

Mining the Riches of God's Word  
Grace Bible Church  
Women's Retreat 2010

**Introduction**

Why do we come to God's Word?

Devotion or careful study?

We ought every day to come to the Word of God to meet with the God of the Word!

Goals for this weekend: to give you confidence that you *can* understand God's Word; to give you some utensils for a life-team of feasting at the table of God's self-disclosure; to make you hungry for God Himself.

(please write down any questions you have in the margins of your notes...)

**A Motivation for Interpreting the Bible**

Psalm 19:7-11

The law of Yahweh is perfect,  
restoring the soul;  
The testimony of Yahweh is sure,  
making wise the simple.  
The precepts of Yahweh are right,  
rejoicing the heart;  
The commandment of Yahweh is pure,  
enlightening the eyes.  
The fear of Yahweh is clean,  
enduring forever;  
The judgments of Yahweh are true;  
being righteous altogether.  
They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold;  
Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.  
Moreover, by them your servant is warned;  
In keeping them there is great reward.

## **Presuppositions for Interpreting the Bible**

Objectivity vs subjectivity: is objectivity possible? is objectivity the goal?

We come to study the Bible with some necessary pre-understandings:

### **1. This Is God's Word**

inspiration - 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21- God-breathed. (dual authorship). every time we are studying "Paul's words" in the Scriptures we are studying God's Words! So when we come to the Word of God to get the God of the Word. verbal/plenary -the whole thing in all of its details. the words themselves are breathed out, and all of the Bible is the breathed-out Word.

### **2. We Need God's Word**

Psalm 19

Limitations of General Revelation

### **3. God's Word Is Without Error**

Inerrancy - the Scripture, in the original manuscripts, speaks truthfully in everything that it says; that is, the Scriptures do not err in anything that they say. They are not exhaustive. But they are true. The Bible claims inerrancy for itself. Inerrancy reflects the nature of God Himself. God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). Denial of inerrancy has consequences:

- God can and does lie
- Can we trust any part of the Bible?
- To deny inerrancy is to deny one of the Bible's own doctrines. The denial of inerrancy does not therefore merely affect scientific and archaeological accuracy; it affects doctrine as well.
- Ultimately we become the standard for what is true.

### **4. God's Word Is Understandable**

Perspicuity - the clarity of Scripture. The Bible is *revelation* - that is, the Bible is the *revealing* of God's mind to us, not the *concealing*, contra gnosticism. The Bible was meant to be understood. God spoke so that we would hear and obey (ie, Deut 4:9). The words of Scripture are to be understood, meditated upon, and taught (Psalm 119:130).

### **5. God's Word Bears Authority**

The Bible's own claim: these are the very words of God (contra neo-orthodoxy).  
To disobey God's Word is to disobey God Himself.

### **6. Human Language Is Able To Convey Meaning**

There is a debate over whether it is even legitimate to invest words with meaning, or to expect to be able to extract meaning from words (signs and symbols). Consider the following illustrations:

"give me a hand", an invitation to dinner, the IRS, your neurosurgeon, nuclear physics; Genesis 3.

### **7. God Is Able To Convey His Meaning Through Human Language**

Meaning- there is a meaning in this text, and it can be gotten! (McCartney and Clayton, 31)

"Deliberately misconstruing some text to misrepresent its author is a morally reprehensible act; it is a kind of lying, a 'bearing false testimony.'" - McCartney and Clayton - 33-34.

"We do not have the Scriptures unless we have the *meaning* of the Scriptures" -John MacArthur.

There is one meaning in a text - and we must get it.

### **8. Spiritual Life is Required for Spiritual Understanding**

1 Cor 2:14

## **Definitions for Interpreting the Bible**

**1. hermeneutics** - a set of principles for understanding texts.

**2. exegesis** - from gr. "to draw out" or "to explain". exegesis is the process by which we draw out the meaning of a passage. Exegesis is the application of hermeneutics. the very idea of exegesis calls for a literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutic.

**3. eisegesis** - the errant practice of reading meanings *into* a text.

**4. meaning** - the truth intention of the author.

**5. interpretation** - an understanding of the truth intention of the author.

**6. literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutics (rules for normal interpretation)** - the set of interpretive principles used to analyze biblical texts which use the following areas of investigation to arrive at a text's meaning:

- the nature of *normal* language - the passage ought to be studied in view of the normal use of language - how is the word, phrase, clause, or section *normally* understood?
- the rules of *grammar* - parts of speech and grammatical constructions must be observed and analyzed - texts follow the rules of grammar, and meaning is determined by understanding those rules.
- the *historical* setting - what cultural, biographical, political, or social circumstances helped shape what is said in the text?

