

# Learning How to Read the Bible

## 1. Defining Biblical Hermeneutics

"Hermeneutics" is the art and science of reading.

Its root is from Hermes, the Greek god who understood and interpreted what other Greek gods wanted to say to humans.

Reading the Bible is called "biblical hermeneutics."

This booklet delves into the subject of biblical hermeneutics and highlights some methods and practical examples that may be worthwhile to add to your reading skills.

For those who desire more, there are biblical scholars who wrote wonderful books on this subject, and you can find more by looking up Bible Hermeneutics.

## 2. Reading the Bible is Difficult

Reading the Bible is difficult for several reasons:

It is not a book that has a continuous historical story line from beginning to end.

It is a book written in several literary styles including poetry.

It was written in cultures and societies very different from today.

It is about an intangible subject - God and his plan for the spiritual condition of man.

## 3. Significant Differences

While the process of reading the Bible is, in many ways, like reading any book, there are several notable differences:

The Bible is the actual revelation of God of Himself to mankind.

The Bible is God's word for the redemption and encouragement of man's spiritual state.

The Bible is the principle means of comprehending the reality of God's love for man.

The Bible was not intended for entertainment or an intellectual exercise; it was intended to change lives.

## 4. A 3-Step Process

How well you read the Bible affects how well you understand it, and this affects how well you apply its truths and principles.

An example of a good reading method is this 3 step process:

**Observation** - what do I see?

**Interpretation** - what does it mean?

**Application** - how does it apply to my life?

## 5. The Importance of Observation

Observation is the gathering of evidence.

Interpretation is your understanding of the evidence.

There are 2 important aspects to note here:

1. Interpretation **arises** from the evidence, not visa versa.
2. The **more** evidence you gather, the **easier** it is to comprehend what is going on

## 6. How to Improve Your Accuracy of Interpretation

You'll discover that **the more you observe,**

**the less you'll need to interpret,**

and **the more accurately you'll be able to apply** the biblical truth to your life.

Of course it's OK not to understand everything you read in the Bible.

But a good Bible study method will certainly help you improve your ability of comprehension and markedly improve the accuracy of your interpretation.

## 7. Define Words and Terms

Let's start with **observation** - what do you see? One skill is to examine, instead of presume, what the words or terms mean. Here are some things you can try:

1. Try reading a different Bible translation. You may discover a translation that is easier for you to read and understand.
2. Try looking up some of the words in a dictionary or a Bible dictionary.

For those who desire more, consider a deeper Bible study by examining the Hebrew or Greek term, which the Bible translation is based on, to understand the term within the context of the author and his period of time.

### **A review of grammar...the importance in understanding words...**

Bible study is no more than careful reading, taking notes, and reflecting on the information. God's intent is to speak to us through His Word and in a manner that would capture our hearts. Observation is simply a careful survey of the content.

**TIP:** While the Bible is Holy, its pages are not; so mark it up with notes!

### **What does the word / term mean?**

How does the author use the word or term here and other places he has authored? What is his intended meaning? Can we assume that we know the author's definition of the word or term?

Example: In John 17:26, John 3:16, and John 14:21 the same word “love” is used towards three groups of people. Does “love” have the same meaning in each of these passages?

1) John 17:26: "And I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them." Jesus acknowledges His Father's love of Him.

2) John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." Jesus speaks of God's love towards the human race.

3) John 14:21: " He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him." Jesus speaks of God's love of Believers.

### **What was being conveyed by those words to the initial readers (audience)?**

Everyone can understand the distinctions of love that a parent makes towards their own child, for the child of a friend and towards a stranger's child. In the above example, the Greek word for “love” was “agapao” which was used identically in each of the verses. In John 17:26, God's “agape love” is towards His beloved Son; in John 3:16, God's “agape love” is towards the human race; and in John 14:21, God's “agape love” is towards Believers. This is revealing to the Greek speaking audience; unlike them, God made no distinctions with His deep esteeming love. God loves all of His children whether they are His only Son, humanity, or Believers.

### **Are there any similar words or opposite words to help you understand the author better?**

Notice how both similar and opposite words are used to convey the meaning of love.

"Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous;

love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly;

it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;

bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails... (1 Cor 13:4-8)."

### **What is its original Hebrew or Greek?**

“Phileo” and “agapao” are two distinct Greek words that are translated as the same English word “love.” To learn about their distinctions, use a concordance.

One cannot assume that the author uses words with the same meaning as the reader. This is just the first step; there are other factors that affect the meaning of words and how they in turn affect our understanding of ideas and concepts.

## 8. Identify the Parts of Speech

Another important skill is identifying the parts of speech of a sentence or passage.

What is the function of the term?

Is it a verb?

How about a conjugation?

Or a preposition?

There are nine parts of speech:

nouns, pronouns, verbs,

adverbs, adjectives, conjunctions,

prepositions, interjections, and articles.

Understanding the combination of parts of speech that make up a sentence will most certainly help you understand what the author is saying.

### **A review of grammar... assembling words together to communicate ideas and concepts...**

The principles of communication vary little among the different languages of the world. How the words are put together form the means by which ideas are conveyed. Let's examine some of those principles.

#### **What is the *form* of the word or term?**

The form of a word describes how it is put together. Examples:

- 1) "Just," is an adjective, which means, "righteous, honorable and fair in dealing or action, valid within the law."
- 2) "Justify" is a verb, which means, "To show or prove valid, absolve, to declare free of blame."

**WARNING:** Root words can help reveal the meaning of a word; however, few words retain their original meaning. In other words, this is a useful tool but not a definitive one. Example: "atone", which means, "to make amends for one's sin", is derived from "at" "one", which means, "in agreement." "At one God" is the equivalent phrase to "atone."

#### **What is the *function* of the word or term?**

The function of a word pertains to its use in a phrase; this specifically refers to the nouns (nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and prepositions) and verbs (verbs, adverbs, conjunctions, and interjections). Examples:

- 1) **Verbs** indicate the **action**, **mood**, or **tense** of nouns or pronouns. Notice the mood and tense.

