**How to Study the Bible**

***James 3:1 reads: Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.***

Teaching God’s Word is not for the faint of heart. It is not for people who want the glory and adoration often afforded to preachers. Rather, it is an act of service with a sober view to the final evaluation of their message. Paul – knowledgeable of this truth implores Timothy, “***Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.***” (***2 Timothy 2:15***) For those of you who are interested in teaching, you need to be diligent in your studies. Therefore, this class will be intense. We will demand that you are diligent in your preparation for this class as well as your preparation for preaching. There will be homework in this class which will take two to three hours a week. You will be required to read the chapter and fill in the answers before we convene, and a quiz will be administered at the beginning of each session.

The outline for the class will be as follows.

**Session 1: (Feb. 18th)**

* Quiz on Lesson 1:
* Discussion of Lesson 1: How We Got the Bible
* Guidelines for Lesson 1 Homework:

**Session 2: (Feb. 25th)**

* Quiz on Lesson 2
* Review of Lesson 1 Homework
* Discussion on Lesson 2: How to Approach Interpretation:
* Guidelines for Lesson 2 Homework:

**Session 3: (Mar. 11th)**

* Quiz on Lesson 3
* Review of Lesson 2 Homework
* Discussion on Lesson 3: Reading and Observations
* Guidelines for Lesson 3 Homework:

**Session 4: (Mar. 18th)**

* + Quiz on Lesson 4
  + Review of Lesson 3 Homework
  + Discussion on Lesson 4: Word Studies
  + Guidelines for Lesson 4: Homework:

**Session 5: (Mar. 25th)**

* Quiz on Lesson 5
* Review of Lesson 4 Homework
* Discussion on Lesson 5: How to Use Commentaries
* Guidelines for Lesson 5: Homework:

**Session 6: (Apr. 8th)**

* Quiz on Lesson 6
* Review of Lesson 5 Homework
* Discussion on Lesson 6: Interpretive Fallacies
* Guidelines for Lesson 6: Homework:
* Guidelines for final project:

Apr. 15th and April. 22nd  are Preaching Labs. A Manuscript of your sermon must be turned in one week prior to your assigned preaching slot. You will be allotted 30 to 35 minutes to preach.

The class will start at 1:30 and end at 3.

**How to Study the Bible**

**Lesson 1: How We Got the Bible**

1. **Introduction:**

The topic of origins has fascinated men and women for centuries. People from all stripes perform copious amounts of research to trace their ancestral heritage. Scientists opine about the origin of natural phenomena. Children ask their parents the dreaded question “Where did I come from?” A number of reasons warrant such curiosity. One that comes to mind is that we believe that the past holds the keys to the future. Understanding our family heritage may give us insight into why we look and act the way we do. Inquiry into the origin of a tornado may warn us of future ones to come. Knowing how children are made, can give us greater insight into the human body and advance modern medicine. In light of this, wisdom dictates that before we understand how to study the Bible, we endeavor to comprehend its origin.

* Why is it important to understand the origin of the Bible? How does knowing how it was put together give us insight into how to interpret it?

1. **Inspiration:**

The Bible is not just another book. It’s God’s book – revealing the heart and mind of the Creator. The following study on inspiration will give us insight into this glorious truth.

1. **Definition**: God superintended the human authors of the Bible so that they composed and recorded without error His message to mankind in the words of their original writings. [[1]](#footnote-1)
2. A few other terms help us to define the scope of the inspiration of God’s Word. It is *plenary* (not in part but the whole) and *verbal* (inspiration extends to the words as well as the ideas). Thus, when we speak of the verbal plenary inspiration of the Scriptures we stress that the totality of the Bible is the inerrant, infallible, and very Word of God.
3. ***2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.***

**Note on “inspired”:** Literally “God-breathed,” this word offers the sense of words coming directly from the mouth of God. Nearly 4,000 times in the Old Testament you will find words like “the Lord spoke,” “the Lord commanded,” “Thus saith the Lord,” “The Lord said,” etc.

1. ***2 Peter 1:20-21 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.***
2. Consider the usage of “move” in ***Acts 27:15*** (especially in light of the interaction between the wind and the sailors). What does this suggest about the Holy Spirit’s role in writing Scripture?

***Acts 27:15 and when the ship was caught in it and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and let ourselves be driven along.***

1. What are some distinctly “human” characteristics of the Bible? How does this explain why different books have different styles?
2. Ultimately, who is responsible for the authorship of Scripture?
3. **How Was the Bible Written?**

While the Bible has one divine author, nearly forty human authors cooperated with the Holy Spirit. Beginning with Moses who penned the first two chapters in Genesis around BC1405 the Bible spans nearly 1500 years concluding with Revelation recorded by the Apostle John in AD95. These authors resided everywhere from Rome to Babylon, thus the events, topography, culture, and even language bleeds through the human authors. The three languages of the Bible testify to its diverse cultural background. Hebrew makes up the bulk of the Old Testament, Greek the New, and Aramaic in Daniel and select sayings in the Gospels.

1. **How do we know that we have the entire Bible?**

Another way of phrasing the question is “What books comprise the Canon of Scripture.” The Canon of Scripture is the collection of books that met certain tests and thus were considered inspired by God, authoritative, and govern our lives. [[2]](#footnote-2)

During the life of Christ the Old Testament was divided up into lists of twenty two books or twenty four books respectively. In the twenty-two book canon Ruth was part of Judges and Lamentations was part of Jeremiah. The books were divided as follows:

1. LAW
2. Genesis
3. Exodus
4. Leviticus
5. Numbers
6. Deuteronomy
7. PROPHETS

(Former Prophets)

1. Joshua
2. Judges
3. Samuel
4. Kings

(Latter Prophets)

1. Isaiah
2. Jeremiah
3. Ezekiel
4. The Twelve[[3]](#footnote-3)
5. WRITINGS

(Political Books)

1. Psalms
2. Proverbs
3. Job

(Five Rolls – Megillot)

1. Song of Songs
2. Ruth
3. Lamentations
4. Ecclesiastes
5. Esther

(Historical Books)

1. Daniel
2. Ezra- Nehemiah
3. Chronicles

During the development of the church the Canon grew to include the New Testament writings. To sift truth from error three widely recognized principles were applied to discern what was considered “Holy Scripture” and what was not. First, the writing had to have a recognized prophet or apostle as its author. Second, the writing could not contradict a previous passage of Scripture. Three, there had to be a wide consensus in the community of believers. This helps us to understand which books are in the Bible and which ones should be excluded.[[4]](#footnote-4)

With regards to the Old Testament, there is some debate. The Catholic Church, for instance, upholds and affirms the Apocrypha[[5]](#footnote-5) – books which the Catholic Church views as authoritative but are not found in most Protestant Translations – as holy and authoritative. In addition, many scholars and religious groups speculate that the Gospel of Thomas and other rival New Testament works should be included as well.

* Why is it important to determine which books belong in the Bible?
* If we see the Bible as authoritative with regards to all matters to which it speaks, what role should it play in defining the Canon?

The Scriptures make claims to their own canonicity. There are a number of reasons for this.

1. *The Old Testament Canon seems to be settled by Jesus.* In ***Luke 11:51*** Jesus states, ***“from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah.”*** Starting with Abel, the first martyr in the book of Genesis and ending with Zechariah, the last martyr in the last book of the Hebrew canon (Chronicles), Jesus lays out what he understood as the Hebrew canon. And this Canon excludes the Apocrypha which were not accepted by the Catholic Church until 1546 when they decisively affirmed the Canon of Augustine.[[6]](#footnote-6)
2. *The Old Testament canon closes itself until the opening of the New Testament*. The prophecy of ***Malachi 4:4–6*** reads  ***“Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. 5 “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. 6 And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”***

This seems to suggest that God will send an Elijah to announce the advent of the Lord. Until then, revelation from God would cease. This silence lasted four centuries until the angel appeared to Zacharias in the temple (***Luke 1:11***). Given the deity of Christ, it is logical to assume that every word that He spoke was indeed inspired.

1. *Christ also hints at the New Testament canon*. Jesus promises in ***John 14:25-26*** to give the disciples the Holy Spirit to ***“teach you all things, and bring to remembrance all that I have said to you.”*** The apostles, assisted by the Holy Spirit, were able to accurately comprehend and remember all things that Jesus had taught them. With that, they were able to teach and instruct the Church with all authority, since they were speaking on behalf of the Lord.
2. The Apostles Treat Their Letters as Canonical*.* Paul makes this very clear in ***1 Corinthians 14:37 If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.***

Here he teaches that one who is a prophet or spiritual will rightly recognize his commands as being from the Lord.

In addition, there are several instances in which the apostles write with a commanding authority, and to disobey their words is to disobey God (***Gal. 1:9***). *“[P]ortions of the New Testament were written with the expectation that they were to be received and obeyed.”[[7]](#footnote-7)* The authoritative tone of all of the Epistles testifies to their authenticity. The apostles played an intricate role in the formation of the canon. Not only did they testify to their own work as authoritative, they pointed to other New Testament Works as inspired as well.

1. *The end of the Bible seems to close the canon*. Jesus' statement at the end of Revelation states the sufficiency of the prophecies contained in the book to cover all future events.

***Revelation 22:18–19 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.***

“The comprehensive scope of Revelation’s coverage of encouragement-parenthesis (***chaps 2-3***) and predictive elements (***chaps. 4-22***) and of the extensive time span from the first century to the eternal state also commends the view that ***vv. 18-19*** anticipate no more prophecy.”[[8]](#footnote-8) Just like Malachi prophesied a gap in revelation until the first advent, it follows that the next revelation of God will transpire during His second advent (***Joel 2:28***).

In conclusion, historical recognition seems to vindicate the canon, as there was stunning unanimity among the early church as to what belonged in the canon. The books that were excluded seemed to be rejected for good reason since they taught bizarre doctrine and strange practices that seemed to contradict the rest of the teachings of the Scriptures (i.e. the Didache taught baptismal regeneration, the Gospel of Thomas taught that Mary needed to become a man, etc.).

* Do we need the Catholic Church to validate the Canon? Why or why not?

1. **Can I Understand the Bible?**

In our postmodern world where “what the Bible means to me” is considered a legitimate interpretive principle, we should take a moment to study the clarity of Scripture. In other words, does God have a single message to communicate to us with each given text? In view of this we will define and discuss the Clarity of Scripture.

1. **Definition**: Wayne Grudem defines this as follows:

*The clarity of Scripture means that the Bible is written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by all who will read it seeking God’s help and being willing to follow it.[[9]](#footnote-9)*

1. **Scriptural Support:**
2. ***Deuteronomy 6:6-7 “These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.”***
3. What is the general command in this passage?
4. How does this passage support the clarity of Scripture? (Hint: remember the audience)
5. ***Psalm 19:7 The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.***
6. What does the term ***simple*** imply about the audience?
7. How does the Scripture’s impact on ***the simple*** affirm its clarity?
8. ***Matthew 21:42 Jesus said to them, “Did you never read in the Scriptures, ‘The stone which the builders rejected, This became the chief corner stone; This came about from the Lord, And it is marvelous in our eyes’?***
   * Did the fact that these Scriptures were written centuries before, and in a different cultural context, excuse the audience for their misunderstanding? Why or why not?
9. **Why Do Some People Misunderstand Scripture?**

When God-fearing Christians disagree on what Scripture teaches there are two possible explanations:

1. They are seeking to make affirmations where the Scriptures are silent.
2. They have misinterpreted the Word.

In both cases, the problem is not with the Scriptures themselves, but with our failure to correctly interpret the Bible.[[10]](#footnote-10)

1. **Are their Mistakes in the Bible?**

In recent years, modern scholarship has severely questioned the accuracy of the Scriptures. This has led some evangelical theologians to concede errors in the Bible with regards to dating, creation, etc. Yet they still maintain their evangelical faith by claiming that the Bible is infallible. In other words, while it may have errors, it speaks with perfect authority on matters of faith and practice.

* If someone affirms this position, what must they believe about the Bible? What must it contain?
* If the Bible has errors in regards to history, origin, etc., how can we be certain that it does not also err in its teachings about Christ?

1. Definition of Inerrancy:

The Chicago Statement on Inerrancy gives this brief definition:

*Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God’s acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God’s saving grace in individual lives. [[11]](#footnote-11)*

Point of Clarification: Inerrancy pertains to the original manuscripts (autographs). To the extent that our copies and translations of the Scripture faithfully represent the original, they are inerrant.

1. Proof of Inerrancy:
2. Inerrancy can be proved through a simple syllogism.
   * 1. God is true (***Rom. 3:4***)
     2. Scripture is breathed out by God (***2 Tim. 3:16***)
     3. The Scriptures must be true, because they were breathed out by God.
3. Christ Viewed the Scripture as Inerrant:

***Matthew 5:17-20 “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”***

* How does affirming every “smallest letter or stroke” uphold inerrancy?

1. Key passages depend on these “smallest letters” and “strokes”.

***Matthew 22:43-45 He said to them, “Then how does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, Until I put Your enemies beneath Your feet” ’? If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his son?”***

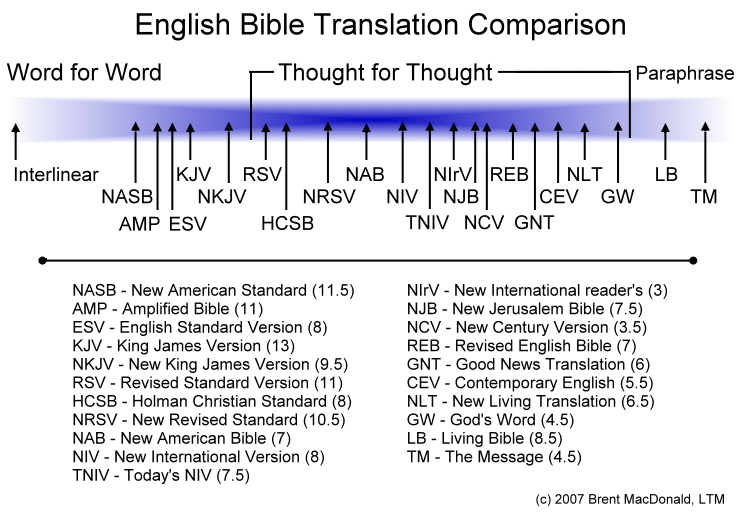
* What single word serves as the crux of the argument? How does this support inerrancy?