## **"Abnormal" Methods for Interpreting the Bible**

- **Reader-Response** - whatever it means to you is what it means. Meaning is wholly tied to the reader. This is a full-bodied post-modern approach to literature.
  - Why is the Mona Lisa behind glass and closely guarded?
  - Performer-Response Beethoven
  - Try this approach on your next tax filing!
  - Respond to a Reader-Response theorist by thanking him/her for affirming LGH hermeneutics - that's what their work meant to you!
- **NeoOrthodoxy** (the Bible becomes the Word of God) - Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, etc. The Bible itself is not God's Word, but when the Spirit of God makes it alive to a Christian, it then *becomes* the Word of God. Historicity is downplayed - the actual events behind the text are not critical - what matters is what the text means to you as you read it.
- **Liberal** (the Bible contains the Word of God) - Liberal theologians denied most, if not all, supernatural elements of the Bible's narrative. But if you dig down beneath and behind what the Bible actually *says*, you can discover some wonderful and beautiful thoughts. The Word of God is really these nuggets of meaning buried beneath the myths and legends and well-told tales. If you work hard enough, you can "demythologize" the text and discover the truth.
- **Allegory** - the narrations of Scripture are allegories to be decoded, extended metaphors to be interpreted. The real meaning of a passage is not to be found in the bare, physical statements of plain language, but rather in the higher, secret meaning of the author, which is encoded beneath the plain sense. Wilderness wanderings are really about my battle with sin. The true meaning of the text is not to be found *in* the text.
- **Spiritualization** - a "spiritual" meaning must be found behind physical realities. The Song of Solomon is *really* about Christ and the church. The true meaning of the text is not to be found *in* the text.
- **Christocentric** - inappropriately making every passage be about Christ. The scarlet thread in Rahab's window is really the blood of Jesus and a picture of redemption by the cross. (Theodore Epp and the elements of the Tabernacle)
- **Biblical Theology** (late 20th century meaning of BT - Pauline, Petrine, etc)
- The rise of **subjectivity** in hermeneutics (Osbourne's Hermeneutical Spiral)

## **"Normal" Interpretation of the Bible**

We must approach the Bible with the intention of understanding what God *meant* by what He *said*. To do that we must seek to understand the Bible in similar fashion to the way we seek to understand other forms of communication. By "normal" interpretation, we mean that we are trying to understand the words of Scripture according the ways those words were "normally" intended and understood in their original setting. This approach leads us to the following commitments:

\* **commitment to literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutics** (normal sense, according to the rules of language, in its historical setting). Remember our definition of LGH hermeneutics:

*literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutics* - the set of interpretive principles used to analyze biblical texts which use the following areas of investigation to arrive at a text's meaning:

- the nature of *normal* language - the passage ought to be studied in view of the normal use of language - how is the word, phrase, clause, or section *normally* understood?
- the rules of *grammar* - parts of speech and grammatical constructions must be observed and analyzed - texts follow the rules of grammar, and meaning is determined by understanding those rules.
- the *historical* setting - what cultural, biographical, political, or social circumstances helped shape what is said in the text?

What do we mean by "literal"?

normal usage  
plain sense

What do we not mean by "literal"?

"The grammatico-historical sense of a writer is such an interpretation of his language as is required by the laws of grammar and the facts of history. Sometimes we speak of the literal sense, by which we mean the most simple, direct, and ordinary meaning of phrases and sentences. By this term we usually denote a meaning opposed to the figurative or metaphorical." (Milton Terry, 203)

This means we must study the laws of language, the meanings and usages of words, the relationships of words to each other, context. These things are important in everyday language, and they are important in studying the Bible as well. Languages are structured to convey meaning.

1 Corinthians 11:27 (What does "unworthy" describe? A person? or a manner of eating?)

"Grammar may not always show us the actual meaning, but it will show us possible meanings. We cannot accept any meaning that does violence to it." - Sterrett, 63.

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**\* commitment to authorial intent** (Author and author).

We do not tolerate it well when people intentionally or unintentionally disregard *our* intentions with *our* words! How much more ought we to pay attention to God's intention with His Word?!

Sometimes the author clearly states his intention or purpose for writing. Sometimes this is more subtle and takes more work to discern.

John 20:31

Ecclesiastes governed by 12:13-14 and the repeated phrase "under the sun". cf 3:19-22; 9:2

We must continually be asking the questions, "What did God mean by what He said?" and, "What did the [little-a] author mean by what he said?" To deviate from the intention of the Author/author is to deviate from the Scriptures themselves!

**\* commitment to the understanding of the original audience**

How would the original audience have understood this passage? How would the original audience have been expected to hear and apply this passage? (Genesis 1-11; Luke 9:23)

What idioms, metaphors, and word pictures would have been familiar to the original audience that are unfamiliar to us? ("argument doesn't hold water", "out like a light", "you sound like a broken record")

"The first and primary meaning of a passage is what it meant in its historical and cultural context - that is, what it should have meant to the people living then. As best we can, we must understand that meaning." - Sterrett, 78.

We must "bridge the gap between our minds and the minds of the Biblical writers. People of the same culture, same age, and same geographical location understand each other with facility. Patterns of meaning and interpretation commence with childhood and early speech behavior, and by the time adulthood is reached the principles of interpretation are so axiomatic that we are not aware of them. But when the interpreter is separated culturally, historically, and geographically from the writer he seeks to interpret, the task of interpretation is no longer facile. The greater the cultural, historical, and geographical divergences are, the more difficult is the task of interpretation." - Ramm, 4.

Watch out for interpretations that depend upon modern or post-modern understandings. Did God really communicate with the original audience in such a way that what He said would never be understood until the 20th century? Watch out for modern or post-modern snobbery when it comes to interpretation! Being in the 21st century puts us as interpreters at a significant *dis*advantage compared to the original readers and hearers. But to read some scholars you would get the impression that the original recipients could never have understood a passage as well as we can today!

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\* commitment to the understanding of "normal" people. (not ivory tower 20th century scholars or astrophysicists)

God wrote to be understood, worshipped, obeyed. This did not require the expertise of highly trained specialists in technical fields - it required humble, personal, spiritual hearing.

(Deuteronomy 4:1,5,6,8,10,13,40; 6:4-9,17; etc)

\* commitment to single meaning.

