

EQUIPPED

How to Study the Bible

Introduction

- a. What makes the Bible so difficult to read and understand?

- b. “Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.” Joshua 1:8

“A Bible that is falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn’t.”
- Charles Spurgeon

“Bible” Toolbox

Ever try to twist a screw with just your hand? Pry a nail out with a wrench? We need the right tools in our toolbox to truly grow in our understanding and interpreting of the Bible!

1. ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR BIAS

- a. “No interpreter (Bible reader) lives in a vacuum.” – Derek Morphey
- b. OSU fan vs. Michigan fan
- c. “Read-In” vs. “Read-Out”
- d. Ex. 1 Corinthians 12-13

2. USE MULTIPLE TRANSLATIONS

- a. Literal vs Dynamic vs Paraphrased
- b. Compare a few quality versions

3. BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

- a. Ever read the last page of a book first?
- b. Jesus redefined and fulfilled the OT scripture
- c. Interpret the Old Testament with understanding that New Testament is coming
- d. Pay attention to the footnotes, study the quoted verses
- e. New to the Bible? Start with the Gospels (Jesus) and Acts, then you understand where the OT is heading

4. LOOK FOR THE PLAIN MEANING

- a. Not an ink blot test
- b. “It’s always the plain and most obvious meaning of the text that is likely to be the correct one.” - Derek Morpew
- c. Literal vs. Allegorical
- d. Zacchaeus come down” – Luke 19:5
- e. What if scripture isn’t clear? Interpret unclear passages with clearer ones... God cannot contradict himself!

5. CONTEXT MATTERS!

- a. Words → Sentences → Paragraphs
- b. Words have different meanings in different contexts
- c. Ex. Ball = round object vs. formal dance
- d. Ex. Flesh = Romans 7:18 NASB “nothing good dwell in me, that is, in my *flesh*” - Sinful Nature
- e. Romans 9:5 NASB “from whom is the Christ according to the *flesh*” – Human Descent

6. DIFFERENT GENRES READ DIFFERENTLY

- a. The Bible is written by many different authors in many different genres/styles
- b. Historical Narrative, Biography, Wisdom, Psalms, Prophetic, Gospels, Letters/Epistles, Apocalyptic
- c. Each style has different intentions and rules (for example, Genesis is historical narrative literature should be read like a history textbook or newspaper article while Revelation is apocalyptic literature and should be read like a political cartoon or Chronicles of Narnia)
- d. Read parallel historic text alongside prophetic text (ex. Hosea – 2 Kings; Haggai – Ezra, Nehemiah)

*See Appendix for other specific tips on understanding various genres found in the bible

Every text must be interpreted within the rules of it's genre!

7. KNOW THE ORIGINAL AUDIENCE

- a. Explore who the first listeners/readers were
- b. “Then and There” before “Here and Now”
- c. Character vs Cultural
 - i. Danger if meaning differs from then vs. now; God cannot contradict Himself!

8. BALANCE INTERPRETATION VS. REVELATION

- a. Interpretation – objectively studying the Word using dictionaries, commentaries, etc.
- b. Revelation – subjectively experiencing enlightenment from Holy Spirit
- c. Not opposed, but balanced
- d. Spectrum between Conservative Evangelicals to Pentecostalism
- e. “If we have the Word without the Spirit, we dry up. If we have the Spirit, without the Word, we blow up. If we have the Spirit and the Word, we grow up.” – Derek Morphey

9. STUDY IN COMMUNITY

- a. Learn more of the Bible in 1 month of studying with others than in 1 year alone!
- b. Studying with a small group/friends enhances our understanding and perspective of God’s word

10. CONSULT THE EXPERTS

- a. Biblical commentaries, concordances, dictionaries, handbooks
- b. Free online sources – Biblegateway.com; Biblehub.com
- c. *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* by Fee & Stuart
- d. *Biblical Interpretation 101* by Derek Morphey

Using Tools Together – Luke 4:14-21

1. Pray: Invite Holy Spirit and ask God to speak to you through text with clarity and without bias (Tool 1 & 8)
2. Read: read scripture, then re-read scripture in different translation (Tool 2)
4. Observe: (Who?, What?, Where?, When?) Rephrase/summarize in your own words (Tool 4, 5, 6, & 10)
5. Interpret: (Then & There) How would first readers/listeners interpret this? (Tool 3, 7, & 10)
6. Apply: (Here & Now) God, how do you want me to respond to this text? Who do you want me to share this truth with? (Tool 1, 8 & 9)
7. Pray: - God would you give me the courage and strength to be obedient to you and continue to transform me in these ways to become more like Jesus!

Appendix

Biblical Genres

a. Historical Narrative

- i. Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) & Historical Books (Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther)
- ii. Read like History textbook or Newspaper article – not meant to look for hidden, symbolic meaning
- iii. Look for principles and moral absolutes, but not necessarily details intended for specific group in specific culture at specific time (i.e. laws about cleansing rituals no longer need apply)

b. Wisdom Literature

- i. Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes
- ii. Read like Philosophy – words move beyond literal meaning to metaphorical
- iii. Synonymous Parallelism – Two lines intended to say same thing “For the lips of an adulteress drip like honey, and her speech is smoother than oil.” – Proverbs 5:3
- iv. Antithetical Parallelism – Two lines intended to say the opposite thing “The house of the wicked will be destroyed, but the tent of the upright will flourish.” – Proverbs 14:11
- v. Parts of Job and Ecclesiastes are meant to be viewed as negative and logic would say we should respond oppositely

- c. Hymns/Songs/Worship
 - i. Psalms, Song of Songs
 - ii. Read like Song Lyrics
 - iii. Meant to include metaphors to invoke emotions and moods
 - iv. Psalm 18:2 “The Lord is my rock, my fortress...” – not a literal solid stone or protective building

- d. Prophets
 - i. Amos (760 BC) – Malachi (460 BC)
 - ii. 5 Major: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel
 - iii. 12 Minor: Amos, Hosea, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
 - iv. Covenant Enforcers - The main purpose of prophetic books remind people of blessings that God promises in His covenants if the people repent and obey or the curses that will happen if they continue to disobey God, not to predict the future
 - v. Part Historical Narrative, Part Poetic
 - vi. Use Bible commentaries to know date and audience
 - vii. Read parallel historic text alongside prophetic text (ex. Hosea – 2 Kings; Haggai – Ezra, Nehemiah)

- e. Gospels/Acts
 - i. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts (Story of Jesus and Early Church) (Luke is Volume 1, Acts is Volume 2)
 - ii. Historical Narrative/Biographies with a Twist...
Evangelistic! (Intended to cause a response from reader about Jesus, either accept or deny but no staying neutral)
 - iii. “written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, that by believing you may have life in his name” – John 20:31

f. Epistles

- i. Letters
- ii. Pauline Letters (Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon)
- iii. Other Letters (Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2, & 3 John, Jude)
- iv. 3 Types:
 1. General (i.e. 1 Peter): Passed around to many churches
 2. Occasional (i.e. 1 Corinthians): Written to 1 particular church with unique challenges)
 3. Personal (i.e. 1 Timothy): Written to 1 specific person
- v. Standard Form (Writer, Recipient, Greeting, Prayer or Thanksgiving, Body, Farewell)
- vi. First, read in one sitting to get big picture; then study specific verses

g. Apocalyptic

- i. Eschatological = End times, this age ends and the new age begins
- ii. Revelation, Parts of Zechariah, Parts of Daniel, Parts of Ephesians
- iii. Read like political cartoon or *Lord of the Rings/Chronicles of Narnia*
- iv. Intended to be symbolic, not literal! (i.e. Lamb represents Jesus, Beast represents evil and Satan's kingdom)