-Please pray. He is praying. Did he pray? He prayed. Pray!

- 2) Modifiers such as **Adjectives** modify a noun or pronoun and reveal a **quality** such as "forgiving God (Ps 99:8)" or **Adverbs** modify a verb, adjective, or another adverb and reveal a **quality** such as "pray without ceasing; (1 Thes 5:17)."

3) **Prepositions** used with a noun, pronoun, adjective, or verb, reveals a **relationship** such "by, from, with, over, against, according, etc."

- "...pray *to* your Father who is in secret... (Matt 6:6)" conveys a **relationship** or direction.

- "...pray *at* all times... (Eph 6:18)" conveys a relationship of time.

- "..., but *in* everything by prayer... (Phil 4:6)" conveys a relationship of method.

- "...joyful in My house *of* prayer (Isa 56:7)" conveys a relationship of origin.

4) **Conjunctions** are used to **connect** words, phrases, clauses, or sentences. Often overlooked, these can be road signs that tell you what you must observe to understand the word, term, or phrase in context.

- "but" indicates a contrast and tells you read the phrase or sentence before it.

- "and" or "also" indicates an addition.

- "because" or "for" indicates a reason.

- "as" indicates a correlation.

- "therefore" or "then" or "consequently" indicates a result or conclusion.

- "when" or "until" indicates time.

- "that" indicates purpose.

Example of **conjunctions**: Joshua 1:8

This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, (what does this mean?)

But you shall meditate on it day and night, (*but*-contrast)

so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; (*so that*-purpose)

for then you make your way prosperous, (*for then*-result)

and then you will have success (*and*-addition).

5) **Interjections** are **exclamatory** words that can stand on their own such as "why? Oh! etc."

It is clear that **the principles of grammar affect the meaning of words**; however, instead of focusing on the form or function of the word as this note summarized, understand how the word, term, or phrase is used within the context of the sentence. Challenging at first, the discipline of improving your observation skills will become a reflex with practice and result in a more satisfying Bible study.

**TIPS:**

1. Look for relationships of the word or term.

2. Look for a pattern. Anything repeated? A sequence or order? A cause and effect? A question and an answer?

## 9. Break Down the Sentence Structure

Equally important is the skill of observing the structure of the sentence.

What is its subject?

What are its predicates?

What is its syntax?

Is there any significance to the order of thought?

For those who desire more, consider a deeper study into Hebrew and Greek syntax.

### **A review of grammar...syntax and the expression of thoughts...**

**Syntax** is the way that words or terms are combined to form clauses, phrases, or sentences. Word order plays a significant role in determining the meaning of any passage.

Example: The meaning of John 3:16 "For God so loved the world..." would change drastically with a simple change in word order, "For the world so loved God..."

Because of the logical presentation of thought through syntax, this provides an excellent means to study any passage in the Bible. The concept is simple: 1) consider the literary genre or style, 2) look for natural divisions of the text, 3) identify the connecting words (conjunctions), and 4) identify the development of the author's theme and observe how the passage fits within context. With this method, you can better understand the words, their context that the author meant, and easily summarize the author's ideas.

Example: Psalm 19:7-8.

#### **The Law of the LORD is perfect,**

(Law of the Lord = Jewish reference to the 5 books of Moses: Gen., Ex., Lev., Num., Deut.) (perfect = flawless)

##### **restoring the soul.**

(restore = resuscitate, reinvigor) (soul = spiritual nature)

#### **The testimony of the LORD is sure**

(testimony = public formal or written evidence, declaration of truth) (sure = reliable, worthy of trust, without any doubt)

##### **making wise the simple.**

(make = to cause) (wise = discernment for what is right, true, and lasting) (simple = humble, lowly)

#### **The precepts of the LORD are right,**

(precepts = principle defining a standard) (right = conforming to law, being with accord with truth, most beneficial)

##### **rejoicing the heart.**

(rejoicing = to delight) (heart = vital center of one's being, emotions, and sensibilities)

**The commandment of the LORD is pure,**  
(commandment = direct order, rule) (pure = without deceit, righteous)

**enlightening the eyes.**  
(enlightening = illumination, enlighten, a way of looking at or considering a matter)

Summary:

The Law of the LORD is synonymous with **testimony, precepts, and commandment of the Lord.**

The Law of the LORD is **perfect, sure, right, and pure.**

The results are **restoring the soul, making wise the simple, rejoicing the heart, and enlightening the eyes.**

**TIP:** the quality of Bible study is directly proportional to the quantity of time spent in reflection.

The Hebrew and Greek manuscripts from which the Bible was translated from was all text; there were no punctuation marks, paragraph indentations, or verse numbers. Some words even lacked spacing; thus literal translations may read, "GOD IS NOWHERE" when the writer was saying, "GOD IS NOW HERE." Imagine trying to comprehend, let alone translate that! We have the fortune of knowing God through translations that allow us to break the syntax down to better understand the writer. Take advantage of that!

## **10. Grasp the Figures of Speech**

The Bible is full of imagery and figurative speech. Enhance your reading experience by creating mental images!

Reading imaginatively, yet with common sense, will help you understand the beauty of the author's writing.

Read with all of your senses!

Can you smell what the author smells?

Can you see what the author sees?

Can you hear what the author hears?

Can you sense what the author touches?

Can you empathize with the author's emotion?

### **Literary devices and figures of speech...communicating with images...**

Pictures can be worth a thousand words and as literary devices, images and figures of speech, produce powerful messages that communicate with few words. There are several reasons why God chose this as a means to communicate: 1) His message becomes alive and memorable, and 2) abstract concepts become tangible and easier to understand. A figure of speech is a term that communicates something other than its literal meaning; however, it conveys literal truth. Figurative speech does not indicate "mythical" or "mystical!"