(double meaning? double entendre? intentional ambiguity? prophecy?)

see 2 Corinthians 5:14; Revelation 1:1

\* commitment to context

Philippians 4:6a; Philippians 2:3a; Romans 3:23; Jeremiah 31



## **The Key to Interpreting the Bible - Observation!**

Observation is THE KEY to Interpretation. This cannot be emphasized enough. The task of the Bible interpreter is, primarily, to discover what the Bible actually says.

"One of the greatest weaknesses in the Bible study of many Christians is that they want understanding before getting acquainted with the passage. They want to know what God means before they know what He has said. so they read a passage through once, probably in a hurry, then try to figure out what it means.... First become thoroughly familiar with what the passage says." - Sterrett 40-41.

### Homework Assignment #1

Consider the English word OBSERVATION. See how many English words you can create using only the letters in the word OBSERVATION. Write them on this page.

## **Rules for Interpreting the Bible: The Importance of Diligent, Determined Investigation**

Rule #1 **stay in your chair.**

you cannot expect to reap the rich rewards of Bible study unless you are willing to give concentrated attention to careful and sustained inquiry and investigation. This requires hunger *and* discipline (and they feed each other!).

Rule #2 **don't turn the page.**

stay in your passage.

Rule #3 **eat your own food.**

personal digestion is always better than somebody else's abc [already-been-chewed] food!

Rule #4 **no hovering.**

hermeneutics is about diving, digging into the text, not hovering over the text!

Rule #5 **no hop-scotch.**

don't jump from text to text looking for meaning. It's not going to hurt you to stay in your passage.

Rule #6 **be a determined detective.**

observation is the key to interpretation!

do you find yourself running to interpretation?

observation is the key to application!

do you find yourself running to application?

running to other passages?

running to theological systems?

running to your small group leader, pastor, or commentary?

don't run - sit and soak!

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## **7 Steps for Interpreting the Bible**

### **Step 1: Pray**

This is God's Word. You have come to God's Word primarily to meet with God. You are a dependent creature in need of the Holy Spirit's illumination. You and I are regularly beset by sin, particularly the sins of pride and independence. We are prone to come to God's Word for reasons other than communion with God.

So pray.

Pray to meet with God, to hear from God. Pray to be affected and changed by God through His Word. Pray for understanding of His Word. Pray for diligence to persevere in your study of God's Word. Pray for appropriate application of His Word to your own heart.

Pray through each step of the exegetical process.

(see Jer 2:8)

### **Step 2: Read Your Passage**

A word about reading and studying: you need to be doing both as a regular course of life.

Keep a notepad handy to write down questions. Write down every question that comes to mind. What does this word mean? Why are the words in this order? To whom do the pronouns refer?

The goal at this stage is not to answer all the questions. Just begin to ask them. Seek to overturn every stone.

The importance of simply reading your passage: "One of the greatest weaknesses in the Bible study of many Christians is that they want understanding before getting acquainted with the passage. They want to know what God means before they know what He has said. so they read a passage through once, probably in a hurry, then try to figure out what it means.... First become thoroughly familiar with what the passage says." - Sterrett 40-41.

*Read* every word in your passage.

Read *every* word in your passage.

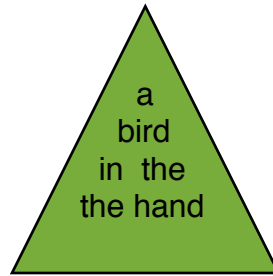
Read every *word* in your passage.

Read every word *in* your passage.

Read every word in *your* passage.

Read every word in your *passage*.

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Read your passage over and over again. Try hard not to assume you know what it says. As you read, ask yourself, "What is this passage *saying*?"

- Read the verses you are studying over and over again.
- Read outward from your passage in concentric circles of context.
- Read the chapter which contains your passage.
- Read (in one sitting) the book which contains your passage (skim if necessary).
- Read or skim the corpus of literature by the author of your passage (Peter's sermons in Acts, statements in the Gospels, and his letters: 1,2 Peter).
- Read your passage in several other versions (NIV, ESV, NASB, KJV, NKJV, HCSB, any non-English versions you can read). Notice where there are differences in translation - different words used, different verb tenses, different phraseology, different word order, etc. Write down these differences. These differences will help you see where further digging might be helpful.

Write down the things that you notice:

repeated words, unknown words, figures of speech, parallelisms, literary genre, indications of setting (time and location), unusual grammar, characters, etc.

Be a detective! Leave no stone unturned.

Resources for Step 2:

- your Bible.
- other Bible versions

### **Step 3: Observe the Syntax (Grammar)**

How is each word being used in a sentence, and how is each word related to the words around it? Understanding, in any language, is dependent upon the meanings of words and the relationships that words have with other words. In order to understand any portion of God's Word, we must understand the words that are being used, and we must understand the relationships that those words have with each other.

*semantics* describes the ranges of meanings of words.

*etymology* describes the history of the development of a word's meaning.

*syntax* describes the relationships between words.

*context* ("with-text") describes the surroundings of words, sentences, paragraphs, etc.

\*A Suggestion: analyze syntax (grammar) *before, during, and after* word study. Careful attention to syntax will limit the semantic range of the words used in your passage, eliminating options and saving time.

Our commitment to the discovery of authorial intent demands that we pay attention to grammar.

1 Corinthians 11:27 (What does "unworthy" describe? A person? or a manner of eating?)

"Grammar may not always show us the actual meaning, but it will show us possible meanings. We cannot accept any meaning that does violence to it." - Sterrett, 63.

