

3. Hermeneutics – Part 1

“A text cannot mean what it never meant.”

— Gordon Fee

Big idea: Scripture is given to us for a specific people, for a specific purpose, with a specific message.

Aim: Equip believers to rightly interpret God’s Word.

Small Group Questions: What is your favorite book of the Bible to read and why? Is there a book that you are afraid to study?

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.”
(Psalm 19:7-11, NIV)

Why we don’t study the Bible...

- “I don’t see how the Bible really applies to my life.”
- “I’ve tried, but I just don’t know how to study the Bible.”
- “I’m not a professional; isn’t that the pastor’s job?”
- “I just don’t have time.”
- “I’m not sure if the Bible is even true.”
- “To be honest, it just seems boring to me.”

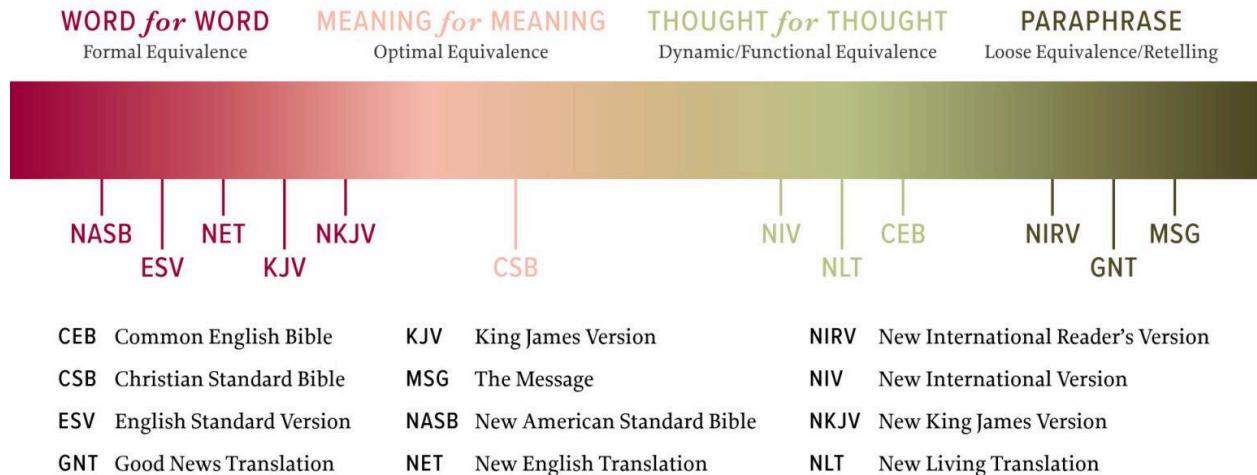
The Approach for translations...

- The Formal Approach: “word-for-word.”
- The Functional Approach: “thought-for-thought.”

A recommendation for English translations...

- English Standard Version
- Christian Standard Bible
- New American Standard Bible

BIBLE TRANSLATION SPECTRUM



Small Group Questions: Tell of a time in your life when a scripture verse has carried you through a difficult phase.

Dangerous Approaches to Bible Study:

- The emotional approach.
 - What feels right to me?
- The spiritual approach.
 - What deep, hidden meaning is there for me?
- The pragmatic approach.
 - What works best for me?
- The superficial approach.
 - What does this mean to me?

