

TRUTH

RIGHTLY
DIVIDED

A SIMPLE GUIDE
TO INTERPRET THE BIBLE

BY
ISRAEL JIMOH
STEVE PHILLIPS

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<http://gospelforwestafrica.com>

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Freely you have received, freely give [Mt.10:8]

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1

CONTEXT

The Bible is God's Word written by His servants through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. **But know this first of all, that no prophesy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophesy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God** [2 Pet.1:20-21].

Therefore the Bible must not be misused by a man to justify his own human thoughts and lustful desires. The Scriptures rather present the words of life to turn us from our own deadened spiritual condition. Jesus said, **It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life** [Jn.6:63].

A foundational principle of Bible study and interpretation is the importance of Context. The verses of the Bible are not to be read isolated from their surrounding context in the chapter. The following points will clarify this principle of Bible interpretation.

WORDS HAVE MEANING WITHIN A CONTEXT

Words within their context will give understanding to their meanings in the passage. For example, the word "fear" is used three times in I Pet. 3, each with a different meaning. In verse 2 it means "respectful behavior," whereas in 14 it indicates "intimidation," and verse 15 signifies "reverence."

The context of a passage will inform if a word is to be understood literally or in a figurative secondary sense. It is immediately clear that references like Jn.11:35, **Jesus wept**, are literal.

But when Jn.10:9 is read, a literal meaning of, **I am the door**, could not possibly be the correct sense. Surely Jesus is not a measured wooden frame which can be opened and closed by our desire. Instead, Jesus is saying that He is the way of entrance into the presence of God.

Thus, when we are reading the Bible, we must discover the meanings of the words within their God-given contexts. The same words may vary in meaning within the same chapter. Some words may be used in a figurative way rather than in their primary literal sense. The context will tell us if we pay close attention.

SURROUNDING VERSES

It is needful to read the verses before and after the one in question when studying and interpreting the Scriptures. For instance, a verse commonly quoted out of context is Prov.23:7, **For as he thinks in his heart, so is he**. Many cite this partial reference and proclaim that one must think great things of himself, thinking positively about one's business, finances, and possessions.

But let's consider this verse in the context of its surrounding verses beginning from verse 1 through verse 8. These verses tell us this, **When you sit down to dine with a ruler, consider carefully what is before you, and put a knife to your throat if you are a man of great appetite. Do not desire his delicacies, for it is deceptive food.**

Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, cease from your consideration of it. When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For wealth certainly makes itself wings like an eagle that flies toward the heavens.

Do not eat the bread of a selfish man, or desire his delicacies; for as he thinks within himself, so he is. He says to you, "Eat and drink!" But his heart is not with you. You will vomit up the morsel you have eaten, and waste your compliments.

Taken in the whole context, this passage is a warning against greed and allowing covetousness to deceive oneself by what one hopes to gain. Verse 7 warns us that a rich greedy man's words are deceptive and do not express what he truly thinks in his heart. Nowhere is positive/possibility thinking to be seen in Proverbs 23, nor anywhere else in the Bible for that matter.

If a verse of the Word of God is quoted out of context, a man can make it say whatever he wants with it. But if it is connected with its surrounding verses in the passage, its true meaning becomes clear.

FRAME OF REFERENCE

It is prudent to know the frame of reference of the author in his book to understand his concept in a particular verse. In the book of I Corinthians, to cite an example, Paul used the word "baptize" in several ways.

Numerous times in I Cor.1:13-17, Paul refers to baptism, each time referring to baptism by water. Verse 16 is cited as showing this use of the word, **Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas.**

When we read I Cor.12:13, it is obvious that he is speaking of baptism in a different sense than in chapter one. It says, **For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.** Here the baptism is a spiritual one whereby the Holy Spirit joins each believer to Christ in one body.

How then are we to understand what he means by baptism in chapter 10:1, 2? It reads like this, **For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.**

There is no indication in the Scriptures that the Jews were baptized in water by Moses or others during the time of their exodus from Egypt. Baptism, then, must have a figurative sense in this passage. But what is that secondary meaning? Paul's frame of reference which we learn from chapter 12 gives us the clue.

Just as the Spirit of God joined us to Christ as our Head and Savior, so the Jews were "joined" to Moses as their leader and deliverer from Egypt. The cloud (picturing God's presence) and the sea (showing their salvation from Egypt) became their new spiritual "environment" with Moses as their head.

In many instances, such as this, the frame of reference of the author can help us understand difficult passages. This is simply extending our examination of the immediate context of a verse to include the book in which the passage is contained.

SCRIPTURES AS A WHOLE

Sometimes we may need to broaden our searching of the context to include pertinent references found elsewhere in the Bible in order to understand our passage. This is especially true of New Testament verses which refer to things found in the Old Testament.