There are many types of figures of speech, and this note intends to introduce the more common types often seen in the Bible. For this example, study the two following verses: Jeremiah 9:3 and James 3:3-12. The subject is the tongue, which is the organ for taste and speech.

**Jeremiah 9:3.** Jeremiah is prophesying in Judah against the sins of the Jews through the reigns of Josiah (640-609 B.C.), Jehoahaz (609 B.C.), Jehoiakim (609-598 B.C.), Jehoaichin (598-597 B.C.), and Zedekiah (597-586 B.C.).

3) “They bend their tongue like their bow; Lies and not truth prevail in the land; For they proceed from evil to evil, And they do not know Me,” declares the LORD.

“They bend their tongue like their bow” is a **simile**; this figure of speech is a comparison using the words “like” or “as.” Qualities of the image are being conferred upon the subject, and, in this case, the majority in Judah is using their tongue as a weapon shooting lies.

**James 3:3-12.** James, the brother of Jesus, is writing to the Jewish Christians about the human tongue.

3) Now if we put the bits into the horses’ mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well.

This verse is not a figure of speech; however, there is an image where horses are *controlled* by a bit, which is known to be *small*.

4) Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires.

This verse is not a figure of speech; however, another image is presented where *great* ships, driven by *strong* winds, are *directed* by *small* rudders. A paradoxical image is created: small devices control large objects. In addition, by controlling the small device, one controls the large object.

5) So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!

The term “so also” is a conjunction that connects the two images of verses 3 and 4 to the tongue. The phrase “boasts of great things” is a figure of speech; it is a **personification** in which the tongue is given a human characteristic. Following this figure of speech and the two previous images, the new image moves from control to escalating destructive loss of control!

6) And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.

The “tongue is a fire” is a **metaphor**. A metaphor makes a comparison and is easily identified with the verb “is,” “are,” “was,” and “were.” A **hyperbole**, “the very world of iniquity,” follows the metaphor; in this figure of speech, an exaggeration is used to emphasize, in this case, the destructiveness of the tongue. The tongue is not only small and powerful, but it is perverse! **Personification** continues to develop the evil image of the tongue; the figures of speech are “defiles the entire body” and “sets on fire the course of our life.” The final metaphor “is set on fire by hell,” which completes the vivid and destructive image of the tongue by comparing where the fire originated.

7) For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race.

8) But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.

This **metaphor**, “it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison,” makes an image transition; the tongue is now an evil entity in which there is nothing good.

- 9) With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God;  
10) from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.

These two verses are not figures of speech; however, the paradoxical nature of man both blessing and cursing emphasizes the evilness of the tongue.

- 11) Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? 12) Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh.

These last two verses are examples of **rhetorical questions**: “Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water?” And “Can a fig tree,..., produce olives, or a vine produce figs?” This form of figurative speech is not a question that asks for an answer; instead, it emphasizes the obvious and apparent truth or point. The tongue should not be used inconsistently!

Understanding figures of speech is very important and this short note only introduces you to the subject. Not recognizing or misidentifying a figure of speech can lead to misinterpretation of the passage. Here are three guidelines (of many more) from scholars on this subject that will help you stay on the path of proper exegesis:

1. **Always take the literal sense unless there is good reason otherwise.**

2. **If the literal is impossible, absurd, or immoral, take the figurative.**

Example: “...the trees of the field will clap their hands (Isa 55:12).” This is an absurd statement.

3. **If the Scripture or context indicates a figurative, take the figurative.**

Example: In Daniel 7, Daniel describes “four great beasts” which, in a later verse (Dan 7:17), are identified, “These great beasts,...are four kings who...” The “four great beasts” are obviously figurative speech.

#### TIPS:

1. Look for comparisons with similes and metaphors. What is alike / unlike?
2. What is the apparent truth or point of the rhetorical question?
3. What is being emphasized by the hyperbole?
4. What inconsistency is being emphasized by the paradox?
5. What is the image and subject of passage?
6. Do not assume that the figure, when used in other passages, will always mean the same thing!

*“Behind every figure of speech is a literal meaning, and by means of the historical-grammatical exegesis of the text, these literal meanings are to be sought out.”* Earl Radmacher

### 11. Recognize the Literary Style

As you will discover, there are many aspects of observation that are necessary for a successful Bible study method. In one instance, it may be a microscopic study of a specific word. In another, your skills may require a more global perspective such as recognizing the literary genre / style of the passage.

In identifying the literary genre, you'll be able to better understand the author's purpose, thought, and emphasis.

Did the author write a legal document?

Is the biblical passage poetic?

Was it written in a narrative, biographical, or historical style?

Did the author write a parable?

Was the literature prophetic or apocalyptic?

## Literary genres...composing information with style...

With over 40 different authors, the Bible is made up of a variety of writing styles. Literary genre describes the type of literature that is similar in content, tone, or structure. For hermeneutics, literary genre helps us know how to read and understand the text better. For instance, a history book wouldn't be read and understood in the same way as poetry. By knowing the literary genre, one is more prepared for observation, and verses are better understood within their context.

