

A person wearing a blue button-down shirt is shown from the chest down, sitting and reading an open Bible. Their hands are resting on the pages of the Bible, which is open to a page with dense text. The background is dark, and the lighting is soft, highlighting the person's hands and the text in the Bible.

*Dr. Kevin Harrison*

# BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION MADE EASY

10 DAYS TO UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE  
IN 15 MINUTES A DAY

# Biblical Interpretation Made Easy

*10 Days to Understanding the Bible in 15 Minutes a Day*

*by*  
*Kevin Harrison, DMin, MBA*

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# Dedication

I dedicate this book to my parents for teaching me the Word of God from the time I was a child. You instilled in me a deep desire to know God more, and without that, my life wouldn't be the same. Dad is now with Jesus, living the truths in God's Word. I miss you, bud. Mom, I'll never forget all those times I woke up early to go to the bathroom, and you were up at 5 am studying the Bible before work. Thank you! (I start mine later each day.)

I dedicate this to my wife and best friend, Becky, who has always believed in and supported me. Your love for Jesus and God's Word is real. You're a Proverbs 31 woman! Also, I dedicate this to my kids, Ronnie and Mikaela Baker, and Julianna Harrison. I pray this book will help love Jesus more!

I also dedicate this book to my grandparents' memory on both sides of my family: Robert and Marjorie Harrison, and Samuel and Rose Worley. The Word of God was important in their lives, and they passed that on to us.

I also want to recognize the men of God I was honored to serve under in ministry, including Dr. E. Wayne Hanks, Dr. John Bosman, Dr. Kermit Bridges, John Jacob, and Dr. A.L. Lastinger. Pastor Jacob and Pastor Lastinger have since gone on to be with the Lord. Thank you! Thank you for investing in my life and for teaching me the value of God's Word! It's imprinted on my heart.

I want to say a major thank you to President Dr. James Flanagan and the professors at Luther Rice Seminary who taught God's Word with conviction and passion in every class. You all made me a better expositor of the Word.

Finally, I want to thank my first hermeneutics professor, Dr. John Wyckoff, who probably thought I was never listening in his class, but I was. Thank you for a life of service in teaching two generations of pastors. You helped lay a solid foundation for biblical interpretation I've been built on since.

# Introduction

Have you ever read something in the Bible and thought to yourself, “What does that mean? Why is *that* there? How is that even relevant to us today? Will I ever be able to understand the Bible?” If you answered “yes” to one, some, or all of the above, you’re not alone, and this book is for you.

When I made the lasting decision in high school to become a Christian, the first advice I received from people at the altar was: “You need to read your Bible every day if you want to know more about God and His plan for your life.” OK, I got that, and it sounded good to me. The problem was: Nobody told me where to start in Bible study or how to begin to understand what I was reading. So, I did what you do with every good book; I opened up to page number one and started my voyage through the Bible.

Genesis was easy to understand because it taught the foundations of the world and was historical. I’m a big fan of history, so reading Genesis was interesting. However, I have to admit that putting stories about disobeying God, murder, lying, deception, and selling a brother into slavery didn’t seem like the best plan to convince me that I need to follow God. I could do all those things without any help at all!

The journey into Exodus started off like wildfire, especially the part about Moses and the burning bush in Exodus 3. God used Moses to go before the Pharaoh, the head of state and religious leader in Egypt and told him God said to release the Israelites from their 400 years of slavery. It’s a long story, but through a series of ten plagues sent on the land, the Israelites were set free and finally delivered from the Egyptians when God parted the Red Sea and let them go through. Right after this, God gave Moses Ten Commandments that he wrote on stone tablets, all easy things to understand.

Then IT happened. I came to a verse that was apparently beyond my pay grade. You can imagine my shock when I read Exodus 23:19 that says, “You must not cook a young goat in its mother’s milk?” Well, I felt pretty good about not doing that because, for one thing, I never liked the taste of goat, nor did I have a goat. But why was the “goat verse” there in the first place? What did that mean? How could that possibly have any relevance to me in the coolest decade of human history, the 1980s?

Next, I came to Leviticus, and that’s where I almost stopped reading the Bible altogether. There were so many different types of offerings and rules and regulations that it overwhelmed me. Some of them sounded utterly ridiculous, like Leviticus 19:19: “Do not wear clothing woven from two different kinds of thread.” Huh?!? I’m pretty sure that everything I had, had more than two kinds of thread. Was I in sin? What did this mean? I could go on and on with more examples, but you get the picture. You’ve probably been there at some point in your journey, as well.

Think about that advice I first received: “You need to read your Bible every day if you want to know more about God and His plan for your life.” Yeah, that’s true. However, telling that to a new Christian is like giving a newborn baby a cow, barbeque grill, and a sack of potatoes and telling them to cook themselves a steak and potato dinner. Sure, they have everything they need, but they’re not going to be ready to do that yet. There’s a lot that has to be processed first.

I know, without a doubt, that many of you have probably been where I was at some point. You’re reading this book because you want to learn how to study and interpret the Bible correctly, and that’s a good thing. You’re still not convinced you can, but let me assure you: You’re going to be in a much different place when you finish this book than you are right now. I know, because I’m on the other side now.

The questions I'm going to answer for you over these next 10 days are the product of a lifetime of study. As with anything else in life, I didn't get where I am by accident. I've put in over 30,000 hours-worth of Bible study in personal devotion and preparing for sermons. I went to Bible college and seminary, have read through the Bible over 50 times, read hundreds of books about the Bible and biblical topics, including commentaries, concordances, Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias, and lexicons. Do you know what all of those are? If not, you'll understand them before you finish this book and be able to use them effectively in your study.

It used to be that to study the Bible; you needed an extensive library of expensive books and an expensive piece of paper on the wall. However, that's no longer the case. I'm going to provide you with many credible and practical resources for studying the Scriptures, and the best thing is, they're online and free. I've spent my life learning and simplifying the complicated processes of interpretation, and when you finish this book, you're going to understand how to interpret Scriptures just like me. You'll have every tool and resource you need to understand and interpret the Bible and properly apply it to your life. The result is you're going to get a low-cost, biblical interpretation education by studying 10 minutes a day for 15 days.

### **Three Primary Reasons Why I'm Writing this Book**

Yeah, but why? As with any book, the questions the reader wants answers for are, "Why are you writing this book, and why should I read it?" There are three primary reasons why I'm writing this book that relate to everyone: Biblical illiteracy, biblical dependency, and biblical heresy.

**Reason #1: Biblical Illiteracy** – I've served as the President of West Coast Bible College & Seminary since 2006. As part of the admissions process, our students take a basic Bible knowledge test that doesn't count against their GPA; it's more to see where they are in their biblical understanding. Unfortunately, the average score on this test is a failing grade. This result



isn't a knock against anyone; it's just a fact that's a picture of where we are as a society, including in the Christian world.

As further proof, the 2019 *State of the Bible* report conducted by the Barna Group and the American Bible Society found the following regarding the types of biblical engagement among Americans, according to them:

- ***Bible-Disengaged***: 48% interact with the Bible infrequently, if at all. It has minimal impact on their lives.
- ***Bible-Neutral***: 9% interact with the Bible sporadically. It has little spiritual influence, but that influence may be growing.
- ***Bible-Friendly***: 19% interact with the Bible consistently. It may be a source of spiritual insight and wisdom.
- ***Bible-Engaged***: 19% interact with the Bible frequently. It is transforming their relationship with God and others.
- ***Bible-Centered***: 5% interact with the Bible frequently. It is transforming their relationships and shaping their choices.<sup>1</sup>

Two things stick out to me from these findings. First, almost HALF of all Americans have NO engagement with the Bible. It has NO impact on their life. Is there any wonder why our nation finds itself in such disarray right now? Secondly, only 5% are *Bible-centered*, allowing God's Word to transform their lives and shape their choices. I'd be interested to know what the percentage was of those surveyed who were Christians. I don't know that answer, but I know 5% being *Bible-centered* isn't acceptable. Let me ask you: Where has your Bible been this week? You can be sure this book will help develop your biblical literacy.

**Reason #2: Biblical Dependency** – One of the realities I found in pastoring is that the only time many people open their Bibles during the week is when they come to church. That's not just me saying that; a 2015 Lifeway Research found that only 45% of those who regularly attend church read the Bible more than once per week, while 40% say they read it once or twice

per month.<sup>2</sup> As a result, many people are dependent on their pastors to teach them the only Scriptures they will hear all week.

For over 1,000 years (the 300's to the 1,300's), the average Christian had no access to the Old and New Testaments. Who prohibited them from reading them? THE CHURCH.<sup>3</sup> Church leaders thought they were the only ones qualified to explain the Scriptures, and as a result, they created a dependency on themselves as the final voice on the Bible. The sad thing to me is that they couldn't study the Scriptures, so they didn't, but we can, and many don't.

God's Word was written for God's people! You don't need a Doctor of Ministry degree or a Ph.D. in Biblical Studies to be qualified to read the Bible. It's essential to have trained, passionate pastors speaking into your life, but you don't need to depend on a leader to tell you what the Scriptures say or mean. This book will equip you with the skills to rightly interpret the Word of God, so you don't have an unhealthy dependency.

**God's Word was written for God's people!**

**Reason #3: Biblical Heresy** – Before I talk about heresy, let's look at its' definition from Easton's Bible Dictionary: The word *heresy* comes from a Greek word, meaning a “self-chosen opinion” or “the sect holding that opinion.”<sup>4</sup> So, a heresy is a man-made concept or doctrine that doesn't come from God or line up with His Word. You can read Here are four simple ways you can know if a teaching is heresy:

- If the teaching contradicts the Bible, it's heresy.
- If the teaching denies the Deity of Jesus Christ, the fact He was and is God, then it's heresy.
- If someone claims to have a special revelation that adds to the Bible, but can't be confirmed by the Bible, it's heresy.

- If a person claims they have the solo authority to interpret the Scriptures, or that their word supersedes God's Word, it's heresy.

I could spend an entire book writing about the heresies that exist in the church in our day, but three of the most notable examples are:

- **Salvation by works:** I've heard many what I call "Cotton-Candy Preachers" who teach a works-centered message that requires you to "do" something to be saved. We need to pray and fast more, read the Bible more, and serve in the church more. Let me be clear: Our salvation has nothing to do with what we can do; it rests solely on what Jesus did when He was crucified on a cross and paid the penalty for our sins. In Ephesians 2:8-9, Paul writes, "8 God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. 9 Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it."
- **The Prosperity gospel (little g):** False prophets and teachers worldwide have taught the Prosperity gospel that God rewards your faith with money and blessing. Some go as far as to say that your faith is insufficient if you aren't financially blessed. There's a big problem with this teaching: Jesus said in Matthew 8:20, "Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place even to lay his head." Jesus didn't have a house, two luxury cars in a garage, or even money to pay His taxes. He had to get that from the mouth of a fish (Matthew 17:27). Was Jesus' faith lacking? On the other hand, the Gospel, which means "Good News," works everywhere and is for everyone, regardless of nationality, race, social class, or financial standing. The Prosperity gospel only works for people who make money, and that's why I spell it with a little "g."
- **False gods:** A dangerous belief in our world is that there are many *gods*, and all are *one path* to get to the same God. I've had countless

conversations with Millennials who expressed this viewpoint, many of those raised in the church. I'm not surprised because there's been a significant shift in our country regarding what people think about God. A 2018 Pew Research study found that 80% of Americans believe in *God*. However, among stated *believers*, only 56% believe it's the God of the Bible.<sup>5</sup> So, in reality, approximately 44.8% of Americans believe in the God of the Bible. America is not heading in the right direction. However, my most significant concerns focus on what's happening inside the church. The God of the Bible has been replaced by lesser gods of politics, materialism, fame, and sports, as churches and leadership drift away from the Scriptures.

Heresies are dangerous because they often contain *some* truth, and they seem to make sense. Inevitably, what happens is that a "teacher" will isolate a verse or passage from the Bible and use it to prove what they're saying. Remember: Satan quoted Psalm 91:11-12 when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness in Luke 4:10-11. However, Jesus overcame every temptation because He knew God's Word and quoted it back to Satan. This book will help you identify heresies and respond with the Truth of God's Word, even when it's unpopular.

**So why do you need to read this book?** God's Word is, literally, a matter of eternal life or death. 2 Peter 1:3 tells us that "God has given us everything we need for living a godly life." King David wrote in Psalm 119:9, "How can a young person stay pure? By obeying your word." God *has* blessed us with everything we need to live a godly and pure life, the Word of God.

Knowing this, understanding God's Word must be the priority of every Christian because it's His Word, through the Holy Spirit's leading, that will lead us into all Truth. This book, *Biblical Interpretation Made Easy*, will help develop your biblical literacy, release you from biblical dependency, and equip you to recognize and respond to biblical heresy.

***Before we get started:*** Let me remind you that reading through this book one time will not make you a scholar. This book is a resource that provides you with principles you need to practice as you study God's Word daily. As you grow in your knowledge and understanding of the Bible, you're going to become more like Jesus, who IS the Word of God (John 1:1). Like anything else in life, the more you do something the right way, the more proficient you will become at that skill.

Like anything else in life, the more you do something the right way, the more proficient you will become at that skill.

Over the next ten chapters, I'm going to introduce you to the Bible, give you the tools you need for interpretation and explain the three-step biblical interpretation process I created and use to make the process easy. It's called:

## **The 3 A's of Biblical Interpretation**

**Step #1:** Acclimation

**Step #2:** Analyzation

**Step #3:** Application

# Chapter One

## *What is the Bible?*

The short answer to this question is that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, made up of a collection of 66 books in two divisions, the Old Testament and New Testament, that approximately 40 men wrote over 1,500 years.

What do I mean when I say it's the "inspired Word of God?" The phrase we use to describe this concept is *Divine Inspiration*, which Paul wrote to Timothy about 2 Timothy 3:16, saying, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right."

*Divine Inspiration* means God *influenced* the biblical writers to write the content they wrote. There was nothing mystical about the writing process. God didn't come down to the earth and grab each author's hand as they dipped the quill in ink and then move their hand over the papyrus. He worked through the circumstances in each author's life, using their personalities and writing styles to bring His message to man. However, don't miss this crucial point: While there were many human "authors," in reality, there was only One Author, God. He brought together all of the Scriptures so that they fit together like a perfect puzzle.

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in reality, there was only One Author, God.

A closely related concept in the formation of the Scriptures is *Divine Revelation*, where God reveals Himself to man as a God who is actively speaking in their lives. There are two ways God reveals Himself; through

*General Revelation* and *Special Revelation*. *General Revelation* refers to the ways He reveals Himself through Creation. Every word, person, story, and event by the various biblical authors are examples of the *General Revelation* of God because God used them all to reveal Himself in some way. In other words, everything you're reading in the Bible is God speaking to you. Carrying that concept into our 21<sup>st</sup>-century world, when you look outside and see the rain pouring from the sky and falling on crops to help them grow, this is an example of *General Revelation* (Acts 14:19). The fact you have a conscience, emotions, and can breathe air or any other gift of life are all further illustrations of this form of revelation.

*Special Revelation* in the Bible occurred when God gave the writers the words to write concerning future events that would have been impossible for them to know otherwise. One example was when God gave Isaiah the words in Isaiah 7:14, "All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us')." Isaiah didn't know that Jesus was going to be born to Mary some 700 years later, but God knew, and He had Isaiah write these words. Who could have, or would have, ever predicted that a virgin would give birth? Only God!

Think about this: There were some 351 Old Testament Scriptures fulfilled with the birth of Jesus.<sup>6</sup> How could approximately 40 authors consistently bring all this information together in one cohesive book? They couldn't. *Divine Inspiration and Revelation* requires One Author, God, *influencing* the "authors" to make sure they wrote the message He was communicating.

**Language of the Bible:** Almost all of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, the native language of the Jews. The only exceptions are several chapters in Ezra (Ezra 4:8–6:18 and 7:12–26) and Daniel (chapters 1-6), written in Aramaic, as was one verse in Jeremiah, Jeremiah 10:11. On the other hand, the New Testament's language was Koine Greek, a less formal Greek spoken among ordinary people. NOTE: It's interesting to note that

one reason the New Testament writers wrote in Greek was many of the Jews in the years after Jesus's death couldn't read Hebrew. Greek had become the official language when the apostles were writing and collecting the New Testament books. (There's a more extensive discussion to have about the loss of their national identity, but you can research that for yourself.)

It's interesting to note that one reason the New Testament writers wrote in Greek was many of the Jews in the years after Jesus's death couldn't read Hebrew.

Before we move on, let's look at the two major divisions of the Bible, with the label of "testament," the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Hebrew word "testament" means *an agreement, covenant, or contract*, while the Greek word means *covenant*.<sup>7</sup> The Old and New Testaments are God's covenant with His people, which requires a personal relationship.

**Grammatical Cue:** Always capitalize the words "Bible," "Old Testament," and "New Testament" in your writing. One of my pet peeves is when people fail to capitalize any of these words. Please hit the SHIFT button before you start to type each.

### **Why is the Bible Called the "Holy Bible?"**

Before we go any further, I want to address why the Bible is called the "Holy Bible." It may seem elementary in that it's just a name, right? However, just like every person's and city's name has meaning behind it, so does the Holy Bible. The word *Bible* comes from the Greek words "ta Biblia," which means *the books or scrolls*. "The word *biblos* itself is likely taken from an ancient seaport city named Byblos. Located in modern-day Lebanon, Byblos was a Phoenician port city known for its export and trade of



papyrus.”<sup>8</sup> Remember: The Ancient Egyptians were responsible for developing papyrus, the writing paper of that day, and it was used by the biblical writers to record the words gave them.<sup>9</sup>

In the fourth century, John Chrysostom was the first person to refer to the Old and New Testament together as “the books.”<sup>10</sup> During this time frame, the 66 books of our Bible began to be put together and arranged in the order we have them today. (We’ll talk about that more as we answer the next question in this chapter.) At some point during the Middle Ages, the Bible was referred to as the *Biblia Sacra* (Holy Bible in English). Then, “one of the earliest uses of ‘The Holy Bible’ appeared in 1611 on the cover of the Authorized Version, which is also known as the King James Version.”<sup>11</sup>

Now I gave you a brief history lesson because you need to know the origin Bible's name. However, I don’t want you to miss the importance of the word *Holy* in front of the word *Bible*. The biblical definition of *holy* or *holiness* is *purity or integrity of moral character; freedom from sin; sanctity*.<sup>12</sup> Since God is perfect and pure in every way, He is holy. Therefore, the words He spoke through human authors are all holy, as well, since He can only be holy. As a result, we have a collection of 66 sacred, holy books, *Biblia Sacra*, the Holy Bible.

## **How Were the Books of the Bible Recognized as Scriptures?**

Let’s move on to answer another important subject linked to our main question in this chapter: How did we get the Bible we have today? Obviously, the human authors wrote the various books, but the papyrus scrolls didn’t just miraculously fall from the sky into one document, giving us the Bible. (Although that would be a pretty cool story.) Remember: The writers all weren’t alive at the same time, so they couldn’t bring their work together to form one big book. So, how did we get the Bible as we know it? I’ll explain it to you by starting with the New Testament and work my way back to the Old Testament.

The starting point for finding the answer to this question begins with the word *canon*, which “comes from the root word *reed*, which was used as a measuring rod and came to mean ‘standard.’”<sup>13</sup> Dr. Timothy Jones noted “the Greeks cut these reeds into specific lengths and used them as measuring sticks. As a result, a *kanon* became a tool that set standards and measured limits, and the word *kanon* came to imply an infallible standard.”<sup>14</sup>

The early church fathers established a *canon*, aka a measuring rod, to help set the standard for what writings were considered Scripture. The three criteria for inclusion were:

- *First, the writing had to follow the rule of faith; that is, the book's Christian teachings had to be consistent in doctrine and instruction throughout the churches.* The author's message had to tell the truth about God, and their life had to demonstrate godly integrity.
- *Secondly, the written document underwent the apostolic test.* Apostolic meant that either an apostle (someone who had been with Jesus) confirmed it or someone in a close personal relationship or contact with one of the apostles validated it.
- *Thirdly, the writing went through an acceptance and application test.* The text had to be widely distributed and was still in use by the church at the time. Furthermore, the people of God had to receive it as the Word of God.<sup>15</sup>

If the writing examined failed to meet any of those minimum standards, the early church fathers didn't include it as Scripture. As a result, many books known as the Apocrypha got rejected from inclusion. Most of these books were written during the Intertestamental period, before the time of Jesus, and the fact that neither Jesus nor any apostle quoted from them leads me to conclude they didn't consider them to be Scripture. Those books are 1-2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Additions to Esther, the Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, the Letter of Jeremiah, the Prayer of Azariah,

Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, the Prayer of Manasseh, and 1-2 Maccabees. Other books written later known as the Apocryphal Gospels include the Gospel of Andrew, the Gospel of Bartholomew, the Gospel of Barnabas, and Memoirs of the Apostles.<sup>16</sup>

Should any of these books have been included in Scripture? 100% no! They didn't meet the minimum standards, and the 27 books we have in the New Testament did. Case closed. You can conduct further research on this if you'd like, but if the early church fathers didn't include them, we have no reason or authority to contradict them.

Let's work our way back to the Old Testament, which is more challenging because we don't have as much information about their process as we did with the New Testament. By the time Jesus was born, there were Scriptures recognized among the Jews as God's Word. Throughout His ministry, Jesus even quoted and referred to these as Scriptures. In one example in Matthew 5:18, He said, "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God's law will disappear until its purpose is achieved." God's Law He referred to is what we know as the Pentateuch (pen-tuh-tük); Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy.

Harold Wilmington provided a list of Old Testament Scriptures Jesus quoted, from The Law to the prophets. The first verse is the words of Jesus and the second is the Old Testament verse(s) He was quoting.

### **The Three Temptations of Jesus**

- The first temptation (Matthew 4:4, Deuteronomy 8:3)
- The second temptation (Matthew 4:7, Deuteronomy 6:16)
- The third temptation (Matthew 4:10, Deuteronomy 6:13)

### **The Sermon on the Mount**

- Matthew 5:21 He quoted Exodus 20:13, the sixth commandment
- Matthew 5:27 He quoted Exodus 20:14, the seventh commandment

**His Hometown Sermon** (Luke 4:18-19, Isaiah 61:1-2)

**Various Confrontations with Jewish and Religious Rulers**

- Defending His association with sinners (Matthew 9:13, Hosea 6:6)
- He explained on marriage (Mark 10:7-8, Genesis 2:24)
- Quoted greatest commandments (Mark 12:29-30, Deuteronomy 6:4-5)
- Rebuked their vain traditions (Matthew 15:7-9, Isaiah 29:13)
- Pharisees questioned His authority (John 8:17, Deuteronomy 17:6)

**His tribute to John the Baptist** (Luke 7:27, Malachi 3:1)

**His Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem** (Matthew 21:16, Psalm 8:2)

**His Cleansing of the Temple** (Luke 19:46, Isaiah 56:7)

**Parable of Israel** (Matthew 21:42 & 44, Psalm 118:22-23; Isaiah 8:14-15)

**Question session in the temple** (Mark 12:36, Psalm 110:1)

**His last Passover night** - (John 15:25, Psalm 35:19; 69:4)

**On the cross**

- His fourth utterance (Matthew 27:46, Psalm 22:1)
- His seventh utterance (Luke 23:46, Psalm 31:5)<sup>17</sup>

Now, we know less about the process of how they became known as Scripture, than we do the New Testament. However, in John 10:35, Jesus explicitly stated that “the Scriptures cannot be altered,” so Jesus recognized the validity of the Old Testament Scriptures, and if He did, then we must too. Even beyond Jesus’s references, there were approximately 300 Old Testament quotations written in the New Testament<sup>18</sup> and more than 1,000 indirect or partial quotations.<sup>19</sup> Jesus and the New Testament writers were undoubtedly concerned with making sure their listeners and readers viewed the Old Testament writings as Scripture.

So, what *do* we know about the Old Testament process? The process began with 2 Kings 22:8: “Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the court secretary, “I have found the Book of the Law in the Lord’s Temple!” Then Hilkiah gave the scroll to Shaphan, and he read it.” The Book of the Law, or the Pentateuch, was found, and King Josiah ordered a complete examination of the Law. We know 2 Kings was written after 561 BC since the last event recorded occurred then, but it had to be before 538 BC since there was no reference to Babylon's return in 538 BC.

Why is that important? Because the next time we see the Book of the Law mentioned is in Nehemiah 8:2: “So on October 8 Ezra the priest brought the Book of the Law before the assembly, which included the men and women and all the children old enough to understand.” Nehemiah was written between 445 BC and 430 BC, so at least 100 years had passed in the process. We know the *Septuagint*, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, was written between the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC. So, several hundred years passed in the process of canonization. There wasn’t one person who made a flippant decision to connect many books in one big book. God orchestrated a lengthy process to have His Words assimilated into the Scriptures.

## **How Did We Get the Bible We Have Today?**

The Holy Bible is made up of 66 books, 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. How did we get there? Here are the highlights of the history:

- The Muratorian Canon in 170 AD was the first canon that brought together 22 of the New Testament books. The books it omitted were Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, and 3 John.
- In AD 363, the Council of Laodicea determined that only the Old Testament books and 26 books of the New Testament were Scripture for reading in the churches. The leaders decided to include the Book of

Baruch in the Old Testament and excluded Revelation because it was an apocryphal book.

- Both the Council of Hippo (393 AD) and the Council of Carthage (397 AD) affirmed the 27 New Testament books as authoritative.
- St. Jerome compiled the first edition of the Bible, as we know it, around 400 AD. This document included all 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament written in the Latin language. This edition of the Bible is known as The Vulgate.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in Qumran, a small village about 20 miles east of Jerusalem, in 1947 was the most significant archaeological find in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The scrolls included fragments of all the Old Testament books, except Esther,<sup>20</sup> and they confirmed the authenticity of the Old Testament Scripture. The fact the scrolls were still in existence some 2,000 years later is a testimony of the lengths God went through to preserve His Word throughout history.

## **INTRODUCTION**

What an introduction! The Bible is God's message written for God's people to demonstrate God's covenant love in one Divine book. It isn't merely a textbook to be studied; it's a living, breathing document that can transform your life, as it points you to Jesus. Each of the 66 books has a Divine message that is still relevant for our world today. It's undergone a rigorously intense verification process over hundreds of years, and yet God's Word remains to speak to us in the 21st century. Now that you've met God's Word, let's get to know it fully!

### **Key Thoughts**

- The Bible is the inspired Word of God, made up of 66 books in the Old and New Testament, that approximately 40 men wrote over 1,500 years.

- While there were many human “authors,” in reality, there was only One Author, God.
- The word *Bible* comes from the Greek words “ta Biblia,” which means *the books or scrolls*.
- The early church fathers established a *canon*, aka a measuring rod, to help set the standard for what writings were considered Scripture.
- Jesus recognized the validity of the Old Testament Scriptures, and if He did, then we must too.

### **Key Terms to Remember**

- *Divine Inspiration* - God *influenced* the biblical writers to write the content they wrote.
- *Divine Revelation* - God reveals Himself to man as a God who is actively speaking in their lives.
- *General Revelation* - Refers to the ways God reveals Himself through Creation.
- *Special Revelation* - Occurred when God gave the writers the words to write concerning future events that would have been impossible for them to know otherwise.
- *Testament* - Means *an agreement, covenant, or contract*, while the Greek word means *covenant*.
- *Canon* - Comes from the root word *reed*, which was used as a measuring rod and came to mean “standard.”
- *Pentateuch* – The first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

# Chapter Two

## *What Tools Do I Need for Studying the Bible?*

The right tools make all the difference in getting the job done right. When I was in college, I decided to change the oil in my 1981 Ford Mustang (AKA the “uncool” Mustang years). After all, how hard could it be? All I had to do was unscrew the oil pan bolt, remove the oil filter, put in five quarts of oil, and put everything back in place. I had my trusty socket set, so I’d knock this out in no time, or so I thought. What was the problem? I was missing one tool: the oil filter wrench. Without going into too much detail, what should have taken me 15 minutes ended up taking me three frustratingly long hours. I cannot tell you how many different tools I used to attempt to remove my oil filter, but if it was in my toolbox, I used it. Hammer? Check. Screwdriver? Check. Pipe wrench? Check. Chisel? Check. Hand and arm strength? Check. I refused to admit that an oil filter was going to get the best of me. In the end, however, nothing worked until I broke down and went to the car parts store and bought the right tool. Then, the job was quick, easy, and done right.

**The right tools make all the difference  
in getting the job done right.**

As with anything else in life, the right tools will make your job much easier in biblical interpretation. So, before we begin interpreting the Scripture, I’m going to give you ten tools to help your work go quicker, easier, and be done right. When applicable, I’ll provide links to all the resources, so there’s no cost to you. However, if you’re a person who prefers to purchase a physical copy of books, I’ll give you the book titles and let you research the lowest cost for them. Are you ready? Let’s look at all the tools you’re going to need to properly discern, understand, and apply the Bible to your life.



## TOOL #1: PRAYER

Starting with prayer may sound like a Christian-cliché, but it's not: Any study of Scripture should begin with prayer because you need the Holy Spirit to lead you into all truth (John 16:13). Since your ultimate goal is to understand what God was saying through His Word, you should begin your study by acknowledging your dependence on God and asking for the Spirit's guidance. If you fail to use this first tool, the next nine will result in nothing more than an academic pursuit.

If you fail to use this first tool, the next nine will result in nothing more than an academic pursuit.

### What should you pray for before reading the Bible?

- **Ask God to help you focus as you study.** One of the quickest ways to miss what God wants to say to you through His Word is to allow distractions to cause your attention to shift from the Bible to social media or texts. Schedule a specific time where you will turn off your notifications and “be present” as you study God's Word.
- **Ask God to open your eyes and mind to understand His Word (knowledge).** I can't tell you how many times this has happened to me. As I've started studying a passage I've read a hundred times, something “clicks,” and I “get it.” God opened my eyes. Paul prayed this would happen to the Ephesians in Ephesians 1:18: “I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance.” The Greek word for “flooded with light” is *photizo* (fo-tid'-zo), which means *to shine or brighten up*.<sup>21</sup>
- **Ask God to give you spiritual wisdom.** In Ephesians 1:17, Paul asks God to give the Ephesians “spiritual wisdom.” The Greek word for wisdom is “sophias,” and it means *an intelligence or skill set*.<sup>22</sup>

However, Paul's use of the word "spiritual" in front of it added a Divine dimension, God's wisdom. How do we receive God's wisdom as opposed to man's wisdom? Solomon wrote in Proverbs 9:10 that "fear of the Lord is the foundation of wisdom." To fear God in the respect, you need to be in awe of His Word He gave to you. As you pray this prayer, ask God to give you His wisdom to go beyond understanding into a life application. Remember: You're created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), so God *wants* to reveal Himself to you in this way.

Biblical interpretation **MUST** begin with prayer to accomplish God's purpose and will.

## **TOOL #2: BIBLE**

Secondly, the most obvious tool you're going to need is the Bible. You probably already have one, but it's good to use numerous translations when you're studying Scripture. The least expensive way to access every Bible translation is through Bible Gateway. <https://www.biblegateway.com/>.

One of the most frequent questions I get related to Bible translations is, "What Bible translation should I read?" As you can see from the notes at the front of this book, I'm using the New Living Translation. I've chosen this translation because it's written in contemporary English and it's easy to understand. **BIG WORDS ALERT:** Some people don't prefer it because it uses what is known as *dynamic equivalence* instead of *formal equivalence*.

*Dynamic equivalence* "is a method of Bible translation that seeks to reproduce the original text of Scripture using modern language and expression to communicate the message of the Bible."<sup>23</sup> It uses thought-for-thought translation methods. On the other hand, *formal equivalence* translations "tend to focus on translating the meaning of sentences and phrases – they tend to put less emphasis on word-for-word accuracy and

retaining grammar and syntax, and more emphasis on presenting the meaning of phrases and sentences.”<sup>24</sup>

Two other translation methods are *optimal equivalence* and *paraphrase*. *Optimal equivalence* “seeks to achieve an optimal balance of linguistic precision reflecting the original languages with readability in contemporary English.”<sup>25</sup> *Paraphrased* versions are loose versions that offer easy readability and contemporary language but lack the accuracy of word-for-word translations and sometimes even add thoughts beyond a thought-for-thought translation.

### **Here are examples of Bible versions by translation methods:**

- *Formal Equivalence*: The New King James Version (NKJV), the New American Standard Bible (NASB), and the English Standard Version (ESV)
- *Dynamic Equivalence*: The New International Version (NIV), the Contemporary English Version (CEV), and the Good News Translation (GNT)
- *Optimal Equivalence*: The Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB); the NET Bible; and God’s Word.
- *Paraphrase*: The Message (TM), The Living Bible (TLB)

### **Two Rules for Choosing a Bible Translation**

#### **Rule #1: Readability**

I grew up reading the King James Bible, but I always struggled with the “thee’s” and “thou’s,” and much of the language reflects 1611 more than the 21st century. I’m not knocking it as a translation because some people prefer it. If that’s your choice, then that’s great if you’re reading the Bible! However, if you can’t understand what you’re reading, you’re going to struggle in your study. If you’re a teacher, you also need to consider the

audience you're going to speak to and choose a readable translation for them.

## **Rule #2: Reliability**

How can you determine if a Bible translation is reliable? I would suggest you begin by conducting a Google search of the Bible translation to see what reputable websites or authors say about them. You have to be careful here because many liberal "scholars" have a hidden agenda of changing Scripture's meaning. Their education goes beyond their knowledge.

**One Version I Wouldn't Use:** One version I 100% wouldn't use is the Revised Standard Version because it's beyond liberal in its scholarship and it impacts the Truth of God's Word. I could give you many examples, but Isaiah 7:14 sums it all up:

14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Imman'u-el.

What's the big deal? Well, most translations read "a virgin," as opposed to "a young woman." When you remove the word "virgin," you change the entire meaning of the prophetic passage. Young girls had babies often back in that day, that wasn't uncommon. If Jesus wasn't born of a virgin, then His birth is no different than anyone that ever lived. The fact HE WAS born of a virgin sets Him apart as God incarnate (in the flesh).

Remember, as Mark Strauss, the New Testament professor at Bethel Seminary, said, "Translation is not about replacing words, it's about reproducing meaning."<sup>26</sup> Bible scholars are flawed human beings, like every person who's ever lived, other than Jesus. Just because a book has the title of a Bible doesn't mean that it is accurate. Choose a Bible translation that's easy to read, appropriate to your purpose, and accurate in meaning.

## **TOOL #3: STUDY BIBLE**

A Study Bible is an excellent resource because it includes book introductions, footnotes, maps, and more within the text to clarify the meanings of words, offers cultural background information, and communicates ideas within the passage. Since the notes are on the same page as the Scriptures, they're much more brief and focused than a commentary. It's a valuable most-in-one resource to have when you don't have access to other tools.

I use the Faithlife Study Bible from Logos Bible Software, which is an outstanding free resource. Google "Faithlife Study Bible," and you will be redirected to Logos.com to set up an account if you don't already have one. (You can also go to <https://www.logos.com/product/36338/faithlife-study-bible>.) Once you register, you can also download their free app study Bible in the Apple and Google Play stores. It has over 10,000 downloads and a 4.8 rating out of 5 stars. It's a tremendous mobile study Bible, and you can also get access to many tools, which we will also discuss.

**IMPORTANT:** You have to be careful that you don't spend more time reading and studying the notes than you do reading God's Word.

Several other study Bibles I recommend are:

- NIV Study Bible, Fully Revised Edition.
- NASB New Inductive Study Bible.
- Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible (NIV, NKJV, and NRSV).

## **TOOL #4: BIBLE DICTIONARY**

A Bible dictionary is one of the most necessary and practical tools when interpreting Scripture because it will help you discover the meaning of a biblical word in a passage you're studying. The content is arranged in short articles in alphabetical order, much like an encyclopedia, and is beneficial

for investigating the biblical passage's historical background and cultural context.

One of the big mistakes people make in biblical interpretation is defining biblical words using a 21st-century dictionary. I can't tell you how many times I've heard a pastor make the statement, "According to *Webster's Dictionary*, this word means," and they share the meaning. All the while, I'm sitting in my seat saying in my mind, "No! No! No! You don't define biblical words with Webster's."

Think about it: The meaning of words has changed since the advent of the internet. For instance, a cloud previously was only the white and grey puffy-looking formations in the sky, but now a cloud is where you store electronic documents. I remember when a troll was an ugly doll bought for kids at Christmas, but now it's a crazy person who spends their life angering people on the internet. Call me old, but I remember when a catfish was a whiskered fish that swam near the bottom of a lake, but now it's a person with a fake identity who seduces a person online and convinces them to be their boyfriend or girlfriend.

Think about how those words have drastically changed over the past 30 years. How much do you think they would have changed in 2,000 years, or even just since the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible was printed in 1611? Words like bowels, careful, and charity have drastically different meanings than in our society, and I could give you a much longer list. Understand: It's essential to have a Bible dictionary to discover the true meaning of biblical words.

Some of the most popular and trusted Bible dictionaries include *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, *Easton's Bible Dictionary*, and *Smith's Bible Dictionary*. Each one of these dictionaries can be found online:

- *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*  
<https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/>
- *Easton's Bible Dictionary*  
<https://www.studylight.org/dictionaries/eng/ebd/a.html>
- *Smith's Bible Dictionary*  
<https://www.studylight.org/dictionaries/eng/sbd/e/ephesians-the-epistle-to-the.html>

## TOOL #5: BIBLE ENCYCLOPEDIA

Bible encyclopedias and Bible dictionaries are similar, but encyclopedias have much more in-depth content. Think about it in terms of reading about a topic in Webster's Dictionary versus reading it in Encyclopedia Britannica. The dictionary will have brief entries for quick reference, whereas encyclopedias have longer articles that go into detail, addressing people, places, events, and more. Similarly, Bible encyclopedias typically go far beyond dictionaries, giving valuable historical and cultural information, including dates, environment, family life, customs, language, and literature.<sup>27</sup>

Three of the most widely-recognized and respected Bible encyclopedias include *Baker's Encyclopedia of the Bible*, the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, and the *Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Baker's and Zondervan are for sale only, but here are three options with free links:

- *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*  
<https://www.studylight.org/encyclopedias/eng/isb.html>
- *Bible Tab Encyclopedia*  
<https://biblehub.com/encyclopedia/>
- *Web Bible Encyclopedia*  
<https://christiananswers.net/dictionary/home.html>

## TOOL #6: MANNERS AND CUSTOMS

Understanding the manners and customs of Bible times is crucial for knowing the audience, recognizing cultural issues within a text, and ensure we don't apply our 21st-century mindset to an ancient Hebrew world. How different were the manners and customs of Bible times different than ours? Does it really matter whether or not we understand their culture?