Many questions come to mind when considering, for example, the priesthood of Christ according to the order of Melchizedek as taught in Hebrews 7. This concept cannot be well understood without looking at the relevant portions of the Old Testament. A basic understanding of the following will shed much light on what otherwise may be unclear.

Gen.14 Describes Melchizedek's first appearance to Abraham

Ex.28 Tells about the High Priest in the nation of Israel

Lev.8 - 10 Shows the consecration of the priests for their service

Ps.110:4 Is the key verse about Christ's eternal priesthood

Mt.1 and Lk.3:23-33 Record the genealogy of Christ that He came from the tribe of Judah and not from Levi

Gal.3:23-25 The Law's purpose was to lead us to Christ

I Tim.2:5 Christ is the one mediator between God and men

I Jn.2:1 Christ is our advocate/representative before God

From the above example we can see that some passages cannot be understood unless we rely upon the broader context of the Bible as a whole.

SUMMARY

The Principle of Context tells us that we must note:

WORDS HAVE MEANING WITHIN A CONTEXT

SURROUNDING VERSES

FRAME OF REFERENCE

SCRIPTURES AS A WHOLE

2

HARMONY

“All truth is one.” Truths are not contradictory but complement each other to give a comprehensive understanding of the subject in question. In the Scriptures, this makes the principle of harmony important in Bible interpretation.

CONSIDER ALL PERTINENT REFERENCES

Harmony involves taking into account the pertinent references covering a particular subject. If any of them are left out or not given proper consideration, we will draw a partial conclusion, if not an altogether faulty one.

For example, Jn.2:13-17 says that the Temple was cleansed at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, while in Mt.21:12, 13, almost at the end of His ministry.

This is not contradictory as some may imagine, but merely shows that the cleansing was done twice. Its not that one or both of these Apostles were mistaken, but simply that each spoke the truth about a similar event which happened at different times.

CLEAR PASSAGES INTERPRET THE UNCLEAR

A second aspect of this principle of harmony is that the clear passages shed light upon the unclear. That is, the obvious interprets the obscure and not the other way around.

An example of the importance of the clear verses shedding light on the unclear can be seen in answering whether Judas Iscariot was chosen by Jesus or not. Jn.6:70, 71 states, **Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?” Now He meant Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray him.**

If we compare this with Jn.13:18, we discover that, though chosen in one sense, he was not chosen as one who was actually saved. It says, **I do not speak of you all. I know the ones I have chosen; but it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled, “He who eats My bread has lifted up his heel against Me.”**

The principle of harmony illustrates in what sense Judas was chosen. Without considering Jn.13:18, one may have thought that Judas was truly saved because he was chosen among the twelve disciples.

Now, is the Bible contradictory about this issue? No, not at all. One must consider all the verses relating to a question/subject before a proper understanding can be reached.

When we do, we can see that Judas rejected the very life of God to men, Jesus Christ, because he loved the world rather than God. Though he walked with Jesus as being chosen as one of the twelve, yet he despised all sound wisdom in preference for his self-chosen ways.

A careful consideration of all the relevant passages shows that Judas was not among those chosen and cleansed in the true spiritual sense. The clear statement of Jn.13:18 helps us to understand other passages about Judas which are not as clear. We must therefore be diligent to apply the principle of harmony carefully before drawing a conclusion on a matter.

A FAULTY PREMISE WILL RESULT IN A FAULTY CONCLUSION

A faulty premise will always result in a faulty conclusion. This was the problem with those who rejected Christ because they thought He was from Galilee (Jn.7:41-42). Their faulty premise was that, since He was from Galilee, He must have been born in Galilee.

They didn't take into account all the relevant information before drawing their conclusion. If they had, they would have seen how the Christ being born in Bethlehem harmonized with His living in Galilee according to the Scriptures (Mt.2:4-6, 22, 23).

Since the Bible is God's Word, it must be our reference point rather than our own understanding when seeking to harmonize seemingly contradictory passages. This is what we are told in Prov.3:5, **Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding.**

SUMMARY

CONSIDER ALL PERTINENT REFERENCES

CLEAR PASSAGES INTERPRET THE UNCLEAR

A FAULTY PREMISE WILL RESULT IN A FAULTY CONCLUSION

3

PRECEPT

Precepts are the clearly stated commands or teachings of the Bible. It is these which will give us understanding of those passages which are presented to us as stories/narratives. Most of the stories about the behavior of people contain no comment in the narrative itself to tell us whether their actions were good or bad. To rightly understand them, we must apply this principle:

NARRATIVE IS INTERPRETED BY PRECEPT

Let us look at Abraham's actions in Gen.12:10-13 as an example. It says, **Now there was a famine in the land; so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.**

It came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, "See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman; and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live.

"Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you."

The narrative itself does not tell us whether this was right or wrong of Abraham. Someone may read this and say that Abraham's actions have been a "revelation" to him. He may think that it is permitted to tell a lie in a difficult situation as Abraham did to save himself from the problem he faced.

But was it good what Abraham did here? The narrative recorded in Gen.12 does not tell us. His actions must be judged by the clearly stated commands and teachings of God found elsewhere in the Scriptures.

A similar situation is seen in the story of Rahab the harlot in the city of Jericho. Josh.2:4, 5 says, **But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them, and she said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from.**

"It came about when it was time to shut the gate at dark, that the men went out; I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them."

But what she said wasn't true, for she was hiding them upon the roof of her house. Does this mean that God was pleased with her untruth? That must be decided by the statements of the Scriptures outside the story itself.

Heb.11:31 tells us, **By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.** Was Rahab justified because of her lie or by faith in spite of it? Jas.2:25 adds this, **And in the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?**

If we would judge Abraham and Rahab's actions by how they may seem to appear to us in the stories, we may draw wrong conclusions. But if we apply the clearly stated precepts of the Bible in verses like Col.3:9, we will immediately see that their actions were not pleasing to God.

Col.3:9 says, **Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices.** So, by precept, we understand that God is never pleased with lying in any situation.

Again, unless we apply this principle, we may reason incorrectly that, since David was a man after God's own heart and he had many wives, I can also therefore do the same. But such practices are condemned by the precepts of the Bible.

In Mt.19:5, Jesus quoted Gen.2:24 to show that one man should be married to one woman. **For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.** In fact, the

king himself was forbidden by God to marry more than one wife. Deut.17:17 warns the king, **Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away...**

Examples such as these show us that we must interpret the stories of the Bible by judging the narrative with the clearly stated commands and teachings of the Scriptures. Failure to do this will make the Bible itself a stumbling block to those who read and interpret it with their own understanding without using this principle. But if we interpret by Precept, the Word of God will surely become light to our path.

SUMMARY

NARRATIVE IS INTERPRETED BY PRECEPT

4

ILLUSTRATION

Some of the narratives in the Bible also may contain spiritual illustrations within them in addition to the historical truth presented in the story itself. At times these deeper spiritual meanings were not understood until sometime afterwards. This principle of interpretation is referred to as this:

NARRATIVE MAY CONTAIN SPIRITUAL ILLUSTRATION

Ex.12:1-29 gives the account of the Passover for the nation of Israel upon the evening of their leaving Egypt. The details of this story contain many wonderful spiritual illustrations of Christ Jesus and His deliverance of His people from the power and bondage of the world.

Christ is our sinless sacrificial lamb. His own blood redeems us from the judgment of God that is coming upon the world of the ungodly. Jn.1:29 says, **The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."** I Cor.5:7 adds this, **Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.**

The story of Noah and the ark also reveals spiritual truths within the narrative recorded in Gen.6-9. The ark was the means of salvation from a condemned world, through judgment, unto a new creation. Here is a picture of Christ Jesus as the only means by which men can be saved from eternal destruction that will come upon the wickedness of men.

The waters of judgment fell upon the ark, not on those safe within. So also with Christ, the judgment of God fell upon Him, so that those who abide in Him are brought safely to newness of life.

Heb.11:7 says, **By faith, Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.**

Another example is the Temple or Tabernacle of the Jews in the book of Exodus. In it are contained many things which have spiritual meanings as well as literal. Christ is the true Temple of God [see Jn.2:19-22]. The veil is like His flesh [see Heb.10:20]. The high priest pictures Christ as He represents His people in the presence of God [see Heb.4:14-16].

Fine linen illustrates righteousness as seen in Rev.19:8. **And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.**

Incense shows the prayers of the saints according to Ps.141:2, **May my prayer be counted as incense before Thee, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.** Rev.8:3 reveals this same spiritual illustration when it says, **Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne.**

As well, certain names in the Scriptures are also spiritually meaningful. For example, "Gilgal" means "rolling." Josh.5:9 records that the reproach of Egypt [the fleshly identity of God's people with the world] was rolled away when they were circumcised at Gilgal. It reads, **The Lord said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." So the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day.**

Ex.17:7 tells us of Israel's quarreling against and testing of God at Massah and Meribah. The former means "temptation" and the latter, "strife." **And he named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us, or not?"**

How can we know if a story in the Bible also contains illustrations of other biblical truths? The key is whether a valid connection exists between the illustration and the thing illustrated. When we interpret narrative by precept, we will be looking at the stories in light of the clear teachings and commands of the Word of God.