**Note:** several literary genres may exist in each book of the Bible.

Literary Genre	Examples	Characteristics	Observation Tips
Legal	Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-This represents a treaty with Israel <i>after</i> God establishes their relationship and just prior to entering the Promised Land.</li> <li>-The treaty is the agreement of the blessings and punishments for loyal or disloyal behavior.</li> <li>-Numbering over 600 laws, there are three categories of Old Testament Law that God instructed Moses: 1) moral, 2) civil, and 3) ceremonial.</li> <li>-While the Old Testament Law is the Word of God, not all is a command to Christians.</li> <li>-Some laws, which Jesus repeated, have been renewed and are commands to Christians.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-What does each law reveal about God's standards, and justice?</li> <li>-Which laws do the prophets and Jesus repeat?</li> <li>-How is the Old Testament Law is used to lead people to Christ?</li> <li>The Old Testament Law reminds us of our privileged status; the Law no longer dictates our behavior.</li> </ul>
Narrative/ Historical/ Biographical	Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1&2 Samuel, 1&2 Kings, 1&2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Jonah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Haggai, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-These are stories of what God did to and through people.</li> <li>-The stories may not have a moral or direct teaching as they record history whether good or bad.</li> <li>-The stories emphasize God's nature and revelation and teach in a manner that no other literary genre can.</li> <li>-God is the heroic protagonist!</li> <li>-Some stories will be difficult to understand; we are not always told how and why God did things.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Read each story as a unit.</li> <li>-Understand the plot.</li> <li>-Study the character(s). Note that the characters may be bad examples, but observing what not to do can be just as important as what to do.</li> <li>-Compare the same story that may be narrated elsewhere in a different book.</li> <li>-Because the stories are so true to life, they can help us understand our own lives.</li> </ul>

Literary Genre	Examples	Characteristics	Observation Tips
Poetry	Job, Psalm, Lamentations, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Hebrew poetry is supposed to be sung. It is worshipful, intensely emotional, and appeals to the imagination.</li> <li>-About 40% of the Old Testament is poetic.</li> <li>-Lacking the traditional elements found in poetry, Hebrew poetry is essentially parallelism. Much of Hebrew poetry cannot be appreciated because of the loss of its subtleties through translation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Read poetry slowly and in short sections.</li> <li>-Study the imagery.</li> <li>-Look for literary devices.</li> <li>-Look for a central theme.</li> <li>-What is being said about God?</li> <li>-What is being said of God's people?</li> </ul>
Proverb / Wisdom	Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-These books are all poetic.</li> <li>-There are two types of wisdom: practical and speculative. Practical wisdom refers to guidelines that will lead to a holy and happy life. Speculative wisdom refers to the deeper issues such as the meaning of life and the existence of evil.</li> <li>-The poetry teaches wisdom in a concise and compressed language.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Observe this as you would poetry.</li> <li>-Examine the metaphors and similes.</li> <li>-Look for the behavior and their consequences.</li> </ul>
Parable	Matthew, Mark, Luke, John	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-These short stories are loved for their simplicity and memorable morals.</li> <li>-They are the hallmark of Jesus' teachings.</li> <li>-These true to life stories, while recorded, may never have historically occurred.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Understand the characters in the story.</li> <li>-Who heard Jesus' parables? How did each identify with the story?</li> <li>-Compare the different Gospel accounts of the same parables.</li> </ul>

*"No man has a right to say, as some are in the habit of saying, "The Spirit tells me that such or such is the meaning of the passage." How is he assured that it is the Holy Spirit, and not a spirit of delusion, except from the evidence that the interpretation is the legitimate meaning of the words?" Alexander Carson*

Literary Genre	Examples	Characteristics	Observation Tips
Logic	Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2, & 3 John, Jude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-These were expository letters written to either a friend or church usually in response to something brought up by the reader (except Philemon and possibly James and Romans).</li> <li>-While principally not a theological thesis, the letters exhort with a logical presentation of truth or doctrine for particular action to a church problem.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Read the whole letter in one sitting.</li> <li>-What prompted the letter?</li> <li>-Who are the recipients of the letter?</li> <li>-What is the mood of the letter?</li> <li>-What does the letter exhort?</li> <li>-Do a syntax study.</li> </ul>
Prophecy / Apocalyptic	Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Revelation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Most prophecy dealt with the future of Israel and Judah and the nations surrounding them. These prophetic predictions were largely fulfilled. Some prophecies have yet to be fulfilled.</li> <li>-Prophetic predictions are not its primary function. Instead it is to proclaim the words of the Lord for the sole purpose of bringing people back to Him. The prophet is the spokesman for God.</li> <li>-The message of the prophets is similar in content as when God spoke to Moses.</li> <li>-Prophets were analogous to “enforcers” of the covenant.</li> <li>-The tone of warning and judgment is ominous and there are many words directly from God.</li> <li>-These books are challenging to understand, but typically end with hope and restoration for God’s people and promises.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-What’s the main problem</li> <li>-What images are used?</li> <li>-What does it say about God?</li> <li>-What happens?</li> <li>-Why did God include this in the Bible?</li> </ul>

## 12. Question the Author

Great readers can identify and determine what is important to the author. One strategy that can improve your observation skill is asking the author questions. This can help you focus on the elements of a story or passage.

Who was involved?

What was the problem, objective, or key events?

Where and when did the event occur?

Why did this happen? What is the reason this matters?

Sometimes breaking up and rearranging the text allows you to see patterns and enhance your ability to see the detail.

Instead of trying to understand the Text, try to make the Text more understandable!

## Salvation at the deathbed...who?...what?...when?...where?...why?

### 1. Study Luke 23: 39-43. List your observations: Who?

Who is the author? Luke the physician wrote both the book that bears his name and Acts, and was the only Gentile author of the New Testament. Believed to have come from Antioch of Syria, Luke, while not an apostle, was a close companion of Paul.

Who is being crucified? Two criminals and Jesus were being crucified, one on each side of Jesus. The Greek word for "criminal" can also mean "insurrectionist," and Mark 15:7 notes that Barabbas, who committed murder in a rebellion, was chained with fellow rebels. Romans generally reserve crucifixion for rebellious slaves and insurrectionists. Pilate declared Jesus innocent; however, the people wanted Him dead and Pilate granted their demand.

### 2. What?

Jesus forgives and "saves" one of the criminals just before they all die crucified.

### 3. When?

The crucifixion occurs when the Passover lambs are being slain and prepared for the Passover meal. Because Jesus' corpse "hung" on the cross (Acts 5:30, 10:39), the Jews saw this form of punishment as a divine curse and rejected the idea that Christ was the Messiah (Deut 21:22-23).

### 4. Where?

They are crucified on a hill just outside the walls of Jerusalem called Place of the Skull. In Hebrew, this hill is known as Golgotha.