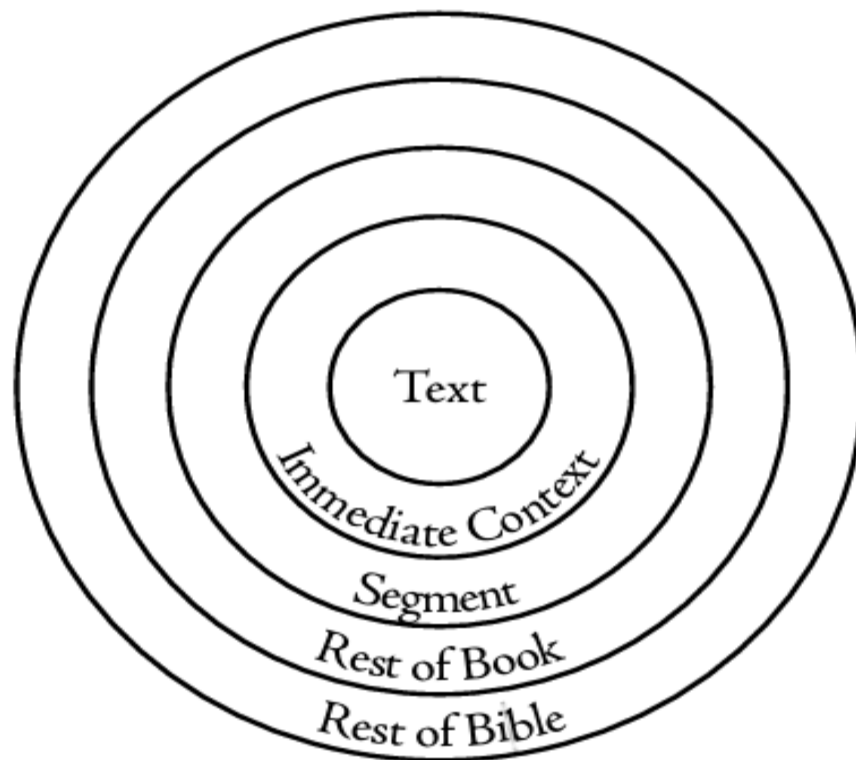
How do we study the Bible?

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

1 Corinthians 2:12-14

Best Principles to Biblical Interpretation

- Context is key
- Seek the full counsel of scripture
 - Scripture interprets scripture
 - Cross references
- Avoid basis theology on obscure passages.
 - 2 Cor 12:2- Third heaven
 - Celestial kingdom



Consider the Context

Literary Context:

Genres:

- Different forms or kinds of biblical texts.
- How things are written dictates how things are interpreted
 - Old Testament
 - Narrative
 - Law
 - Poetry
 - Prophets
 - Wisdom
 - New Testament
 - Letters
 - Gospels
 - Parables
 - Acts
 - Revelation

Grammar:

- Individual words or phrases
 - Repeated in this section, book, or direct phrases from other books
 - Change of tenses- Past, Present, Future
- Surroundings
 - The bible contains messages in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts

Historical/Cultural

- Know the author
- Know the audience
- Know the geographical conditions
- Know the social conditions
- Know the religious conditions
- Know the economic conditions
- Know the Political conditions

Turn to John 6:35

Theological Context:

- Where does this passage fit into the unfolding revelation of God in scripture?
 - What does all scripture say about this text?
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- The best interpretation of scripture is scripture.

Guidelines for biblical interpretation:

COMA stands for:

- Context
- Observation
- Meaning
- Application

1. Read the passage.

2. context questions of the text:

- What sort of writing is this? (A letter, a narrative, a poem?)
- Are there any clues about the circumstances under which it was written?
- What has happened so far?

3. Observation questions of the text:

- Are there any major sub-sections or breaks in the text?
- What is the main point or points?
- What surprises are there?
- What are the keywords? What words or ideas are repeated?

4. Meaning questions of the text:

- How does this text relate to other parts of the book?
- How does the passage relate to Jesus?
- What does this teach us about God?
- How could we sum up the meaning of this passage in our own words?

5. Application questions of the text:

- How does this passage challenge (or confirm) my understanding?
- Is there some attitude I need to change?
- How does this passage call on me to change the way I live?

Small Group Questions: Share with your group ways you can implement a plan for a personal bible devotion, or practice steps you have learned to study God's Word better.

How to Study the bible resources:

- J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, Grasping God's Word
 - Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, How To Read the Bible for All Its Worth
 - Howard G. Hendricks and William D. Hendricks, Living by the Book
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-Kay Arthur, How to Study Your Bible

Homework:

Take the given COMA Method and study God's word with it 3 times this week in your personal quiet time. Answer all questions to the best of your ability and ask questions if you do not know the answers.

Studying the Genre:

The Gospels and Acts

The Gospels are the four accounts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection found in the beginning of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). They individually cover some of the same parts of Jesus' life, but from slightly different perspectives, emphasizing different themes in the story of Jesus. In a literary sense, the Gospels are narratives. They tell a story (a true story), and as we read them we need to bear in mind how stories work. Here are some

Context questions:

- What has happened so far in the narrative? Have there been any major events, characters or themes?
- What has happened just prior to the section you are reading?

Observation questions:

- What do you learn about the main characters in this section? How does the author describe them? How do they describe themselves? Is time or place significant in the events that happen in the passage? Is there a conflict or high point in the passage? Do you think there is a main point or theme in this section of the story? What surprises are there?

Meaning questions:

- Are there any 'editorial' comments from the author about the events in the narrative? How do these comments illuminate what is happening? Does someone in the narrative learn something or grow in some way? How? What does this person learn? What does the passage reveal about who Jesus is, and what he came into the world to do? How could you sum up the meaning of this passage in your own words?
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Application questions:

- How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding? Is there some attitude you need to change? What does this passage teach you about being a disciple of Jesus?
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Old Testament Narrative

Old Testament narrative is the 'story' part of the Old Testament. If you look at the table of contents of an English Bible, the Old Testament narrative covers Genesis through Esther. Also called 'history', it recounts the story of God's people from the beginning of creation through their many high and low points to their scattering and exile. The narrative passages read very much like other narratives or stories, and so share many of the same literary features: plot, characterization, setting, and the like. Many of the Old Testament narratives have a particular function in relation to the whole Bible. They articulate the promise of Jesus Christ, the coming saviour. Often through typology or illustration, Old Testament narrative lays out a specific path toward a king of God's people who will both sacrifice himself for them and rule them in eternal glory. Here are some COMA questions that are especially suitable for Old Testament narrative:

Context questions:

- What has happened so far in the narrative? Have there been any major events, characters or themes? What has happened just prior to the section you are reading?

Observation questions:

- What do you learn about the main characters in this section? How does the author describe them? How do they describe themselves? Is time or place significant in the events that happen in the passage? Is there a conflict or high point in the passage? Do you think there is a main point or theme in this section of the story? What surprises are there?

Meaning questions:

- Are there any 'editorial' comments from the author about the events in the narrative? How do these comments illuminate what is happening? Does someone in the narrative learn something or grow in some way? How? What does this person learn? How does the passage point forward to what God is going to do in the future? Does it prophesy or anticipate Jesus Christ in some way? How could you sum up the meaning of this passage in your own words?

Application questions:

- How does this passage challenge your understanding about who God is and what he is like? Is there some attitude or behaviour you need to change?
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Epistles

The epistles are first-century letters, all written in Greek. They make up the bulk of the New Testament. There are two groups of epistles: the Pauline epistles (Romans through Philemon) and the catholic (or general) epistles (Hebrews through Jude). The epistles often contain close, detailed arguments, and sometimes it can take a solid 30-minute session of one-to-one reading just to get through ten verses. The epistles are all written to specific churches or individuals, and the timeless truths they teach about God and the gospel and the Christian life are worked out in these particular situations. Here are some COMA questions suitable for the epistles:

Context questions:

- What can you learn about the person or situation to which the letter is written? What clues are there about the author and his circumstances? What was the main point of the passage immediately before this one? Are there logical or thematic connections to the passage you are reading?

Observation questions:

- Are there any major sub-sections or breaks in the text? Are there key connecting words (for, therefore, but, because) that indicate the logical flow of the passage? What is the main point or points? What supporting points does the author make? What surprises are there in the flow of the argument?

Meaning questions:

- How does this text relate to other parts of the book? How does the passage relate to Jesus? What does this teach you about God? How could you sum up the meaning of this passage in your own words?

Application questions:

- How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding? Is there some attitude you need to change? How does this passage call on you to change the way you live?
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Hebrew wisdom literature and poetry

Hebrew wisdom literature (such as Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes) and Hebrew poetry (typically referring to the book of Psalms, Song of Songs, and poetic passages found within other books) are somewhat distinct, but are often taken together as a unit—‘wisdom’ referring to the content and ‘poetry’ to the literary form. This type of biblical writing is known for its terse style (often using short phrases) and its rich imagery. Sometimes wisdom literature, such as Proverbs, is deliberately enigmatic and thought-provoking, requiring the reader to chew over the meaning and think in new ways. Its lessons for us are not always simple commands (‘go and do this’); sometimes they are observations on the way life works in the world God has made. Very often, Hebrew poetry uses strong contrasts and comparisons in a two-line form (where the first part of the verse and the second part of the verse parallel each other).

Context questions:

- Are there any clues about the circumstances in which the passage was written?
- What has happened so far?

Observation questions:

- Are there repetitions or multiple instances of similar ideas?
- Do these repetitions make a particular point, or point to the structure of the passage? What images or metaphors does the author use? What do they indicate about God or the other people in the text? What might they indicate about modern readers? What is the tone of the passage? What emotions is the author arousing? What is the main point or points? What surprises are there?

Meaning questions:

- Are there specific instructions/commands given to the reader? Does this passage mention any consequences for not following God’s commands? How does the author motivate the reader/audience, or make his appeal? What does the passage teach us about God, and his people, and life in his world? Does the passage point forward to Jesus? Is the gospel anticipated or foreshadowed in some way?

Application questions:

- How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding? Is there some attitude you need to change? How does this passage call on you to change the way you live?
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Prophetic literature

Many people, even in churches, think that biblical prophecy is mainly about predicting the future. While there is a predictive element in the prophetic books, this is not their primary function. A prophet is one who speaks for God, whether about the present situation or the future. The prophetic books are records of God speaking to his people through the voice of a chosen man. God speaks not only of his historical promises to his people, but also of the judgments and blessings they face as a result of their ethical conduct. In this sense, the prophets are as concerned, if not more so, with the present-day moral character of the people as with the future.

The prophets also anticipate the coming of Jesus Christ in significant ways. They often directly predict what God will do through Jesus, and specific attributes of Jesus' time on earth, but they also point to the general interplay between God's judgment and God's mercy on his people in anticipation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The major prophets (named for the great length of the books) are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel. There are 12 minor prophets, from Joel through Malachi.

Context questions:

- Are there any clues about the circumstances in which the prophecy was given or written?
- Are there any people or places mentioned that you aren't familiar with? (Chase them up in earlier parts of the book, or refer to a Bible dictionary or commentary.)
- Are other bits of the Old Testament mentioned or alluded to in the passage? What part do these 'memories' play in the text?

Observation questions:

- Are there repetitions or multiple instances of similar ideas? Do these repetitions make a particular point, or point to the structure of the passage?

Paying attention to when the prophet is speaking and when God is speaking, what does the passage tell us about God's plans? What does it tell us about God's character? What kind of human behaviour, if any, is condemned or rewarded? What response is called for (if any);

What is the main point or points.

Meaning questions

- Are there specific instructions/commands given to the reader? Does this passage mention any consequences for not following God's commands?
- Does the text have a sense of expectation about something happening in the future? What is to be expected and when? How should this motivate action in the present?
- Does the passage point forward to Jesus? Is the gospel anticipated or foreshadowed in some way?

Application questions:

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- How is your own situation similar to or different from those being addressed?
 - How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding?
 - How does this passage lead you to trust God and his promises in Jesus?

How does this passage call on you to change the way you live?

Apocalyptic literature

Apocalyptic literature takes its name from the Greek word *apokalypsis*-literally, 'revelation'. As such, this genre is an 'unveiling' or 'pulling back of the curtain' on the unseen transcendent world and its role in bringing this present world to an end. This definition is a good beginning, but apocalyptic literature is also known for other literary characteristics. While it is very appropriate to focus on future action as we study apocalyptic literature, we should not forget that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ figure heavily in the events described in such literature. Several books in the Bible include some amount of apocalyptic literature, including all of Revelation, Daniel 7-12, portions of Zechariah and other prophetic books, and even parts of the Gospels and epistles (like Mark 13 and 2 Thessalonians 2).

Context questions:

- Are there any clues about the historical circumstances the literature is addressing
- Are other bits of the Bible mentioned or hinted at in the passage? What part do these 'memories' play in the text?

Observation questions:

- What images are used in the passage? What effect do they have?
- What emotions does the passage create (eg. fear, expectation, awe)?
- How does the passage seek to reveal what God is like? Where in this passage might we find hope for men and women?
- Is there a crisis in the passage? What is the tension/conflict about, and how does it relate to readers?

Meaning questions:

- Are there specific instructions/commands given to the reader? Does this passage mention any consequences for not following God's commands?
- Does the text have a sense of expectation about something happening in the future? What is to be expected and when? How should this motivate action in the present?
- Does the passage point to Jesus? Is the gospel to be shadowed or looked back upon in some way?

Application questions:

- How is your situation similar to or different from those being addressed?
 - How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding?
 - How does this passage lead you to trust God and his promises in Jesus?
 - How does this passage call on you to change the way you live?
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3. Knowing God's Truth – Part 1 (Scripture)

"When the Bible speaks, God speaks." — B.B. Warfield

Aim: To build confidence in the Bible as God's inspired Word.

Content:

1. Inspiration & Inerrancy
 - 2 Tim 3:16-17 – All Scripture "breathed out by God."
 - Ps 19:7 – The law of the LORD is perfect.
2. Authority & Clarity
 - Matt 4:4 – Jesus relied on Scripture in temptation.
 - Deut 30:11-14 – God's Word is near and understandable.
3. Sufficiency
 - 2 Pet 1:3 – His divine power has given us everything we need.

Discussion/Application:

- How does confidence in Scripture shape evangelism? Parenting? Worship?
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4. Knowing God's Truth – Part 2 (God & Man)

"The infinite God stooped to make himself known." — J.I. Packer

Content:

1. God's Attributes (Ex 34:6–7; Isa 40:28)
 - Holy, loving, just, eternal, all-knowing, all-present.
2. Trinity
 - Matt 28:19 – Father, Son, Spirit in unity.
3. Man in God's Image
 - Gen 1:27 – Created in God's image.
 - Sin's effect: Rom 3:23; Eph 2:1–3.

Application:

- How does God's holiness change your prayer life?
 - What does being made in God's image teach us about human dignity?
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5. Salvation – Part 1 (Work of Christ)

“Christ’s death is the center of the gospel; without it there is no good news.” — John Stott

Content:

1. Substitution – Isa 53:5; 2 Cor 5:21.
2. Propitiation – Rom 3:25.
3. Redemption – Eph 1:7.
4. Reconciliation – Col 1:21–22.

Discussion:

- **Why is the cross central to preaching?**
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6. Salvation – Part 2 (Application)

“No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit.” — John Owen

Content:

- Order of salvation:
 - Election (Eph 1:4)
 - Calling (Rom 8:30)
 - Regeneration (John 3:5–8)
 - Faith & Repentance (Acts 20:21)
 - Justification (Rom 3:24)
 - Adoption (Gal 4:5)
 - Sanctification (1 Thess 4:3)
 - Perseverance (Phil 1:6)
 - Glorification (Rom 8:30)

Application: Assurance of salvation in Christ alone.

7. Ecclesiology – Part 1 (Church)

Quote:

"The church is the gospel made visible." – Mark Dever

Content:

- Nature: Body (1 Cor 12), Bride (Eph 5:25), Family.
 - Marks: Word, Ordinances, Discipline.
 - Baptist distinctive: Congregational, regenerate membership.
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8. Ecclesiology – Part 2 (Ordinances)

Quote:

"Baptism and the Lord's Supper are sermons in water and bread." — Charles Spurgeon

Content:

- Baptism: Matt 28:19; Acts 2:38.
 - Lord's Supper: 1 Cor 11:23–26.
 - Memorial, anticipatory, non-saving but commanded.
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9. Covenant Theology – Part 1

Quote:

"All of God's promises find their yes in Christ." – 2 Cor 1:20, John Piper

Content:

- **Covenants:** Adam (Gen 2), Noah (Gen 9), Abraham (Gen 12, 15), Moses (Ex 20), David (2 Sam 7), New Covenant (Jer 31, Luke 22:20).
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10. Covenant Theology – Part 2 (Baptist Distinctive)

Quote:

"A new covenant demands new covenant people." – Tom Schreiner

Content:

- Importance of regenerate membership: Jer 31:33–34.
 - Why Baptists baptize believers, not infants.
-

11. Eschatology – Part 1 (Return of Christ)

Quote:

"The certainty of His coming should shape the urgency of our living." – David Platt

Content:

- Acts 1:11; 1 Thess 4:16–17.
 - Judgment: Rev 20.
 - Encourage watchfulness and mission.
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12. Eschatology – Part 2 (Final State)

Quote:

"For the believer, heaven is not merely a place, it is being with Christ forever." –
Jonathan Edwards

Content:

- Heaven: Rev 21:1–4.
 - Hell: Matt 25:46, 2 Thess 1:9.
 - Eternal perspective fuels holiness and evangelism.
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OT Timeline Graph