

# Guidelines for Effective Bible Study

## -Resources-

### Bibles

- **Literal Translation** – This type of translation most closely follows the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek manuscripts. The translators aim for the highest level of accuracy, working to produce a translation that is as close to the original as possible. However, this type of translation comes with its own challenges. Most of the Old Testament was written in Ancient Hebrew – a language that is very old and has relatively few words – which means that words have multiple meanings. When choosing a “modern” word, the translators must consider the meaning of the original word based on the context in which it is found. The New Testament was written in Greek. Greek has unique grammatical intricacies not found in English. Because of these challenges, word-for-word translating is much more complicated than one may think. This type of translation is best for those who value accuracy over readability – examples:

**KJV** – King James Version

**NKJV** – New King James Version

**ASV** – American Standard Version

**NASB** – New American Standard Bible

**ESV** – English Standard Version

**YLT** – Young’s Literal Translation

**LEB** – Lexham English Bible (web based)

- **Dynamic Translation** – Dynamic Bibles can be helpful when trying to understand complex and intricate passages and they are a good choice for engaging seekers and new believers due to their readability. While this type of translation is easy to understand, the reader must be cautious because translators are given the maximum level of poetic license and the freedom to “elaborate” on scripture – examples:

**NIV** – New International Version

**GNB** – The Good News Bible

**NLT** – New Living Translation

**CEV** – Contemporary English Version

- **Personal Paraphrase** – is a next level Dynamic Translation. This type of translation is usually the work of one person and is more like a commentary than an accurate translation of the original text. With a paraphrase it is impossible to completely eliminate the translators personal theology and is not recommended for serious Bible Study – examples:

**MSG** – The Message (Eugene Peterson)

**TLB** – The Living Bible (Kenneth N Taylor)

**CLW** – Clear Word (Jack Blanco - The author takes many liberties including; inserting Adventist Beliefs and adding Ellen White quotes into the body of the text without noting that he has done so - in some cases completely altering the text)

**It can be overwhelming with the number of Bible choices available. Choose something that is easy for you to read and understand, however, having at least one literal translation is vital. If you are interested in comparing translations, pick up a Parallel Bible, which contains multiple versions, i.e., NIV, KJV, NASB, AMP all in one.**

## Below is Hebrews 4:12 - Note the differences between the translations

### Literal Translation:

#### ***KJV – King James Version***

For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

#### ***NKJV – New King James Version***

For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

#### ***ASV – American Standard Version***

For the word of God *is* living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart.

#### ***NASB – New American Standard Bible***

For the word of God *is* living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

#### ***ESV – English Standard Version***

For the word of God *is* living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

#### ***YLT – Young’s Literal Translation***

for the reckoning of God *is* living, and working, and sharp above every two-edged sword, and piercing unto the dividing asunder both of soul and spirit, of joints also and marrow, and a discerner of thoughts and intents of the heart;

#### ***LEB – Lexham English Bible***

For the word of God *is* living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, both joints and marrow, and able to judge the reflections and thoughts of the heart.

### Dynamic Translation:

#### ***NIV – New International Version***

For the word of God *is* alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

#### ***GNB – Good News Bible***

The word of God *is* alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It cuts all the way through, to where soul and spirit meet, to where joints and marrow come together. It judges the desires and thoughts of the heart.

#### ***NLT – New Living Translation***

For the word of God *is* alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.

#### ***CEV – Contemporary English Version***

God’s word *is* alive and powerful! It is sharper than any double-edged sword. His word can cut through our spirits and souls and through our joints and marrow, until it discovers the desires and thoughts of our hearts.

### Personal Paraphrase:

#### ***MSG – The Message***

God means what he says. What he says goes. His powerful Word is sharp as a surgeon’s scalpel, cutting through everything, whether doubt or defense, laying us open to listen and obey. Nothing and no one is impervious to God’s Word. We can’t get away from it—no matter what.

#### ***TLB - The Living Bible***

For whatever God says to us *is* full of living power: it is sharper than the sharpest dagger, cutting swift and deep into our innermost thoughts and desires with all their parts, exposing us for what we really are.

#### ***CLW – The Clear Word***

God’s word *is* like a double-edged sword that cuts both ways. It cuts into a man’s soul and spirit, as well as into his bones and marrow; it lays open to us our spiritual condition and exposes the thoughts and intentions of our hearts; it lets us see our own motives and then helps us change them.

**Concordances** - A Bible concordance is an alphabetical listing of words and phrases and shows where the terms occur throughout all 66 books of the Bible with cross-references. Concordances make it easy to understand the meaning of terms and the context in which those words are used – examples:

- Strong's
- Young's

**Commentaries** – A Bible commentary explains and interprets the text – use discernment because personal theology may influence the commentators interpretation. A commentary is usually organized to match the sequential flow of the biblical books, chapters, and verses and may also provide illustrations, applications, and homiletic expansions of the Scripture.