### 5. Why?

The first criminal:

- a) mocked Christ, as the people did, for His claim of Kingship without any obvious possession or display of power.

The second criminal:

- a) rebuked the first criminal for his lack of fear for God.
- b) feared God.
- c) recognized and admitted to his sin and guilt.
- d) recognized Christ's innocence.
- e) recognized Jesus was God.

As a method, who what when where why, is a good start towards observation. From there you could probe more deeply into the passage in preparation of a better understanding of its context and then a better understanding of how this could apply.

### 13. Interpretation within Context

The next step in a good Bible study method is **interpretation**. This asks the question, "what does it mean?"

This is where you draw inferences. Here you combine your background knowledge and information from the Bible to interpret and draw conclusions.

It requires you to use some prior knowledge and is the process of building new knowledge. Gaining new comprehension of the biblical text builds upon your prior knowledge of the Bible and enables you to better comprehend the Text.

You will see this when you read a familiar biblical passage and discover a new insight or meaning that you didn't discover earlier.

And you monitor your interpretation and comprehension here by asking if it makes sense or not.

#### **Interpretation...in search of context...**

Observation is essentially taking the biblical passage, observing its component parts, and understanding its basic meaning; it is the discovery phase of Bible study. This forms the foundation for the next phase in Bible study, which is interpretation. In interpretation, the biblical passage is probed more deeply with questions of context; it is the interactive phase of Bible study. As you recall, the objective of Bible study is understanding the original meaning of the Text as the author intended; thus, there is only one correct interpretation.

##### 1. What is the literary context?

How does this passage fit within the adjacent passages? How does it fit within the whole book? How does it fit within the whole Bible? Who is the author? Etc.

##### 2. What is the historical context?

What impact do current historical events have on the biblical passage? What is happening to the Jews? What political forces and agendas are present? What geo-political events are taking place? What social influences exist? Etc.

##### 3. What is the cultural context?

How do cultural values influence the biblical passage? What are the current social values? What cultures are present and how do they differ? How do people live at this time? What socio-economic differences exist? Etc.

##### 4. What is the geographic context?

What role does geography play in the Biblical passage? Where are mountains, roads, and water? How far are various landmarks? How long does it take to travel that distance? Where are the cities, towns, and temples? Etc.

##### 5. What is the theological context?

What is the spiritual state of the people of the biblical passage? What do people currently believe? What god is being worshipped? What does the author know about God? What prophecies are the Jews aware of? Etc.

While asking questions is easy, answering them is not. Thank goodness for the scholars who spent their lifetime studying and writing reference works! Here is a method of answering those contextual questions with the use of reference books and with a suggested sequence for personal study:

**FIRST:** Concordance. This reference provides references to other Bible verses that use the same word or term. This method studies the Bible the best way; namely, using Scripture to interpret Scripture. While this is a more arduous method of Bible study, it is very effective in providing context within the whole Bible.

**SECOND:** Bible Dictionaries. This reference provides in depth information on specific subjects.

**THIRD:** Bible Commentary. This reference provides encyclopedic information on every verse of the Bible. Christians love these books, because their need for various reference books can be met with just one book. However, the reader is susceptible to the theological bias of the authors / editors. Bible commentaries by themselves are not the recommended method of interpretation.

**TIP:** God wrote this book to you; read the Bible first, then consult the references!

*“There is a great danger, when once we have adhered to one particular school of thought or adopted one particular system of theology, or reading the Bible in the light of that school or system and finding its distinctive features in what we read.”* F. F. Bruce on the dangers of imposing one’s own theological system on the biblical data in lieu of deriving the system from it.

#### **14. Understand the Cultural Context**

Perhaps one of the greatest obstacles to understanding the Bible is the presuppositions you may bring to the Text.

Be careful of bringing your socio-cultural perceptions, because it will alter the context and meaning of the Text.

The writers of the Bible wrote from and to an audience with a cultural experience much different from our own; as much as two to several thousand years in difference!

Take the time to learn about the society and culture that the Bible was addressing.

#### **Cultural revelations...limitations of the Law...**

When studying the Bible, we often observe with a cultural bias that we are familiar and accustomed with. To understand the writer and his perspective, we are required to learn about his culture set within the period of writing. Only then can we really glimpse the essence of the lesson. Observation is a matter of perspective. Examine the following example.

1. Study Mark 1:40-45. What is leprosy?

Leprosy is a bacterial mediated disease affecting both nerves and skin and leaving the person permanently disfigured.

2. What does the Mosaic Law say about the process of diagnosing leprosy (Lev 13:1-46)? What does this reveal about the leper in Mark 1:40-45?

The Mosaic Law pertaining to skin diseases designated the priests as a sort of public health official who would submit the person up to three examinations with one week quarantines between each. The purpose was to determine if the person has a contagious skin disease. If so, they were designated unclean and they had to warn other healthy citizens by shouting “unclean!” People therefore had time to scurry from their presence. During this time, afflicted people were usually isolated from society into leper colonies symbolic of the person's separation from Israel. Thus the leper suffered physically, mentally, socially, and religiously; the epitome of sin. Despite the likely prospect of public distain and rejection, the leper's approach to Christ was bold and with the conviction that Jesus had the power to clean and restore his citizenship within Jewish society. The leper did not ask to be healed, he begged on his knees to be cleaned.

3. What does the Law say about cleansing a leper (Lev 14:1-32)? What can you conclude about the purpose of the Mosaic Law? Why does Jesus send the Leper to the priest in Mark 1:44?

To be pronounced clean and thus restored within the community of Israel, the person had to be healed from the skin disease and be certified by the priests. The certification involved a cleansing ritual, which required ceremonies with two birds, a bathing, and another sacrificial ceremony one week later. The Mosaic Law is a specific set of procedures in response to certain circumstances. But observe closely what the Law does; it could declare a leper cleansed but it cannot on its own clean regardless of how closely one follows the Law. What then is the purpose of the Law? The Law's intent is to bring sinners to Christ. By sending the healed leper back to the Rabbis, the Rabbis would have had to certify that the leper had become clean and the priests knew that only God could cure one of leprosy (2 Kings 5:1-14). The Rabbis would have had to face the contradiction of pronouncing the healed leper as clean, but deny the One who healed him.

