



D.J.G. Study – December 1st, 2005

How to Read Your Bible... and Understand It

Prelude

Why do we study the Bible? God tells us to! If we do not study the Bible, we will miss out on a great relationship with God! We will not grow at all in our Faith! And we will miss out on great truths that are in the Bible! Truths which will help us navigate life's choppy waters. Can you give me a passage which tells us to study the Bible?

- ✓ **Hebrews 5.12-14** – *“In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! 13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.” (NIV)*
- ✓ **1 Peter 2.1-3** – *“Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. 2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, 3 now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.” (NIV)*

Part One – What is the Bible Anyway?

Let's Brainstorm for a minute... What is the Bible?

- Scripture
- Word of God
- Guidebook
- Love letter
- Confusing?
- Hard to understand?
- Irrelevant?
- _____

Thursdays

6PM

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All of these are very viable answers. They are all correct in their own way, especially the ones with a question mark next to them. This is because asking questions is one of the best ways to deepen our understanding of our faith.

But how do we truly know what the Bible is? Let's look at some proofs of what the Bible is...

- **God-Breathed - 2 Timothy 3.16-17** – *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*
- **The Power of God - Matthew 22.29** – *“Jesus replied, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.”*
- **Testimony to God - John 5.38-40** – *“nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.”*
- **Something that we should Study – Acts 17.11** – Earlier I asked for passages which tell us to study Scripture. Here is one which gives us an *implicit* example to follow. *“Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.”*

(Implicit is an implied item, one which is suggested, but not necessarily stated.

Explicit is an idea which is stated out loud, a command rather than a suggestion.)

Part Two – Which Bible is the Right Bible?

How do you know which Bible is the “right” Bible to be reading??? I mean, there are literally tons of different kinds of Bibles out there to choose from, right? Well, hopefully this part will take some of the confusion out of the whole “which Bible” question for you.

There are many different Translations available to you, as already stated, so let's take a look at a few different ones that are out there. But first, why do we need translations?

We need translations because the last book of the Bible was written close to 2,000 years ago! It was written in entirely different languages, which used completely different metaphors, idioms, and other fun English gobbledy-gook that you love to learn about in school. Here's a breakdown of what all we need to take into consideration.

- ✓ **Original Language:** the language being translated from, in this case typically Hebrew, Aramaic, or and Greek
- ✓ **Receptor Language:** the language that the text is being translated into, in our case, English

- ✓ **Historical Distance:** This is the amount of time and space which has come between the original text and our present day. It includes but is not exclusively concerning language, metaphors, idioms, and cultural changes.

All of this goes into translating the Bible as we read it today! Taking all of this under consideration, many different translations have been written based upon the original Scriptures. All of these translations which you will find today are grouped underneath three different categories.

- ✓ **Formal Equivalence** – This mode of translation takes the original language (Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek) and translates it as close to Word-for-Word as it can, keeping all the original metaphors and stuff intact. For example, here is a passage from 1 Corinthians 7.36 from the NKJV and the NASB:

“But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin, if she is past the flower of youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry.” (NKJV)

“But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter, if she is past her youth, and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry.” (NASB)

- ✓ **Functional Equivalence** – This method translates close to the Word-for-Word style like the Formal Equivalence, but it will change idioms, metaphors, and cultural differences to make it more understandable. Take the same passage (1 Corinthians 7.36) read from the NIV and the NLT:

“If anyone thinks he is acting improperly toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if she is getting along in years and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married.” (NIV)

“But if a man thinks he ought to marry his fiancée because he has trouble controlling his passions and time is passing, it is all right; it is not a sin. Let them marry.” (NLT)

- ✓ **Free Translation** – This method Translates ideas rather than words. It is more concerned with the fact that the reader understands the thinking behind the passage more than it concerns itself with the technical measurements and whatnot. Read the Corinthians passage from *The Message*:

"If a man has a woman friend to whom he is loyal but never intended to marry, having decided to serve God as a "single," and then changes his mind, deciding he should marry her, he should go ahead and marry. It's no sin; it's not even a "step down" from celibacy, as some say." (The Message)

See how radically different each one is from the one before it? This is why reading the Bible can be so confusing for us at times. Depending upon the translation we are reading, it might not mean exactly what it was intended to mean! So here is the quick and dry answer for the question about which Bible is the right Bible. If it makes sense to you, if you can understand it and read it, it's a good Bible for you. If you can read and enjoy understanding the NKJV, then by all means use it! If you prefer the Message, then use it as well! Just remember, for real study though, you should use at least one Bible from each category. For devotional reading, one from any category is fine however.

Each translation has its faults and shortcomings. KJV, NIV, NLT, *The Message*. They all fall short because it is fallen humans who are doing the translating. But most have a lot to offer, so read as many as you can!

That leads us into our third area which we must investigate in order to more full understand what it means to Study the Bible.

Part Three – Real Technical Stuff

Here we get into the real technical stuff. Where the rubber hits the road. This is the big payoff... How exactly are we supposed to use all of these confusing, different opinions? You must use Exegesis and Hermeneutics.

Exegesis

Exegesis is looking at the text and discovering what it meant to the original reader waaaay back when it was written. It is the careful, systematic study to find the original, intended meaning of the text. For example here is a passage from 1 Thessalonians 5. 22 from the KJV:

"Abstain from all appearance of evil."

One man attempted to use this passage to dissuade an author from speaking at a conference with another speaker whose theology was off. But the real meaning of this text in today's English is:

“Do not treat prophecies with contempt, but test them all; hold onto what is good, reject whatever is harmful.” (TNIV)

We need to not just read a verse and use it however we desire, we have to read the context it is in. This means reading the paragraph, the sentence, even the whole passage the verse is from so that we can understand how it was meant to read when it was originally written. If we do not do this we are doing what is known as eisogesis, or proof-texting. We are placing our own meaning into the text, and this is a huuuuge no-no. So if we can't apply our own meaning to the text, what's the point, right? What purpose does the text serve today? Here is the fun part.

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is simply taking what we learned in exegesis and finding the eternal meaning that applies in the here and now. It would be taking the passage from 1 Thessalonians above, reading it, and applying it by being very careful about what you watch in the movie theater, watch on TV at home, listen to as far as music goes, and what sites you visit on the Web. Though not all of these options in media consumption are prophecies, the principal in the verse is to think and wrestle with what you hear. Some is worth holding on to, some is garbage and needs to be gotten rid of. The principal could also extend to “don't believe everything you hear.” The call is to only take into ourselves what is good. As Philippians 4.7-9 tells us:

“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” (NIV)

Think on the good, whatever will edify your mind, and take everything you can from your Spiritual leaders. Learn from them and apply it to your life.

There are lots of helpful tools for you to use if you want to truly study and perform exegesis and hermeneutics successfully. Commentaries and Bible Dictionaries are great resources and are of great use to us young scholars today.

Part Four – A Preview of Next week

Next week we'll take a brief look at some of the different literary forms in the Bible, and why we need to look at them differently. From there we will go on to dive into the book of Romans, and see what God has for our lives there.

