

# THE BASICS OF PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

## PART ONE: THE INTRODUCTION

### INTRODUCING THE BIBLE<sup>1</sup>

*The Bible contains: the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be saved, and practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveller's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword and the Christian's charter. Here too, Heaven is opened and the gates of Hell disclosed. Christ is its grand subject, our good its design, and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently and prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure. It is given you here in this life, will be opened at the judgment, and is established forever. It involves the highest responsibility, will reward the greatest labour, and will condemn all who trifle with its sacred contents.*

### SHORT SYNOPSIS OF THE SCRIPTURES

1. The Bible contains 66 books, divided into two segments: The Old Testament (39 Books); and The New Testament (27 Books).<sup>2</sup>
2. The term "Bible" simply means "book" which is why publishers often include the title "The Holy Bible" (The Holy Book).
3. The Bible was written by over 40 different authors who wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. These writers were from all different walks of life E.G. shepherds, farmers, tent-makers, physicians, fishermen, priests, philosophers and kings.
4. The Bible was originally written in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic and Koine (common) Greek.
5. The Bible was written on three different continents: Asia, Africa and Europe.
6. The Bible is made up of many different genres: narrative (stories), poetry, wisdom, prophecy, gospels, epistles, and apocalypse.
7. The Bible also includes many different literary devices: parables, metaphors, anecdotes, rhetoric, hyperbole, illustrations, symbolism, personification, acrostics, alliterations, idioms, paradox, parallelism, types, and much more.
8. The Bible was written over a period of approximately 1500 years. The 66 books of the Bible were "canonised" around 300AD.<sup>3</sup> The first English translation of the Bible was produced by John Wycliffe in 1382. The Bible was first printed in 1454 by Johannes Gutenberg, and was the first book ever printed on the press.

Organisation of Bible Books	
<b>The Law (Torah/Pentateuch)</b>	Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
<b>Old Testament Narrative</b>	Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther
<b>Wisdom Literature</b>	Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon
<b>Major Prophets</b>	Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel
<b>Minor Prophets</b>	Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

<sup>1</sup> This paragraph is found at the beginning of all Bibles produced by the Gideon's International.

<sup>2</sup> "Testament" refers to a "statement of belief, a covenant, agreement."

<sup>3</sup> "Canonisation" refers to the process of identifying the divinely inspired writings and bringing them together into one book, the Bible.

<b>New Testament Narrative</b>	Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts
<b>Pauline Epistles</b>	Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon
<b>General Epistles</b>	Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1,2,3 John, Jude
<b>Apocalyptic Epistle</b>	Revelation

## FIVE GOALS OF PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

1. *Transformation.* True spiritual transformation comes by “*renewing the mind*” in the Word of God (Romans 12:1-2). Interacting with God’s Word privately will produce profound change within and without. Growth and maturity as a Christian is only possible when we are “tutored” by the Scriptures. The ultimate goal of Bible Study is to be like Christ (Romans 8:29).
2. *Fellowship with God.* There is a precious and unrivalled intimacy found when a believer embarks upon a private journey of study into God’s Word. It is in this secret place of prayer and “digging” that great gems of truth are discovered, and new heights of intimacy are experienced. It is God’s great delight that we know Him deeply (Jeremiah 9:23-24).
3. *Understanding God’s Message.* The Bible is God’s revealed Word to mankind. It is essential that the Christian “*rightly divides*” this book and understands what God (and the human authors) were seeking to communicate. Paul instructed Timothy to “*study*” the Word so that he might “cut” (divide, interpret) it correctly.
4. *Life Application.* Studying the Bible is not an end in and of itself. It is the means to transformation of the mind (see point 1) and the life. James commanded the believers to “*be doers of the word, and not hearers only*” (James 1:22). Jesus said, “*Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!*” (Luke 11:28). Personal Bible Study must have a practical application otherwise it is simply knowledge which puffs up. It is essential that time is given to applying the truths which have been studied into everyday life.
5. *Discernment.* Knowing what is true is just as important as discerning what is not. Personal Bible Study sharpens the believers ability to recognise what is right and what is wrong. The writer of Hebrews said, “*For everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil*” (Hebrews 5:13-14)

## BLESSINGS ASSOCIATED WITH STUDYING THE SCRIPTURES

1. Deepens your understanding of the Scriptures.
2. Sharpens your powers of discernment.
3. Deepens your knowledge and understanding of God.
4. Enables you to disciple others and therefore fulfil the Great Commission.
5. Aids in memorising the Scriptures.
6. Personal discovery of “nuggets of truth” (Illustration: gold panning).
7. Deepens your prayer life and causes you to pray more “effectively” (in accord with His will).
8. Gives you new appreciation for those who teach the Scriptures.
9. Provides strength in times of trial and temptation.
10. Deepens fellowship with other believers who also pursue truth.

## TYPES OF BIBLE INTERACTION

Some Christians think Bible reading is the same thing as Bible study, but these are not the same at all. The following chart should help you identify the different types of interactions we can have with the Scriptures. Each of the following play an important role in the life of a Christian.