***Matthew 22:32 ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’. He is not the God of the dead but of the living.”***

* Why is the verb tense to important to Jesus’ argument? Again, how does this support inerrancy?

1. Parameters of Inerrancy:
2. ***Inerrancy allows for variety in style.*** The gospel of John was written in the simple style one might expect of an unlearned fisherman; Luke was written with the more sophisticated vocabulary of an educated person; Paul’s epistles reflect the logic of a philosopher. All of these variations are entirely compatible with inerrancy.
3. ***Inerrancy allows for variety in details in explaining the same event.*** This phenomenon is particularly observed in the synoptic gospels. It is important to remember that Jesus spoke in Aramaic and the writers of Scripture wrote their accounts in Greek, meaning they had to translate the original words into Greek. Two writers would use slightly different words to describe the same incident, yet both would give the same meaning. There is an additional reason for variety in details: the various writers may have emphasized different aspects of an event in order to best convey their message. This would make the details appear different, yet both would be accurate.
4. ***Inerrancy does not demand verbatim reporting of events.*** “In times of antiquity it was not the practice to give a verbatim repetition every time something was written out.” [[12]](#footnote-12)
5. ***Inerrancy allows for departure from standard forms of grammar.*** Obviously it is wrong to enforce English rules of grammar upon the Scriptures.
6. ***Inerrancy allows for problem passages.*** With a work as vast as the Holy Scriptures it is nearly impossible to provide solutions to all the problems. In one case the solution awaits the findings of the archaeologist’s spade; in another case it awaits the linguist’s research; in still others the solution may never be discovered. It is never an option, however, to take our inability to solve every problem and suggest that there are contradictions or errors in Scripture. If the Scriptures are God-breathed they must be entirely without error.
7. ***Inerrancy demands the account does not teach error or contradiction.*** In the statements of Scripture, whatever is written is in accord with things as they are.[[13]](#footnote-13)
8. **Thought Questions:**
9. How should knowing that the Bible was written in three languages (which naturally does not include King James English) impact how we study the Bible?
10. How should knowing that the Bible was written in the ancient Near East 3,400 to 1,900 years ago impact our interpretation of the Bible? What elements should we think about as we try to garner the original meaning of the text?
11. How should knowing that the Bible is free from error impact our Bible Study, especially when we see a “contradiction”?
12. Knowing that the Bible was written by men moved along by the Holy Spirit, how should our study of the Bible differ from our study of Shakespeare?
13. **Application:**

Knowing the origin of the Bible should cause us to realize that while the translations are exceedingly accurate, they are translations none the less. Different translational theories lead to various interpretations (see chart below). Thus, we should not be overly reliant on one single translation. In addition, we should seek the assistance of dictionaries and commentaries gleaning from the wisdom of men who have a working knowledge of the original language.



This chart shows the style of Bible translation, ranging from Word for Word (Formal Equivalence), to Thought for Thought (Dynamic Equivalence) and Paraphrase. The numeric value shown in parenthesis following each translation name is the grade level of readability. This chart makes no assessment as to the quality of each translation and, in fact, includes at least one translation with a strong Roman Catholic bias. While it does not cover every English translation, it does reference a majority of best sellers including many recent translations.[[14]](#footnote-14)

1. **Assignment::**

Read the Book of Titus three times. Each time read it in a different translation.

1. **Conclusion:**

The foundation of all theology rests upon the rock of the Word. What you believe about the Word will determine what you believe about Creation, the Resurrection, Salvation, and the Return of Christ. Yet the Scripture is more than just a theological tome. In the words of the author of Hebrews:

***Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.***

May God give us a love and reverence for His Word so that we might pursue Him as you seek to understand the true meaning of Holy Scripture.

**Appendix**

Common objections and answers

A. **Objection 1:** We don’t have the original Bible. After all, it was written thousands of years ago and passed down through the centuries by men.

The guardianship of the Old Testament was entrusted to the Masoretes—Hebrew scholars who meticulously copied the Old Testament. Using such techniques as numbering the letters, words, and lines in each book, as well as identifying the middle word, they successfully maintained the Old Testament. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls confirmed the efforts of the Masoretes. When scholars compared the Isaiah Scroll, which was dated around 150 BC, with the Masoretic copy, which was dated around AD 900, they discerned ninety-five percent agreement between the two texts. The variants were obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling.

Scholars, archeologists, and researchers have sifted through over 24,000 manuscripts related to the New Testament that date all the way back to the first half of the second century. By comparison, only 647 manuscripts of Homer’s classic *Iliad* have been recovered. Through the science of textual criticism (comparing manuscripts of similar passages in order to detect human errors), scholars believe that we have at least ninety-eight percent of the New Testament accurately reconstructed. Of the remainder, it should be noted that it in no way interferes with orthodox (mainstream) Christian doctrine.

B. **Objection 2:** Doesn’t the Bible contradict itself?

Many people who carry this objection have never taken the time to actually read the Bible and see for themselves. For those who have found apparent contradictions, further study of the context of the passages often clears up these questions. For those who are seriously stumped, many books are available which can assist in resolving these apparent contradictions, such as Gleason Archer’s *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* and Norman Geisler’s *When Critics Ask*.

C. **Objection 3:** What about other books of revelation, like the Koran?

First of all, unlike the Koran, the Bible consists of multiple authors, literary forms, and types of revelation and yet it maintains the same message. Secondly, books like the Koran and the Book of Mormon contain historical inaccuracies and misrepresent the Bible.[[15]](#footnote-15) Thirdly, the Bible has a proven track record of fulfilled prophecies.

Here are some examples:

1. **Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, nor will I so abhor them as to destroy them, breaking My covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God. (Leviticus 26:44)**

In the near context of this verse, Yahweh tells the Israelites that the Promised Land will be abandoned on account of their unfaithfulness. Yet, as we read in verse 44, the Lord will graciously preserve them while they are in the land of their enemies. This passage clearly alludes to the Babylonian exile, which transpired roughly 850 years later (see 2 Kings 17:6; 24:10-16).

2. **And Babylon, the beauty of kingdoms, the glory of the Chaldeans’ pride, Will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It will never be inhabited or lived in from generation to generation; Nor will the Arab pitch histent there, Nor will shepherds make their flockslie down there. (Isaiah 13:19-20)**

This prophecy was penned by Isaiah in the seventh century BC. At that time, Babylon was at its height and was a formidable military city. Yet today this once-prosperous city is a barren wasteland because of the extreme salinization of the surrounding farmland—a fulfillment of the words “Nor will shepherds make their flocks lie down there.” The reference to Arabs not pitching their tents on the site of this once-mighty city is significant because they did not inhabit the region until the eighth century AD.

3. The account of the suffering servant in Isaiah 52:13-15 and 53:1-12, composed during the late seventh century BC, offers a striking Old Testament portrait of the life and death of Christ. Phrases such as “He was pierced through for our transgressions” and “by His scourging we are healed” clearly point to the crucifixion of Christ and our spiritual salvation through His suffering on the cross.

For more examples of fulfilled biblical prophecy consult Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction,* pages 563-568.

Ultimately, the truth of the Bible will commend itself above and beyond any works such as the Koran. The wisdom of the Scriptures speaks for itself. When we adhere to its commands and precepts we will find that the testimony of the Word of God is true. However, we must be aware that the sinfulness, or deceitfulness, of our own hearts (see Jeremiah 17:9), may interfere with our ability to completely understand it. Jesus Christ leaves us with the following challenge in John 7:17:

Lesson 1 Quiz

1. Define Inspiration:
2. Define Inerrancy:
3. Give three proofs of Inerrancy:

1.

2.

3.

\_\_ I have completed (read and answered the question) this lesson.

**How to Study the Bible**

**Lesson 2: How To Approach Interpretation**

1. **Introduction:**

On Tuesday night you attend a Bible Study at the invitation of your neighbors. You gather together in their home with an assortment of individuals, and the leader opens the Bible to ***John 10:9 "I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.”*** He then asks the question, “What does this passage mean to you?”

Fred says, “I believe that Jesus is the door of hope. He invites us to graze in his pasture, and feast upon his body every time we take the Eucharist.”

Nancy responds, “Perhaps we mistakenly see Jesus as a person. Who’s to say that he wasn’t actually a walking and talking door?”

Percy remarks, “I believe that he is the key to understanding the Old Testament. If you want to understand Isaiah, you have to walk through the door of Jesus.”

Wendy comments, “Perhaps he is saying that he is the only way to be saved, and there is no other entry into God’s kingdom apart from him.”

1. Can all of these interpretations be right? Why or why not?
2. Is one interpretation more right than others?
3. How would you assess each interpretation?
4. How can you determine which interpretation is correct?

We live in a day and age of moral and interpretive subjectivism. Everyone believes that their interpretation of the Bible is right in their own eyes. Consequently, the Bible is used to oppose homosexuality and affirm homosexuality. It proves the trinity and disproves the trinity. It teaches the reality of hell and affirms that everyone goes to heaven. In light of this confusion, it is important that develop an interpretative framework so that we can accurately understand the message of the Bible as God intended.

1. **Key Terms:**
2. **Hermeneutics:** The theory, method, or rules of biblical interpretation.
3. **Interpretation:** The process by which the Scriptures are understood by the reader.
4. **Exegesis:** The process of discovering the original meaning of the biblical text, “bringing it out” (“exegeting”) by studying the text according to the authorial intent in its historical and grammatical contexts.[[16]](#footnote-16)
5. **A Survey of Interpretive Methods:**
6. **Allegorical:** This perspective widely practiced by some of the church fathers (i.e. Origin) sees the literal meaning of the passage as a jumping off point for a deeper meaning. For instance, Origen saw the water pots in John chapter 2 that contained the water which Jesus changed to wine as alluding to the Scriptures – given to purify the Jews. Such insight is given to those granted special grace by Christ to have unique spiritual insight.

* Under this school of thought who determines the meaning; the author or the interpreter?

1. **Devotional:** The Bible is a rich and wonderful book and should primarily be used to nourish the spiritual life of the believer. Emphasis is placed on the aspects of the Bible which edify their walks with God.

* What is your assessment of this view? What are its strengths and weaknesses?

1. **Liberal:** This holds that Scripture must be interpreted within the framework of science and reason. Human intellect is adequate to sift between truth and error in the Bible.

* How would a liberal interpreter regard the miracles of the Bible?
* How would a liberal interpreter view the formation of the Bible?

1. **Neo-Orthodox:** God is a transcendent God who cannot be confined to mere propositional statements.The Bible is not revelation but a witness to revelation: it is not to be equated objectively with the Word of God; the revelation of God is not in words. Jesus Christ is the focal point of God’s revelation and consequently man meets God in an experiential encounter with Jesus Christ. [[17]](#footnote-17)

* What regard does this view have for the “historicity” of the Bible?

1. **Post Modern:** This view’s proponents are skeptical of the reality of absolute truth and suspicious of anyone who claims to know it. This approach to hermeneutics teaches that:
2. We cannot know God’s revelation with confidence because we *always* ascribe meaning to the biblical Text (consciously or unconsciously);
3. We must constantly dialogue with different traditions or theological models to formulate theological constructions that are *closer* to biblical revelation;
4. We need to restrict formal or even practical certainty to the Bible’s metanarrative (aka the master narrative, the story about the story which makes sense of all the little stories).

(4) We must discourage, modify, or eliminate the positive role of individual understanding.[[18]](#footnote-18) This is because we will always contaminate meaning with our individual experience.

* What role does God play in this interpretive scheme?

1. **Literal:** Also known as the literal grammatical historical method.One arrives at the meaning of the passage by a “normal” reading of Scripture. We read the Bible like we read the newspaper taking into account grammar, syntax, historical background, etc. Not an advocate of wooden literalism, this school of thought takes into account figurative language and metaphor. For instance, when Jesus says “I am the door” they would not believe that Jesus had hinges and a doorknob, but they would understand Jesus as an access point.

* Under this school of thought who determines the meeting; the author or the interpreter?
* What separates this perspective from the others?
* How would you respond to the charge that no matter how hard anyone tries they cannot be objective?

1. The last objection has some traction and requires some consideration. How can we expect a factory worker with an eighth grade education living in urban Cleveland to understand the teaching of an imprisoned former Pharisee writing to churches scattered through Asia Minor approximately 2,000 years ago. Some scholars have developed the following responses:
2. **False Antithesis**: The problem with this objection is that he assumes that you cannot know anything unless you know it omnisciently. Therefore you must know something perfectly or you can’t know it at all. This antithesis makes it impossible to prove such events as “I graduated from the University of Kansas” or “I have traveled to Samara Russia.” This factual skepticism makes it impossible to know or understand anything, including the purveyors of this post modern ideology. As we shall see there are ways to know something truly even if you do not know it completely.
3. **The Fusion of Horizons**: To use the above analogy, the factory worker lives in his own horizon of understanding and Paul lives in the other. But the factory worker through careful study and research is able to move closer to the horizon of Paul. He can learn Greek, read all of Paul’s letters, study the origins of the Pharisees, etc. At the same time, he seeks to distance himself from his own horizon, purposely discarding cultural biases which may cloud his judgment. For instance in reading about his union with Christ, he remembers that they did not have Labor unions during that time, and endeavors to see what Paul means. As he advances he can have fusion of horizons where he can see things from Paul’s perspective, and evaluate his own horizon from Paul’s perspective. This does not mean that he has to become a Pauline scholar, but he can move closer to the truth and thereby reject certain interpretations as false (an activity which post-moderns are reluctant to do.)
4. **The Hermeneutical Spiral**: Similar to the fusion of Horizons the factory worker asks the text questions, and the text answers them. These answers subtly change the man and shape his additional questions. In the middle of this circular exchange is the truth, and as each question is asked and answered the radius of the circle shortens drawing the factory worker closer to the truth. For instance:

Factory Worker: Who is Jesus.

**Text**: A carpenter’s son reared in rural Israel 2000 years ago who claimed to be the Christ and was Crucified.

**Factory Worker**: Was he really the son of God?

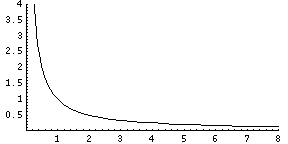
**Text**: Jesus attests to this, and it was confirmed by his teaching and miracles. It is also confirmed by His death burial and resurrection.

**Factory Worker**: Why did Jesus have to die?

Text: He died on account of your sins and trespasses against a holy God.

As you can see, each answer changes the questioner and his future questions. If he asks enough questions, he will become a believer, which will shape additional questions. When he keeps interacting with the Bible, he descends into a tighter spiral around the truth.

1. **The Asymptotic Approach**: An asymptote is a curved line which gets closer to the line without ever touching it.



In this case the vertical axis (y) is the distance from reality and the horizontal (x) is time.

A child attends AWANA’s and learns a little about Romans. As a result he will move closer to the truth. As he gets older he reads the entire book for himself. Then he reads a commentary. Called to ministry he learns Greek, and as a missionary meticulously translates Romans into another language. By this time he may not have perfect omniscient knowledge, but he has closed the gap.[[19]](#footnote-19)

* In light of all of this, is it arrogant to believe that a certain interpretation is wrong? For instance, is the interpretation that Paul embraced loving monogamous homosexual relationships just as valid as the interpretation that Paul condemned all forms of homosexuality?

1. **Rationale for the Literal Hermeneutic:**

The literal grammatical historical hermeneutic is our chosen method as it seeks to understand the passage as the author intended it to be understood. While we cannot have omniscient knowledge of authorial intent, we can have increasingly certain knowledge through rigorous Bible Study along with the divine assistance of the Holy Spirit. The following is a brief defense of this hermeneutic.

1. **The Purpose of Language:** The purpose of language itself requires a literal interpretation. Created in his image, God gifted man with language to understand, pray, and communicate to and about God.

Two ramifications flow from this idea. First if God originated language for the purpose of communication, and if God is all-wise, then we may believe that He saw to it that the means (language) was sufficient to sustain the purpose (communication). Second it makes sense that God would expect man to use language in its normal sense. He does not expect us to use an encrypted speech or communicate on a “deeper” level outside the channel of normal language.[[20]](#footnote-20)

1. **The Need for Objectivity:** If one does not employ the normal interpretation then the truth of Scripture is lost, especially when the reader and not the plain sense of Scripture determines its meaning. This is why subjective “what the Bible means to me” interpretations are fraught with peril.
2. **The Example of the Bible:** The prophecies of the first advent of Christ were fulfilled literally. Bethlehem meant Bethlehem (***Mic. 5:2***). When Jesus was pierced for our transgressions, there was a literal hole in his body (***Isa. 53***). There are some instances of what we call “typological” interpretations” where the imagery of Old Testament events (i.e. ***“out of Egypt I called my son” Matt. 2:15***), are related to Christ. But these are exceptions to the literal fulfillment of numerous prophecies. These typological interpretations in the New Testament are inspired by the Holy Spirit. Additionally, the reason we can understand these interpretation is because we interpret the interpretations literally.
3. **The Principles of Normal Hermeneutics:**
4. **Interpret Grammatically:** Since words are the vehicles of thoughts, and since the meaning of any passage must be determined by a study of the words therein and their relationships in the sentences, determining grammatical sense of the text must be the starting point of normal interpretation. **[[21]](#footnote-21)**
5. **Interpret Contextually:** Words and sentences do not do not stand in isolation; therefore, the context must be studied in order to see the relation that each verse sustains to that which preceded, and to that which follows. Involved are the immediate context and the theme and scope of the whole book.[[22]](#footnote-22)
6. **Compare Scripture with Scripture:** The dual authorship of the bible makes it necessary not only to know the human author’s meaning but also God’s. God’s meaning may not be fully revealed in the original human author’s writing but is revealed when Scripture is compared with Scripture. We must allow for a *sensus plenior* which allows for a fuller (though directly related) meaning in the mind of the divine author of Scripture. We cannot say that the human authors of Scripture always understand the full implications of their own words. When we compare Scripture with Scripture, we can discover the fuller intention of the divine author.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Using the Bible to interpret the Bible is not foolproof. You must use the right portions of the Bible to interpret the Bible. Certain texts are more suited than others. For instance, Romans is better suited to help us understand Ephesians, than say James. Reason being, Romans and Ephesians share the same author. At the same time, the New Testament refers to many Old Testament events, thus it makes sense to seek to understand the Old Testament event in its context, and then see how the New Testament uses it.

1. **Recognize the Progress of Revelation:** It is important to realize that revelation was given over a period of time. While Isaiah may have prophesied about the suffering servant on the cross, his knowledge of the event was not as complete as John’s. Beginning in Genesis, biblical history adds additional layers as to our understanding of God, Jesus, and salvation. With this said, we should not assume that Abraham was fully informed, and interpret his understanding of events in light of his location in the progress of revelation.

* How does this concept help us to understand why we can eat bacon whereas the Old Testament Saints could not?

1. **Thought Questions:**
2. How would you answer the following objection, “Scholars and theologians disagree on the meaning of this passage, so my view is just as valid as yours”?
3. How would you respond to the following “This is what the Bible means to me”?
4. How would you respond to the following “I can’t know what the Bible means unless I have a thorough knowledge of Greek and Hebrew”?
5. Can non-Christians teach us anything about the Bible? Can their studies help us to make sense of the text?
6. What is the most important step to understanding the Bible?

***1 Corinthians 2:14-16 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. 15 But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. 16 For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.***

1. **Application:**

In view of the need to plunge ourselves into the Biblical world in which we study. It is important that we learn about the ancient world. This introduces us to the significance of studying the historical background. As we progress in our study we will learn more about this principle and its application. But suffice to say, it is important that we do our part to get into the mind of the author.

One key to allowing the Bible to speak for itself is to determine how the Bible is speaking. In other words, what kind of literary genre does the author use? A literary genre is the kind, sort, or style of literature the author uses. For instance, in our bookstores we see fiction and non fiction, prose and poetry. In the Bible we have:

* *Historical Narrative*: Books which give a factual and historical account of its events.
* *Law*: These are didactic commands and standards meant to govern the people of Israel. Much care should be taken before we apply the law to our present day and age.
* *Poetry/Wisdom*: This includes songs, psalms, poems, and proverbs. The artistry of the language brings special emphasis and force as well as the words themselves.
* *Prophecy*: These books detail God’s future plans and or give divine commentary on the events of the time. Often these prophecies use poetry, songs, stories, which are rich in symbolism and meaning.
* *Gospels*: This is similar to a historical narrative, except the main protagonist is Jesus Christ. Unlike some of the historical narratives which have some fallacious but truly recorded comments (i.e. the Serpent’s deception), the gospels record the words of Jesus which are perfect, true, and right. In addition, the inclusion of His parables merits special interpretive consideration.
* *Personal Epistles*: These are structured letters written by the human/divine authors to individual churches. Usually, there is a specific occasion which merits such apostolic intervention.

When approaching a text, we must determine what kind of genre is being used. This helps us to understand how to read the book.

Once this is established be need to allow the text to speak for itself by trying to understand its flow and context. Outlining is an excellent way to do so. The following is a brief explanation of how to do so.

The standard outline format looks like the following. One should note that you must have at least two of each point.

I.

A.

1.

a.

i.

Try to Summarize Each Paragraph in Five Words.

After you have done that you can further break down the paragraphs.

Looking at the summary sentences, try to determine which one’s go together.

-Contrasts

-Lists

-Examples

-Supporting points

Look for any wording that seems to start a new section (Therefore, Now, etc.)

1. **Assignment:**
2. Read at least two introductions on the book of Titus (i.e. the beginning of the MacArthur Study Bible)
3. Then answer the following questions:
   1. Who is the author?
   2. When was the book written?
   3. What is the occasion for writing the book (why was it written)?
   4. What are some major themes which will be discussed?
   5. What interpretive challenges await us in our study?
   6. What are you most excited to learn about the book?

See Appendix 1 For an Example:

1. Determine the literary genre for Titus.
2. Outline the book of Titus, list major themes.

This may be as simple as providing chapter titles. Or you may go through the text and give a title to each paragraph. Once you are done, try to arrange those titles under larger titles.

1. Write out the purpose of the book.

**For an Example, go to Appendix 2:**

1. **Conclusion:**

The God of the universe who created language and chose to express Himself through language has surely given humans the ability to understand language. Yet, there remains variety of interpretations. Some of this may be because of the distance between the audience and the authors. This may account for some of the minor theological variations among Christians who gladly submit to the Lordship of Christ, but vary in how this is to be done. Still, there is another category of readers. They do not understand the Bible is because they do not want to understand it. So long as they live in opposition to the Living God, the author of Scripture, they will seek to tone it down and shape it to fit their own agenda. But when you submit your life to the Lord of the Universe and the God of the Bible, you will gladly accept what He says at face value.

Appendix 1:

Background Study on the Epistle of Jude

1. Who is the author?

Jude the half brother of Jesus. He identifies himself as the brother of James in the first verse and in verse 17 he does not include himself as one of the apostles.

1. When was the book written?

On account of the relationship between 2nd Peter which had to have been written before 68 AD (the year of his death) and the absence of the destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70), it may have been written between 68 and 70 AD. Whereas 2nd Peter describes the coming of false teachers, Jude describes the presence of false teachers. Jude also quotes from 2 Peter 3:3. Thus, Peter predates Jude.

1. What is the occasion for writing the book (why was it written)?

Though Jude wanted to write to the members of the church about their salvation, he must warn them about certain immoral men among them who are circulating heresy. Namely, that since they were saved by grace they can live any way they want. It has been suggested that Jude is battling a Gnostic type of heresy.

1. What are some major themes which will be discussed?

Apostasy

Contending for the Faith

Discernment of Biblical Truth

Old Testament Illustrations

The Character of False Teachers

1. What interpretive challenges await us in our study?

Namely the use of non-canonical literature in His epistle.

1. What are you most excited to learn about the book?

The importance of defending the faith as well as the effect of proper doctrine upon one’s lifestyle.

Appendix 2:

Outline of the Epistle of Jude:

I. Greeting (1-2):

II. Body (3-23)

A. Call to Contend (3-16)

1. Contend for the Faith against False Teachers (3-4)

2. Warnings from History ( 5-7)

3. The Characteristics of False Teachers (8-13)

4. The Final Judgment of False Teachers (14-16)

B. Call to Persevere (17-23)

III. Doxology (24-25)

Purpose: Jude writes to believers under attack from false teachers so that they will persevere in the faith.

Themes:

False Teachers (greed, sensuality, blaspheming, anti-authority)

Perseverance and preservation

Judgment

The Last times

Keeping others in the faith.

Lesson 2 Quiz:

1. Define Hermeneutics:
2. List three interpretive methods:

1.

2.

3.

1. List three rationale for the literal hermeneutic:

1.

2.

3.

1. List three principles of Normal Hermeneutics:

1.

2.

3.

\_\_ I have completed (read and answered the questions) this lesson.

How to Study the Bible

Lesson 3: Reading and Observation

1. **Introduction:**

Consider the following line from the Oregonian used to promote HBO’s *The Girl in the Café*.

“An endearing romantic comedy.”

* What does this quote seem to indicate about the reviewer’s sentiments for the movie? Why?

This is the actual line: “This new offering from HBO Films is at its heart a bit of political propaganda wrapped into an endearing romantic comedy that starts losing its laughs when it gets to Reykjavik and decides its teachable moment has arrived.”

* How does the fuller context inform the meaning of the initial quote?
* What prompted the promoters of the movie to truncate the quote?
* What does this exercise teach us about the importance of analyzing a quote in context?

In the previous section we outlined a four step procedure for interpreting the word so that we can allow the word to speak for itself.

1. Receive (You must receive the word as it stands)
2. Read (You must read and observe what it says)
3. Reflect (You must reflect and contemplate the passage so as to derive its meaning)
4. Relate (You must relate it to your life).

The first step is a little tricky. Receiving the word is not necessarily a skill that is taught so much as a humble disposition which seeks to take the Scriptures at its Word. Knowing this struggle should lead us to approach the Scriptures understanding that we carry a certain amount of bias. Our theology, culture, family background, generation, class, ethnicity, education, etc. can color the way we look at the Scriptures. Very few people can empty themselves of all bias. But we must try. Focusing on observation and what the text actually says instead of what we think it means is one way to limit our bias. This is an exercise that causes us to pause and consider the content before we jump to conclusions. Therefore in this study we are going to examine the art of observation so that your future interpretations will be thoroughly grounded in the actual text.

1. **Observation Explained: Receive (You must receive the word as it stands)**
2. **What is an Observation**:

This means to inspect, examine, poke, prod, the chosen text of Scripture. Someone who is a keen observer will seek to uncover every clue and turn over every stone.

* Why is it important to suspend judgment while making observations? What happens if you make an interpretation too early? (Hint: How would it color your observations)

1. **Why we Should Observe**:

Charles Spurgeon quoted from a writer in his day, “Most read their Bibles like cows that stand in thick grass, and trample under their feet the finest flowers and herbs.”[[24]](#footnote-24) Observation counters this as the Bible student trains her eyes to find things which others may not see. Observation is different from interpretation as it looks to gather the who, what, when, where, and why of the text. While interpretation asks the question “what does it mean?” observation asks “what does it say?”

* What is the danger of forming an interpretation without adequate observation?

1. **What to Look For:**

Martin Luther studied the Bible as one who gathered apples “First I shake the whole tree that the ripest may fall. Then I climb the tree and shake each branch and then each twig, and then I look under each leaf.”[[25]](#footnote-25)

The following list is meant to give you some insight regarding what to observe.

1. Connecting words – “and”, “But”, “therefore”, “For”, and others.
2. Verbs – Note the tense[[26]](#footnote-26), voice[[27]](#footnote-27). Is it a command or a declaration?
3. Nouns, note where it is singular or plural. Look up the word in the lexicon so that you can observe its meaning.
4. Patterns in context – Look for similar verb forms in the passage such as the five participles[[28]](#footnote-28) strung out in Ephesians 5:19-21.
5. Repeated words – note words that are repeated within a verse or within a context.
6. Words a given writers tends to use – For example, Matthew is the only gospel writer who uses the phrase “the kingdom of heaven.”
7. Contrasts
8. Comparisons
9. Commands.
10. Exhortations.
11. Definite articles (i.e. the) or the lack of them.
12. Adjectives.
13. Prepositions (in, on, before, out of, into, etc.)
14. Genitives[[29]](#footnote-29) (Revelation of Jesus Christ)
15. Relation of the verse to the section it is in.
16. What the verse does not say may be important.
17. Whether the verse used a phrase that may be synonymous with some other phrase – For example, may “filled with (by) the Spirit” in Ephesians mean the same thing as “strengthened with might by His Spirit”?
18. Evidence of the writer’s own passion, feeling, heartbeat, and goals or his anger or disappointments.
19. The variety of ways the author refers to Christ, God, the Holy Spirit or the Christian.
20. The place of the verse in the larger context. For instance when looking at the eight parables of Matthew 13 they all deal with the development of God’s kingdom interests in the present age.
21. Words that need historical data like the term “Nicolaitians” in Revelation 1.
22. Words or phrases which might be explained in books on manners and customs, dictionaries, Bible encyclopedias, or commentaries. For instance, what is a threshing floor (2 Sam. 6:6) or the white stone of Revelation 2?
23. References to geography – locale, distance, terrain, climate, vegetation, etc.
24. References to chronology – like understanding how Acts 15 relates to Galatians 2.
25. How much space a writer devotes to a given topic. For instance, in Ephesians the first half covers doctrine while the second has more practical implications.
26. Features of the writer’s style. For example, Paul has an affinity for long sentences. [[30]](#footnote-30)
27. Another thing to look for is to examine the differences between different translations.
28. Other ideas?
29. Remember, an interpretation is different than an observation. Interpretation deals with what the text means whereas the observation merely states what the text says.
30. **Biblical Examples of Observation:**
31. ***Matthew 22:31-32 “But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: 32 ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.”***
32. What observation does Jesus make?
33. How did it impact his interpretation?
34. ***Matthew 22:43-45He said to them, “Then how does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying, 44 ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, Until I put Your enemies beneath Your feet” ’? 45 “If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his son?”***
35. What observation does Jesus make?
36. How did it impact his interpretation?
37. ***Galatians 3:16 Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ.***
38. What observation does Jesus make in this passage?
39. What is the bearing upon the interpretation?
40. **Tools for Observation:**
41. **Compare Bible Versions:**

| **New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update** | **The New International Version** | **The New King James Version** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 10 For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel. | 10 For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel. | 10 For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel. |

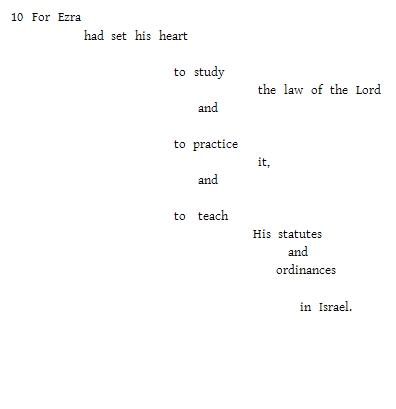
* Take a moment to note any translational differences. Do any of them seem significant? Why are these passages translated differently? (Hint: What is the difference between the NIV and the other versions?)

1. **What the Texts Says:**

Pick a version and right down what it says for sure:

1. Ezra is the subject of the sentence.
2. The main verb of the sentence is “set his heart”.
3. The main verb “set his heart” is modified by three infinitive phrases “to study the law of the Lord,” “to practice it” and “to teach His statutes”.
4. The phrase “Statutes and ordinances” is modified by “His.”
5. There seems to be a progression from “study” to “practice” to “teach”.
6. The passage begins with “for” implying a link to the preceding thought.
7. Immediately before this passage, we read “For on the first of the first month he began to go up from Babylon; and on the first of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, because the good hand of his God was upon him.” In light of the underline phrase, verse 10 may provide the reason why the good hand of the Lord was upon Him.
8. Can you think of any others?
9. **What the Text Does not Say:**
10. The text does not say “to teach His statutes and ordinances to Israel” but “in Israel”.
11. In the original Hebrew there were no capital letters, so technically “His” could also be translated “his”.
12. The text does not disclose the exact identity of his audience, it merely discloses the location.
13. Can you think of any others?
14. **Block Diagram:**

This is a process in which we try to break down the flow of the sentence and examine each word and phrase’s relationship with each other. Often this helps us to see certain patterns in the verse.

****

1. **Outline:**

Another technique is to outline the passage. The block diagram will help you to arrange and order an outline.

Why the Good Hand of the Lord was Upon Ezra:

1. He Set His Heart to Study the Law:
2. He Set His Heart to Practice It:
3. He Set His Heart to Teach His Statutes and Ordinances:
4. **Questions:**

Finally, it’s a good idea to ask questions which may assist you in further study.

1. Why does the text say “in Israel” and not “to Israel”? Why the emphasis on the geographic location?
2. Does “His” refer to Ezra, God, or someone else?
3. What if any is the difference between “statutes” and “ordinances”?
4. Should “study” and “observe” be grouped together (NIV) or should they be separated (NASB/NKJV)?
5. Can you think of others?
6. **Thought Questions:**
7. What are some attitudes, habits, or perspectives that can interfere with choice observations?
8. Why is it important that we commit ourselves to observing what the text says?
9. What is the danger of reflecting on the meaning of the passage without carefully reading it? Or relating it without first reflecting on its meaning?
10. Why is the process of observation difficult for many people?
11. **Application:**

The application of this lesson is easy: as you interpret the time focus on discerning what the text says. Before you proceed with your interpretation take an hour or two to notice every nook and cranny.

1. **Assignment:**

Read ***Titus 3:4-7*** and writes down:

1. Ten or more things that the text does say.
2. Five things that the text does not say.
3. Five questions about the text.

Feel free to block diagram, outline, or compare translations to help with the observation process.

1. **Conclusion:**

Observation is the key to focused Bible study as we seek to train our minds to take meaning out of the text instead of reading meaning into the text. A keen observer is one who approaches the text without and agenda, and humbly waits for the text to speak to them. He or she thoroughly examines the text from every angle, and then proceeds to draw out the true meaning and message of the text.

**Appendix 1:**

**The Student, the Fish, and Agassiz**

**By the Student**

It was more than fifteen years ago that I entered the laboratory of Professor Agassiz, and told

him I had enrolled my name in the scientific school as a student of natural history. He asked me a few questions about my object in coming, my antecedents generally, the mode in which I afterwards proposed to use the knowledge I might acquire, and finally, whether I wished to study any special branch. To the latter I replied that while I wished to be well grounded in all departments of zoology, I purposed to devote myself specially to insects.

“When do you wish to begin?” he asked.

“Now,” I replied.

This seemed to please him, and with an energetic “Very well,” he reached from a shelf a huge

jar of specimens in yellow alcohol.“Take this fish,” said he, “and look at it; we call it a Haemulon [pronounced Hem-yuì lon]; by and by I will ask what you have seen.”With that he left me, but in a moment returned with explicit instructions as to the care of the object entrusted to me.

“No man is fit to be a naturalist,” said he, “who does not know how to take care of specimens.”

I was to keep the fish before me in a tin tray, and occasionally moisten the surface with alcohol

from the jar, always taking care to replace the stopper tightly.

Those were not the days of ground glass stoppers, and elegantly shaped exhibition jars; all the

old students will recall the huge, neckless glass bottles with their leaky, wax-besmeared corks half eaten by insects and begrimed with cellar dust. Entomology was a cleaner science than ichthyology, but the example of the professor, who had unhesitatingly plunged to the bottom of the jar to produce the fish, was infectious; and though this alcohol had “a very ancient and fishlike smell,” I really dared not show any aversion within these sacred precincts, and treated the alcohol as though it were pure water. Still I was conscious of a passing feeling of disappointment, for gazing at a fish did not commend itself to an ardent entomologist. My friends at home, too, were annoyed, when they discovered that no amount of eau de cologne would drown the perfume which haunted me like a shadow.

In ten minutes I had seen all that could be seen in that fish, and started in search of the

professor, who had, however, left the museum; and when I returned, after lingering over some of the odd animals stored in the upper apartment, my specimen was dry all over. I dashed the fluid over the fish as if to resuscitate it from a fainting-fit, and looked with anxiety for a return of the normal, sloppy appearance. This little excitement over, nothing was to be done but return to a steadfast gaze at my mute companion. Half an hour passed, an hour, another hour; the fish began to look loathsome. I turned it over and around; looked it in the face—ghastly; from behind, beneath, above, sideways, at a three-quarters’ view—just as ghastly. I was in despair; at an early hour I concluded that lunch was necessary; so, with infinite relief, the fish was carefully replaced in the jar, and for an hour I was free.

On my return, I learned that Professor Agassiz had been at the museum, but had gone and

would not return for several hours. My fellow students were too busy to be disturbed by continued conversation. Slowly I drew forth that hideous fish, and with a feeling of desperation again looked at it. I might not use a magnifying glass; instruments of all kinds were interdicted. My two hands, my two eyes, and the fish; it seemed a most limited field. I pushed my finger down its throat to feel how sharp its teeth were. I began to count the scales in the different rows until I was convinced that that was nonsense. At last a happy thought struck me—I would draw the fish; and now with surprise I began to discover new features in the creature. Just then the professor returned.

“That is right,” said he; “a pencil is one of the best of eyes. I am glad to notice, too, that you

keep your specimen wet and your bottle corked.”

With these encouraging words he added,— “Well, what is it like?”

He listened attentively to my brief rehearsal of the structure of parts whose names were still

unknown to me: the fringed gill—arches and movable operculum; the pores of the head, fleshy lips, and lidless eyes; the lateral line, the spinous fin, and forked tail; the compressed and arched body.

When I had finished, he waited as if expecting more, and then, with an air of disappointment,—

“You have not looked very carefully; why,” he continued, more earnestly, “you haven’t seen one

of the most conspicuous features of the animal, which is as plainly before your eyes as the fish itself; look again, look again!” and he left me to my misery.

I was piqued; I was mortified. Still more of that wretched fish! But now I set myself to my task with a will, and discovered one new thing after another, until I saw how just the professor’s criticism had been.

The afternoon passed quickly, and when, towards its close, the professor inquired,— “Do you see it yet?”

“No,” I replied, “I am certain I do not, but I see how little I saw before.”

“That is next best,” he said earnestly, “but I won’t hear you now; put away your fish and go

home; perhaps you will be ready with a better answer in the morning. I will examine you before you look at the fish.”

This was disconcerting; not only must I think of my fish all night, studying, without the object

before me, what this unknown but most visible feature might be; but also, without reviewing my new discoveries, I must give an exact account of them the next day. I had a bad memory; so I walked home by Charles River in a distracted state, with my two perplexities.

The cordial greeting from the professor the next morning was reassuring; here was a man who seemed to be quite as anxious as I that I should see for myself what he saw.

“Do you perhaps mean,” I asked, “that the fish has symmetrical sides with paired organs?”

His thoroughly pleased, “Of course, of course!” repaid the wakeful hours of the previous night.

After he had discoursed most happily and enthusiastically—as he always did—upon the importance of this point, I ventured to ask what I should do next.

“Oh, look at your fish!” he said, and left me again to my own devices. In a little more than an

hour he returned and heard my new catalogue.

“That is good; that is good!” he repeated, “but that is not all; go on.” And so, for three long days,

he placed that fish before my eyes, forbidding me to look at anything else, or to use any artificial aid. “Look, look, look,” was his repeated injunction.

This was the best entomological lesson I ever had—a lesson whose influence has extended to

the details of every subsequent study; a legacy the professor has left to me, as he has left it to many others, of inestimable value, which we could not buy, with which we cannot part.

A year afterward, some of us were amusing ourselves with chalking outlandish beasts upon the

museum black board. We drew prancing star-fishes; frogs in mortal combat; hydra-headed worms; stately craw-fishes, standing on their tails, bearing aloft umbrellas; and grotesque fishes, with gaping mouths and staring eyes. The professor came in shortly after, and was as amused as any, at our experiments. He looked at the fishes.

“Haemulons, every one of them,” he said. “Mr. \_\_\_\_\_\_ drew them.”

True; and to this day, if I attempt a fish, I can draw nothing but Haemulons.

The fourth day, a second fish of the same group was placed beside the first, and I was bidden

to point out the resemblances and differences between the two; another and another followed, until the entire family lay before me, and a whole legion of jars covered the table and surrounding shelves; the odor had become a pleasant perfume; and even now, the sight of an old, six-inch, worm-eaten cork brings fragrant memories!

The whole group of Haemulons was thus brought in review; and, whether engaged upon the

dissection of the internal organs, the preparation and examination of the bony framework, or the

description of the various parts, Agassiz’s training in the method of observing facts and their orderly arrangement was ever accompanied by the urgent exhortation not to be content with them.

“Facts are stupid things,” he would say, “until brought into connection with some general law.”

At the end of eight months, it was almost with reluctance that I left these friends and turned to

insects; but what I had gained by this outside experience has been of greater value than years of later investigation in my favorite groups.

The same kind of prolonged pondering of the Scriptures will eventually pay even longer dividends, stretching into eternity.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Lesson 3 Quiz:

1. List ten things to look for when observing a text.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

How to Study the Bible

Lesson 4: Word Studies

1. **Introduction:**

The word is the cornerstone of all language. Used in various forms, structures, and combinations they convey thoughts, actions, events, etc. Thus, in our study of the Bible it is important that learn to mine the depths of the vocabulary of God. While this is an essential element to Biblical interpretation, it’s also one of the most abused. A common saying among interpreters goes “He knows enough Greek to be dangerous.” Just like giving a man a saw does not make him a master carpenter the ability to look up a word in a dictionary and lexicon does not automatically make one a stellar Bible student. Yet, when used properly the word study is a tool which when used with skill can lead to fantastic results. In this study, we will introduce you t this vital tool, so that you can skillfully mine the riches of God’s word.

* How can people abuse word studies?
* Why is it important to remember that the Bible contains sentences not simply words?

1. **Tools for the Trade:**

The following resources are immensely helpful for a word study.

* NASB Concordance (This is indexed with Strong’s Numbers)
* Vines Complete Expository Dictionary
* ESV and MacArthur Study Bible
* Good Biblical Commentaries

Note blueletterbible.org is also an excellent resource for word studies.

1. **Word Study Mistakes:**
2. Believing that words which share the same root have the same meaning.

Adult and Adultery

Exist and Existential

In Biblical Hebrew the word for “bread” has the same root as “fight” and “angel” has the same root as “work, occupation.”

1. Not being Mindful of the migration of language.

Compare modern usage of gay with its usage a hundred years ago. This is not a major issue in the New Testament, but it is in the Old Testament which was written over a thousand year period.

1. Placing undue emphasis on the origin of words.

For instance in ***1 Corinthians 4:1 Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.***

The term servant comes from a term “under rower.” This has caused many to conclude that Paul is drawing upon nautical language. But just like a pineapple is neither pine nor apple, an under rower is neither under nor a rower, it simply means “servant.” When determining the meaning the word, look at the present context.

1. Reading Modern Usage Back Into the Words:

In ***Romans 3:18*** we read "***There is no fear of God before their eyes***."

The Greek word for fear is “*phobos*” and for God it is “*Theos.”* Thus, we should not reverse the words and construct *theophobia* believing that there was an absence of the irrational fear of God.

1. Having a Salad Bar Approach to dictionaries and lexicons.

This happens when you see five different definitions of a word, and you select the one which helps the verse make your point.

1. Stretching the Meaning:

For instance crawling is different from walking. While they both use legs and involve motion, it would be a mistake to say that walking and crawling are synonyms or even have some overlapping meaning. We should not stretch the meaning of certain words to say things that they don’t mean. For instance, it would be a mistake to say that “fear” means deep passionate love.

1. **Principles and Procedure for a Word Studies:**

The following principles do not always have to be used in the same order, but each of them should be considered when using a word study.

1. **Use multiple translations to discern how a word is translated and which word merits a word study.**
2. **Use a wide variety of sources including dictionaries, concordances, and commentaries.**
3. **Understand that different authors use words in different ways.**
4. **Ask yourself why the author used one word and not the other.**
5. **Consider the meaning of a word in relationship to another. For instance, does an accompanying word shape its meaning.**
6. **Consider whether or not a word is a technical or idiomatic expression. Is this a figure of speech, or taken literally.**
7. **Remember context is king. Test your conclusion against the context.**
8. **An Old Testament Example:**

To help illustrate this point we will look at the following passage:

***Proverbs 8:13 “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverted mouth, I hate.***

1. **Use multiple translations to discern how a word is translated and which word merits a word study.**

Looking at the different versions on blueletterbible.org there seems to be uniform consistency in the translations. Therefore, I will select fear, which seems to be a key word.

1. **Use a wide variety of sources including dictionaries, concordances, and commentaries to categorize meanings.**

In this case, I look up the Strong’s reference number (H3374), and consult Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary. Towards the end of the definition under the heading of nouns I read:

“Fear; reverence.” The noun yir'ah appears 45 times in the Old Testament. It may mean “fear” of men (Deut. 2:25). Of things (7:25), of situations (Jonah 1:10), and of God (Jonah 1:12); it may also mean “reverence” of God (Gen. 20:11).

On blueletterbible.org I see the following outline of biblical usage.

**1)** fear, terror, fearing

**a)** fear, terror

**b)** awesome or terrifying thing (object causing fear)

**c)** fear (of God), respect, reverence, piety

**d)** revered

1. **Understand that different authors use words in different ways.**

When surveying Solomon’s writings we observe that “of the Lord” accompanies every usage of “fear.” In the earlier Law of Moses, we see that “fear of the Lord” is not used so much as “fear of God.” It is translated both reverence and fear in Job as well as the Psalms. In the prophetic literature (written at a later date), we see the usage includes “Frightened.”

* Given this information, which of the following definitions can we rule out for ***Proverbs 8:13***?

fear, terror, fearing

**a)** fear, terror

**b)** awesome or terrifying thing (object causing fear)

**c)** fear (of God), respect, reverence, piety

**d)** revered

1. **Ask yourself why the author used this word and not the other.**

This can happen by looking up “fear” in a concordance or doing a search on blueletterbible.org and seeing the different words for “fear.” When you do this you will notice that terror, dread, and being afraid are most commonly associated with other words.

In the Old Testament especially, we have to be mindful of the impact of genre on our word study.

* For instance, how would the concept of fear be used by the Prophets verses the wisdom literature of the Proverbs? How might its usage be different in the Law verses Leviticus?

1. **Consider the meaning of a word in relationship to another.**

For instance “body” when accompanied by “of work” has a narrow meaning.

As we noted in Proverbs, fear is always accompanied by “of the Lord.”

“Of the Lord” leads us to adopt the definition from Strongs:

**c)** fear (of God), respect, reverence, piety

1. **Try to understand if this word is a technical or idiomatic expression. Is this a figure of speech or should it be taken literally?**

For instance “in a minute” taken technically would be 60 seconds, taken idiomatically it would mean a short amount of time.

In light of the above, “fear of the Lord” is really an idiomatic expression. The context shows us that “fear” in the phrase “fear of the Lord” does not mean literal fear or terror.

1. **Remember context is king. Test your conclusion against the context.**

Adapting the term “reverential, respect, piety” of God, place this understanding back in the verse to see if it still makes sense.

***Proverbs 8:13“The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverted mouth, I hate.***

1. **A New Testament Example:**

In this section we will examine:

***Colossians 3:21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.***

1. **Use Multiple translations to discern how a word is translated and which word merits a word study.** You can do this by clicking on the “V” icon in Blueletterbible.com.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | **The New International Version** | **New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update** | **The Good News Translation** | | --- | --- | --- | | 21 Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged. | 21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart. | 21 Parents, do not irritate your children, or they will become discouraged. | |  |  |
|  |  |  |

* Which word seems to alter the meaning of the text?

1. **Use a wide variety of sources including dictionaries, concordances, and commentaries to categorize meanings.**

Looking it up on Blueletterbible.com, we see that there is an overwhelming amount of usages, so we will use the outline they provide.

**1)** generator or male ancestor

**a)** either the nearest ancestor: father of the corporeal nature, natural fathers, both parents

**b)** a more remote ancestor, the founder of a family or tribe, progenitor of a people, forefather: so Abraham is called, Jacob and David

**1)** fathers i.e. ancestors, forefathers, founders of a nation

**c)** one advanced in years, a senior

**2)** metaph.

**a)** the originator and transmitter of anything

**1)** the authors of a family or society of persons animated by the same spirit as himself

**2)** one who has infused his own spirit into others, who actuates and governs their minds

**b)** one who stands in a father's place and looks after another in a paternal way

**c)** a title of honour

**1)** teachers, as those to whom pupils trace back the knowledge and training they have received

**2)** the members of the Sanhedrin, whose prerogative it was by virtue of the wisdom and experience in which they excelled, to take charge of the interests of others

**3)** God is called the Father

**a)** of the stars, the heavenly luminaries, because he is their creator, upholder, ruler

**b)** of all rational and intelligent beings, whether angels or men, because he is their creator, preserver, guardian and protector

**1)** of spiritual beings and of all men

**c)** of Christians, as those who through Christ have been exalted to a specially close and intimate relationship with God, and who no longer dread him as a stern judge of sinners, but revere him as their reconciled and loving Father

**d)** the Father of Jesus Christ, as one whom God has united to himself in the closest bond of love and intimacy, made acquainted with his purposes, appointed to explain and carry out among men the plan of salvation, and made to share also in his own divine nature

**1)** by Jesus Christ himself

**2)** by the apostles

* Which of these definitions can we rule out?

The MacArthur Study Bible leads us to the following conclusion:

**6:4 fathers.** The word technically refers to male parents, but was also used of parents in general. Since Paul had been speaking of both parents (vv. 1–3) he probably had both in mind here. The same word is used in Heb. 11:23 for Moses’ parents.[[32]](#footnote-32)

1. **Understand that different authors use words in different ways.**

Given the scope of the term father, it may be helpful to narrow any search to Paul. Clicking on the “C” I am given every occurrence of patēr but when I look through Romans through Philemon, I note that it is only translated Father.

* How should the above impact our understanding of how patēr should be translated?

1. **Ask yourself why the author used one word and not the other.**

To do this exercise, let’s do a search on the word “parents”.

When I do this, I see that “parents” is used in ***Colossians 3:20***. Further research shows that the word is different from “Father” (patēr). It is transliterated “goneus” which can be translated “Fathers, parent, the parents.”

* How does this help us understand how patēr should be translated?

1. **Consider the meaning of a word in relationship to another.**

(Try to understand if associated words shape its meaning).

In order to do this, we might want to look at the larger structure of the household code. Consider the larger context of ***Colossians 3:18-4:1***.

***Colossians 3:18-4:1 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. 20 Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart. 22 Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. 25 For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality. 1 Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.***

* List who is addressed with each command?
* Notice that the subordinate member is listed first and the authority is second.
* Why would it be a problem to translate patēr as parent instead of father given the parallel commands?

1. **Consider whether or not a word is a technical or idiomatic expression. Is this a figure of speech, or taken literally.**

* How does the command to children help us to discern if this is literal or idiomatic?

1. **Remember context is king. Test your conclusion against the context.**

* Does the translation of patēr as father furnish us with a consistent translation? Why or why not?

1. **Thought Questions:**
2. Should the fact that there is scholarly disagreement about translation discourage us from performing word studies?
3. Why is it important to subject all word studies to the last step of testing your conclusion against the context?
4. **Application:**
5. Use the method to conduct your own word studies.
6. Understand that you can’t simply rely on one source.
7. Show discernment when you read or hear others conclusions about the meaning of a word.
8. **Assignment:**

Using ***Titus 3:4-7*** perform two word studies using the following principles and procedures:

1. **Use multiple translations to discern how a word is translated and which word merits a word study.**
2. **Use a wide variety of sources including dictionaries, concordances, and commentaries.**
3. **Understand that different authors use words in different ways.**
4. **Ask yourself why the author used one word and not the other.**
5. **Consider the meaning of a word in relationship to another.**
6. **Consider whether or not a word is a technical or idiomatic expression. Is this a figure of speech, or taken literally.**
7. **Remember context is king. Test your conclusion against the context.**
8. **Conclusion:**

Word studies can no doubt be laborious and at times difficult. However, sometimes a quick consultation of Vines and a Concordance is all you need. Like of skills in this series this is a tool which whose helpfulness varies on the circumstance. In addition, be patient with yourself as you will find rapid improvement with repetition.

Lesson 4 Quiz

1. List five mistakes we can make with word studies.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

1. List five principles for Word Studies.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

\_\_ I have completed (read and answered the questions) this lesson.

How to Study the Bible

Lesson 5: How to Use Commentaries

1. **Introduction:**

Like a good sermon, devotional book, or counselor a commentary serves as a gift to church. Gleaning from the mind of knowledgeable scholars, they can provide profound insight which will enhance our understanding of the text.

* Why might some people hesitate to use commentaries?
* How can commentaries be helpful?
* What would you say to someone who says, “I don’t need a commentary so long as I have my Bible”?

1. **The Usefulness of Commentaries:**
2. They often impart valuable historical/background information which you would not acquire through normal observation.
3. They often provide some very detailed word studies, often drawing from extra biblical resources.
4. They give you good leads on other books or passages which may answer your questions.
5. When there is a controversial passage, they will explain the different possibilities and give guidance for the best one.
6. They can be used to “check” your interpretation. In other words, they will help you to discern if you are way off in left field with your conclusions.
7. Like good sermons, they can be extremely devotional and helpful in internalizing the text.

