

**How to Understand Your Bible-The Big Picture**

**Mini-Lecture #14**

River Valley Community Church

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**REVIEW—The Basics:**

**Four Important Questions to Answer**

1. What is the Bible?
2. Why do we need to understand it?
3. Why is it difficult to understand?
4. How do we understand it?

**OVERVIEW of the Three Steps For Studying Your Bible**

1. O \_\_\_\_\_ Ask: What \_\_\_\_\_?

2. I \_\_\_\_\_ Ask: What \_\_\_\_\_?

3. A \_\_\_\_\_ Ask: What \_\_\_\_\_?

## Five Different TYPES of Bible Study

- *The \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ method:* You investigate the general content or message of an entire book of the Bible. You read the book repeatedly, determining the author's theme and outline and focus of teaching. This synthetic study is like flying over the United States and getting a broad view of the topography and geography. Driving across the country gives more detail and relates to the analytical studies of the Bible. Both types are necessary, but the synthesis method provides insight for more accurate analysis.
- *The \_\_\_\_\_ analysis method:* You select one passage of Scripture and study it in detail by asking questions, focusing on the structure (by determining the main subject and main verbs as well as the subordinate verbs), chasing-out cross references, and summarizing the verse, while looking for applications for your life. This can be done for a single \_\_\_\_\_, a \_\_\_\_\_ of the Bible, a \_\_\_\_\_ within a book (i.e., The Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7), or verse-by-verse through an entire \_\_\_\_\_.
- *The \_\_\_\_\_ method:* You choose a topic and collect and compare all the verses you can find on that particular topic by using your concordance and cross-references. A topical study Bible is useful for this. You then organize your conclusions into an outline from which you draw applications. You use this method to learn about \_\_\_\_\_ topics like prayer, the will of God, forgiving others, fasting, principles of parenting, the roles of church leaders, etc. A specific type of topical study can be \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_, where you investigate what the Bible says about a specific doctrine, such as God, the Holy Spirit, salvation, the second coming. This can be done by studying one \_\_\_\_\_ of the Bible or by studying the topic throughout the \_\_\_\_\_ Bible.
- *The \_\_\_\_\_ method:* You choose a Bible character and research all the verses in the Bible referring to him or her (a concordance or computer program will help you chase these out). You also use historical books that provide additional information about a person. Next, you summarize your findings noting attitudes, strengths, and weaknesses. Finally, you draw some applications for your life.
- *The \_\_\_\_\_ method:* You choose a word and collect all the verses in which it occurs. You study its meaning and shades of meaning in various contexts and research the original meaning in the dictionaries. Even if you do not know the original languages (Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic), you can use the numbering system in Strong's Concordance to study specific words. Then you put together applications based on your findings.

PROOF TEXT: the inaccurate use of a biblical text to support a teaching without regard for the texts true meaning.

## Basic RULES for INTERPRETING the Bible

1. Interpret Scripture \_\_\_\_\_ by taking words, phrases and sentences in their \_\_\_\_\_ sense.
2. The Bible passage means what the \_\_\_\_\_ it to mean.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ interprets \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Use the \_\_\_\_\_ passage to interpret the more \_\_\_\_\_ passage (on the same topic).
5. \_\_\_\_\_ is everything.
6. Always be aware of the type of \_\_\_\_\_ you are studying (i.e., wisdom, poetry, a letter, gospel, etc.)  
  
See, Gordan Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition.
7. There is \_\_\_\_\_ meaning and \_\_\_\_\_ applications for each passage.
8. Words mean what they \_\_\_\_\_ meant.
9. A narrative is only a \_\_\_\_\_ if God \_\_\_\_\_ it to be a model.

## **Basic TOOLS for Bible Study**

### A good Study Bible.

*The NIV Study Bible*  
*Nave's Topical Study Bible—NIV*

### An Exhaustive Concordance

*Strong's or Young's Concordance*  
*Electronic Concordance—Bible Software or Online*  
[www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org)

### A good Bible Dictionary and/or Encyclopedia

*The New Bible Dictionary* (Eerdmans)  
*The Holman Bible Dictionary*  
*The Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*  
*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 volumes.  
*Holman Bible Handbook*

### A good Atlas

*The Holman Bible Atlas*, Thomas V. Brisco

### Basic Greek Helps

*Greek for the Rest of Us: Using Greek Tools without Mastering Biblical Greek*, William D. Mounce.  
*Using New Testament Greek in Ministry: A Practical Guide for Students and Pastors*, David Alan Black.

### Beginning Helps for Understanding Bible Interpretation

*Living by the Book*, William Hendricks.  
*How to Study Your Bible*, Kay Arthur  
*The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible*, Scot McKnight

### Advanced Helps for Understanding Bible Interpretation

*Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, William Klein, Craig Blomberg, & Robert Hubbard, Jr.  
*New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, Gordon Fee.  
*The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Grant Osborne.  
*Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*, in *Guides to New Testament Exegesis* 5, Thomas Schreiner.  
*Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, Bruce Corley, Steve Lemke, & Grant Lovejoy.

## What are the differences between different translations of the Bible?

The Bible was originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. It has been translated from those languages into English for those who read English. There are many different versions or translations of the English Bible (as you know if you have ever gone into the bookstore to purchase a Bible). These are different because of the people who do the translating and the rules that they follow (you can find these explained at the beginning of most Bibles. Most of these are good translations, though some are better than others, meaning they are more accurate and easier to understand). Your first goal should be to get an accurate translation, and your second goal should be to get one of those that makes sense. In addition to the different versions of the actual biblical text, there are differences in the packaging and the “extras” that are included. For example, Study Bibles have sections that explain history, the meaning of words, give you maps, etc. Student Bibles have pictures and practical applications given for teenagers. Here are some words from the experts, and a chart to clarify it a little more (Gordon D. Fee & Mark L. Strauss, *How to Choose a Translation for all Its Worth*, 30-34):

“All translation involves interpretation. Some people say, ‘Just tell me what the Bible says, not what it means.’ The problem with this is that ‘what the Bible says,’ is in Hebrew and Greek, and there is seldom a one-to-one correspondence between English and these languages. Before we can translate a single word, we must interpret its meaning in context. Of course, it is even more complicated than that, since words get their meaning in dynamic relationship with other words. Every phrase, clause, and idiom must be interpreted in context before it can be translated accurately into English.

“Translation is, therefore, always a two-step process: (1) Translators must first interpret the meaning of the text in its original context.... (2) Once the text is accurately understood, the translator must ask, How is this meaning best conveyed in the receptor language? What words, phrases, and idioms most accurately reproduce the author’s message?”

“Although meaning can never be reproduced *perfectly*, it can be rendered *truly*, that is, with a high degree of accuracy. What Bible readers need to take from this is that all Bible versions—no matter how accurate—have certain limitations. These can be overcome by (1) using more than one version to gain a better perspective; (2) reading larger units of text to determine the greater context and flow of thought; (3) checking good commentaries on difficult passages; and (4) gaining a better knowledge of the world of the Bible through studies of its background and culture.

“One way to categorize the difference between the translation philosophies . . . is to ask how far translators are willing to go in modifying the form of the Hebrew or Greek to communicate the meaning. As we have seen, all translations—even the most literal—alter Greek and Hebrew *forms* in order to communicate meaning. So what’s the difference?”

The chart on the following page will divide translations into three categories, each with different goals and so the use of different translation procedures to reach those goals. The different translations of the Bible are grouped within those descriptions.

	<b>Formal Equivalence (literal)</b>	<b>Mediating</b>	<b>Functional Equivalence (idiomatic)</b>
<i>Goal</i>	<u>Comprehensiveness</u> : Alter the form until the text is comprehensible.	<u>Clarity</u> : Alter the form until the text is clear.	<u>Naturalness</u> : Alter the form until the text is natural.
<i>Examples</i>	NASB, KJV, NKJV, NASU, NRSV, RSV, ESV	NIV, TNIV, NAB, NJB, HCSB, NET, NEB, REB	NLT, NCV, GNT, GW, GNT, CEV, LB, The Message
<i>Strengths</i>	Helps to capture metaphors, verbal allusions, and ambiguities.	Achieves both accuracy and clarity.	Greatest comprehension. Communicates the message clearly and naturally.
<i>Weaknesses</i>	Can result in awkward English, obscurity, and inaccuracy. Comprehension test often fails.	More interpretation, so greater margin for interpretive error. Sometimes uses unnatural English.	Even more interpretation, so greater margin for error. Sometimes loses nuances of meaning in pursuit of simplicity and clarity.