#### Parts of Speech

**noun** - person, place, thing [Scott, ball, dog, Bible, Alaska, keys, etc]

**verb** - the action in a sentence (or the statement of being) [run, explode, be, pray, etc]

**adjective** - describes or modifies a noun [blue, exciting, sad, good, etc]

**adverb** - modifies verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs [very, quickly, badly, etc]

**preposition** - [usually] smaller words that convey a relationship between words.

(note! many of these words can be used as other parts of speech. To call it a preposition, you must identify a prepositional phrase and the object of the preposition. ) Here are 70 of the most common in English:

**aboard about above across after against along amid among anti around as  
at before behind below beneath beside besides between beyond but by  
concerning considering despite down during except excepting excluding  
following for from in inside into like minus near of off on onto opposite  
outside over past per plus regarding round save since than through to  
toward towards under underneath unlike until up upon versus via with  
within without**

**pronoun** - takes the place of a noun [he, she, it, they them, we, us, etc.]

**conjunction** - connects words, phrases, and clauses together [and, but, or, nor, although, because, so that, etc]

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other important terms:

a *phrase* is a group of words.

a *clause* is a group of words with a complete subject and predicate.

Sentence Diagramming 101

subject | predicate  
(modifier) (modifier)

the man ran quickly.

man | ran  
the quickly

subject | verb | object  
(modifier) (modifier) (modifier)

the big, bad wolf ate my daughter's math homework with rabid ferocity.

wolf | ate | homework  
the | with | ferocity | daughter's  
big | rabid | my  
bad | math

subject | "to be" verb | predicate adjective -or- predicate nominative

Janet | is \ beautiful

Janet | is \ wife  
my

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Smedly's steps for analyzing grammar:

Ask yourself: How is each word being used in a sentence, and how is each word related to the words around it?

- 🎧 Label each word's part of speech, and identify the function of each word in the sentence.
  
- 🎧 Identify all clauses in your passage.
  
- 🎧 Mark out all prepositional phrases and participial phrases.
  
- 🎧 Line Diagram each clause.
  
- 🎧 Diagram the relationships between the clauses.
  
- 🎧 Categorize the relationships between clauses, noticing conjunctions and identifying the type of clause being used.
  - coordination (normally introduced by a coordinating conjunction - "and", "but", "or", or "nor"
  - subordination (normally introduced by a subordinate conjunction or identified by the use of a relative pronoun). Here are some types of subordinate clauses (See Joel James, pp21-22):
    - relative
    - temporal
    - purpose
    - result
    - causal
    - contrast
    - conditional
    - comparison
    - concessive
    - sequential
    - noun
  
- 🎧 Identify the function of each participle and participial phrase. Here are some categories (See James, p23):
  - Purpose
  - Temporal
  - Causal
  - Conditional
  - Concessive
  - Instrumental
  - Circumstantial
  
- 🎧 Determine the referent for every pronoun.

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🌐 Analyze the voice, tense, and mood of each verb.

verb voice:

- active
- passive

i *ate* spaghetti  
the spaghetti *was eaten* by me.

tense:

- past
- present
- future
- past perfect
- perfect (or present perfect)
- future perfect

i *ate* spaghetti  
i *eat* spaghetti  
i *will eat* spaghetti  
i *had eaten* spaghetti  
i *have eaten* spaghetti  
i *will have eaten* spaghetti

mood:

- statement of fact (indicative)
- statement of possibility (subjunctive)
- question (interrogative)
- command (imperative)

i eat spaghetti  
i *might eat* spaghetti  
*will you eat* spaghetti?  
(you) *eat* spaghetti!

\*for longer passages and narrative sections:

- Identify clauses or sections.
- Watch your verbs for the tracing of the action.
- Diagram the relationships between the clauses or sections.
- Categorize the relationships between clauses or sections.
- Determine the referents for pronouns.
- Consider applying more detailed study to significant portions.

Let's do some sentence diagramming!

John 11:35

A large crowd followed Him

You search the Scriptures

Do not marvel at this

Do not grumble among yourselves.



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the testing of your faith produces endurance.

I have come in My Father's name

What shall we do?

Jesus then took the loaves

He distributed to those who were seated

So they were willing to receive Him into the boat

they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves

So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.

Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.

The one who accuses you is Moses

Resources for Step 3:

Joel James *How To Study the Bible: A Course for Serious Bible Students and Teachers*

English Grammar Texts (I refer often to *Harper's English Grammar* by John Opdycke)

a complete English dictionary will give you parts of speech and usages for English words.

*An Introduction to English Grammar and Sentence Diagramming* by Jeff Barbour and Rob Rugloski (available from GBC office)

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Homework Assignment #2:

Take your best shot at observing the relationships between the words in John 3:16. Try to diagram the verse according to the steps outlined above. Ask yourself, "how are the words in this verse related to each other?" Use the NASB version below.

"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."

## **Step 4: Observe the Words**

A warning about word study:

Our understanding of a passage will much more likely be determined by the relationships of words to each other than by the research of meanings of individual words.

examples:

Will the bass buffet entrance the great number of sewers present?

They refuse to produce moped polish.

Here are some common pitfalls to avoid doing word study:

- plugging in a definition of a word without thought to its context.  
Psalm 19:9 See the word "fear".
- importing all or too much of semantic range.  
consider the English word "board". We do not intend every semantic possibility whenever we use the word "board." And with the exceptions of figures of speech like puns, double entendres, etc. where multiple meaning is clearly intended, we never use even more than one semantic possibility for a word. We should not import multiple meanings into biblical words either.
- importing most exciting/favorite part of semantic range.  
If I issued command "Have a ball!" in my home, two of my children would put on long fancy dresses and begin dancing, another would start looking around (i hope! - Emet has been known to join the girls in a round of "dress-up" - argh!) for a football, basketball, or some other sports equipment, and another good would just smile at you and drool. If my kids are not concerned with what *I mean by what I say*, they will be tempted to insert their favorite meaning for a word, rather than my intended meaning.
- root fallacy. This is the determination of a word's meaning by appeal merely to its component parts or etymology. Consider the English words "butterfly" and "pineapple".