* Can you think of any other benefits of using a commentary?

1. **Marks of a Good Commentary:**
2. Is the commentary exegetical (a study of a text), homiletical (a sermon in print), or both? For those students serious about interpreting the Bible, you want someone who will help you to answer your questions. Therefore, what you really want in a commentary is exegesis.
3. Is the commentary based on the original language? Does the author have a working knowledge of Greek or Hebrew, and are the original languages the real source of his comments? If the author does not, then there is little they can add to your study. Do not worry if you don’t know the languages. Even if the author throws out Greek and Hebrew words, you can “read around” the words to get a source of the meaning.
4. When the text has more than one possible meaning, does the author discuss all possible meanings and then give clear reasons for his interpretive choice?
5. Does the author discuss a textual critical problem? In other words, when you notice in your margin “some manuscripts do not include . . .” does the author bring it up?
6. Does the author offer important historical background of the text in important places?
7. Does the author give you bibliographic information so that you can engage in further study?
8. Does the introduction to the commentary give you enough historical information so that you can have a good sense of the occasion of the book?[[33]](#footnote-33)
9. **When to use a Commentary:**

“You go to a commentary after you have done your own work: the reason you eventually consult a commentary is to find answers to the content questions that have arisen in your own study. At the same time, of course, the commentary will alert you to questions you failed to ask, but perhaps you should have.”[[34]](#footnote-34)

* What is the danger of using a commentary too early?
* Conversely, what might be the danger of not going to a commentary at all?

1. **Mistakes We can Make with Commentaries:**
2. *We go to them too early.* If you go to a commentary too early you train yourself to let the scholar do the thinking for you. Over the long run this will lead you to spend more time in the commentary than in the Word, replacing thoughtful observation with barrowed insight.
3. *Using Too Few Commentaries:*

***Proverbs 18:17 The first to plead his case seems just, Until another comes and examines him.***

One commentary can make a compelling case for a certain interpretation, but it will remain unchallenged in your mind until you garner another point of view. While most commentaries are in general agreement they will debate on the meaning of certain key passages. Thus, using a variety of commentaries will give you a well rounded perspective of the debate.

1. *Using Too Many Commentaries.* Using too many commentaries can paralyze the reader. Unable to process all of the nuances of the arguments or feeling overwhelmed by some of the technical points, the reader will be tempted to throw their hands in the air and give up.
2. *We can rely on one of them too heavily.* When I was in seminary there was a joke about the new MacArthur Study Bible. Apparently, they printed the notes in red letters. While John MacArthur is an excellent interpreter of the text, he is not infallible. Don’t allow the esteem of a certain teacher nor the quality of his comments lead you to blindly accept them as authoritative. You still have a responsibility to interpret the text for yourself (***Acts 17:11***).
3. *We are afraid to disagree with them*. There is nothing that says that commentaries are always right. In most cases, if you have diligently performed your exegesis, you will find that your conclusions match those of the better commentaries. However, there are times when you have to “stand on your own.” If you find that your conclusions do not match a commentary, your first instinct should be to carefully reassess your interpretations. We should not be quick to discard the insights of patient and wise scholars, none the less, there are times when we have to stand by what we believe the text is teaching.
4. *We take their word for it.* It’s not enough to read a stated conclusion we need to do our best to see how the commentator arrives at that conclusion. Only then can we weigh the strength of their arguments and conclusions.
5. *We are careless in our selection of commentaries.* A bad commentary can lead you an errant direction in your study. Some of the academics who publish their commentaries have a low view of inspiration and seem bent on pleasing their colleagues in the academy rather than standing for the truth. Other commentaries can be written with a decisive agenda to prove a certain point.

In addition, we should take great care and caution in our use of online commentaries. Just because they are free does not make them worth it.

1. **How to Get Started:**

For those of you who are serious about bible study let me recommend the following resources. In order to help you appreciate the nuances of each, I have included their commentary on ***John 3:16***:

***“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.***

1. *The MacArthur Study Bible*: This is a clear, straightforward study bible. The simplicity and clarity of his explanations are the strength of this resource. In addition, he does a wonderful job of cross referencing the reader to other passages which may illumine the reader. You can purchase this resource for $31.99 at Christianbook.com.

**3:16 For God so loved the world.** The Son’s mission is bound up in the supreme love of God for the evil, sinful "world" of humanity (cf. 6:32, 51; 12:47; *see note on 1:9*; *see note on Matt. 5:44, 45*) that is in rebellion against Him. The word "so" emphasizes the intensity or greatness of His love. The Father gave His unique and beloved Son to die on behalf on sinful men (*see note on 2 Cor. 5:21*). **everlasting life.** *See note on v. 15*; cf. 17:3; 1 John 5:20.

1. *The ESV Study Bible*: This is an extremely thorough study bible with detailed notes and introductions. One of the strengths of this Study Bible is that it raises awareness and addresses a number of the key textual debates. The articles in the back of the tome have been extremely informative as well. You can purchase this resource for $31.99 at Christianbook.com.

***16*** Here is the most famous summary of the gospel in the entire Bible. **For** connects to [v. 15](http://www.esvstudybible.org/search?q=John+3%3A15) and explains what happened to make it possible that someone can “have eternal life” ([v. 15](http://www.esvstudybible.org/search?q=John+3%3A15)), that is, through believing in Christ. **God so loved the world** was an astounding statement in that context because the OT and other Jewish writings had spoken only of God's love for his people Israel. God's love for “the world” made it possible for “whoever” ([v. 15](http://www.esvstudybible.org/search?q=John+3%3A15)) believes in Christ, not Jews alone, to have eternal life. God's love for the world was not mere sentiment but led to a specific action: he **gave his only Son**, which John elsewhere explains as sending him to earth as a man ([v. 17](http://www.esvstudybible.org/search?q=John+3%3A17)) to suffer and die and thereby to bear the penalty for sins (see note on [1 John 2:2](http://www.esvstudybible.org/search?q=1+John+2%3A2); cf. [Rom. 3:25](http://www.esvstudybible.org/search?q=Rom+3%3A25)). On “only Son,” see note on [John 1:14](http://www.esvstudybible.org/search?q=John+1%3A14), which contains the same Greek phrase. The purpose of giving his Son was to make God's great gift of eternal life available to anyone—to **whoever believes in him**, that is, whoever personally trusts in him (see note on [11:25](http://www.esvstudybible.org/search?q=John+11%3A25)). **Not perish** means not perish in eternal judgment, in contrast to having **eternal life**, the life of abundant joy and immeasurable blessing in the presence of God forever. Those who “believe in” Christ **have** that “eternal life” and already experience its blessings in this present time, not yet fully, but in some significant measure. [« Less](http://www.esvstudybible.org/search?q=John+3%3A16#show less content)

1. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*: If you buy one commentary series this is the one. The information is insightful and accessible for any earnest Bible Student. You can get the 12 Volume Set on Christianbook.com for $129.99 or you can get the CD-ROM for $75.

**16** Commentators are divided as to whether vv. 16-21 are a direct continuation of the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus or whether they represent only the author's comment on Jesus' words. In either case, they express the most important message of the Gospel (emphasized elsewhere in many ways)-that salvation is a gift received only by believing God for it. The nature of belief is implied in the illustration of Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness (v. 14). Belief consists of accepting something, not doing something. The result of belief is that one receives eternal life. He is freed from condemnation and lives in a relation of total honesty with God, for he does not fear having his real self exposed.

"Eternal," the new life God gives, refers not solely to the duration of existence but also to the quality of life as contrasted with futility. It is a deepening and growing experience. It can never be exhausted in any measurable span of time, but it introduces a totally new quality of life. The believer becomes imperishable; he is free from all condemnation, he is approved by God.

The verb "perish" depicts the opposite of salvation. It is used of death as opposed to life (Mark 3:6, transitive), "destroy" as opposed to preserve (1Cor 1:19), "loss" as opposed to win or gain (2John 8). It may be used of sheep that have gone astray (Matt 10:6) or a son who has wandered from his father's house (Luke 15:24). Its use here clearly implies that those without God are hopelessly confused in purpose, alienated from him in their affections, and futile in their efforts. Positive belief in Christ is necessary; all that one has to do to perish is nothing. To perish is to fail completely of fulfilling God's purpose and consequently to be excluded forever from his fellowship.

The presentation of the good news of God's love offers only two options: to believe or to perish. Eternal life, which is accepted by believing, is a gift of God and brings with it the fullest blessings God can bestow. To perish does not mean to cease to exist; it means to experience utter failure, futility, and loss of all that makes existence worthwhile. Its use with reference to Judas in John 17:12 is a vivid illustration.

1. For those of you studying an individual book, all me to direct you to [http://www.bestcommentaries.com](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/). This website provides helpful reviews and ratings for just about every biblical commentary in print. In addition, the appendix found at the end of the study provides some recommendations for individual books of the Bible.
2. **Application:**

The best time to use commentaries is after you have made your observations and performed your word studies. My advice is to go to a commentary with an agenda. Take the exegetical questions raised from your observations, and seek to get answers from the commentaries. In addition, watch for observations made in the commentaries which you may have overlooked in your studies. Finally, after surveying the commentaries, reanalyze your passage with the additional information you may have gleaned from the commentaries.

1. **Assignment:**

Consult at least two commentaries (e-mail me if you want some) on ***Titus 3:4-7*** and answer the exegetical questions you asked when you made observations on the text.

1. **Conclusion:**

By God’s providence He has given us scholars to bless the church by providing enriching commentary on various books of the Bible. For many a student, these commentaries serve as knowledgeable friends whom they can bounce their ideas off of and move ever closer to the pure meaning of the text. While excellent tools, these books should be used judiciously with the understanding that God wants us to understand the text for ourselves.

***Acts 17:11 Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.***

Appendix 1

Recommended Commentary List

The following comes from bestcommentaries.com which I found to be a helpful website.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| [Wenham, Gordon J.](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3967/genesis-gordon-j-wenham/) | [Genesis (2 Vols)](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3967/genesis-gordon-j-wenham/) | [WBC](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/series/word-biblical-commentary-wbc/) |
| [Stuart, Douglas](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3585/exodus-douglas-stuart/) | [Exodus](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3585/exodus-douglas-stuart/) | [NAC](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/series/new-american-commentary-nac/) |
| [Wenham, Gordon J.](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3676/the-book-of-leviticus-gordon-j-wenham/) | [The Book of Leviticus](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3676/the-book-of-leviticus-gordon-j-wenham/) | [NICOT](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/series/new-international-commentary-on-the-old-testament-nicot/) |
| [Cole, R. Dennis](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3587/numbers-r-dennis-cole/) | [Numbers](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3587/numbers-r-dennis-cole/) | [NAC](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/series/new-american-commentary-nac/) |
| [Craigie, Peter C.](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3678/the-book-of-deuteronomy-peter-c-craigie/) | [The Book of Deuteronomy](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3678/the-book-of-deuteronomy-peter-c-craigie/) | [NICOT](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/series/new-international-commentary-on-the-old-testament-nicot/) |
| [Howard, David M.](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3589/joshua-david-m-howard/) | [Joshua](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3589/joshua-david-m-howard/) | [NAC](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/series/new-american-commentary-nac/) |
| [Block, Daniel I.](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3590/judges-ruth-daniel-i-block/) | [Judges-Ruth](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3590/judges-ruth-daniel-i-block/) | [NAC](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/series/new-american-commentary-nac/) |
| [Hubbard, Robert L.](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3680/the-book-of-ruth-robert-l-hubbard/) | [The Book of Ruth](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3680/the-book-of-ruth-robert-l-hubbard/) | [NICOT](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/series/new-international-commentary-on-the-old-testament-nicot/) |
| [Tsumura, David Toshio](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3681/the-first-book-of-samuel-david-toshio-tsumura/) | [The First Book of Samuel](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3681/the-first-book-of-samuel-david-toshio-tsumura/) | [NICOT](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/series/new-international-commentary-on-the-old-testament-nicot/) |
| [Hubbard, Robert L.](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/6385/first-and-second-kings-robert-l-hubbard/) | [First and Second Kings](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/6385/first-and-second-kings-robert-l-hubbard/) | [EvBC](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/series/everyman-s-bible-commentary/) |
| [Selman, Martin J.](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3894/1-and-2-chronicles-martin-j-selman/) | [1 & 2 Chronicles (2 Vols)](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3894/1-and-2-chronicles-martin-j-selman/) | [TOTC](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/series/tyndale-old-testament-commentary-totc/) |
| [Fensham, F. Charles](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3682/the-books-of-ezra-and-nehemiah-f-charles-fensham/) | [The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3682/the-books-of-ezra-and-nehemiah-f-charles-fensham/) | [NICOT](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/series/new-international-commentary-on-the-old-testament-nicot/) |
| [Finley, Thomas J.](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/4993/joel-amos-obadiah-thomas-j-finley/) | [Joel, Amos, Obadiah](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/4993/joel-amos-obadiah-thomas-j-finley/) | [WEC](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/series/wycliffe-exegetical-commentary-wec/) |
| [Alexander, T. Desmond; Baker, David W.; Waltke, Bruce K.](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3926/obadiah-jonah-micah-t-desmond-alexander-david-w-baker-and-bruce-k-walt/) | [Obadiah, Jonah, Micah](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3926/obadiah-jonah-micah-t-desmond-alexander-david-w-baker-and-bruce-k-walt/) | [TOTC](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/series/tyndale-old-testament-commentary-totc/) |
| [Waltke, Bruce K.](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3496/a-commentary-on-micah-bruce-k-waltke/) | [A Commentary on Micah](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3496/a-commentary-on-micah-bruce-k-waltke/) |  |
| [Patterson, Richard D.](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/4992/nahum-habakkuk-zephaniah-richard-d-patterson/) | [Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/4992/nahum-habakkuk-zephaniah-richard-d-patterson/) | [WEC](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/series/wycliffe-exegetical-commentary-wec/) |
| [Taylor, Richard A.; Clendenen, E. Ray](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3605/haggai-and-malachi-richard-a-taylor-and-e-ray-clendenen/) | [Haggai and Malachi](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3605/haggai-and-malachi-richard-a-taylor-and-e-ray-clendenen/) | [NAC](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/series/new-american-commentary-nac/) |
| [Merrill, Eugene H.](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/5579/haggai-zechariah-malachi--an-exegetical-commentary-eugene-h-merrill/) | [Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi - An Exegetical Commentary](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/5579/haggai-zechariah-malachi--an-exegetical-commentary-eugene-h-merrill/) |  |
| [Carson, D. A.](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3325/matthew-d-a-carson/) | [Matthew (2 Vols)](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3325/matthew-d-a-carson/) | [EBC](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/series/expositor-s-bible-commentary-ebc/) |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | [Chisholm, Jr., Robert B.](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/4666/interpreting-the-minor-prophets-robert-b-chisholm-jr/) | [Interpreting the Minor Prophets](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/4666/interpreting-the-minor-prophets-robert-b-chisholm-jr/) |  |
|  | [Hiebert, D. Edmond](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/5757/the-gospel-of-mark-an-expositional-commentary-d-edmond-hiebert/) | [The Gospel of Mark: An Expositional Commentary](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/5757/the-gospel-of-mark-an-expositional-commentary-d-edmond-hiebert/) |  |
|  | [Bock, Darrell L.](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3169/luke-darrell-l-bock/) | [Luke (2 Vols)](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3169/luke-darrell-l-bock/) | [BECNT](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/series/baker-exegetical-commentary-on-the-new-testament-becnt/) |
|  | [Carson, D. A.](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3809/the-gospel-according-to-john-d-a-carson/) | [The Gospel According to John](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3809/the-gospel-according-to-john-d-a-carson/) | [PNTC](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/series/pillar-new-testament-commentary-pntc/) |
|  | [Kent, Jr., Homer A.](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/6449/jerusalem-to-rome-studies-in-the-book-of-acts-homer-a-kent-jr/) | [Jerusalem to Rome: Studies in the Book of Acts](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/6449/jerusalem-to-rome-studies-in-the-book-of-acts-homer-a-kent-jr/) |  |
|  | [Moo, Douglas J.](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/5/the-epistle-to-the-romans-douglas-j-moo/) | [The Epistle to the Romans](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/5/the-epistle-to-the-romans-douglas-j-moo/) | [NICNT](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/series/new-international-commentary-on-the-new-testament-nicnt/) |
|  | [Fee, Gordon D.](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3662/the-first-epistle-to-the-corinthians-gordon-d-fee/) | [The First Epistle to the Corinthians](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3662/the-first-epistle-to-the-corinthians-gordon-d-fee/) | [NICNT](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/series/new-international-commentary-on-the-new-testament-nicnt/) |
|  | [Belleville, Linda](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3563/2-corinthians-linda-belleville/) | [2 Corinthians](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3563/2-corinthians-linda-belleville/) | [IVPNTC](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/series/ivp-new-testament-commentary-ivpntc/) |
|  | [Kent, Jr., Homer A.](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/6450/the-freedom-of-gods-sons-studies-in-galatians-homer-a-kent-jr/) | [The Freedom of God's Sons: Studies in Galatians](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/6450/the-freedom-of-gods-sons-studies-in-galatians-homer-a-kent-jr/) |  |
|  | [Hoehner, Harold W.](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3/ephesians-an-exegetical-commentary-harold-w-hoehner/) | [Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3/ephesians-an-exegetical-commentary-harold-w-hoehner/) |  |
|  | [Fee, Gordon D.](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3666/pauls-letter-to-the-philippians-gordon-d-fee/) | [Paul's Letter to the Philippians](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/3666/pauls-letter-to-the-philippians-gordon-d-fee/) | [NICNT](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/series/new-international-commentary-on-the-new-testament-nicnt/) |
|  | [Kent, Jr., Homer A.](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/6451/treasures-of-wisdom-studies-in-colossians-and-phil-homer-a-kent-jr/) | [Treasures of Wisdom: Studies in Colossians & Philemon](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/6451/treasures-of-wisdom-studies-in-colossians-and-phil-homer-a-kent-jr/) |  |
|  | [Hiebert, D. Edmond](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/6452/the-thessalonian-epistles-a-call-to-readiness-d-edmond-hiebert/) | [The Thessalonian epistles: A call to readiness](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/6452/the-thessalonian-epistles-a-call-to-readiness-d-edmond-hiebert/) |  |
|  | [Mounce, William D.](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/4021/pastoral-epistles-william-d-mounce/) | [Pastoral Epistles (Vol 46)](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/4021/pastoral-epistles-william-d-mounce/) | [WBC](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/series/word-biblical-commentary-wbc/) |
|  | [Kent, Jr., Homer A.](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/6453/the-epistle-to-the-hebrews-homer-a-kent-jr/) | [The Epistle to the Hebrews](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/6453/the-epistle-to-the-hebrews-homer-a-kent-jr/) |  |
|  | [Hiebert, D. Edmond](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/6004/james-d-edmond-hiebert/) | [James](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/6004/james-d-edmond-hiebert/) |  |
|  | [Hiebert, D. Edmond](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/6454/first-peter-d-edmond-hiebert/) | [First Peter](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/6454/first-peter-d-edmond-hiebert/) |  |
|  | [Hiebert, D. Edmond](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/6455/second-peter-and-jude-an-expositional-commentary-d-edmond-hiebert/) | [Second Peter and Jude: An Expositional Commentary](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/6455/second-peter-and-jude-an-expositional-commentary-d-edmond-hiebert/) |  |
|  | [Thomas, Robert L.](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/4986/revelation-robert-l-thomas/) | [Revelation (2 Vols)](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/book/4986/revelation-robert-l-thomas/) | [WEC](http://www.bestcommentaries.com/series/wycliffe-exegetical-commentary-wec/) |

Lesson 5 Quiz:

1. Provide five ways that commentaries can be useful to the interpreter.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

1. List five mistakes we can make with commentaries.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

\_\_ I have completed (read and answered the question) this lesson.

How to Study the Bible

Lesson 6: Interpretive Fallacies

1. **Introduction:**

Type “top ten mistakes” into an internet search engine and you will receive endless results ranging from love and relationships to gardening.

1. Why is there such a public fascination with mistakes?
2. How can identifying mistakes be helpful?
3. Why is it important to identify mistakes people make when interpreting the Bible?

One of the best ways to avoid mistakes is to know what kind of mistakes to avoid. While we will never advance in our understanding of how to interpret the Bible correctly by simply avoiding mistakes, an understating of interpretive fallacies can be instructive. Therefore in this study we will survey various interpretive fallacies so that you will avoid them in your own study and intake of the Word.

1. **Interpretive Fallacies:[[35]](#footnote-35)**
2. **Taking Passages Out of Context:**
3. **Prooftexting:** This occurs when we string together an inappropriate or inadequate series of Bible verses to prove our theology.

For instance, many who advocate the prosperity gospel will cite:

***John 14:14 “If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.***

They believe that Jesus is teaching that so long as you ask in “Jesus” name, God will answer such a request – provided you have enough faith. However, we must consider some of the other passages which teach about prayer. What qualifications do the following scriptures provide?

***1 John 5:14-15 This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.***

***1 John 3:22 and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.***

***James 4:1-2 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.***

In addition, further study on what it means to pray in Jesus’ name will show that “Jesus’ name” is not so much an incantation to add to the tail end of the prayer. It is essentially Jesus’ signature on your prayer. You should pray for requests which Jesus Himself would pray for.

1. **Isolationism:** This is failureto interpret a single Scripture in light of its context.

***Matthew 18:19-20 “Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. 20 “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”***

* Does this passage promise that God will answer any prayer where two or three believers agree? How does the greater context of this passage inform our understanding?

1. **Adding to Scripture:**

This consists of bringing truths out of Scripture which were not there to begin with.

1. **Spiritualizing:** Reading a spiritual or historical truth into a text rather than extracting truth from it.

Richard Mayhue shares the following story:

*A recently married couple approached a Southern California pastor for help with their troubled marriage. As a part of the initial interview, the pastor asked, “What convinced you that you should marry?” The husband recounted how he had gone to his pastor, seeking to know the will of God for himself and his girlfriend, now his wife. That pastor reminded the young man of how Joshua and the Jews had marched around Jericho several times and how the walls collapsed (Josh. 6:15). Then the pastor suggested that the boyfriend literally walk around his girl seven times. If the walls of her heart collapsed then he could be sure God wanted him to take her for his wife.*

1. How did the pastor use the text?
2. How can you guard against such spiritualizing (remember the concept of reading)?
3. Why is it important to distinguish between strict interpretation and possible applications?
4. **Nationalizing:** Seeing one’s own country as the recipient of national promises made by God in the Bible to Israel.

A classic example is the use of ***2 Chronicles 7:14*** by earnest believers who are shocked and appalled by the social degradation of believers:

***2 Chronicles 7:14 and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.***

* Does this apply to America? Why or why not?

1. **Editing God’s Mind:**

This is the process of revisionism where the interpreter seeks to make the Bible conform to a modern theory of novel teachings. The aim of this fallacy is to dismiss or re-imagine those portions of Scripture which do damage to the pet theory in question.

1. **Embellishing:** Reading current thinking into the Bible and straining the natural reading of the Scripture to make it fit.For instance since the onset of Darwinian evolution, many have sought to tweak their understanding of the Hebrew word for day (***yom***) in the context of the creation account. However, we must weigh the following factors:
2. The Hebrew word for day, when accompanied by a numerical adjective is never used figuratively.
3. Looking beyond the creation account we see that the Hebrew plural for day is never used figuratively in the Old Testament.
4. The terms morning and evening are never used figuratively in the Old Testament, and always describe a twenty-four-hour period.
5. ***Genesis 1:5*** designates a day as a period of light and darkness.

Such data may not comport with modern scientific notions of the origins of the cosmos, but must seriously be considered when interpreting this text.

* Can you think of other ways in which people seek to force modern thought upon the Bible? (Hint: How do people mangle ***Mark 12:31 "The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'***?)

1. **Methodologizing:** Interpreting the Scripture by means of an unproved theory about the Bible’s literary origin.Scholars hypothesize about how the Bible came to be, and then use this methodology to interpret the text. We see this in liberal circles where they suggest among other things that the authors of Matthew and Luke plagiarized Mark. These authors attached the name of these formidable men to their gospels, so that they would gain wide readership in the early church. Thus, scholars seek to read between the lines and note the differences which may highlight the theological ideology of the original authors.

* What kind of regard does this perspective have for the inspiration of the Scripture and the historicity of the events?

1. **Modernizing the Bible**

This is the process of accommodating the Bible to modern sensibilities.

1. **Accommodation:** Viewing Scripture through the lens of human reason. For instance, many homosexual advocates will take a modern understanding of homosexuality and read it back into the Bible.

Consider their treatment of:

**Romans 1:26-27:**

***For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.***

They believe that Paul is condemning certain homosexual *acts*, not homosexuality, or the homosexual, or the responsible practice of homosexual behavior. Whether he knew it or not, we now know that some people constitutionally prefer members of the same sex. They experience no attraction to members of the opposite sex. Therefore, we must distinguish between the *invert* and the *pervert*, between *inversion* and *perversion*. Perverts are not genuinely homosexual. They engage in homosexual practices although they are heterosexuals, or they commit heterosexual acts though homosexuals. Inverts, on the other hand, are constitutionally gay. Their sexual orientation is the inverse of heterosexuals, and for them, engaging in homosexual acts is normal. In ***Romans 1*** Paul condemns perversion, not inversion.

Support for this view is adduced from Paul’s claim that those he discusses changed or left the natural use of their sexuality for that which was unnatural or against nature. Thus, Paul only condemns homosexual acts committed by apparently heterosexual persons.﻿[[36]](#footnote-36)

* How does this exemplify accommodation?

In response we would says that there is no proof that there is a constitutional homosexual for whom homosexual acts follow from a genetic condition, but this interpretation clearly requires that. Moreover, there is no reason to believe that even if such a condition exists, Paul knew of it and refers to it here.[[37]](#footnote-37) In a classic case of eisegesis pro homosexual scholars are guilty of anachronism - imposing distinctly modern thoughts upon the theology of Paul. This would be equivalent to saying that “the poor in spirit” in the beatitudes are those with low self esteem. Such psychological concepts did not surface until the 20th century.

1. **Culturalizing:** Limiting a text to a specific time in history or culture, when in reality the text demands a wider application in time. OR extending a past practice or culture into our time which in fact should have been limited historically. We often see this in gender issues, for instance in ***1 Timothy 2:12*** we read:

***But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.***

Consider the following explanation:

*Paul was not giving a universal order to all women of all time not to teach nor have authority over a man, but was ordering that women do not assume superiority over men or promote false teachings. Women should learn first, being educated in the faith before they teach. It is clear from Paul’s other letters that Paul supported women teachers and leaders. Priscilla was a minister of the Gospel who taught a man, Apollos (Acts 18:26), and in 2 Timothy, Paul asks Timothy to greet Priscilla and Aquila (4:19). Surely, I Timothy 2:11-15 is not prescriptive to women for all time if Paul also commends women leaders and teachers.[[38]](#footnote-38)*

Closer scrutiny of this argument will demonstrate that there is no conclusive evidence that the furnished examples ever taught men in a public setting (i.e. a church service). Also, consider the significance of the following passage which provides the basis for the command:

***1 Timothy 2:13-14 For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. 14 And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.***

* Does the appeal to creation imply a “limited” application of the prohibition for women not to teach men? Why or why not?

1. **Twisting Scripture:**

This consists of distorting Scripture beyond what the original audience would recognize.

1. **Redefining:** Giving historically accepted biblical words new definitions to support our theology.For instance, one popular author redefines sin as “Any human condition or act that robs God of glory, by stripping one of his children of their right to divine dignity.” This helps him to maintain his self esteem theology which strives to ignore any doctrine which may harm a person’s positive self image.
2. **Anglicizing:** Reaching inaccurate conclusions by drawing theology from the English text alone. You may see this in certain fundamentalist camps who insist “If the King James Version was good enough for the Apostle Paul it’s good enough for me.” They would be wise to understand that the *original* text is inspired, and not a four hundred year old translation. Another example would be the Wesleyan teaching on perfectionism from the King James translation of ***Phil. 3:15***.
3. **Mysticizing:** Finding hidden meanings in Scripture that can be understood only by the one who knows the “secret code.” For those of you who actually sat through “The Omega Code” you would be familiar with the plot line which centered upon prophetic secret codes lifted from the Bible by carefully counting letters in a complex 3D matrix. This is merely parroting a practice advocated by mystical Kabbalah sect of Judaism, where they assigned numerical values to Hebrew letters.

* How would you answer the assertion “The secret codes embedded in the Bible which foretell the future prove that it’s a supernatural book!”?

1. **Over Literalizing:** This speaks of a failure to interpret the Bible normally. We need to allow the Bible to use metaphors and figures of speech.
2. **Letterism:** Ignoring figures of speech and drawing woodenly literal conclusions.

For instance, many in the Catholic persuasion will use the following verse to prove that communion wafer is the Lord’s actual body, and the wine is his actual blood.

***John 6:53 So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves.***

* How does the following passage help us make sense of what Jesus really meant?

***John 6:35 Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.***

1. **Legalizing:** Overemphasizing the letter of God’s Word at the expense of its spirit.

For instance a home church movement surveyed various biblical passages (***Acts 2:46; 5:42; 12:12; 20:20; Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Phm. 2; 2Jo. 10***) and concluded that a home was the only acceptable place for worship.

While homes are wonderful venue for worship, the Bible cites other places as well such as hills (***Luke 6:12, 17***), seashores (***Matt. 13:1-2***), riversides (***Acts 16:13***), and public buildings (***Acts 3:1***). Nowhere in the Bible is there a list of acceptable places.[[39]](#footnote-39) So how do you guard against this?

1. *Distinguish between the desired end and means to an end.* What is the “heart” behind the command. For instance, is the point the command to wear head coverings (***1Co. 11:5***) or sanction certain attire or promote submission?
2. *Distinguish between outward form and inward motive*. What is your “heart” behind obeying the command? Is it merely external conformity, a means of easing the conscience, a cause of self righteous celebration, or the heart of worship?
3. *Determine if the outward expression or observance is cultural or absolute.* For instance, the prohibition for women to teach in ***1 Tim. 2*** is rooted in creation, not the culture. However, the rampant feminism of the Corinthian church may have led Paul to encourage cultural expressions of femininity.

1. **Reversing Interpretation**

This speaks of making the Bible say what you want it to say.

1. **Generalizing:** Assuming that any specific historical experience reported in Scripture is a valid, general experience for today. For instance, people would claim that if there are apostles in the early church then there is no reason why there can’t be apostles today. However, an examination of

***Acts 1:21-22*** indicates that living apostle would be impossible.

***“Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us— 22 beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.”***

In addition, it would be unwise for a father driving his minivan full of kids to assume that God will part the river like He did for the Israelites so that his family can return to their “promised land.”

This fallacy can turn serious when people advocate that God can heal as He did in the early church, and encourage sincere believers to refuse medical counsel.

To guard against this we need to examine the practice or phenomenon in its scriptural or historical context. Secondly, ask yourself if there is anything in the text which suggests that it should be practiced today. Thirdly, do other passages affirm that the experience of practice is normative. Finally, recognize that while God can do anything, he does choose to do different things at different times.

1. **Experientializing:** Reasoning that if any experience has occurred in Scripture, and I have the same experience, then it must be from God, i.e. using experience to validate Scripture instead of vice versa. For instance, many conclude that since many prophets had visions, their visions (or dreams) must be of the Lord as well. The same precautions which apply to generalizing apply to this fallacy as well. For instance, while the Bible does not promise visions, it does repeatedly promise joy ***(John 15:11***) and peace (***Phil. 4:7***).
2. **Over Systematizing:**

This takes place when the interpreter engages in circular reasoning. By circular reasoning I mean using an assumption to “prove” a premise. For instance, you can’t give me a C because I am an A student. This argument falls flat since claiming to be an A student does not make someone an A student. But scoring 100% on a test does prove the claim.

Robert Thomas comments on how people abuse the “analogy of faith” the idea that Scripture there is harmony of biblical doctrine found in all of the Scriptures. For instance some reason that since Christ will come back and establish and immediately establish the “eternal state” a 1,000 year millennium as suggested in ***Revelation 20:1-4*** would be an impossibility. Beginning with a quote from an amillennial theologian Thomas reports of this mistake:

‘When a doctrine is supported by an obscure passage of Scripture only and finds no support in the analogy of faith, it can only be accepted with great reserve. Possibly, not to say probably, the passage requires a different interpretation than the one put on it. Cf. ***Rev. 20:1–4***.’ This affords a good example of misusing the general analogy of faith. The ‘obvious scope and import of Scripture teachings as a whole’ allows no place for a thousand-year kingdom, so it is automatically written off without due consideration of what Rev 20:1–4 says. [[40]](#footnote-40)

When a passage of Scripture challenges our preconceived theology, it is important that we adjust our theology to fit the Scripture rather than adjust the Scripture to fit our theology.

1. **Thought Questions:**
2. Why is it important to be mindful of potential fallacies when interpreting the Scriptures?
3. What does the presence of all of these fallacies teach us about the level of effort and thought we need to exert when we study the Scripture?
4. Why do many people want to rush into their biblical interpretations?
5. **Application:**

The presence of fallacies reminds us that it is indeed possible to misinterpret the text. Driven by the conviction that the intent of the original author is the driving force of biblical interpretation, we should seek to enter into his world and then painstakingly apply the message to our modern world. This means that we should be cautious in our application of the passage. For instance, when we read about Jesus miraculously healing the blind man (***John 9***) we should not conclude that we should expect him to fix our eye sight. Rather, we should seek to ask the following questions before we apply it to our world:

1. What do we learn about God?
2. What do we learn about man?
3. What do we learn about how God relates to man or man relates to God?

From the account in ***John 9*** we learn that Jesus is the Son of God as proved by the miracle. We learn that He is compassionate and gracious. We also learn about how the formerly blind man’s parents did not confess Christ because they were afraid of being put out of the Synagogue (***John 9:22***). The list goes on. Knowing that Christ is the Son of God should lead us to worship and follow him. Understanding that Christ is compassionate should lead us to show compassion to others as well as come to Him as a compassionate King. Finally, the negative example of the formerly blind man’s parents should lead us to confess Christ before men.

1. **Homework:**
2. Carefully write you’re your interpretation of ***Titus 3:4-7*** using the knowledge you acquired from your study.
3. Answer the following questions and then list out possible applications.

* What do we learn about God?
* What do we learn about man?
* What do we learn about how God relates to man or man relates to God?

1. For the next session. You need to pick out a portion of Scripture and go through the entire process outlined in this study. For a summary see the following appendix. The date gathered here will be used to make your message.
2. **Conclusion:**

In ***2 Timothy 2:15*** we read:

***Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.***

Before we rush into applying it to our lives we must remember that the goal of any Bible student is to accurately understand what the Word says. This takes painstaking effort on our art, but it is well worth it when we consider the blessing of a clearer view of God through a right understanding of His Word.

Lesson 6 Quiz:

List and explain 5 interpretive fallacies.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Appendix 1: The Procedure

1. **Step 1**: Read the passage’s book three times. Each time read it in a different translation.
2. **Step 2**: Read at least two introductions on the book (i.e. the beginning of the MacArthur Study Bible) Then answer the following questions:
   1. Who is the author?
   2. When was the book written?
   3. What is the literary genre.
   4. What is the occasion for writing the book (why was it written)?
   5. What are some major themes which will be discussed?
   6. What interpretive challenges await us in our study?
   7. What are you most excited to learn about the book?
3. **Step 3**: Outline the book, list major themes.

This may be as simple as providing chapter titles. Or you may go through the text and give a title to each paragraph. Once you are done, try to arrange those titles under larger titles.

1. **Step 4**: Write out the purpose of the book.
2. **Step 5**: Read your passage in three different versions. Then write down:
3. Ten or more things that the text does say.
4. Five things that the text does not say.
5. Five questions about the text.

Feel free to block diagram, outline, or compare translations to help with the observation process.

1. **Step 6**: Perform two word studies using the following principles and procedures:
2. Use multiple translations to discern how a word is translated and which word merits a word study.
3. Use a wide variety of sources including dictionaries, concordances, and commentaries.
4. Understand that different authors use words in different ways.
5. Ask yourself why the author used one word and not the other.
6. Consider the meaning of a word in relationship to another.
7. Consider whether or not a word is a technical or idiomatic expression. Is this a figure of speech, or taken literally.
8. Remember context is king. Test your conclusion against the context.
9. **Step 7**: Consult at least two commentaries (e-mail me if you want some) on ***Titus 3:4-7*** and answer the exegetical questions you asked when you made observations on the text.
10. Carefully write you’re your interpretation of your chosen passage using the knowledge you acquired from your study.
11. Answer the following questions and then list out possible applications.

* What do we learn about God?
* What do we learn about man?
* What do we learn about how God relates to man or man relates to God?

1. Charles Ryrie Systematic Theology p. 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Charles Ryrie, p. 534. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Richard Mayhue *How to Study the Bible* (Ross-Shire: Christian Focus 2009), pp. 30-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. These books include Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach, and Baruch. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. One should note that the translator of the Latin Vulgate (the official interpretation of the Roman Catholic Church for centuries) did not affirm the canonicity of the Apocrypha. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. R. Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Scriptures.*(Greenville, SC: A. Press, 1995), 234. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Robert L.Thomas, *Revelation 8:22 An Exegetical Commentary.* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 517. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Wayne Grudem, “Systematic Theology” (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994,) p. 1204. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. If you would like more info on how to correctly interpret the Bible consult: *How to Get the Most From God’s Word* by John MacArthur. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. As quoted in Wayne Grudem, “Systematic Theology” (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994,) p. 1204. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. A verbatim quote could not be demanded for several reasons. First, as already mentioned, the writer had to translate from Aramaic to Greek in recording Jesus’ words. Second, in making reference to Old Testament texts it would have been impossible to unroll the lengthy scrolls each time to produce a verbatim quote; furthermore, the scrolls were not readily available, hence, the freedom in Old Testament quotes.﻿ [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Enns, Paul P.: *The Moody Handbook of Theology*. Chicago, Ill. : Moody Press, 1997, c1989, S. 167 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. http://www.notjustanotherbook.com/biblecomparison.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. For specific examples of the inaccuracies of the Koran and Book of Mormon consult: Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1994), pp. 549-556. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The Theology Notebook – Bibliology and Hermeneutics (The Theology Program, 2005) p. 129. Downloaded from bible.org on August 12th, 2009 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Enns, Paul P.: *The Moody Handbook of Theology*. Chicago, Ill. : Moody Press, 1997, c1989, S. 465 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Paul R. Shockley “The Postmodern Theory of Probability on Evangelical Hermeneutics” *Conservative Theological Journal Volume 4*. Tyndale Theological Seminary, 2000; 2003, S. 4:71 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. D. A. Carson Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church(Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2005) pp. 115-120. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Charles Ryrie, (Wheaton, IL, Victor Books 1986) p. 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ryrie, p. 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Richard Mayhue , How to Study the Bible (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus. 2009) p. 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Mayhue, p. 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Present, past, future.

    [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Active “He hit the ball.” Passive “He was hit by the ball.” Middle “He hit himself.” [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. These are verbal nouns usually identified by the “ing” ending. “We was in the running.” [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. These usually indicate a possessive relationship between nouns, often identified by “of”. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. James E. Rosscup *Hermeneutics* (unpublished class syllabus) p. 7-8 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Mayhue pp. 65-69 [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. MacArthur, John Jr: *The MacArthur Study Bible*. electronic ed. Nashville : Word Pub., 1997, c1997, S. Eph 6:4 [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Fee and Stuart p. 247-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Ibid. p. 248. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. All of these fallacies are described in greater detail in Richard Mayhue’s excellent book “How to Study the Bible.” [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Feinberg, John S. ; Feinberg, Paul D. ; Huxley, Aldous: *Ethics for a Brave New World*. Wheaton, Ill. : Crossway Books, 1996, c1993, S. 197 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Ibid. S. 198 [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. http://www.cbeinternational.org/?q=content/1-timothy-211-15 [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Mayhue p. 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Robert Thomas, “***A Hermeneutical Ambiguity Of Eschatology: The Analogy Of Faith***. (1980; 2002). *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society Volume 23* (23:47). The Evangelical Theological Society. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)