Leviticus is identified as an example of a legal literary genre. Other biblical examples of legal literary genre are found Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, and this largely makes up the Old Testament (also known as Mosaic) law (Ex 20-Deut). The Old Testament laws can be viewed as falling into three categories: 1) ceremonial, 2) civil, and 3) moral. Leviticus and Numbers have mostly ceremonial laws as they regulate the Old Testament priests in their conduct of sacrifices, issues of cleanliness and food for religious purity, and the priesthood. In this example with Leviticus, by understanding an aspect of the Old Testament Law, one can better understand the behavior of the Leper and the significance of Jesus' actions. When reading a New Testament incident involving any laws, take a moment and cruise through the Old Testament Law!

### **15. Learn the Histo-Geographical Context**

Just as important as learning about the cultural context, understanding the historical and geographical context can bring much clarity to the passage.

Great civilizations with significant geo-political influences rose and fell during the period that the Bible was written.

Get the big picture.

What role did geography play?

What was happening politically during that time?

## The basic geography of Jesus' ministry (by Dr. J. C. Laney)

### 1. Study Matthew 4:25. What do you know about the geographical areas mentioned in this passage?

*Galilee* is the name applied to the northern district of Israel that was surrounded on three sides by foreign nations. The term literally means "circle" or "district," the fuller expression of which is "district of the Gentiles (Isa. 9:1). According to Josephus' description of Galilee, the territory was divided into upper and lower regions. (1) Upper Galilee, being mountainous and isolated, does not enter much into biblical history. Lower Galilee served as the location for most of Christ's ministry as recorded in the synoptic gospels. The region is divided into a series of east-west valleys and basins. Galilee's fertility is highly praised by Josephus, who states that no part of the land was left uncultivated. (2)

*Judea* is the name used to refer to the southern region of Palestine. Since most of the exiles returning from the Babylonian captivity were of the tribe of Judah, they came to be called Jews and their land, Yehud. The name "Judea" (the Graeco-Latin form of Judah) was used in the Hellenistic period to describe the area where the Jews of the land of Israel lived. Judea is made up of a massive upwarp of Cenomanian limestone rising from the coastal plain on the west and bending down towards the wilderness and Dead Sea on the east. The region also encompasses the Negev ("desert-land") to the south, the Shephelah ("lowland"), and a transitional region between the coastal plain and the hill country. Judea provides the geographical background for the greater part of John's gospel.

*Samaria* was the name of the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel that Omri built on a hill purchased from Shemer (1 Kings 16:24). Samaria eventually became synonymous with the Northern Kingdom (1 Kings 13:32) and in Roman times was applied to the administrative region situated between Galilee and Judea. Samaria is more open and accessible than the hill country to the south. According to Josephus, "Its character differs in no wise from that of Judea." (3) Both regions have fertile soil and are well watered. Josephus writes that these areas are "well wooded and abound in fruits, both wild and cultivated." Jesus' travels between Galilee and Judea sometimes took Him through Samaria (John 4:4-5; cf. Luke 9:52-53; 17:11).

*Perea*, a term used regularly by Josephus to refer to Transjordan, is not found in the Bible except in a variant of Luke 6:17. The term is used to describe both the political district administered by Herod Antipas and the land beyond the Jordan in general. Perea was a long, narrow territory (about thirteen miles wide) encompassing the area between the Rift Valley and the Syrian Desert. The territory extends from the River Arnon in the south to the borders of Pella in the north. Perea was less densely populated in the first century than Galilee or Judea and figures less in the life of Christ than these regions (cf. Matt. 19:1). Though he admits to exceptions, Josephus regards Perea as generally "rugged and too wild to bring tender fruits to maturity." (4)

*Decapolis* (lit., "ten city") refers to the region in southern Syria and northeastern Palestine composed of territories of certain Hellenistic cities. The traditional view that Decapolis was a federation of cities has been recently challenged. A study of the ancient sources reveals no evidence of any political, military, or commercial arrangements among the members. (5) As indicated by the name, the number of cities was originally ten, but the number and members varied from time to time. These cities were all Greco-Roman and shared a common religious and cultural identity. Jesus attracted followers from Decapolis and ministered in this region (Matt. 4:25; Mark 5:1-20; 7:31).

From a study of the geography of the gospels, one gains several strong impressions:

1. The gospel writers had a definite geographical perspective and emphasis, but they were not obsessed by this interest. They were not writing a geography of the life of Christ, but they used selective geographical notices to elucidate His life and ministry.
2. The general framework of the life of Christ is clear. The places of His birth, childhood, and death are known. The major portion of His ministry was in Galilee, and the center of His Galilean ministry was at Capernaum.
3. Relatively few of the places where Jesus ministered are definitely named and identified by the gospel writers. The writers were more interested in Christ's message than the place He delivered it. They used geography only where it furthered that objective.
4. Jesus' ministry was confined almost entirely to Jewish centers free from Gentile influence. His ministry was primarily to the Jews. He had little to do with the Hellenistic centers such as Sepphoris, Scythopolis, and Tiberias.
5. The gospels reflect not only a geographical perspective and emphasis, they are topographically accurate. Satisfactory explanations are available that refute the arguments of the critics and vindicate the accuracy of the gospels.

## **16. Develop the Theological Context**

God has a purpose and meaning, and our objective is to discover that. The challenge is to develop the skill to interpret God's objective meaning without our subjective bias!

Be mindful of the theological context. As you develop your theology, are your views consistent within the context of the Bible?

Do other passages backup your theological interpretation?

What do you do when it clashes with cultural norms?