BIBLE INTERACTIONS	
<b>Auditory Interactions</b> <i>"The Spa"</i>	This refers to all "hearing" of the Scriptures and includes: audio Bible, listening to teaching/preaching, listening to Scripture put to music, etc. This is called <i>"The Spa"</i> because it requires no direct output on the part of the listener. The message has been prepared, and the listener can simply "get in" and enjoy.
<b>Devotional Reading</b> <i>"The Daily Shower"</i>	This refers to what is sometimes called a "quiet time" and is primarily reading the text and being "washed" by it. Typically this type of interaction is relatively short in terms of time. This is called the <i>"The Daily Shower"</i> because it does not take very long and requires minimal effort. It is a "light wash" and rinse but extremely important in maintaining spiritual "hygiene".
<b>Meditative Reading</b> <i>"The Bath"</i>	This usually refers to a prolonged period of reading which includes allocated pauses to consider deeply what has been read. This is often (not always) enjoyed atop a mountain or by a quiet lake away from the noise of everyday life. Typically this type of interaction requires a reasonable portion of time. This is referred to as <i>"The Bath"</i> because it is a soaking - A time to stop and think.
<b>Basic Bible Study</b> <i>"The Swimming Pool"</i>	This refers to a specific time set aside to study and understand a topic or text of Scripture. This interaction is the focus of this series and requires effort, study skills, and dedicated time and space. This is called <i>"The Swimming Pool"</i> because it is larger than the other bodies of water and requires more effort to explore the area. Energy is required if the student wishes to plummet the depths and come to terms with what the Bible is communicating.
<b>Exhaustive Bible Study</b> <i>"The Ocean"</i>	This refers to the most exhaustive form of Bible study and would most commonly be associated with pastors, teachers and lecturers. This interaction demands honed study skills, training, time management, significant reading, and intensive "wrestling" with the text. This is referred to as <i>"The Ocean"</i> because it is very hard work. Fighting fatigue, avoiding the rocks, swimming against the tide at times are just some of the difficulties associated with this mammoth task.

**Important Note:** God communicated truth in a book. It is essential that God's people learn to read, and read well. Listening to God's Word being read is good and important, but it cannot replace the individual responsibility of every believer to read the Scriptures for themselves. What if I can't read? Seek help. Learn. Every individual is required to hone skills in their working life, why should they not invest time and energy in this all-important aspect of their spiritual life?

One of the first things missionaries do when they arrive on a foreign field is teach the people how to read and write. This will ensure that they can pick up the Scriptures for themselves in due course, and learn independently.

## PRE-REQUISITES FOR EFFECTIVE BIBLE STUDY

- 1. The Holy Spirit.** The only way a person can read, understand, and apply God's Word is if the Holy Spirit lives within and reveals the truth to them. Even the secular "Bible scholars" cannot comprehend the Scriptures. Paul wrote, *"The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned"* (1 Corinthians 2:14). Ezra the Scribe was an outstanding Bible student and he wrote, *"I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation"* (Psalm 119:99).
- 2. The Ability to Read (and write).** As mentioned before, it is essential that the Bible Student can pick up the Bible and read it. A Christian who struggles in this area should consult their pastor in choosing an appropriate translation to aid them in studying the Scripture.
- 3. Submission to the Scriptures.** The Christian Bible Student must recognise and submit to the absolute authority of the Scriptures. This is the only way he or she will grow and change.

4. *Desire to Study.* The reason most Christians do not study the Bible is because they do not have a desire for it. They are satisfied with a shallow Christianity and would rather pursue other endeavours. However, the Spirit-filled believer longs to know the Lord in deeper ways and has an unquenchable thirst to grow through the Scriptures.
5. *Time to Study.* Another reason many Christians do not study the Bible is because it requires dedicated time away from other pursuits. This means the individual must be organised and plan specific blocks of time for study. It is hard to do any kind of serious study in less than 30 minutes which means it must be planned and then actioned. Bible study requires discipline.
6. *Personal Copy of the Scriptures.* It probably goes without saying that the Bible student will require their own copy of the Scriptures. If you do not own a Bible, please see your pastor. A discussion about suitable translations for study will be had a little later in our study.
7. *The Ideal Environment for Study.* This will be spoken about in some detail shortly.

## THE IDEAL ENVIRONMENT FOR BIBLE STUDY

God has designed us with the desire to “categorise” or “compartmentalise” our lives. We appreciate order, and so we should, because we are made in the image of God. We build garages to house our vehicles, retaining walls to define boundaries in our gardens, clearly-defined rooms in our homes so that there is organisation and structure.

One thing that is lacking in our homes is a sanctified space for Bible Study. This is a sad commentary on our spiritual lives. We have a dedicated entertainment area which houses the TV, playstation, sound system etc. We have devoted floorspace to a dining table where our physical bodies are nourished. We could not live comfortably without a place to rest and sleep. However, because we do not see the value of Bible study or have never thought about it before, we have not allocated any room for this all-important task.

### The following is recommended for the would-be Bible Student:

1. **Allocate space** in your home specifically designed for Bible study. Consider the following when preparing the area:
  - Is there sufficient room for a desk and small bookcase?
  - Is the area well-lit? I.E. natural lighting or electric?
  - Is it away from distractions? I.E. television, technology, children’s play area, outside activities, etc.
  - Is there a powerpoint nearby for computer, lamp, etc.?
  - Is there wall space nearby for a cork board or framed verse?
  - Is it a generally quiet location I.E. not next to hot water service or air conditioner.
  - Is there room to kneel? (Not essential but advantageous).
2. **Allocate some funds** to purchase items needed to enhance Bible study. Consider the following “shopping list”:
  - A desk with draws (draws are needed to organise paperwork, writing implements, etc. and to be easily packed up and uncluttered).
  - A small bookcase to house some basic study tools (more on these later).
  - An LED lamp suitable for reading (a lamp with a flexible head is preferable).
  - A comfortable padded chair (an office chair on wheels is helpful).
  - A carefully-selected verse of Scripture laminated or framed above the desk.
  - A good selection of writing implements: fine liners, pacers, highlighters, etc.
  - Several lecture notepads (ideally ones where pages are perforated) and a journal.
  - A trustworthy translation of the Scripture in easy-to-read font size (not a study Bible with notes - more on this later).
  - Tools of the trade (specific resources for study - this will be covered later).
  - A computer and printer nearby which is connected to the internet (not essential but certainly beneficial). It is best if these devices are located elsewhere.
  - A coaster for your hot beverage (highly recommended during the study time).
  - A tissue box.