Consider the word in John3:16 for "only begotten" (*μονογενης*). Consider its usage in Hebrews 11:17. The intended meaning is something like "one and only", "unique", or "special".

- anachronism. Applying a definition to a word that was not even available at the time the word was used. See the use of *δυναμιζ* "dynamite" in Romans 1:16. See also *λαρον* in 2 Corinthians 9:7.

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- obsolescence. Using a definition for a word that is no longer in use at the time of writing. The English word "prevent" used to mean "to go before, to prepare the way or to assist someone" - now it means to hinder or obstruct.

*κεφαλαι* (kefalai) - an appeal is made in egalitarian interpreters to Classical Greek rather than NT and Hellenistic Greek for the use of this word in 1 Corinthians 11. Classical lexicons will list "source" or "origin" as a possible meaning for *κεφαλαι*. But no such definition exists for usage in Greek by the NT era.

- usage of unknown or unlikely meaning. *κεφαλαι* - debatable 5th century BC source for determining the meaning "source" or "origin" (as of a river - while all other uses describing rivers referred to the "mouth" of the river).
- applying the fruits of successful word-study to every other usage of the same word.  
"justification" in James 2 and Romans 4.
- overdifferentiated or flattened-out synonyms  
Consider the pallet of synonyms used for "sin," in Psalm 51 or 32. Consider also the many Hebrew words available to describe "put to death" and the careful use of these synonyms. (see Tenney 193-194).

How to study the words in a passage:

1. Begin with an English dictionary. What possible definitions exist for this word? An Collegiate English Dictionary will even list theological and Biblical definitions for words!
2. Refer back to your observation of the grammar. How is the word being used in this verse? If it is being used as a noun, you cannot import a definition for the word that serves as a verb.
3. Use an exhaustive concordance to observe how the same word is used throughout the Bible.
4. Select the usage that best fits the context.

Resources for Step 4:

Your Bible  
An English Dictionary  
A Concordance

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\*\*\*If you want to dig deeper into word study... here are some steps you can take to get at the words in the original languages.

Remember: the meaning of a word is *significantly* determined by its usage in a context. This is why syntax is so important. A proper understanding of a word's function in a sentence will help us filter out some wrong usages of a given word.

(technology note: feel free to utilize the electronic resources available to you. These will certainly speed up the process! But be careful: sometimes the dependence upon an electronic resource may cause you to bypass some important information. Get familiar with the resources below. Compare them to what is available electronically. Then use what proves to be most helpful and accurate.)

- Select the key word(s) you wish to investigate from your passage.
- Identify the part of speech and function of this word in the sentence.
- Start with an **English dictionary** (an unabridged dictionary is preferable). The scholars who translated the Bible into English selected specific English words to represent the words of the originals. They selected the English words based on English usage. An unabridged English dictionary will give you a good start into understanding a word that is being used. Check your part of speech to make sure you are using the correct one.
- Use an **exhaustive concordance** to scan the uses of your word in your translation of the Bible. You can use a concordance for another translation to see if there are synonyms interchanged for your word. Catalogue the various uses of your word. Begin to get a feel for the range of meaning the Biblical authors gave to this word. Be sure to scan the entries for forms of the word other than the one in your passage. For instance, if the word is plural in your passage, don't neglect the singular usages; if it is a verb in the present tense, look at the other tense usages as well. Scan the related words. If your word is *sanctified*, be sure to scan *sanctification, sanctifies, sanctuary*, etc. Look up and read the passages that seem to give some help for understanding the word's occurrence in your passage. Pay attention especially to the uses of your word in the same passage, near context, same author, etc., outward in concentric circles of context.
- Use the **Strong's Number** to get to the Greek or Hebrew word behind the English word. The numbers are indexed in *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance to the Bible* and are utilized by many reference works. You can also utilize an interlinear Bible to discover the original words behind the English words.
- Once you have the Greek or Hebrew word you can look up the definition in an original language **lexicon**.
- The next step is the theological dictionaries (TDNT in the New Testament; NIDOTTE and TWOT in the Old Testament). These give much more lengthy entries for significant words. They do not cover every word in the Bible, or even most words. They select significant words and trace etymology, diachronic usage, extrabiblical usage, theological meaning, and more. These are significantly more interpretive than a lexicon, and not all entries are written by believers - so use discretion!
- You should now examine commentaries to see how they explain the usage of this word in your passage.

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- You should compile and analyze all of your research. You can begin to sift out what is unhelpful, what is errant. If your word study has prompted more questions, write those down.

\*\*\*\*Note to the overwhelmed - this probably seems like a lot to do. It is. Not every word is worth this kind of investigation. But digging deeply will produce fruit. Budget your study time. It cannot all be given to word study! Plan ahead, be as thorough as you can in the allotted time, and then move on.\*\*\*\*

Resources for Step 4 (advanced):

An Unabridged Dictionary

An Exhaustive Concordance in the translation from which you are studying.

An Interlinear Bible (Hebrew-English; Greek-English)

*Vine's Expository Dictionary*

*A Greek-English Lexicon of The New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker

*The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*

*NIDOTTE (New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis)*

*TWOT (Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament)*

*TDNT (Theological Dictionary of the New Testament - affectionately referred to as "Kittle")*

*Word Pictures in the New Testament* by A.T. Robertson

*The Expositor's Greek Testament* ed. by W. Robertson Nicoll

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## **Step 5: Observe the Context**

Our commitment to the discovery of authorial intent demands that we pay attention to context!