### **In the beginning...how can God be both three and one?**

1. Study Deuteronomy 6:4. Grab a concordance and do a word study on the word "God" and "one." What do you observe? How do you reconcile the seeming contradiction of the Hebrew meaning for these two words?

During biblical times, it was a privilege to know someone's name; it revealed something about them. In today's contemporary Bible translations, the original Hebrew names may not be given, thus one may miss how God has revealed Himself to His people.

"El" is one such word. It is a root word for God and refers to a god. It was used by many ancient Semitic cultures and referred to either the true God or false gods. "Elohim" is the plural form of *El* and is the Hebrew word used here in Deut 6:4. It refers to "three or more." This concept of God (Elohim) is actually found in the very beginning in Genesis 1:1. Yet the Bible is clear and consistent about there being only one true God in the Old Testament (Deut 4:35, Isa 43:10, Isa 44:6, and Isa 46:9) and in the New Testament (1 Cor 8:4-6, Eph 4:4-6, and James 2:19). How does this plurality fit in?

"Echad" is the term used for "one" in Deut 6:4. To gain a better understanding of this term, a concordance lists the use of this word used elsewhere. In Numbers 13:23, *echad* is used in "a (echad) single cluster of grapes;" thus, referring to a group comprised of individual grapes. In Genesis 2:24, *echad* is used as, "they shall become one (echad) flesh." *Echad* describes the oneness or singularity of marriage though comprised of two individual people one male and one female.

2. Another challenge is the nature of the Holy Spirit. Is the Holy Spirit a Spirit or God? Examine the following verse of John 14:16: "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever." What are some observations that you can make about the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is referred to with a personal pronoun.

The Holy Spirit is distinguished from God and Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit is a distinct personality with power; He helps and is eternal.

3. With this plural aspect to the one and only God, one gets a glimpse of His complex nature, which defies human logic. How was the concept of the Trinity derived?

Because of its difficulty to comprehend, the Trinity doctrine has generated the most questions and criticisms. Critics, who do not accept the Bible as a true and accurate document, fall into two camps:

1) Monotheism: There is only one god, but Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are separate entities.

2) Polytheism: The doctrine was adopted from older pagan religions such as Hinduism, which embraced the triune godhead of Brahma - the god of creation, Vishnu - the god of maintenance, and Siva - the god of destruction, or one of Egypt's many trinities such as Horus, Isis, and Osiris.

Because Christianity shares the number three with these other pagan "trinities," some have erroneously concluded that Christianity borrowed their pagan concepts.

Upon closer examination, **the uniqueness of the Trinity is found in their service of selfless love towards each other.** The Father serves the Son, the Son serves the Father, and both defer to the Holy Spirit who also defers and serves the Father and the Son. This concept is what makes Christianity unique, a model for Christian living, and is beyond human nature and comprehension.

The Trinity doctrine does not emerge easily, but if one studies of the biblical evidence within context, it does become apparent. One such method is to examine the attributes of each: God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. If they were not the same, they would not share the same characteristics.

Complete this chart. What do you notice?

Attribute	God	Jesus Christ	Holy Spirit
Omnipotence	Matthew 19:26 1 Peter 1:3-5	Matthew 28:18 2 Corinthians 12:9	Luke 1:35 Romans 15:18-19
Omnipresence	Jeremiah 23:24 1 Kings 8:27	Matthew 18:20 Matthew 28:20	Psalms 139:7-10
Omniscience	Jeremiah 17:10 1 John 3:20	John 16:30 John 21:17	1 Corinthians 2:10-11
Eternal	Psalms 90:2	John 17:5 Revelation 1:8, 17	Hebrews 9:14
Truth	John 7:28	Revelation 3:7	1 John 5:6
Searches the heart	Jeremiah 17:10	Revelation 2:23	1 Corinthians 2:10
Sanctifies	1 Thessalonians 5:23	Hebrews 2:11	1 Peter 1:2

**Both Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit have qualities like and equivalent to God.** This evidence suggests that they are God, and because there is only one God, the Trinity doctrine exists.

#### 4. What is the definition of Trinity?

God is one Divine Being who has three distinguishable personal distinctions; each serves the other in selfless love and working dependently and cooperatively together.

God is not three distinct individuals working independently.

God does not have three phases as solid, liquid, and gas.

God does not act in three different ways.

#### 17. Softening Your Heart

The last step of a good Bible study method is application.

How does this apply to your life?

What will you do with this information?

This process begins with the condition of your heart.

What quality of relationship do you seek with God?

How does the passage help you improve your personal qualities?

## Application...working with the heart...assessing the raw material...

*“Thus says the LORD, ‘Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his strength, and whose heart turns away from the LORD. For he will be like a bush in the desert and will not see when prosperity comes, but will live in stony wastes in the wilderness, a land of salt without inhabitant. Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD and whose trust is the LORD. For he will be like a tree planted by the water, that extends its roots by a stream and will not fear when the heat comes; but its leaves will be green, and it will not be anxious in a year of drought nor cease to yield fruit. The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds”* Jeremiah 17:5-10.

The prophet Jeremiah is speaking to Judah about its affection for foreign gods and mutual defense treaties with foreign nations. Through these verses and throughout the context of the Bible, it is clear that Man cannot, on his own will or strength, accomplish anything that could be considered a blessing from God or bring glory to God; true motives for one's actions are hidden through self deception. At the core of the issue is the condition of Man's heart. This alone determines what the Holy Spirit will illuminate to you and how successful you will apply; indeed, the whole exercise of Bible study would be fruitless without the right heart.

How do we begin to discover what the “right” heart is? It begins with what God has already done for you and understanding the implications of His Grace.

1. God saved you from the consequences of your sins.

-You now have a personal relationship with Him. His Grace extended to even the worst possible sins you could commit.

2. God loves you.

-You now have new self-esteem. Our self worth is based on what God thinks of us. Jesus chose to die for you; your faults, despite what others say, did not deter His atoning sacrifice. Your self-image is not based on the opinions of man, but by the love of God.