3. **Allocate time** to engage in this Bible study activity every week. Consider the following when planning your study time:
  - When throughout the day is my mind most engaged?
  - When can I set aside at least 30 minutes of uninterrupted time to this activity?
  - What other activities need to be reduced to make this a priority? I.E. watching television, playing sport, etc.
  - Who can I ask to keep me accountable about this Bible study plan?
  
4. **Prepare clear objectives** for your Bible Study. Consider the following when planning your Bible study:
  - What topic or text will form the basis of my studies (we will discuss this in more detail)?
  - What method of study will I use (more on this soon)?
  - What boundaries will I put in place to stop myself going on “rabbit trails”?
  - Who will I share my findings with? (an accountability partner).

## PROJECTS FOR GROWTH

1. Read through these notes entirely. What have you learned? What changes are you going to make? Are you committed to starting or sustaining a regular personal Bible study?

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2. What are the greatest hindrances in your life to engaging in regular personal Bible study? How will you overcome these obstacles? What help do you need?

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3. List some of the topics/Bible texts that you would like to study for yourself?

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4. Read the following verses from the Bible this week and write them out below in preparation for our next study.

Psalm 118:24 \_\_\_\_\_

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Isaiah 53:5 \_\_\_\_\_

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Matthew 18:20 \_\_\_\_\_

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Matthew 7:1 \_\_\_\_\_

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# THE BASICS OF PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

## PART TWO: THEO-CENTRIC STUDY MODEL

### REVIEW OF PROJECTS FOR GROWTH

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### LEARNING TO DISCOVER GOD

Paul's prayer for the Colossians was that they might *"walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God"* (Colossians 1:10).

*"The danger is that we know more about the Scriptures than the God of the Scriptures."*<sup>4</sup>

One of the great tragedies in Bible Study courses today is that people are taught how to read, research, and interpret the Scriptures without developing the most critical aspect - the ability to observe the character of God in order to be more like Him.

The leadership at MCCBC are not concerned with rearing "spiritual academics", but rather in developing a people who are intimately acquainted with their God.

There are many different Bible Study Methods: Topical Bible studies, chapter summaries, book surveys, verse-by-verse analysis, the thematic method, word studies, character studies, and devotional studies. Each of these have great value and require different approaches. However, I am less concerned about the *type* of study we do, as the *overarching purpose* for the study.

The highest aim in all Scriptural interactions is to grow in the knowledge of God and understand what He is communicating to us through His Word, so that we can be obedient to it. Having this mentality changes how we study, why we study, and the applications that we draw from our discoveries.

#### The Detective Illustration:

Like a detective, every Christian should enter the biblical scene seeking to locate the main character (God). Look for His "fingerprints" and "DNA" on every page. Ask questions about who He is, why He showed up in this scene, and what His intentions were.

The main character in all of biblical revelation is God. Thus the majority of our time spent in the study of Scripture should be unpacking deeper truths about Him. This is what I call the "Theo-centric (God-centered) Study Model".

### BEGINNING WITH THEOLOGY PROPER

Theology Proper is a category of study concerned with understanding the nature of God. In my opinion, all Bible study must begin with this basic (and profound) category. Only as we come to terms with the character of God can we understand what He is saying, doing, and thinking.

The following table is an attempt to "organise" some of the truths about God revealed in the Scriptures. This can then be used as a reference tool for identifying His attributes as you read the Bible.

We are beginning with this "Theo-centric Study Model" because it is the one unchanging element in Scriptural interpretation. God's character never changes. His interactions do, but never His person. He is the "immutable hermeneutic."

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<sup>4</sup> Howard G. Hendricks, *Living by the Book - Video Series*.

Attribute/Characteristic	Definition	Scriptural Evidence
Incomprehensible	God cannot be fully understood. The finite cannot contain (or grasp) the infinite.	Job 11:7-8; Isaiah 40:18; Psalm 145:3; Job 26:14, Isaiah 55:8-9; Romans 11:33-34; Psalm 139:6, 17-18; Psalm 147:5;
Knowable	While God cannot be understood comprehensively, He can be known truly, personally, and sufficiently. God has revealed Himself in the person of Jesus Christ and our spiritual lives are dependent on knowing Him.	2 Peter 1:2-3; Jeremiah 9:23-24; John 14:7; John 17:3; 1 John 5:20.
Spiritual (spirit, incorporeal)	Without a human body, invisible, alive, personal, infinite, unlimited by dimensional restrictions (space, time).  (Discuss: anthropomorphisms - Deut.33:27, 2 Chron. 16:9, etc.)	John 4:24; Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17;
Immanent	God pervades and sustains the universe, yet He is always distinct from it. He is everywhere, yet not in everything. He is personally and intimately involved, yet distinct (Antithesis: Mother Nature).	Proverbs 5:21; Psalm 33:13-14; Romans 11:34-36
Personal (personality of God)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Self-consciousness</li> <li>2. Intelligence or Thinking Mentality</li> <li>3. Self-Determination or Will</li> <li>4. Sensibility or Emotion</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Exodus 3:14</li> <li>2. Isaiah 40:12-14</li> <li>3. Psalm 115:3; Isaiah 46:10</li> <li>4. Genesis 6:6; Proverbs 6:16</li> </ol>
Self-Existence	God exists independently of any cause. God's existence is from Himself.	Exodus 6:3; Exodus 3:14
Eternality	This includes three concepts: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The nature of God is without beginning or end.</li> <li>2. God is free from all succession of time.</li> <li>3. God contains within Himself the cause of time.</li> </ol>	Genesis 21:33; Psalm 90:1-2; Isaiah 40:28; 1 Timothy 1:17; Revelation 1:8.
Unity	This includes two concepts: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There is only one God (numerically-speaking)</li> <li>2. God's nature is indivisible I.E. He is not a composite and cannot be divided into parts.</li> </ol>	Deuteronomy 6:4; 4:35; Isaiah 44:6-8; Isaiah 45:5-6; 1 Corinthians 8:4-6; John 5:44
Infinity/Immensity	God is without limitations. He has no bounds or restrictions (except for those associated with His character). He is transcendent. Infinity in relation to time = eternity. Infinity in relation to space = omnipresence. Infinity in relation to power = omnipotence. Infinity in relation to knowledge = omniscience.	1 Kings 8:27; Acts 17:24-28; Deuteronomy 33:27
Immutability	God is not subject to change. He is invariable, not only in His being, but also in His perfections.	Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; Psalm 33:11; Malachi 3:6; James 1:17; Isaiah 14:24.