Investigate the context in expanding concentric circles. What are the circles of context?  
phrase, clause, sentence, paragraph, chapter, book, Testament, Bible.

It is important also to investigate the context in view of the progress of revelation, the trajectory and timeline of the Bible. Where does this passage fit in the whole storyline of the Bible?

Let's look at some examples where context helps us determine the meaning of some easily misunderstood passages:

- Philippians 2:3(a)
- Romans 2:5-10
- Philippians 4:13
- John 9:3
- John 8:30
- Lamentations 3:22-23
- Jeremiah 29:11
- Jeremiah 31:31
- Romans 3:23
- Psalm 137:4
- Luke 20:45-21:4

\*note - read your Bible *forward*. This is the way we read most books. The Bible is not an encyclopedia or a topically-arranged theological textbook. Your Bible is the storyline of God's redemptive plan. It begins in Genesis and ends in Revelation. Try to interpret it that way. We do not read the Old Testament in light of the New Testament. Rather, we read the New Testament in light of the Old Testament.

Where does your passage fit on the timeline of redemptive history? Where is it in relation to the cross? Where is it in relation to us today? To whom is God speaking, and what would have been their understanding of His Words?

Chronological Bibles, books on Biblical history, and Bible surveys are good tools to help you see the big picture and the trajectory of the Bible. Other tools for getting the overall timeline of the Bible:

A Lifetime of Regular Bible Reading

*The Bible Panorama* by Gerard Chrispin

*A History of Israel* by Kaiser

Charts and timelines of Biblical history in a study Bible

Scott Maxwell's preaching series on Leviticus

Jacob Hantla's small group

(develop your own timeline chart of Redemptive History)

Teach the whole Bible in one sitting to your kids

## **Step 6: Observe the Genre**

Prescriptive or Descriptive? A passage of Scripture may be telling its readers *what to do*. Another passage of Scripture may simply be telling its readers *what happened*. Be careful not to make a *descriptive* text become *prescriptive*.

Genesis 2:7-8

Genesis 29:1-30

Judges 6:36-40; 11:29-40

Narrative (History), Poetry, or Letter?

Poetry is written in a different style, with different words, figures of speech.

Contrast Genesis 1-3 (narrative history) with Psalm 104 (poetic description of the same events).

Contrast Judges 4 (narrative history) with Judges 5 (poetic description of the same events).

\*note - some interpreters place prophecy and apocalyptic literature as separate genres requiring special rules for interpretation. I believe it is best to consider prophetic passages as future history, sometimes described in the language of narration, sometimes painted in the word pictures of poetry.

Special Considerations for Narrative

- treat the narrative portions of Scripture as actual history (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1).
- pay attention to the narrator's comments (Judges 21:25). What individual characters may say or do in a narrative passage may not be the best indication of the message God wants us to hear.
- God Himself is the main character. Ask yourself: What is God doing in this text?



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Special Considerations for Poetry

Hebrew Poetry occurs in much of the Old Testament - in the Psalms, Wisdom Literature, inside narrative sections, in prophetic books. Hebrew poetry uses noticeably different verb forms and conjunctions, and would have been readily recognizable to Hebrew readers. Many modern English translations of the Bible mark out poetry by indentation. Hebrew poetry is characterized not primarily by the rhyming of sounds but by the rhyming of ideas. Consider the following features of Hebrew poetry (and see the examples in Joel James, p.13ff):

- Synonymous Parallelism - two lines say the same thing, or the second line expands the idea of the first line. Isaiah 42:5,8; 43:25; 44:24; 45:22; 48:8-9,11; Psalm 18:1-6
- Antithetical Parallelism - two lines express a thought by approaching it from opposite angles. Proverbs 11:23; 10:12, 29.
- Literary Devices in Hebrew Poetry:
  - Chiasm ABCCBA (see Joel James p14) Isa 53:3; Psalm 18:30-32.
  - Simile - uses *like* or *as* to portray a relationship of similarity. Proverbs 10:26; Psalm 1:4; Hosea 6:4; 14:5.
  - Metaphor - a comparison is made without *like* or *as*. Psalm 18:31
  - Metonymy - an idea is presented by using a related item. Proverbs 10:21
  - Synecdoche - a part of something is used to describe the whole, or vice versa. Genesis 42:38

Watch out for the Abuse of Literary Genre!!!

- Genesis as myth (Ancient Near-Eastern parallels)
- Genesis 1-3 as Poetic (see RATE project and statistical analysis of Hebrew poetry)
- Suzerain Vassal-Treaties (Deuteronomy and Exodus and ANE parallels)
- Historical Accounts as theological polemics (Pentateuch - JEDP, Gospels - see Matthew 5-7; Matthew 10:5-42)
- Literary Dependence (Markan priority and the Synoptic "problem")
- Revelation as Apocalyptic - highly symbolic, metaphorical, undecipherable.
- Gospel of John as a Gnostic text

If the pursuit of a specific genre or sub-genre of literature pushes the interpreter to avoid the veracity of a text, get scared! Or if mountains of extrabiblical technical explanation are required to "understand" a text, get scared!

## **Step 7: Observe the Author and the Audience**

What biographical information can you discover about the author?

- Begin with the Bible itself. You can use an exhaustive concordance and/or a Topical Bible to discover every place in Scripture the author of your passage is mentioned. Read or skim the narrative portions of Scripture pertaining to your author. Read or skim any other portions of Scripture your author has penned. Ask lots of questions: When did this man live? Where was he born? When/How did he die? What was his conversion like? What was his upbringing like? His education? What significant experiences shaped this man's character, behavior, perspective?
- In a good study Bible, read the introductory notes to the book in which your passage is found. This is a good, concise resource for the author's biographical information.
- Next, read entries in Bible Dictionaries and Bible Encyclopedias.
- Next, you can turn to specialized works on the author you are reading. Much has been written on the Apostle Paul. *Twelve Ordinary Men*, by John MacArthur, contains biographical summaries and character sketches on each of the 12 Disciples.
- Finally, read through the introductions to several good commentaries. They will contain a section devoted to information about the human writer of your passage. You may want to check the introductions to commentaries of other books the author penned, so that you can fill in more biographical information.

What situational information can you find out about the author at the time of his writing?

- Ask the following questions: When was this book written? Under what circumstances? How did the human author get his information? Was it direct dictation, prophetic vision, eyewitness account, historical research, or "normal" writing of Scripture? Where was the author when he wrote? Was he in prison? Hiding out in a cave? In fear for his life? Secure in a palace? In a field with sheep? Did he have other resources at his disposal? Did he write under the eyewitness testimony of another person? Where was the author in relationship to his audience?
- Begin with your passage and the book it is in. Are there any clues in the text that might shed light on the author's life situation at the time of writing?
- Read the introductory notes in a good study Bible. There will be a section devoted to the situation of the author at the time of writing.

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- In a Bible Dictionary or Bible Encyclopedia, look up the name of the book in which your passage is found. There will often be some information given about the author's situation at the time of writing.
- Finally, read the sections in the introductions of several good commentaries pertaining to the author's situation at the time of writing.

What can you find out about the audience to whom your passage is written?

- Ask the following questions: Who was the intended original audience? Was it an individual, a group, a church, a group of churches, a nation? Was it a racially mixed audience? A gathered group? Were they spread out geographically?
- Begin with the Bible itself. What clues exist in the text that might shed light on the audience to whom it was written (or spoken)? Keep in mind that there may be multiple audiences to investigate (If you are studying a passage in the Sermon on the Mount [Mt 5-7] you will need to consider the crowds on the grass as well as Matthew's readership). If you are studying an Old Testament prophet, you will want to consider which kingdom the prophet was speaking to, and under what king(s) he prophesied.
- Use the introductory articles in several good commentaries and your Study Bible to investigate the audience to whom this passage was written.
- Some of your investigation of the audience will require digging up cultural, historical, political, religious, and archaeological data relevant to the time period. This will be covered next session.
- These investigations will help you ask and (hopefully) begin to answer interpretive questions, like: What occasioned the writing of this passage? What was going on in the audience that prompted the writer to pen this book? How did the Author/author intend the original audience to *understand* this passage? How did the Author/author intend the original audience to *apply* this passage?

Resources for Step 7:

An Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible  
*The MacArthur Topical Bible* or other topical Bible  
*The MacArthur Study Bible* or other study Bible  
*The Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*  
*Eerdman's Handbook to the Bible*  
*ISBE - International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* or other Bible Encyclopedia  
*Unger's Bible Dictionary* or other Bible dictionary

Introductions to the OT, NT, or Bible:

*Introduction to the Old Testament* by RK Harrison  
*A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* by Gleason Archer  
*An Introduction to the New Testament* by D. Edmond Hiebert  
*An Introduction to the New Testament* by Carson, Moo, and Morris

Good Commentaries

Specialized works on human authors of Scripture (these are some examples):

*Paul: Apostle of God's Glory in Christ* by Schreiner  
*Twelve Ordinary Men* by John MacArthur

## **Step 8: Dig Up The Historical Context**

- What is the historical context of your passage? When in world history does your passage take place? What world historical events bear on the passage you are studying? What governments are in place? What nations or empires are in charge? What human rulers are present? What is attitude of government toward the characters or original readers of your passage?
- What geographical features bear significance on your passage? Investigate the geography and topography of travels in your passage. What does the phrase "from Dan to Beersheba" mean? Look up any place names on a map.
- What biographical information can you find out about the characters in the passage? Besides the author of your passage, what characters do you need more information on?
- Are there any cultural phenomena in your passage that you need more understanding on? Are there any cultural behaviors or customs evident in your passage that, if understood, could bring more clarity to your passage?
- What is the religious climate/situation at the time of your passage? What is the predominant spiritual climate among God's people during the time your passage was written? What about the original audience? and the world around them?

Your passage may dictate that you spend a significant portion of time digging up the historical, cultural, biographical, geographical, and political context in which it was written. Or you may spend virtually no time on this step. The key here is to ask questions of the text. Pay attention to your commentaries - they may tip you off that there is more research to be done. Read as broadly as you have time for, remembering to budget your study time well.

### Resources for Step 8:

*A History of Israel* by Kaiser; *The History of Israel* by Noth

*The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times* by Gower

*Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* by Neusner and Green; *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ* by Schurer

general works on ancient world history (Egypt, Israel, Assyria, Babylon, Greece, Rome)

Bible atlases

*The MacArthur Study Bible* or other study Bible

*The Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*

*Eerdman's Handbook to the Bible*

*ISBE - International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* or other Bible Encyclopedia

*Unger's Bible Dictionary* or other Bible dictionary

Introductions to the OT, NT, or Bible:

*Introduction to the Old Testament* by RK Harrison; *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* by Gleason Archer;

*An Introduction to the New Testament* by D. Edmond Hiebert; *An Introduction to the New Testament* by Carson, Moo, and Morris

good commentaries

specialized works on geography, biography, history, culture, archaeology

journal articles (BibSac, BAR, TMSJ, JETS, etc)

## **Step 9: Cross Reference**

Are there other passages that can help you understand this text? Cross-referencing other texts can help in understanding the text you are studying, if done well. But be careful! It is very easy to misuse and abuse cross-reference. Often we will leave a text we do not understand very well in hopes that we can make sense out of it by looking at other, perhaps unrelated, passages that we do not understand very well.