3. God has opened your eyes to the Truth.

-You now know the enemy and the enemy now knows you; people are victims of the enemy.

4. God wrote the Bible for you.

-You now have the guidelines for living; you can know what to do as well as what not to do. Foolish behavior will be less common.

-You know what sin is. Your moral values are objective and no longer subjective and relative.

-You have examples to follow and to avoid; you see the consequences of actions before you yourself make them.

-You know His Commands and His Promises; you know what to expect and can be more confident in your convictions.

## 18. Working with the Text

Application causes us to focus on the essential aspects of the biblical text.

Finding key words and phrases that capture the gist of what we've read remind us of the lesson that God is teaching us.

But don't make the mistake of substituting interpretation for application!

## Application...working with the Text...

*“But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”* 2 Tim3:13-17. While in prison and ultimately beheaded, Paul pens his very last Epistle to Timothy to encourage him in his ministry of Ephesus.

If Man, by nature, deceives himself, what methods could we employ to safeguard the appropriate application of God’s Word?

1. Rely on the Holy Spirit. Yield your will to the Will of the Holy Spirit; change your thought process and realign your will to God’s. In what “heart” do you read the Bible? In what “mind” do you interpret the Bible? In what “spirit” do you apply the Bible?

**Deception:** You can simply read the Bible and just do it.

2. God pleasing application is built on proper interpretation and accurate observations of the Bible. Application is based on sound and objective reasoning.

**Deception:** Application is based on how “spiritual” you feel.

3. The Bible has many commands (i.e. “And just as you want people to treat you, treat them in the same way.” [Luke 6:31]) and prohibitions (i.e. “You shall not oppress a hired servant *who* is poor and needy” [Deut 24:14]). Appropriate application of biblical commands and prohibitions are based on contextual similarities of the original audience and today. Study the original recipients of the Bible. What was their condition like? What was expected of them? The more similar the conditions, the more valid the application; God’s Word to them applies just as much to us **but** limited to God’s original intent.

**Deception:** The Old Testament only applies to the past and is no longer valid for today.

4. Look for the principle **within** the text and **within** the context of the Bible. In many examples, parables, and narratives, God’s message is not so obvious leaving one to derive the principle of the passage. Proper application requires the evaluation of the principle in light of the context of the Bible.

**Deception:** The application of a principle can be extended to apply to other contexts of today.

5. Make it easy to apply the Text. Consider the following questions:

Is there a command to obey?

Is there an error to avoid?

Are there sinful behavior or attitudes that need to be worked on?

Is there an example to follow?

Is there a promise to claim?

**TIPS:**

1. When in doubt of a particular principle, always double check to see if the principle is repeated somewhere else in the Bible.
2. Get a hermeneutics book! Books are so much better and thorough than these web pages. God used some brilliant minds write these books just to teach us how to read the Bible!

**19. Transforming Your Mind**

"He who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding." (Prov 15:32)

Don't stop the process of God led self improvement.

Will it be rationalization or repentance?

Let the Word work by changing your thoughts, priorities, and moral standard!

**Application...working with the mind...**

Each Biblical passage has only one correct interpretation; but it may have many applications. The applications may affect your heart and strengthen your love for God, or they affect your mind and improve your ability to discern and perceive, or they can affect your actions and strengthen your moral and ethical convictions. Looking for how the passage may apply to your life is the key to successful Bible study. Consider some of the following questions:

Is there any new appreciation for the **character of God** that you need to respect and obey better?

In addition to the purpose of training for holiness, God's commands, promises, and judgments reveal His character and nature. Love is often defined by social and cultural values, which mute one's perception of God's esteeming love. God's character, nature, and esteeming love are beyond the human scale; can you grasp it? Does the biblical verse reveal any information about God's nature that would affect your heart and love for Him?

Are there any **personal moral** issues to consider?

Today's social and cultural values are relative; any moral value is fine as long as no one is hurt by it. The same applies to what we chose to watch, listen, and imagine. Does this make it right? God's moral standards are absolute; does the biblical passage reveal any information on God's moral standards?

Are there any **personal ethics** to learn?

There are many examples of show what to do as well as what not to do. Society also shows many examples of success and failure; what we achieve seems more important than how we achieve. Is this true? What principles should one live by? Does the biblical passage reveal any biblical principles that would help clarify your responses to various situations?

Are there any **priorities** that need to be reconsidered?

Society and culture determine a large part of our values and priorities. How do you rank your various goals and how will you achieve them? Do you need to reconsider what your priorities are based on? Does the biblical passage reveal any biblical priorities that would realign yours?

There are other questions that can be asked as you explore how the biblical passage will apply to your life. That is the essence of the process of application: wrestle with the Text and examine the interpretation, be open to change both in your understanding of the Bible and your life, and have the courage and humility to change.

If you're not having a blessed life, it is likely that you fall in the following categories:

1. **Not reading** the Bible.
2. Reading the Bible with **poor observation** skills and **misinterpreting** the Word.
3. **Believing interpretation is the application** of the Bible. Knowledge is not the same as wisdom.
4. **Selective application** of the Word; you apply it only to areas in your life that you feel comfortable.
5. **Denial of a personal sin**; you see the application as being more appropriate for others than yourself.

*“But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.”* James 1:22-25. James, in his letter to the greater church, in contrast to Paul who wrote to specific churches or people, is exhorting believers to active obedience instead of passive listening.

This concludes this introduction to learning how to read the Bible. As you explore [www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org](http://www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org), you'll see a variety of Bible study methods and examples that will bless your life, and each is based on the foundation of observation, interpretation and application.

As you learn more, [www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org](http://www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org) can help you construct your understanding of God and ultimately your systematic theology. In our society of confusing clash of worldviews and contradictory morality, the Bible informs one of the Good News and provides the means for clarity and the truth about life.