Attribute/Characteristic	Definition	Scriptural Evidence
Omnipresence	God is everywhere present, but not in everything (pantheism).	Psalms 139:7-12; Jeremiah 23:23-24; Acts 17:24-28
Omniscience	God knows all things perfectly. He sees and hears everything,	Psalms 147:5; Job 37:16; 1 John 3:20; Exodus 3:7; Psalm 34:15
Omnipotence	God is all-powerful - His power is unlimited, and He has the ability to do whatever He pleases.	Psalms 68:14; Psalm 91:1-2; 2 Corinthians 6:18.
Sovereignty	God is the highest, the chief, and has absolute supremacy. He is the single, authoritative ruler of all.	1 Samuel 2:2-8; Job 42:2; Psalm 103:19; Daniel 4:31-32; Isaiah 46:9-10
Holiness	God is absolutely pure. He is distinct from all others in this regard. Existing without defilement, impurity or vice.	Psalms 99:5; Isaiah 6:3; 1 Peter 1:15-16; Revelation 15:4.
Righteous/Just  Sub-categories: • Jealousy • Wrath	The righteousness of God means that He always thinks and acts in a manner corresponding to His perfect character. God is righteous and just and therefore the “standard” of morality in all matters.	Isaiah 61:8; Job 34:12; Psalm 9:7-8; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9
Goodness  Sub-categories: • Benevolence • Mercy • Grace	The goodness of God is the expression of both His love and righteousness. It is that aspect of God’s character concerned with promoting “happiness” for His creatures. 1. Benevolence - disposition to promote kindness. 2. Mercy/Loving-kindness - compassion towards the unworthy. 3. Grace - giving of good gifts to the undeserving.	1. Matthew 6:26; Psalm 145:15-16. 2. Psalm 103:8; Luke 1:78 3. Ephesians 1:4-6; Titus 2:11-14; Ephesians 2:8-9.
Love	God is the author of love. His love always seeks the absolute and perfect well-being of the object loved, regardless of the personal cost associated with loving the individual.  (Important note: God’s love cannot act against His holiness.)	Romans 5:8; 1 John 3:1; Galatians 2:20; John 3:16; Psalm 86:15;
Truth/Veracity/ Faithfulness	God is absolutely dependable, without falseness of any kind. He is reliable, accurate, correct, factual, and real.	Exodus 34:6; Psalm 19:9; Isaiah 25:1; Micah 7:20; Revelation 16:7
Wisdom	The intellectual element of His character. Wisdom is both an intellectual and moral quality. It is not merely His knowledge (omniscience), but also how it is used (omnipotence).	1 Timothy 1:17; Psalm 104:24; Proverbs 3:19; Jeremiah 10:12; Daniel 2:20-22; Romans 11:33.

### THE CHARACTER OF GOD Vs. THE INTERACTIONS OF GOD

Learning WHO God is in contrast to WHAT God does will help you immensely in your study of the Scriptures. For example: The Bible promises that the nature (character of God) never changes. However, throughout the Scripture we observe that the ways (interactions) of God (though bound by His character) are wide-ranging.



The God of the Old Testament is the same God of the New Testament. The difficulty we often face in interpreting the Bible, is that we have not learned to differentiate God's character (changeless) from His ways (interactions, laws, conversations, etc.).

## PROJECTS FOR GROWTH

1. Read Psalm 103. Identify and list below the attributes of God contained in this chapter.

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2. Read Psalm 139. Identify and list below the attributes of God contained in this chapter.

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3. Using the list of God's attributes you have discovered in Psalm 103 and Psalm 139, what truths can you apply to your everyday life as a Christian?

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# THE BASICS OF PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

## PART THREE: PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

### INTRODUCTORY EXERCISE:

Read the following verses ALONE without the surrounding context.

Discuss what you think the text might be saying. Draw some applications.

1. Philippians 4:19 \_\_\_\_\_
2. Matthew 18:20 \_\_\_\_\_
3. Psalm 118:24 \_\_\_\_\_

Now read the passages again with the surrounding context and see if the meaning changes.

### DEFINING “HERMENEUTICS”

Hermeneutics is the branch of knowledge (science) that deals with interpretation, especially of the Bible. The term finds its origin in the Greek “*hermeneutikos*”, which means “interpreting, understanding, expounding, deciphering, comprehending”.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF PROPER HERMENEUTICS

Using sound principles for interpreting the Bible is crucial for the genuine disciple of Christ. Our desire is to know what the Scripture says and what God is communicating through His Word. Employing proper hermeneutics helps to ensure that we are basing our interpretations on the truth as God has revealed it, while avoiding error to the greatest degree possible.

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

Every false teacher- either intentionally or unintentionally- is guilty of straying from proper biblical hermeneutics. This leads to a misrepresentation of the character of God, resulting in destructive theology. This is why so much time is being dedicated to understanding theology proper and the principles of biblical hermeneutics. If we follow some basic guidelines when reading and studying the Bible, we will not go off on tangents and end up in erroneous doctrine.

### GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Revelation:** From the word “reveal”. It is the act of God whereby He unveils or uncovers truth which man through his own intellect and reason cannot discover for himself. “Revelation can be defined as ‘God’s supernatural disclosure to human beings of truth they would not otherwise know and are incapable of discovering on their own.’ This communication may be either oral or written. Revelation is usually understood as God’s written communication to humankind.”<sup>5</sup>

**Inspiration:** “Inspiration must be carefully defined because of the varied uses of this term and the wrong ideas about inspiration being promoted today, ideas that are inconsistent with what the Bible itself teaches regarding inspiration. Inspiration may be defined as ‘God’s superintendence of the human authors of Scripture so that using their own individual personalities, they composed and recorded without error His revelation to man in the words of the original autographs.’”<sup>6</sup>

**Illumination:** The divine influence of God’s Spirit that helps individuals understand the truth of God contained in the Bible. Illumination is something that comes directly from the Holy Spirit and is available to every believer. See 1 Corinthians 2:10,14. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, the believer is able to understand the things of God; they are to be spiritually understood.

**Interpretation:** The process of a reader seeking to understand the meaning of a scripture passage.

**Application:** The process of a reader putting into practice the truths and principles he/she has learned in the Bible.

<sup>5</sup> Taken from [https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don\\_stewart/don\\_stewart\\_368.cfm](https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/don_stewart_368.cfm)

<sup>6</sup> Taken from <https://bible.org/seriespage/bible-inspired-revelation-god>

## SCHOOLS OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

### **Allegorical Interpretation:**

The allegorical school of interpretation postulates that beneath each verse of Scripture is a “deeper”, symbolic meaning only discovered through subjective reasoning. In other words, there is hidden spiritual meaning that transcends the literal sense of a sacred text. This approach was developed by the Greeks (and even employed by some of the early church fathers) who sought to give Scripture charm for unbelieving minds by allegorising the text.

The great tragedy of allegorical interpretation is that it is subjective. The student can manipulate the text and make it a law unto himself. Furthermore, it obscures the truth of Scripture by imposing eisegesis in the place of exegesis.

### **Liberal Interpretation:**

Sadly, this has become the most prominent school of interpretation in the “church” today. The National Council of Churches and The World Council of Churches hold to this interpretive approach. This view believes that human intellect is adequate in itself to select between what is acceptable and what is erroneous in Scripture. It is easy to identify people in this camp because they usually say something like *“But that’s a matter of your own interpretation.”*

Regarding liberal interpretation, one commentator wrote, *“The final and supreme authority is transferred from God to the throne room of the human mind.”*

The liberal interpretation approach is rationalistic, arrogant, and simply replaces the revealed truth of God with palatable “truths” for modern man.

### **Devotional Interpretation:**

This view of interpreting Scripture regards the Bible as a rich book primarily given to nourish the spiritual life of the believer. Emphasis is placed on the edifying aspect of Scripture. While seemingly noble, it reduces the Bible to little more than a “What’s in it for me” book of self-helps!

The devotional interpretation approach is incredibly self-centered and happily avoids difficult passages which require disciplined study. Because it is so application-focussed, the Christian does not come to terms with what the Scripture is actually saying, but is only concerned about being built up.

### **The Grammatical-Historical Normative Interpretation:**

This is sometimes called the “Literal Interpretation approach. In this discipline of interpretation the meaning of Scripture is deemed to be the basic, customary, socially acknowledged designation of the terms used at the time they were penned. The literal sense of the document is derived from the basic meaning of the words in the context of their otherwise usage in the time they were written, i.e. how were these words used at the time of writing and what is their historical context?

- The GHN method of interpretation is the usual secular practice for interpreting literature today, both present and ancient. In other words, this is the natural, reasonable method of interpretation and it stands up to all scrutiny in the academic constructs of society.
- The GHN method exercises a control on the imagination of the interpreter. He or she cannot cavalierly say, “I think this is what God is speaking to me from this passage” if indeed what they conclude is not what the author intended for them to conclude from the passage. It is a disciplined objective method, not a subjective undisciplined method of understanding a written document.

Martin Luther, speaking of the GHN method said, “That is the true method of interpretation which puts Scripture alongside of Scripture in a right and proper way.”

John Calvin wrote, *“It is the first business of an interpreter to let his author say what he does say, instead of attributing to him what we think he ought to say.”*

## PRINCIPLES OF HERMENEUTICS

All efforts to interpret and “rightly divide” the Scriptures require some basic principles. Most of these principles are not exclusive to the Bible but common to all forms of literary study, and can be applied in a broader sense.

As Bible-believing Christians, we acknowledge that God has spoken to us unambiguously. Furthermore, we assert that, while there are many applications, there is only one “right interpretation” of any given biblical passage, and this is the meaning God intended when He inspired (“breathed-out”) His Word into the human author.

**Principle #1: THE AUTHORSHIP PRINCIPLE.** Interpretation must be based on the author’s intention of meaning and not the reader. This means we must get into the author’s context, historically, grammatically, culturally and the literary forms and conventions the author was working in. To be able to do this some good Bible study tools are needed since we are 2000 years or more removed from the biblical authors and their context is very different than ours.

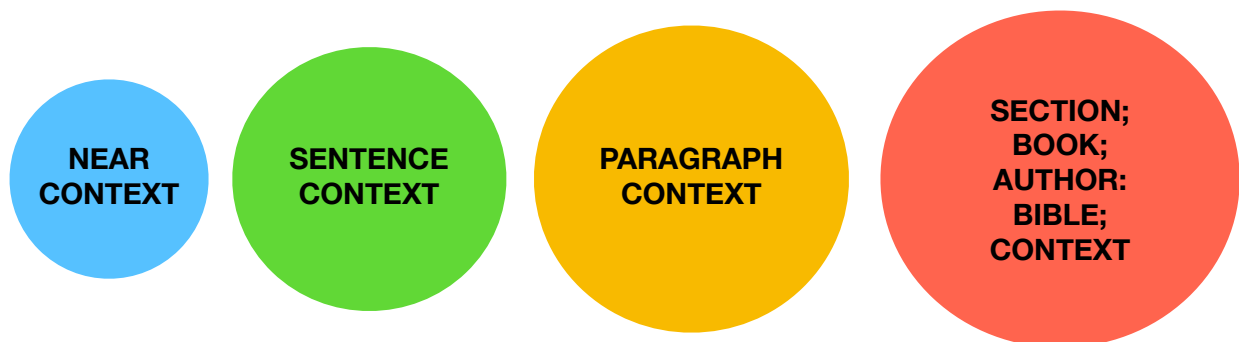
The first tool that any one should get is a good study Bible with notes that explain historical and cultural background information. Most major Bible translations come in editions with these types of notes. Other helpful tools include: Bible handbooks, Old and New Testament surveys, lexical aids, and general commentaries.

**Principle #2: THE CONTEXTUAL PRINCIPLE.** Interpretations must be done in the context of the passage. EXAMPLE: What does the following mean? “It was a ball.” Well, the answer depends on the context. Consider the following sentences: We went to the dance last night, in fact it was so formal “it was a ball.” As I was walking along the golf course I spotted something small and white in the tall grass, “it was a ball.” I had so much fun at the game night, “it was a ball.” In each case the word ball means something different. Therefore, context determines meaning!

The nearest context must given the most weight in interpretation. First, there is the near context of the sentence, then the paragraph, then the section and then the book and even author. The interpreter should look at all these circles of context to be able to correctly assess the meaning.

Far too often people try to interpret a verse by itself in isolation without looking at the context itself. For example, consider the verse Revelation 3:20 which is sometimes used as an illustration for evangelism. “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me” (Rev 3:20; ESV). If this is all you looked at, it would be easy to understand the verse in terms of someone responding to Jesus at the point of salvation. But the context in the preceding verse (v. 19) is talking about discipline of those whom Jesus loves, which would most naturally refer to believers. Also, in looking at the larger paragraph the passage is to a church (Rev 3:14, 22). The verse is really addressed to believers who need to repent from their sin and return to right fellowship with God.

“A text without context is a pretext for a “proof text.” By “proof text” is meant the abuse of a single verse or phrase taken out of context to “prove” a particular view. The Word of God is a perfect unit. The Scriptures cannot be broken; they all hang together, a perfect unity. The Bible must be interpreted within the framework of the whole.



**Principle #3: THE LITERAL INTERPRETATION PRINCIPLE.** Interpret the Bible literally (or normally) allowing for normal use of figurative language. Take the plain meaning of the text at face value. When the literal does not make sense you probably have a figure of speech.

For example, Isaiah 55:12 states the trees of the field will clap their hands. Since trees do not have hands or clap this must be a figure of speech. Look for words such as “like” or “as” which can also communicate a figure of speech. Figures of speech and illustrations give the Bible a powerful and colourful means of expression. They are an important part of the normal expression of language.

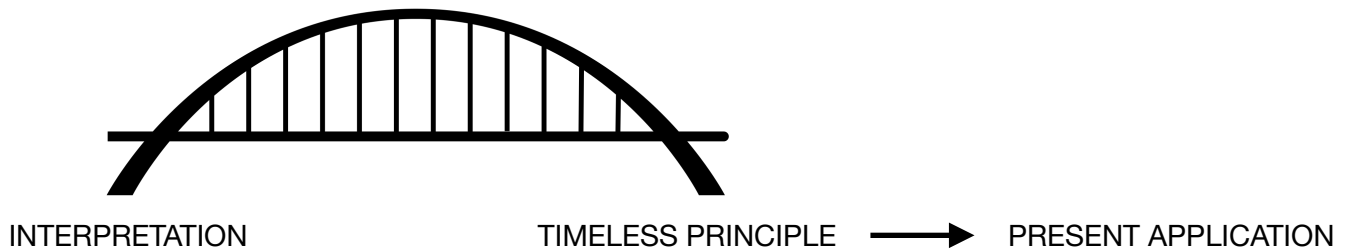
**Principle #4: THE NON-CONTRADICTION PRINCIPLE.** Use the Bible to help interpret itself. Interpret difficult passages with clear ones. This is sometimes called the law of non-contradiction. Because the Bible is God’s word, and God is true, the Bible will not contradict itself.

For example, there are clear passages that teach the doctrine of eternal security, that once a person is truly saved he or she cannot lose salvation (John 5; Rom 8). Some passages in the Bible are very hard to interpret like Hebrews 6:4-6. So I would let the overall and clear theology of the Bible influence me that a very hard passage like Hebrews 6 is not teaching that someone can lose his salvation. Also, use the New Testament to help interpret the Old Testament. This recognises the progressive nature of revelation, that is the Bible is giving more revelation on topics over time. But one must start by interpreting the Old Testament text in its context before a New Testament consideration is made.

Recommended Aids: Thompson Chain Reference Bible, The Bible Self-explained (Moody Press).

**Principle #5: THE STUDY PARAMETER PRINCIPLE.** Interpretation must be distinguished from application. While there is one interpretation that is historical, there are many applications that can be carried over to our modern context. Build an application bridge from the interpretation to the timeless principle and then to the application now. Understand and identify this transition!