**Dictionaries** (examples):

- Greek Dictionary
- Vine's Expository Dictionary

**Reference Materials** (examples):

- Josephus – Jewish Historian
- People of the Old Testament World
- Exploring the Old Testament
- Bible Manners and Customs
- Old Testament Ethics
- Interlinear Bibles / Parallel Bibles in English and Greek or Hebrew

**Atlas or Bible Geography**

**Web-based Resources**

- [www.biblehub.com](http://www.biblehub.com)
- [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)
- [www.biblestudytools.com](http://www.biblestudytools.com)
- Logos Bible Study App

**-General Strategies of Bible Study-**

**Read thoughtfully** - Look for the most **OBVIOUS OR SIMPLEST MEANING** of the passage. The aim of good interpretation is not trying to discover what no one else has seen before. The aim of good interpretation is simple: to get at the plain meaning of the text.

**Read Patiently** - You may have to read a section of scripture two or three or fifty times before God opens it up to you. Remember it is not for you to "figure out" it is for the Holy Spirit to "reveal." Focus on what you do understand and don't worry about what you don't understand.

**Read Expectantly** -

- When you read the Bible, you must think that here and now God is speaking with me. – **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**
- Read the Bible with CHRIST constantly in view. The whole book is about Him. Look for Him on every page. He is there. If you fail to see Him there, you need to read that page again. – **J.C. Ryle**

## Have a proper perspective / humble attitude

- Pray – Invite the Holy Spirit into your Bible study and ask for divine guidance, understanding and wisdom.
- Recognize the authority of the Bible as the Word of God.
- Submit personal preferences, desires and understanding to the teaching of the Word.
- Be willing to learn and not just look for ways to reinforce preconceptions or tightly held beliefs.

**Use multiple translations** – preferably literal and/or dynamic

## Choose a study plan

- Book by book – start at the beginning and read the whole book in one sitting, if possible.
- Chapter by chapter
- Verse by verse
- Biblical solutions to a specific life problem
- Topical study (faith, love, death, 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming, etc.)
- Word study – note the meaning of a word in the original language and all the verses in which the word is used. This is where a Concordance will come in handy.
- Biographical studies – choose a person and discover all you can about them.

## Context! Context! Context!

- Read what comes before and after the verse you are reading. The original writings did not contain the chapters and verses we use today, so a single verse may be part of a larger thought or statement. Example:
  - **John 13:36 - 14:4** - Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward." <sup>37</sup> Peter said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake." <sup>38</sup> Jesus answered him, "Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times. **John 14:1** "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. <sup>2</sup> "In My Father's house are many mansions; if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. <sup>3</sup> "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also. <sup>4</sup> "And where I go you know, and the way you know."

The chapter division creates an artificial separation of thought. Verse 38 through verse 4 are Jesus' full statement to Peter. John 13 and 14 should be read together as one conversation.

Additionally, the original writings did not contain punctuation, so a verse may read completely different depending on where the interpreter places punctuation. Example – Luke 23:43:

**Original:** And he said to him truly thee I tell today with me thou wilt be in paradise.

**Interpretation 1** – And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

**Interpretation 2** - And He said to him, "Truly I say to you today, you shall be with Me in Paradise."

See how the meaning completely changes depending on where the punctuation is placed.

- Compare Scripture with Scripture: Base doctrines on the broad themes of scripture and not on isolated statements or obscure texts.
- Let the Bible be its own interpreter – Nothing else has authority over the Bible, including Ellen White, church doctrine, etc. The Bible must be allowed to speak for itself - base every interpretation of scripture on the direct testimony of scripture and not on the statements of another source.
- Seek to harmonize biblical writings – apparent contradictions can be resolved by looking for the underlying perspectives of different authors. **Example:** there is an apparent contradiction between Jeremiah and Ezekiel regarding the fate of last king of Judah – Zedekiah.

**Jeremiah** states that Zedekiah would be captured, see the Babylonian king face to face and then be taken to Babylon. (Jeremiah 32:2-5)

**Ezekiel** states that Zedekiah would be captured and brought to Babylon, but would not see the land of the Chaldeans. (Ezekiel 12:11-13)

Who is telling the truth and is this apparent contradiction enough to call into question their prophetic gifts? **2 Kings 25:6-7** provides us with the answer:

*"So they took the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and they pronounced judgment on him. <sup>7</sup> Then they killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, put out the eyes of Zedekiah, bound him with bronze fetters, and took him to Babylon."*

Both prophetic statements were true, just from different perspectives. Don't jump to conclusions when you encounter an apparent contradiction.

