



Lecture #1, Part 2

Course Information

1. Course Description

Survey of basic New Testament Bible facts to provide a usable foundation for personal study, for ministry, and for other courses in biblical studies and in systematic and practical theology.

A GUIDE TO GOOD BIBLE READING: A Personal Search For Verifiable Truth

At least **three related components** may be found in all written human communication:

In the past, different reading techniques have focused on one of the three components. But to truly affirm the unique inspiration of the Bible, a modified diagram is more appropriate:

In truth all three components must be included in the interpretive process. For the purpose of verification, my interpretation focuses on **the first two components: the original author and the text.**

I am probably reacting to the abuses I have observed:

- (1) allegorizing or spiritualizing texts and**
- (2) “reader response” interpretation (what-it-means-to-me).**

Abuse may occur at each stage. We must always check our motives, biases, techniques, and applications. But how do we check them if there are no boundaries to interpretations, no limits, no criteria? This is where authorial intent and textual structure provide me with some criteria for limiting the scope of possible valid interpretations.

In light of these inappropriate reading techniques, what are some possible approaches to good Bible reading and interpretation which offer a degree of verification and consistency?

At this point I am not discussing the unique techniques of interpreting specific genres but general hermeneutical principles valid for all types of biblical texts. A good book for genre-specific approaches is *How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth*, by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, published by Zondervan.

My methodology focuses initially on the reader allowing the Holy Spirit to illumine the Bible through four personal reading cycles. This makes the Spirit, the reader, and the text primary, not secondary. *This also protects the reader from being unduly influenced by commentators. I have heard it said: “The Bible throws a lot of light on commentaries.”*



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This is not meant to be a depreciating comment about study aids, but rather a plea for an appropriate timing for their use.

We must be able from the text itself to support our interpretations. **Five areas** provide at least limited verification:

- (1) historical setting**
- (2) literary context**
- (3) grammatical structures (syntax)**
- (4) contemporary word usage**
- (5) relevant parallel passages**

We need to be able to provide the reasons and logic behind our interpretations. The Bible is our only source for faith and practice. Sadly, Christians often disagree about what it teaches or affirms.

Four reading cycles are designed to provide the following interpretive insights:

(1) The first reading cycle

- (a)** Read the book in a single sitting. Read it again in a different translation, hopefully from a different translation theory
 - (i)** word-for-word (NKJV, NASB, NRSV)
 - (ii)** dynamic equivalent (TEV, JB)
 - (iii)** paraphrase (Living Bible, Amplified Bible)
- (b)** Look for the central purpose of the entire writing. Identify its theme.
- (c)** Isolate (if possible) a literary unit, a chapter, a paragraph or a sentence which clearly expresses this central purpose or theme.
- (d)** Identify the predominant literary genre
 - (i)** Old Testament
 - 1)** Hebrew narrative
 - 2)** Hebrew poetry (wisdom literature, psalm)
 - 3)** Hebrew prophecy (prose, poetry)
 - 4)** Law codes
 - (ii)** New Testament
 - 1)** Narratives (Gospels, Acts)
 - 2)** Parables (Gospels)
 - 3)** Letters/epistles
 - 4)** Apocalyptic literature

(2) The second reading cycle

- (a)** Read the entire book again, seeking to identify major topics or subjects.
- (b)** Outline the major topics and briefly state their contents in a simple statement.
- (c)** Check your purpose statement and broad outline with study aids.



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(3) The third reading cycle

- (a)** Read the entire book again, seeking to identify the historical setting and specific occasion for the writing from the Bible book itself.
- (b)** List the historical items that are mentioned in the Bible book
 - (i)** the author
 - (ii)** the date
 - (iii)** the recipients
 - (iv)** the specific reason for writing
 - (v)** aspects of the cultural setting that relate to the purpose of the writing
 - (iv)** references to historical people and events
- (c)** Expand your outline to paragraph level for that part of the biblical book you are interpreting. Always identify and outline the literary unit. This may be several chapters or paragraphs. This enables you to follow the original author's logic and textual design.
- (d)** Check your historical setting by using study aids.