Examining the narrative by clear Bible teaching will also help us to discover actual spiritual illustrations of that which is directly taught elsewhere in the Scriptures. In this way, we will be getting our doctrines from what is plainly stated and not building our teaching upon illustrations which we have made up in our own minds.

Many other passages could be cited to demonstrate this point. Where there exists an obvious parallel to clear biblical teaching, we can validly use the narrative passage to illustrate the truth of God's Word.

SUMMARY

NARRATIVE MAY CONTAIN SPIRITUAL ILLUSTRATION

5

COVENANT

If the truth would be rightly divided, we must see the distinction between the Old and New covenants. Both are vitally related to one another. The Old is of the Law but the New is of Grace. The former is associated with Moses, the latter with Christ.

The Law was given through Moses; but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ - Jn.1:17. The Old Covenant foreshadows while the New is the fulfillment.

Jesus said, **These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled - Lk.24:44.**

The basic difference between these two covenants is summarized in this principle:

WHAT IS TRUE OF THE OLD COVENANT EXTERNALLY AND PHYSICALLY
IS SEEN TO BE TRUE IN THE NEW INTERNALLY AND SPIRITUALLY

The Old and New Covenants are compared in this chart:

COVENANTS

OLD <i>EXTERNAL - PHYSICAL</i>	NEW <i>INTERNAL - SPIRITUAL</i>
Law was written on tablets of stone - Ex.32:15; Deut.4:13	Law is written on human hearts - 2 Cor.3:3
Temple was built of stones and wood in Jerusalem - I Kings 5 & 6	Temple is built of believers as living stones - I Pet.2:5; I Cor.3:16
Priests were from the tribe of Levi only - Lev.8	Priests are made up of all believers in Christ - I Pet.2:5, 9
Worship consists in various required ceremonies - Lev.23	Worship is in Spirit and truth; not places and ceremonies - Jn.4:23, 24
Giving of Tithes was required of every Israelite to support the priests of Levi - Num.18:21-24	Giving is from the heart out of love without compulsion - 2 Cor.9:7
Circumcision was outward in the flesh as a sign of the Covenant - Gen.17:11	Circumcision is of the heart, by the Spirit through Christ - Rm.2:28, 29
Sabbath was one day per week as a day of rest - Ex.31:14-17	Sabbath is resting from our works in Christ's provision - Heb.4:3-11
Sacrifice consisted of various animals slain on the altar - Lev.1-7	Sacrifice is offering ourselves and our praise to God - Rm.12:1; Heb.13:15
Battle was with the sword against the wicked Canaanites - Josh.6-12	Battle is not against people but against spiritual forces by the Word - Eph.6:12, 17
Blessings were physical in the land of Canaan - Deut.8:7-9	Blessings are every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ - Eph.1:3

Therefore, we may not directly apply everything said in the Old Covenant to ourselves as Christians in the literal and physical sense that Israel could. The church is not an actual building as was the Jew's Temple. Of that Temple Jesus said, **Not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down** [Mt.24:2]. Whereas, in the New Covenant Jesus declares, **I will build My church; and the gates of Hell will not overpower it** [Mt.16:18].

Christ, our great and final sacrifice, has done away with the repeated animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant. **Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins;**

But He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God [Heb.10:11, 12].

There exists no more a distinction between the priests [clergy] and the common people [laity]. Each and every Christian is now a spiritual priest with equal access to God through Jesus Christ. **You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ** [I Pet.2:5].

Christ is a High Priest of a completely different type than the ones under the Old Covenant. They were sinful men, He is holy and undefiled **who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself** [Heb.7:27].

They were weak but He is made perfect forever [Heb.7:29]. They were prevented by death from continuing, but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently [Heb.7:23, 24].

Those priests could save no one by their repeated ceremonies. But Jesus is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them [Heb.7:25].

Failure to understand the difference between the two Covenants will greatly confuse and hinder the Christian's progress in the faith. Many mistakenly try to apply the codes and requirements of the Old Covenant to the believer under the New Covenant. But this cannot be done without spiritual ruin.

We are instructed clearly about this danger in passages such as Colossians 2:16-23. Following are selected quotes from this part of the Scriptures.

Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ...If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!"

These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and false humility and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

Let us consider carefully the Law's relationship to the Christian under the New Covenant. The Scriptures reveal the following things about the Law.