- Consider the general purpose of what you are reading. What are the major themes found in the **text, passage** or entire **book**.
- Look for the underlying principles within the details – example: What does this Scripture teach me:
  - About the nature of God?
  - About the nature of man?
  - Is there a promise to claim?
  - Is there a commandment to obey?
- Refer to other books written by the same author:
  - Moses wrote the first 5 books of the Bible and possibly Job.
  - Solomon wrote Song of Solomon, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.
  - Jeremiah wrote Jeremiah and Lamentation.
  - Paul wrote 13 books in the New Testament and possibly Hebrews.
  - John wrote John, 1,2,3 John and Revelation.
  - Luke wrote Luke and Acts, etc.
- Determine the kind of literature that is being represented:
  - Narrative (story or history).
  - Prophetic prediction or vision.
  - Sermon, letter, poem or parable.
- Consider the original language, i.e. Ezra and Daniel are written in both Hebrew and Aramaic.
- Revelation is progressive and biblical statements may reflect a developing understanding of truth.

## **Who, What, When, Why, Where**

- **Who** is the author? **Who** is the audience?
- **What** is the cultural, political, economic, religious beliefs and practices, social customs, and ethical standards of the time?
- **When** was the book written?
- **Why** was the book written – what were the problems and reasons for writing?
- **Where** was the book written?

**PAST** – What the text **MEANT**.

**PRESENT** – what the text **MEANS** now. Do the same principles that applied **THEN**, apply **NOW**?

## -Strategies for Understanding Prophecy-

### **Non-Apocalyptic** Prophecy:

- Addresses God's people.
- Conditional – human choices will influence the outcome.
- Often jumps between a local crisis and end-time events
- Time prophecies are generally long and are indicated in "years":
  - 400 years of Israel's servitude
  - 70-year captivity in Babylon

### **Apocalyptic** Prophecy (Daniel and Revelation):

- Universal in scope
- Highly symbolic language
- Emphasizes the sovereignty of God – these prophecies are NOT conditional
- Presents the course of history from the time of the prophet to the end of the world
- Time prophecies are generally phrased in "days or months" but represent longer periods of actual time.
  - 2300 days
  - 1260 days
  - 42 months

## -Structure of the Old Testament-

### **The Law** (Torah / Pentateuch):

- Genesis
- Exodus
- Leviticus
- Numbers
- Deuteronomy

### **Prophets:**

- **Major:** Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel;
  - **Minor:** Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zachariah, Malachi
- Minor Prophets are considered "minor" because of the length of each book, compared with length of the major prophets, not because of content.**
- **Northern** – Amos, Hosea, Jonah
  - **Southern** – Isaiah, Jeremiah
  - **Pre Exile** – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea, Jonah, Micah
  - **Exile** – Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Joel
  - **Post Exile** - Haggai, Zachariah, Malachi,

**Writings:** Psalms, Job, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther

**Books of Wisdom:** Daniel, Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, Song of Songs

# **-Structure of the New Testament-**

## **THE GOSPELS:**

- **Synoptic** – Matthew, Mark, Luke
- John

## **ACTS of the Apostles**

### **Paul's Letters** (Epistles):

- **Prison Letters** – Philippians, Ephesians, Philemon, Colossians
- **Pastoral Letters** – 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus
- **General Letters** – Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians

## **Hebrews**

**General letters** - James; 1 & 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter; 1,2,3 John; Jude

## **Revelation**

# **-Dates to Remember-**

## **Old Testament**

- 957 BC – 1<sup>st</sup> Temple completed by Solomon
- 722 BC – Assyrian Deportation of 10 tribes by Shalmaneser

### **Babylon Captivity – remaining tribes**

- 605 BC – Nebuchadnezzar ascends the throne of Babylon
- 605 BC – 1<sup>st</sup> deportation - Daniel taken to Babylon
- 597 BC – 2<sup>nd</sup> deportation - Ezekiel taken to Babylon
- 587/586 – Jerusalem and the Temple Destroyed
- 559 BC – Cyrus the Great becomes king of the Medes and Persians
- 539 BC – Babylon falls to the Medes and Persians

### **Exile's Return to Judah / Jerusalem**

- 538 BC – 1<sup>st</sup> wave of exiles return to Judah (Zerubbabel and Joshua).
- 536 BC – Foundation of Temple laid
- 515 BC – 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Completed
- 458 BC – 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of exiles return to Judah (Ezra).
- 444 BC – 3<sup>rd</sup> wave of exiles return to Judah in the 20<sup>th</sup> year of Artaxerxes (Nehemiah).

## **New Testament**

- 6-4 BC – Jesus is born
- 4 AD – Herod the Great's death (Joseph and family return from Egypt and relocate to Nazareth)
- 27 AD – Jesus baptized
- 31 AD – Crucifixion and death of Jesus
- 34 AD – Stoning of Stephen
- 66 AD – Jewish Revolt
- 70 AD – Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple