McGarvey). Also I would recommend Donnie Rader's *Divorce And Remarriage* (and not because he got together this special!)

No library is complete without something about our "roots" as well. I highly recommend *Search For The Ancient Order* (West), Vol. 1 and 2. To some, they have almost climbed out of reach in cost, but stop and consider what you spend on other books and magazines or newspapers. They are still an excellent source of the restoration movement here in America. To these could be added *The Life And Times Of David Lipscomb* and *J.D. Tant, Texas Preacher* along with *W.W. Otey*. To these I would recommend *They Being Dead Yet Speak* (Florida College Lectures 1981) and *Their Works Do Follow Them* (Florida College Lectures 1982). When the biography of Roy Cogdill is published, I would definitely recommend it be added to these as a study of church history. For those who do not wish to spend what *Search For The Ancient Order* costs, the Senior High *Truth In Life* series (Yr. 2, Bk. 2) is an excellent study. Also Yr. 3, Bk. 3 (Evidences) and Bk. 4 (Marriage and the Home) are good studies.

Depending on your area and problems, others might recommend other books and subjects. But, to this, if you could add a subscription to *Truth Magazine*, you will probably cover many of those same studies and topics. No doubt after this hits print, I may think of others I wish I might have included, but these are foremost in my thinking for a good beginning library. Remember: they are just the *works of men* (not infallible), and they are *aids* (not to replace the study of the word of God itself). Consult with your preacher, elders, and others before spending big sums and see what they might recommend on special topics. Choose carefully, prayerfully, and cautiously; then "study to show thyself approved unto God" (2 Tim. 2:15).

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## “Understanding” continued from front page

### The Bible Is Inspired By God

The process by which God’s revelation was reliably communicated is called *inspiration*. “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 complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Holy Scriptures have been “God-breathed” (vv. 15, 16). Commenting on the meaning of the Greek word *theopneustos* (translated “inspiration of God”), B.B. Warfield said it “has, however, nothing to say of *inspiring* or of *inspiration*: it speaks only of a ‘spiring’ or ‘spiration.’ What it says of Scripture is, not that it is ‘breathed into by God’ or is the product of the Divine “inbreathing” into its human authors, but that it is breathed out by God, ‘God-breathed,’ the product of the creative breath of God.” (I.S.B.E., III:1474). He defined inspiration as the “supernatural influence exerted on the sacred writers by the Spirit of God, by virtue of which their writings are given Divine trustworthiness” (*Ibid.*, 1473). Inspiration, then, is the miraculous means by which God has accurately published his word to the world.

### The Bible Is Verbally Inspired

Many believe Bible inspiration amounts to God giving artistic latitude to the writers of the Bible — allowing them free rein to express in their own words the ideas God gave them. However, the Bible teaching on inspiration is very different. The Bible boldly declares that God gave men the very words he wanted them to write. This is called plenary inspiration (full, complete, extending to every part).

**1. The Old Testament contains the statement “thus saith the Lord” or its equivalent over 2,000 times.** The very words of the Old Testament are attributed to God! One who believes the Bible accepts its verbal inspiration.

**2. Men spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit:** “. . . knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:20-21). Neither prophecy nor its fulfillment was produced by human wisdom, power or manipulation. The prophets of God spoke the word of God as the Spirit of God gave them utterance.

**3. God put His words into the mouths of His prophets.** “I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him” (Deut. 18:18). While this prophecy was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the principle of verbal inspiration it established is seen in the Old Testament prophets (Acts 3:22). David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, said “The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, And His word was on my tongue” (2 Sam.

23:2). God put his words in the mouth of Jeremiah (Jer. 1:9). Zechariah observed the process of revelation used by God when he wrote, “Yes, they made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear the law and the words which the Lord of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets” (Zech. 7:12). God sent his *words* to Israel *by His Spirit* through the *prophets*.

**4. Verbal inspiration is declared by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:13.** “These things (God’s revelation to the apostles by the Holy Spirit — vv. 10-12, jrp) we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” The Holy Spirit guided the apostles of Christ into all truth by giving them the very words they were to use when preaching it (cf. John 16:13-15). The Spirit “moved” or drove these holy men of God to speak (and write) the very words of God (2 Pet. 1:21).

**5. What was first spoken by God’s prophets was then written down for the perpetual use of man.** Inspired words which were put into written form (Scripture) were regarded with equal force as when God’s prophet spoke them. Whether God’s word has been conveyed in oral or written form, the message is the same and its authority equally binding (cf. 1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Thess. 2:15). The written word of God, just like the oral word of God, is verbally inspired.

To illustrate how inspired Scripture was produced, let us turn our attention to Jeremiah. God put his words into Jeremiah’s mouth and he spoke all that God commanded him (Jer. 1:9, 17). The words Jeremiah spoke were the words of God (cf. Jer. 2:1-2). Not only did God put his words into Jeremiah’s mouth, he later commanded Jeremiah to write those words in a book (Jer. 36:1-2). Jeremiah’s scribe, Baruch, wrote all the words of the Lord which Jeremiah spoke to him (36:4, 17-18). A roll of a book was produced from which “the words of the Lord” were read (36:8). The “words of Jeremiah” (36:10) were regarded as equivalent with the “words of the Lord” (36:11). The Scripture which was produced, the book of Jeremiah, originated with God and its transmission was by the power of God. The inspired word of God was first spoken by Jeremiah and then put into written form (Jer. 36:17-18). Both were verbally inspired.

### Conclusion

The Bible has come to us by a process of revelation and inspiration (cf. Luke 24:44-45; Acts 8:28; 1 Tim. 5:18; 2 Pet. 3:16). The word of God has been revealed to men by the power of the Holy Spirit. These men first spoke God’s word and then put it into written form for all the world to read, learn, believe, and obey (Rom. 1:5, 16-17; 16:24-25; Eph. 3:3-5; 2 Tim. 2:15). When God’s word was written

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it was to be circulated from place to place (1 Thess. 5:27; Col. 4:16). God's word is living, active and incorruptible (Heb. 4:12; 1 Pet. 1:22-25). It will accomplish God's will in men's lives (Isa. 55:10-11). God wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. His truth is still available today. We call it, "The Bible."

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## **"Attitudes Essential" continued from page 2**

### **Honesty**

In the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23, the sower went forth and sowed seed and that seed, the word of God, fell on four different soils (hearts). Of the four soils (hearts) only one received that word properly. This was the heart which was good and honest (Matt. 13:23). This heart has a love for the truth and does not take pleasure in unrighteousness (2 Thess. 2:9-12). It is honest in that it is fair and truthful. In our study of the Bible, God's book, we must be fair and honest in our examination of Scripture. As we allow God to speak to us through his word we take a good and honest look at ourselves in respect to our relationship to God. With a poor and broken spirit (Matt. 5:3) and contrite heart (Isa. 66:2), we meekly (Matt. 5:5) submit ourselves to do the will of God. Honesty in study is not reading the Bible to prove a preconceived doctrine. Honesty is studying to find the doctrine of God and a willingness to submit to it. A good illustration of this is what James wrote in James 1:23-25, "For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." Is an individual really being honest with himself as to his physical appearance if he looked in the mirror and saw a big glob of barbecue sauce on his face and didn't wipe it off, but walked away from the mirror acting like his appearance was fine because it had been on there for days? What should he do? Wipe the sauce off! The same is true in spiritual things! If we are honest in our study, when we behold a stain of sin which we have possibly been practicing for years, honesty is not finding an excuse to leave it there but doing what God commands to clean our life up.

### **Application To Self**

Did you ever study the Bible, or listen to a sermon and hear a passage of Scripture or series of Scriptures which applied specifically to you but you didn't make the application to yourself but thought, "Boy, I sure am glad so-in-so is here because they really needed that!"? Friend, it is possible they did need that, but did I need that too? If we are honest in our study we will first apply it to self. Paul wrote Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:16, "Take heed unto thyself,

and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee." In 2 Corinthians 13, Paul reminds the brethren that all the time they were spending in examining Paul as to whether or not he was a genuine, bonafide apostle or not they had forgotten someone, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves." Friend, it wasn't until the prophet Nathan told David, "Thou art the man" in 2 Samuel 12:7 that David got the point that he was the one Nathan was making reference to in the short parable he taught to convince David of his sin he had committed with Bathsheba. David surely thought this story would not apply to him and even pronounced sentence upon the other! David's anger that was kindled against "the man" (v. 5) was now changed as he took a good and honest look at himself. "And David said unto Nathan I have sinned against the Lord."

### **Sincerity**

Sincerity in study is most important. Sincerity is an interesting word. When Jesus stated in the sermon on the mount, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God," the word pure comes from the same root word from which we get our word *sincerity* and it means without wax. It has the idea of a sculptor who is shaping out a rock and makes a mistake and sticks wax in to gloss the thing over. You see, the idea from the spiritual standpoint is, its sincerity, without wax, there's not a flaw in it, it's real, it's not something glossed over.

Sincerity in study involves putting that which is studied to action. Jesus said in John 14:15, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." Friend, if we sincerely love the Lord, then we will keep what he says to be true. The epitome of insincerity is hypocrisy. This individual only pretends to love God and his brethren for when opportunity arises, the behavior is such which violates the previous so-called pure activity. Remember, sincerity is without wax. If we love the truth we will practice it purely. Isn't it interesting what the good and honest heart of Matthew 13 which received the word of God properly did? ". . . Which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty"(v.23). If I am sincere in my study I will actively exercise God's commands to bear fruit of what I have read and understood. I will be holy in my manner of life. I will be kind in my speech, always having it seasoned with salt not gossiping nor slandering another's good name. I will be reverent in worship. I will not play like I'm a Christian but I will be truly committed to the Lord, remembering and applying what I've studied. Remember, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3:17). I am reminded of what Joshua bid the people of God during his day in his farewell address in Joshua 24:14, "Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord."

## Open Mindedness

The final point I would like for us to consider is the importance of being open minded. I heard a preacher say one time that we don't need to be so open minded that our brains fall out. I emphatically agree. There is a limit to our open mindedness, for we must be lovers of truth and haters of every wicked way. But there is a need for open mindedness in study of the Bible. The apostle Paul spoke of matters of indifference in Romans 14 and he stated that each must be persuaded in his own mind (v. 5). In these matters, we move by faith and not by doubt (v. 23). As I study on these matters of indifference or opinion, I need to certainly have conviction, moving by faith, but I must exercise open mindedness in my study recognizing that it was solely a matter of opinion. Suppose I was not open minded. I might bind my opinion on another thus causing that brother to stumble or fall which is a specific violation of Romans 14:21. I have witnessed brethren being so dogmatic in their convictions on various matters of indifference that they weren't open minded enough to receive those who differed with their matter of judgment. Paul says in Romans 14:3, "Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him." When studying matters of indif-

ference we should be open minded enough to consider our conviction in light of the Scriptures as well as our brothers in light of the Scriptures that we may receive one another consistent with what Romans 14 teaches.

Those who submit to the Lord must be poor in spirit as already stated in this article. Thus, they cannot be arrogant. Many a close minded people exemplify this kind of attitude. They will not open their minds up to see the truth even in matters of doctrine. Jesus spoke of those in his day who had ears dull of hearing and eyes they have closed (Matt. 13:15). They were not open minded to the truth but were set in their Jewish ways. When we close our hearts to the truth, we shut ourselves off from every opportunity of absorbing lessons which will course our path to heaven and open our hearts up to prejudice and stereotyping.

I close with the words of Jesus in John 5:39, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."

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*1101 Gallatin St., Ravenswood, West Virginia*

## Field Reports



**South Bloomfield, Ohio:** The church that meets at South Bloomfield has been working to establish a congregation in this area of northern Pickaway County. We currently do not have our own building and are meeting in the town Municipal Building. South Bloomfield is strategically located about 15 miles south of Columbus which is rapidly growing. This area has been in need of a faithful congregation and we believe this community can benefit greatly by our presence. Right now we are a small congregation and have as immediate aims to increase faithful membership to the point where we have adequate faithful men to ordain elders. We are working to establish our presence in this area through advertisements, letters to area churches, and door to door. Our door to door work is currently underway in the South Bloomfield municipality. The goal of this work is to visit every home in the community (pop. about 800). In addition, we fellowship with the congregation meeting in Mexico and would like to periodically submit field reports from brother Rogelio Reynoso and the saints' work there.

If you are visiting the South Bloomfield or Columbus area, please come and visit. We meet at 5023 S. Union St. (Municipal Building). **Mark Garner, 525 Elm Ave., Circleville, OH 43113.**

## Preachers Needed

**Elk Fork, West Virginia (near Middlebourne, WV):** The congregation at Elk Fork is looking for a preacher to work on a full-time basis. They have a rural congregation of approximately 75 members. It is desired that this individual take a leadership role in personal work. Wages of \$32,600 per year/two weeks of vacation/one week for attending lectures or similar events/two gospel meets per year are part of the working agreement at this time. Housing is not provided. The starting date is February 1, 1998. If interested, please contact Elk Fork Church of Christ, c/o W.F. Ferrell, Rt. 1, Box 185, Middlebourne, WV 26149 (304-758-4463).

**Morrilton, Arkansas:** A full-time gospel preacher is needed for this congregation that averages 35-40 in attendance. Interested party must be able to secure some support. Inquiries may be directed to Westside Church of Christ, 1218 W. Childress St., Morrilton, AR 72110, Email, wssexton @IPA.net.

**Indianapolis, Indiana:** The Lafayette Heights church is looking for a preacher to start working with them in August 1998. They are a group of about 130 members with two elders located on the west side of Indianapolis. If you are interested, please contact Ron Capps (317-856-6827), recapps@in.net or Ron Walker (317-856-6380), rwalker2@prodigy.net.