A cross-reference is a good one when there is a legitimate parallel to the text we are studying, and if we understand that parallel.

Cross-references can take be of several sorts:

- lexical - if a particular word is difficult to understand in our passage, we can examine how that same word is used in other passages. We essentially did lexical cross-reference in our word study above.
- syntactical - we can discover patterns in the way specific authors employed particular grammatical constructions. This might shed some light on an interpretive decision in our passage.
- synoptic - [syn + optic = looking together at the same event] two or more passages may describe the same event from different angles or different writers' perspectives. This is especially true between the "synoptic gospels" (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), but is also true of the relationship of the Gospel of John to the Synoptic Gospels, the book of Acts to things referenced in the NT Epistles, 1 and 2 Kings with 1 and 2 Chronicles, Davidic Psalms with events in Chronicles and Kings, OT Prophets with events in Kings and Chronicles, etc. [\*\*Keep in mind that while the parallel passages may contain more information that helps fill out the details of a given event, the writer of your passage, under the expiration of the Holy Spirit, included only the details that he included - and for specific reason.\*\*]
- theological - other passages may speak to the same theological issue as the passage you are studying. (This is the kind of cross-reference we most easily abuse!) When you have finished your exegetical work on your passage, you will begin to see its themes in other places in the Bible, and the more you study, the more you will see recurrent themes and theological concepts interwoven throughout the Bible. Well-studied passage become great allies in cross-referencing. Poorly studied passages are dangerous cross-referencing tools. The goal of a good theological cross-reference may be to clarify something in your passage that is obscure, or to give another facet to a many-faceted theological diamond. But the goal of a good cross-reference is never to *erase* (we would rather say "balance out") what your passage is intending to say! We must let the text mean what it means by what it says in its context to its audience in the trajectory of Scripture and the flow of redemptive history!

### Resources for Step 9:

Margin notes in your Bible or study Bible.

*Harmony of the Gospels* by Thomas and Gundry (or other Gospels Harmony)

Chronological Bible

Chain-Reference Bible

Topical Bible

Commentaries

## **Step 10: Read Commentaries**

By this time you have already skimmed or read significant portions of the commentaries available to you. If you haven't done it yet, this is a great time to read them through. Take notes on places that commentators differ from each other. Take note of places that commentators differ from you. Commentaries are a great tool to keep you accountable - if you find yourself interpreting a passage in a manner that no one else in all of church history ever has, you might want to go back and check your work! A reading of good commentaries will help you overturn some stones you didn't think to turn over, to ask some questions that did not come to your mind, to think of possible solutions to interpretive questions that did not occur to you. This is an important step worth taking some time on.

There are a variety of types of commentaries. You should consult some of each:

- Big-picture commentaries - these are either very brief works on a book of the Bible, or they can be whole-Bible commentaries, or they can be the notes in a study Bible. These are an attempt to briefly summarize the meaning of a large section of Scripture. Economy of words is important in a commentary like this, so these can be helpful at getting the overall idea of a verse or section. (examples: *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (12 volumes))
- Devotional commentaries - these are geared toward ready application by the reader. These will be very light on technical discussions of grammar, word meanings, or theological difficulties. The aim of a devotional commentary is to bring the Word of God to bear on the hearts and lives of its readership. (examples: *The Cross and Christian Ministry* by DA Carson, The "Be" Series by Warren Wiersbe, *The Treasury of David* by Spurgeon)
- Homiletical commentaries - these are the printed versions of preached expository sermons. These commentaries "hide" most of the exegetical research of the author/preacher. They are the (often edited) transcript of sermons preached in a series through a book of the Bible. These are valuable for seeing how others have taught these passages and for how they outlined and organized their material. They can also be a great bibliographical resource. You can find out about other commentators from the men who have preached the passage you are studying. Keep in mind, however, that a pastor will have his own flock of people in mind as he organizes and delivers his material. His audience will be different than yours and will have different needs. He is therefore not going to explain all the details in the passage you are studying. He has included only those things which he thought would be most helpful to his audience when he delivered that message. (examples: *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series*, *Commentary on Romans* by D Martin Lloyd-Jones)
- Technical Commentaries - these commentaries deal with the original languages, grammar, text-critical issues, historical background, archaeology, literary context, etc. Many commentaries that thorough in their dealing with the original languages and grammar can be very liberal in their theological perspective. Many technical commentaries outright deny the inspiration of Scripture! So be careful. There are good, conservative technical commentaries out there. (examples of pretty much good ones: *Galatians* by Eadie, *The Gospel of John* by DA Carson, *Colossians* by PT O'Brien, *NIGTC*)

## **Building a Bible Study Library at Home:**

What books should I have to study the Bible (in some order of importance)?

1. A good word-for-word translation of the Bible (NASB, ESV, HCSB)
2. An English dictionary
3. An exhaustive concordance in the Bible version you study from
4. A Study Bible (The MacArthur Study Bible, for instance)
5. A Bible Dictionary (Unger's Bible Dictionary, or others)
6. A Bible Encyclopedia
7. Commentaries (used appropriately)