LAW

HAS BEEN CHANGED

For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change in law also [Heb.7:12]

WAS WEAK

There is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness [Heb.7:18]

MADE NOTHING PERFECT

For the Law made nothing perfect [Heb.7:19]

IS AN INFERIOR COVENANT

But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better Covenant, Which has been enacted on better promises [Heb.8:6]

HAD FAULT

For if that first Covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second [Heb.8:7]

HAS BEEN MADE OBSOLETE

When He said, "A new Covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete ...is ready to disappear [Heb.8:13]

CANNOT CLEANSE THE CONSCIENCE

Gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation [Heb.9:9, 10]

IS ONLY A SHADOW

For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near [Heb.10:1]

ITS SACRIFICES DO NOT PLEASE GOD

Whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have not desired,
nor have You taken pleasure in them which are offered according to the Law [Heb.10:8]

IS TAKEN AWAY

He takes away the first in order to establish the second [Heb.10:9]

IS AN UNBEARABLE YOKE

Why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke
which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? [Acts 15:10]

CANNOT MAKE RIGHTEOUSNESS

For Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to every one who believes [Rm.10:4]

BRINGS A CURSE

For as many as are the works of the Law are under a curse, for it is written,
“Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the Law, to do them [Gal.3:10]

BRINGS WRATH

For the Law brings about wrath [Rm.4:15]

SEVERS FROM CHRIST

You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be
justified by Law; you have fallen from grace [Gal.5:4]

IS THE POWER OF SIN

The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the Law [I Cor.15:56]

HAS FINISHED ITS WORK

Why the Law, then? It was added because of transgressions... until the Seed would come to Whom the promise
had been made. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ...
But now that the faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor
[Gal.3:19, 24, 25]

IS REPLACED BY CHRIST'S WORD

You have heard...But I say to you... [Mt.5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44]

Therefore, we cannot truthfully or rightly equate the priests of Levi with pastors or priests in the church. In the New Covenant, all believers are priests with none having a higher privilege than any others.

Neither are we to imagine that the tithes of the Jew's food items are the same as Christians' voluntary giving out of love. These are some applications of this principle of interpretation.

The Law, however, is not the “enemy” of the New Covenant believer. No, rather the **Law is... holy, righteous, and good** [Rm.7:12]. **We know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious** [I Tim.1:8, 9].

Christ did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, I did not come to abolish but to fulfill [Mt.5:17]. The mere external demands of the Law were only an instructor to lead us to Christ.

The Lord Jesus fulfilled the Law because He brought about a change in outward behavior by bringing about a change of heart within. If the heart is changed, the outward actions will change also.

A man who does not look at a woman with lust for her [Mt.5:28] will never commit adultery with her. But a man who never actually commits the deed, may yet commit **adultery with her in his heart** [Mt.5:28].

This is the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. The Old regulates from without while providing no ability to perform its requirements. The New works from within to transform the heart of a man by the power of God so that his outward actions also become righteous.

It is therefore of great importance in understanding the Word of God to pay careful attention to this principle. By doing so, we will avoid falling into the error of trying to mix the Old with the New; a thing which cannot be done without ruining both.

No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment and puts it on an old garment; otherwise he will both tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old [Lk.5:36].

SUMMARY

*WHAT IS TRUE OF THE OLD COVENANT EXTERNALLY
AND PHYSICALLY*

IS SEEN TO BE TRUE IN THE NEW INTERNALLY AND SPIRITUALLY

6

DECISIONS

Some teachings of the Bible are very plain and straightforward. No real questions arise as to what God is saying. Others are not quite as clear. In fact, we are told that there are **some things hard to understand** [2 Pet.3:16]. How are we to interpret these things? The following guidelines will be helpful in deciding on unclear issues.

DIRECT STATEMENTS

The direct statements of the Scriptures are to be given the first and most important consideration in deciding any difficult matter.

PRINCIPLE

If there are no direct revelations in the Word about a certain issue or practice, we must evaluate it by principle. By principle is meant the general elements of truth and godliness found in the Bible. Following are listed important principles to consider when deciding on something that is not specifically spoken of in the Scriptures.

Does it glorify God? - I Cor.10:31

Can I give thanks for it in Jesus' name? - Col.3:17

Does it have an appearance of evil? - I Thess.5:22

Will this practice somehow dictate to or control me? - I Cor.6:12

What real spiritual profit will result from it? - I Cor.10:23

Will it give offense to unbelievers or to the church? - I Cor.10:32

Will it cause my brother to stumble? - I Cor.8:13, Rm.14:13-21

Do I have a clear conscience about it? - Rm.14:22, 23

Does the peace of Christ rule in my heart? - Col.3:15

Do the spiritually mature agree? - I Pet.5:5, Heb.13:7

EXAMPLE

If an answer is not arrived at by the above, we can look at the example of the Lord Jesus Christ to see what He did or did not do in similar situations. He is our perfect example as **the Way, the Truth, and the Life** [Jn.14:6]. We can also gain instruction by seeing what other godly men in the Bible practiced or didn't do.

ANALOGY

The last aspect to consider is analogy. By analogy is meant comparing qualities and similarities between two somewhat related though different things. For example, we may want to know specifics of how we should raise our children.

Besides the understanding gained from the first three considerations, we may reason that, since God is our Father, we can learn some ways of training our children by reflecting upon how God brings up His spiritual sons and daughters.

SUMMARY

In deciding on unclear passages or on matters not specifically spoken of in the Word of God, we must carefully consider these guidelines:

DIRECT STATEMENTS

PRINCIPLES

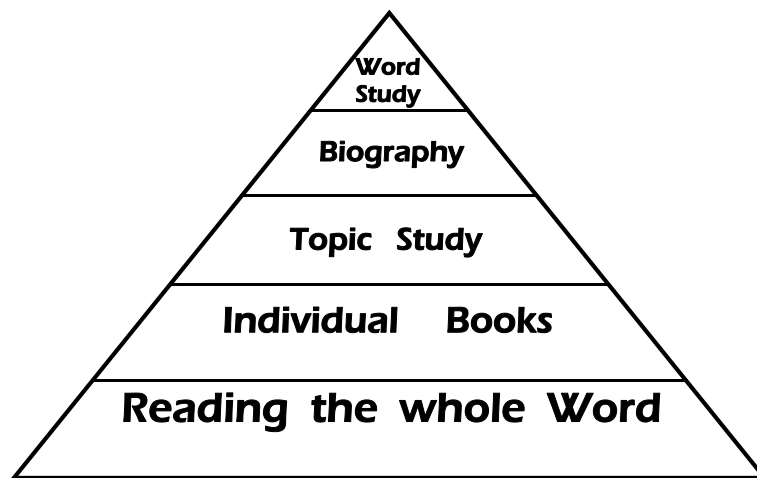
EXAMPLE

ANALOGY

7

STUDY

The study of the Word of God has the **Reading of the whole Word** as its foundation. With that as its base, we can then examine **Individual Books**. Based on our knowledge gained from these we can focus on various **Topics** and the **Biographies** of Bible characters. The last and most detailed part of Bible study is examining specific **Words**. This is shown in the chart below.



We first want to outline a useful way for *READING THE WHOLE WORD*. There are six sections. Each day you should read one chapter from each section, making six chapters read each day. Keep a book mark in each of the sections so you do not loose track of where you are each day.

BALANCED DIET READING SCHEDULE

- [1] *GENESIS – ESTHER* This section is Narrative/History and contains examples, warnings, and illustrations. [After reading Esth.10, return to Gen.1]
- [2] *JOB – MALACHI* Contains Poetry and Prophecy [Psalms and Proverbs will not be read as part of this section since they are covered in #3 and #4]. [After reading Mal.4, return to Job 1]
- [3] *PSALMS* Prayer, Worship, and Deliverance in Affliction. [After reading Psalm 150, return to Psalm 1]
- [4] *PROVERBS* Wisdom for all of life. [After Prov.31, return to Prov.1]
- [5] *MATTHEW – ACTS* Life of Christ and the Church. [After reading Acts 28, return to Matt.1]

[6] *ROMANS – REVELATION* Doctrine of the Scriptures. [After reading Rev.22, return to Rom.1]

The above schedule will provide a “balanced diet” approach to reading through the Scriptures. During the course of one year, Sections 1 & 2 will be read about once each. Sections 3 & 6 will be read about twice each, Section 5 nearly three times, and Section 4 twelve times.

In all of your study of the Word of God, it is very helpful to write down notes of what you learn. It may be only one verse. It may be more. But the things that the Lord shows you from His Word are good to note for your own and other’s blessing.

As well, as you read you will find verses that help to explain other verses in the Bible. These references should be noted neatly in the margin of your Bible near the verse they relate to. By doing this, you will develop your own cross-reference system for the future.

For example, as you read through Proverbs in your daily reading, you will meet with Prov.11:19, **As righteousness leads to life, so he who pursues evil pursues it to his own death.** Likewise you will read Prov.29:1, **He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.**

These verses shed light upon I John 5:16, 17 which describes **sin unto death.** It is very helpful, therefore, to write the references from Proverbs in the margin of your Bible alongside I John 5:16, 17 as a future reminder.

Let us now consider the study of *INDIVIDUAL BOOKS.*

[1] The first aspect of studying a particular book of the Bible is to become familiar with its contents by several readings of the entire book. This should be done quickly so as to not forget what you have earlier read before you reach the end.

By doing this you will begin to see the different subjects and sections of the book and the overall message of the writer. If you can read it in another translation as well, this will also be helpful.

[2] Next, carefully read through again, this time for the purpose of noting the main theme in each chapter. This time you will write them down. This will enable you to grasp the general message at a glance and provide a framework for the various details learned later.

[3] Each chapter should then be re-examined to see its particular sections of thought, again, writing down key thoughts in each sub-section. You are now beginning to develop your own outline of the book which will greatly aid in your understanding of the whole.