For example in John 12, Mary anoints Jesus with very expensive oil. The historical context records a historical event. The interpretation relates only to what Mary did to Jesus. What about us today? An application might be that we are willing to give sacrificially for the Lord’s work and give Jesus acts of worship as Mary did. Or when Jesus states the principle in Matthew 7 to love one’s enemies it is a general command that I might apply specifically by loving a worker who undermines me or a neighbour who offends me.



**Principle #6: THE DISPENSATION PRINCIPLE (or “The Progressive Revelation Principle”)** Be sensitive to distinctions between Israel and the church and Old Covenant and New Covenant eras/requirements. Promises made to Israel in the Old Testament cannot automatically be transferred to the church in which we are a part.

For example, the land promises were given to Abraham and his descendants (Gen 12:7) but that does not include me, a 21st century (Gentile) Christian. Christians are not under the requirements of the Mosaic law (Rom 6:14). For example, in Lev 19:19 there is a command “you must not wear a garment made of two different kinds of fabric.” This was a binding command under the Mosaic law but not under the terms of the New Covenant. It is true that certain Old Testament commands repeated in the New Testament are still binding, but this is made clear by their repetition in the New Testament.

The church was formed in Acts 2 with the descent of the Holy Spirit and most direct statements to and about the church occur after that. Also, there is a future for national Israel (cf. Rom 11) in which many Old Testament promises will yet be fulfilled and certain practices of the church age will come to an end at the second coming of Jesus (such as the Lord's supper 1 Cor 11:26).

**Principle #7: THE GENRE PRINCIPLE. Be sensitive to the type of literature you are in.**

The Bible contains many different types of literature: law, narrative, wisdom, poetry, gospel, parable, epistle, and apocalyptic (Please see lesson 1 in this series). Each of these types of literature has specific features that must be considered when interpreting a text. Some of these will be examined in another study. For now we need to understand that where we are in the Bible makes a big difference on how we interpret and apply it.

**Principle #8: THE ACCOMMODATION PRINCIPLE. Be sensitive to the infinite communicating to the finite.**

The Bible is to be interpreted in view of the fact that it is an accommodation of divine truths to human minds: God the infinite communicating with man the finite. The Bible was written in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. The Bible was also created in space, in time, and in history so that man could understand it. We must be careful, then, not to push accommodating language about God and His nature to literal extremes. E.G. anthropomorphisms.

**Principle #9: THE GRAMMATICAL PRINCIPLE. It is necessary to look beyond the common language into the original at times.**

The Scripture was originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. While we have several highly accurate translations of the Bible in English, all translation involves a certain amount of interpretation on the part of the translator.

Thus, the study of word meanings, grammar, and syntax of the original languages is important for a proper understanding of the Scriptures. This does not mean every Christian must learn Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. There are many tools available today to help in this area. Some of these include: lexicons, Bible dictionaries, exegetical commentaries, concordances, etc.

**Principle #10: THE SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLE. Remember the purpose of seeking to interpret the Scriptures - to know the author and obey His revelation.**

The study and interpretation of God's Word becomes laborious and academic when the Christian forgets the spiritual principle. This final principle is not put at the end because it is of least importance, but because it puts everything before this into perspective.

Remember that prayer, sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, and a willingness to obey the revealed truth of God is crucial to interpreting the Scriptures correctly. It is essential that we approach the study of God's Word with humility and a willingness to relinquish our theological presuppositions.

**RECOMMENDED RESOURCES FOR BASIC BIBLE STUDY:**

1. A very accurate Bible translation. Recommendations: English Standard Version, New American Standard Bible, King James Version, New King James Version.
2. A good study Bible with notes. Recommendation: The MacArthur Study Bible (ESV).
3. An exhaustive concordance. Recommendation: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance.
4. Word study dictionaries (lexicons). Recommendations: Vine's Expository Dictionary, The Complete Word Study Dictionary (Zodhiates).
5. A Bible Handbook. Recommendation: Unger's Bible Handbook.
6. A Bible Atlas. Recommendations: The Moody Atlas of the Bible Lands.
7. Single Volume Bible Commentaries. Recommendations: John Gill's Exposition of the Bible, The MacArthur Bible Commentary, Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible (discernment needed), Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary (discernment needed).
8. Individual Commentaries. Recommended authors: John MacArthur, James Montgomery Boice, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, John Calvin, Warren Wiersbe, H.A. Ironside, Spiros Zodhiates.

## **TYPES OF BAD HERMENEUTICS (AN ADDENDUM)**

*The information provided in this article below was derived from the studies of Justin Peters of Justin Peters Ministries, Chris Rosebrough of Pirate Christian Radio, and a former Jehovah's Witness named Brock Weigum who is now a pastor.*

**A.) Isolationism:** Also called proof-texting, isolationism is the practice of isolating a verse of scripture from its proper context in order to change its meaning and form or support an unbiblical doctrine. For example, the Roman Catholic Church uses Matthew 16:18-19 as a proof text to show that Peter was the first Pope. Also, the Watchtower Society uses Matthew 24:45-47 as a proof text to prove that God appointed the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses as His sole "channel of communication" for the modern world. We should do our best to read and study the Bible according to context instead of proof-texting.

**B.) Spiritualising:** Reading a spiritual idea or concept into a text despite the text not supporting that spiritual idea or concept. An example would be the Watchtower Society's teaching that scriptures commanding Christians to help the poor and needy refer only to Christians preaching the gospel of salvation to the unsaved (spiritually poor). Also, some religious groups, such as Roman Catholicism and the Watchtower Society, would give a spiritual meaning to Proverbs 6:20 by teaching that the Church is the "spiritual mother" of all Christians even as God is their spiritual Father. Therefore such religious groups would require their members to strictly obey both God and the church leaders based on this spiritualisation of Proverbs 6:20.

**C.) Culturalising:** Interpreting a scripture in light of changing culture and mores. For example, liberals make the claim that most moral principles contained in the Bible were meant only for the ancient cultures that existed at the time the Bible was written and were not meant for modern cultures. Liberal pastors, such as Rob Bell and Brian McLaren, think that the Bible should be reinterpreted, and that Christianity should be revised or changed in order to accommodate the shifting cultures and generations.

**D.) Nationalising:** Reading one's own country into a warning and/or promise given specifically to the nation of Israel. Verses such as 2 Chronicles 7:14 and Psalm 33:12 are often taken out of context and applied to one's own nation instead of Israel and the Jews. Although God promises to bless or curse any nation on earth based on its righteousness or sinfulness (Psalm 9:17; Proverbs 14:34; Jeremiah 18:7-10), the majority of warnings and promises in the Bible were meant specifically for Israel and the Jews, who are the only ethnic nation on earth to officially have a covenant relationship with God.

**E.) Redefining:** Assigning new meanings to biblical terms to suit one's own theology. For example, Robert Schuller redefines sin to mean low self-esteem instead of rebellious disobedience of God's law (1 John 3:4). Likewise, the Watchtower Society defines Jesus' title "Son of God" to mean that Jesus is the first and only direct creation of Jehovah God instead of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity incarnate in the flesh. Annihilationists redefine hell as the "common grave of mankind," while liberal pastors of the seeker-friendly churches redefine hell as a disconnection from God accompanied by feelings of anxiety and depression and a lack of prosperity in the here-and-now. These views of hell are different from the biblical view of hell being the eternal punishment of the unsaved sinners under God's wrath.

**F.) Generalising:** Assuming that a historical event or promise in scripture is to be considered normative and universally applicable today. For example, many people think that, because most Christians in the book of Acts spoke in tongues when they initially received the Holy Spirit, every Christian on earth must be capable of speaking in tongues as part of salvation. Another example

would be prosperity televangelists using the story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath to teach that God will multiply a person's small donations to the church into an enormous supply that never runs out. There is much debate over the issue of tithing, but the tithing system was established as an Old Testament practice for Abraham and his descendants the Hebrews; it was not meant for today's Christians. Yet I believe Christians are still free to make sizeable donations to their church on their own accord, whether it be less than or more than ten percent. People will argue that the Bible very often generalises and paints with a broad brush, and such people are correct to some extent. The Bible does generalise on some things, but it does not generalise on everything. The Bible makes a generalisation on verses like John 3:16, Romans 3:23 and 1 John 1:7-10. We know that these scriptures universally apply to everyone because God said that everyone has sinned against Him and needs Christ for forgiveness and salvation.

**G.) Emotionalism & Experientialism:** Interpreting the Bible subjectively based on one's own emotions and experiences. People who use this method will say, "These scriptures must mean this because I feel this particular way whenever I read them," or they would say, "These scriptures must mean this because I have experienced something like this before." Human experiences are limited and our emotions flow from a heart that is deceitful and full of evil (Proverbs 28:26; Ecclesiastes 9:3; Jeremiah 17:9; Mark 7:20-23). Therefore, we must not interpret the Bible by our emotions and experiences; rather, we must interpret our emotions and experiences by the Bible that takes precedence over all.

**H.) Individualising:** Reading oneself into a text and claiming that the elements and characters in the text are about oneself. This practice is also called "narcissistic eisegesis." For example, Luke 1:28 is used by individual women to label themselves as "highly favoured" and "blessed among women" despite the fact that the context clearly refers to Mary alone, who was selected by God to be the earthly mother of the Christ. John 11:4 is often individualised by sick people who think they cannot die of their sickness, but Jesus was referring specifically to Lazarus who died and was resurrected. People who individualise scriptures often compare themselves to Bible characters, such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samson, David, Solomon, Jesus, one of the OT prophets, one of the NT apostles or any one of the female characters. Should we allegorise specific events and circumstances in the lives of those Bible characters to establish our own moral or philosophical principles for success? No we should not, because God has a unique purpose for each and every person's life, different from that of the Bible characters. God did not call everyone to part the Red Sea like Moses, or slay giant people as David did, or rule over an entire nation like Solomon, or walk on water or raise dead people back to life as Jesus did. Each Christian should interpret the Bible objectively, have faith in God and live out their life according to God's unique calling for their own lives.

**I.) Numerological Eisegesis:** Taking various numbers in the Bible out of their context and applying irrelevant meanings to those numbers in order to teach unbiblical principles or ideas. For example, Harold Camping misapplied numerology in order to formulate his false prophecies pertaining to 1994 and 2011. It is true that certain numbers, such as seven (7), carry specific meanings in the Bible, but we must avoid applying unbiblical meanings to such numbers.

**J.) Assuming a False Premise:** The act of quickly jumping to conclusions about the meaning of a certain verse or passage of scripture, thus resulting in a false interpretation. Some would go even further by assuming a false premise on top of a false premise. For example, it is a false premise that Proverbs 6:20 refers to a "spiritual mother," and believing that a specific church or organisation is the "spiritual mother" based specifically on Proverbs 6:20 would be assuming a false premise on top of a false premise. This practice must be avoided at all costs.



# THE BASICS OF PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

## THE BIBLE STUDY WORKSHEET

Scripture Texts/Passages: \_\_\_\_\_

Book Genre: \_\_\_\_\_

Authorship: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Theological Truths (Timeless truths about God): \_\_\_\_\_

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Context (use the "circles of context"): \_\_\_\_\_

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Specific Text Literary Type: \_\_\_\_\_

Dispensation Category: \_\_\_\_\_

Key Words to Investigate: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Timeless Principles: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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Personal Applications: \_\_\_\_\_

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Verse(s) to Memorise: \_\_\_\_\_

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