If you don’t know the meaning of a word in a passage, you will not be able to properly understand the message. Use a dictionary, remembering that words have meaning within a context. Make a note of the meaning.

[4] Now, as you meditate upon the details of each chapter, you will be seeking the meaning according to the principles of interpreting the Bible contained in the previous chapters of this book. Always make notes of what you learn.

GENESIS

Let us now use the book of Genesis for an example.

[1] As the book is read several times, you will see that it falls into two main parts: God’s dealings with all mankind [chapters 1-11] and God’s dealings with His chosen people [chapters 12-50].

It will be seen after a few readings that the first 11 chapters introduce several “beginnings”; that of heaven and earth, man, marriage, sin, Satan, death, murder, judgment, and languages.

Chapters 12-50 focus on the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and the tribes of Israel. These are the main divisions of the book of Genesis which are seen from several readings and should be written down in your notes.

[2] The basic chapter themes should then be noted so you can easily think your way through the book. These should be very brief. The purpose of this is to help you call to mind the contents of each chapter.

Chapter themes from the book of Genesis can be described as follows. This is not the only way that each chapter can be described. As you read, use your own words that will remind you of each chapter’s contents.

1-creation, 2-Eden, 3-Sin, 4-Cain & Abel, 5-Adam’s offspring, 6-9-Flood, 10,11-Babel, 12-God’s call of Abram, 13-Lot and Abram, 14-Battle & Melchizedek, 15-Abram believes God, 16-Hagar, 17-Circumcision, 18-Lord visits Abraham, 19-Sodom, 20-Abimelech, 21-Isaac born, 22-Isaac offered, 23-Sarah dies, 24-Bride for Isaac, 25-

Abraham dies & birth of Jacob and Esau, 26-Isaac's wells, 27-Jacob's lie, 28-Jacob's dream, 29-Jacob & wives, 30-Sons of Jacob & sheep, 31-Jacob flees Laban, 32-Jacob wrestles the angel, 33-Jacob meets Esau, 34-Dinah & Shechem, 35-God appears to Jacob at Bethel, 36-Esau's offspring, 37-Joseph's dream, 38-Judah & Tamar, 39-Joseph in Potiphar's house, 40-Joseph interprets dreams in prison, 41-Pharaoh's dreams & Joseph's rule, 42-Joseph's brothers in Egypt & confession, 43-Joseph's brothers return to Egypt with Benjamin, 44-Joseph hides cup in their sack, 45-Joseph reveals himself, 46-Jacob comes to Egypt, 47-Jacob blesses Pharaoh, 48-Jacob's blessing of Joseph's sons, 49-Jacob's prophesy to the 12 tribes, 50-Death of Jacob & Joseph.

[3] Following this, the sub-sections of the chapters can be written down in your notes. We will look at Chapter 1 of Genesis as a sample of this next step in studying a book. This should be done for each of the book's chapters.

Chapter 1 narrates the account of the creation of the heavens and earth. [Verse 1] – A summary statement of the whole. [Verses 2-5] – Day One: Let there be light. [Verses 6-8] – Day Two: Separation of the waters. [Verses 9-13] – Day Three: Dry land, plants, fruit, and seeds. [Verses 14-19] – Day Four: Sun, moon, and stars. [Verses 20-23] – Day Five: Fish and birds. [Verses 24-31] – Day Six: Man in the image of God.

[4] Having done all of this, you are now ready to begin to carefully meditate on the individual verses in each chapter. What you have done thus far has been to practically apply the first principle of interpretation, namely, CONTEXT.

As you now consider the individual verses, you have already placed them in a proper CONTEXT by your reading and noting the general flow of thought in the book and in each chapter and sub-section.

Since Genesis is part of the narrative portion of the Word of God, we must be careful to apply the principle that Narrative Is Interpreted By PRECEPT. The clear teachings and commands of the Word of God must be applied to the stories in order to understand whether the actions and words recorded there are good or bad. An example of this from Genesis is found in Chapter 3 of this book.

Always keep in mind that the narratives of Scriptures may also contain Spiritual ILLUSTRATION. As you read Gen.1:2-4, you may reflect that "Light" and "Darkness" are mentioned in many places in the Bible. In other passages, they have moral and spiritual meanings. "Light" represents righteousness and truth. "Darkness" shows us evil and error.

Does Gen.1:2-4 illustrate these deeper spiritual meanings through its record of the literal history of Creation? We might see in these verses an ILLUSTRATION of man; ruined in depths of sin. Only the Spirit of God moving upon man's heart can bring the Light of life and scatter our darkness.

And so, we have discovered a picture of our condition before God and His remedy for it. Write these things down in your notes as they will be a blessing to you for many years by doing so.

There are times when we will wish to gain an understanding of what the Lord says on a certain subject by doing a TOPIC STUDY. Here, we will need to relate together verses that teach us about one theme. This is an application of the principle of interpretation noted in Chapter 2, that of HARMONY.

This is where your reading of six chapters daily and the cross-references noted in your margin will be of great help in studying your TOPIC. A very useful tool for this type of Bible study is a concordance.

A concordance is a book that lists every word of the Bible in alphabetical order. Each word is shown as it is used in each verse of the Bible where it is found, beginning from the first time the word is used, and listed by the order of the books of the Bible.

The word "Counsel," for example, first occurs in Ex.18:19. As we look through all the references to this in the Scriptures, we discover that man's counsel is always against that of God's. Verses like Ps.33:10, 11 show this.

The Lord nullifies the COUNSEL of the nations; He frustrates the plans of the peoples. The COUNSEL of the Lord stands forever.

As a TOPIC study progresses, you will need to note how the subject is treated in various passages in order to be able to summarize your findings after you Consider All Pertinent References. Thus, when you draw your conclusion, it will accurately state what the Word of God says.

It will be very useful to you if, in addition to your daily reading, you will study the book of Proverbs topically. List the key phrases from each verse that describes the fool, the righteous, the wicked, laziness, our tongues and speech, wisdom, fear, parenting, etc. This is a limited type of TOPIC study, one that is confined to one book as its reference.

A special type of topical study is that of *BIOGRAPHY*. Here you will be looking at all the references that describe the life of a particular person in the Scriptures. In the book of Genesis for example, Lot, Abraham's nephew, is mentioned.

If you study his life as recorded in Genesis 12, 13, & 19 along with the references found in Lk.17:29-32 and 2 Pet.2:6-9, a most sober warning against loving and being entangled in the world is discovered.

Our approach to study of the Scriptures has begun from the broad and general exposure to the Word gained by daily reading. From this wide base we moved to the more focused and specific study of individual books of the Bible.

Particular topics are even more limited in their scope than those which have considered. This leads us to the most specific and detailed of the various ways to study the Bible, the *WORD STUDY*.

A *WORD STUDY* is a more restricted kind of Topic Study. Here you are focusing upon the various definitions of a particular word as it is used in different verses. Let us illustrate this by looking at the word translated as "rule" in I Tim.3:4, 5.

This word is found in the following passages only in the New Testament: Rom.12:8; I Thess.5:12; I Tim.3:4,5,12; I Tim.5:12, 17; Tit.3:8, 14. It has a wide range of meanings.

It literally means, "to stand before," and is variously translated as "lead, attend to [with care and diligence], manage, maintain, direct, or rule." Which definition is proper in each passage?

Since we know that Words have meaning in a CONTEXT, we must see which definitions will make the most and best sense of each of these verses. In the verses cited, the best sense is not that of ruling over with authority and power, but rather standing before others as an example of service and help. As an exercise, insert the various definitions into the passages noted and see which make sense in the contexts.

Bible study is work. Truth rightly divided is not a simple or lazy process. All are to **study to show yourself approved unto God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth** [2 Tim.2:15].

Handling accurately and interpreting truthfully the Word of God is described in this verse as being done by a workman. Labor, diligence, humility, discipline, and seeking the mind of the Lord is required.

We are to love the Lord our God with all of our mind. There is no higher use of our minds than reasoning together with Him from His unchanging Word that is forever settled in heaven.

May the Lord Himself guide you into all truth through his Spirit who has been sent for that very purpose. And may that truth, rightly divided, enter your heart with conviction and power to set you free.

8

SUMMARY

1 CONTEXT

WORDS HAVE MEANING WITHIN A CONTEXT
SURROUNDING VERSES
FRAME OF REFERENCE
SCRIPTURES AS A WHOLE

2 HARMONY

CONSIDER ALL PERTINENT PASSAGES
CLEAR PASSAGES INTERPRET THE UNCLEAR
A FAULTY PREMISE WILL RESULT IN A FAULTY CONCLUSION

3 PRECEPT

NARRATIVE IS INTERPRETED BY PRECEPT

4 ILLUSTRATION

NARRATIVE MAY CONTAIN SPIRITUAL ILLUSTRATION

5 COVENANT

WHAT IS TRUE OF THE OLD COVENANT EXTERNALLY
AND PHYSICALLY
IS SEEN TO BE TRUE IN THE NEW INTERNALLY AND SPIRITUALLY

6 DECISIONS

DIRECT STATEMENTS
PRINCIPLES
EXAMPLE
ANALOGY

7 STUDY

READING THE WHOLE WORD
INDIVIDUAL BOOKS
TOPIC STUDY
BIOGRAPHY
WORD STUDY

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