Let's look at those answers through the lens of location and time. My family moved from California to Mississippi in the 1970s. Both of these states were part of the United States, but they were drastically different in manners and customs. They both spoke English, but words often had far different meanings. (Actually, I'm not sure some of my friends in Mississippi spoke English.) Houses were different, the food was different, the way people dressed was different, their politics were different, and their activities differed. Now, fast-forward to our current day. Both California and Mississippi are *drastically* different than they were in the 1970s. What has changed? Language, houses, food, dress, politics, and people's activities are far different now than they were less than 50 years ago. Think about the extreme changes that have occurred in that short time frame and then multiply that 40 times; 40 times 50 equals 2,000 years, and that number only to get back to when Jesus lived.

Let's consider one biblical example from Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 14:34: "Women should be silent during the church meetings. It is not proper for them to speak. They should be submissive, just as the law says." If we look at this at face value, the message is clear: Women shouldn't talk at church. However, as you study the manners and customs of the time, you discover that men would typically sit in a different location than the women during the service. If they didn't understand something said, they would ask the question out loud during the meeting. So, Paul said they need to wait until they get home to ask the questions because it disrupted the meetings.



They weren't sitting next to each other and whispering questions as we do in church now—manners and custom matter for understanding.

*Manners and Customs of the Bible* by James Freeman is an excellent paid book on this topic. Additionally, here are three free tools that will help you better understand the manners and customs of Bible times.

- *Manners and Customs of the Bible* by James Freeman  
<https://bibletruthpublishers.com/manners-and-customs-of-the-bible/lbd23559>
- *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands*  
<https://rb.gy/goi8lg>
- *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands* by Fred H. Wight  
<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/OTStudies/MannersandCustomsInBibleLands1953.aspx>

## **TOOL #7: CONCORDANCE**

A concordance is a useful tool for cross-referencing words and uncovering their specific meaning in the original Hebrew or Greek. An exhaustive concordance, including *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* (which I highly recommend), lists each word alphabetically and notes each occurrence throughout the Bible. If you want to do a word study, a concordance is a great place to start to see the use of the word.

### **Here's how you use a concordance:**

- Look up the specific word you want to study.
- Read each verse linked to it.
- Note the number by the word, so you can look it up in a Hebrew or Greek dictionary.

**Two free tools I recommend you use are:**

- Strong's Exhaustive Concordance  
<https://www.biblestudytools.com/concordances/strongs-exhaustive-concordance/>
- Nave's Topical Bible  
<https://www.biblestudytools.com/concordances/naves-topical-bible/>

## **TOOL #8: BIBLE MAPS**

Have you ever read the name of a city in the Bible and wondered where it was? Is it even important to know? Geography is a lost study in our world today, thanks to Google Maps and Siri just telling us where to go. When we first got married and wanted to go somewhere, we had to pull out our Rand McNally Road Atlas. I like to joke that we used to have to EARN where we were going because the states were on different pages, and states like Texas were on three different pages. However, there was great value in using the map or atlas because it familiarized us with other cities nearby we didn't know before.

Bible maps are vital because they will develop your understanding of biblical towns and locations, allowing you to see the distances and relationships between journeys. One example that shows the importance of using Bible maps is Paul's three missionary journeys that were each very different. If we apply our context of going on a mission trip, we hop on a plane until we reach our destination. Instead, Paul traveled on foot or by animal, and he faced some rugged terrain. When Paul referenced that he had "been kept" from traveling to Asia in Acts 16:6, in tracing his journey on a map, you'll see how the mountains and the time of the year impacted his trip. Maps will allow you to trace Jesus' life and ministry and understand his movements and how close His enemies were in proximity.

The *Holman Bible Atlas* and *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible* are excellent paid resources. However, StudyLight.org offers a variety of free Bible maps that correspond with every biblical era at:

<https://www.studylight.org/pastoral-resources/bible-maps-archive.html>.

## **TOOL #9: COMMENTARY**

A Bible commentary is a systematic interpretation of Scripture written by a specific author or authors. The author(s) goes verse-by-verse or passage-by-passage and explains their analysis and thoughts regarding the text. Often, they will also address the Bible and each book as a whole.

Think of a commentary as being like a running blog post a person writes about each verse of the Bible. A blog, like a commentary, is more conversational in style and has the purpose to inform the reader regarding a given topic. The blogger gives insight into a topic and expands on it, with the hope of giving the reader valuable information. The blog isn't necessarily the best resource for learning, but it can be helpful.

Similarly, a commentary isn't the end-all-beat-all tool for biblical interpretation. However, I like to use commentaries because they allow me to see what other people of God have to say regarding a book or passage. I view it as a small resource. Now the danger of commentaries is that when you find a person you agree with, it's easy to stop studying the Scripture for yourself. Reminder: There's not a person alive who's perfect, so be careful that you don't take the word of one commentator as "the gospel."

### **Two free commentaries I recommend are:**

- *The Enduring Word Bible Commentary by David Guzik*  
<https://enduringword.com/>
- *Matthew Henry Concise Commentary on the Bible*  
<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-concise/>

## **TOOL #10: LEXICONS**

A lexicon is a dictionary of foreign languages. For the purpose of biblical interpretation, you will use a Hebrew and Greek Lexicon to further research any Bible word by either typing in the specific word or Strong's Concordance number. A good lexicon will help confirm the findings of your word studies.

- *Old Testament Hebrew Lexical Dictionary*  
<https://www.studylight.org/lexicons/eng/hebrew.html>
- *Old & New Testament Greek Lexical Dictionary*  
<https://www.studylight.org/lexicons/eng/greek.html>.

## PREPARATION

Preparation is rarely fun, but it's always necessary. Chapter two has been all about equipping you with every tool and resource you need to begin your biblical interpretation journey. If you work at this craft, you will use every one of these tools and more. What the best part? They're free, so you have NO EXCUSES!

### Key Thoughts

- Any study of Scripture should begin with prayer because you need the Holy Spirit to lead you into all truth (John 16:13).
- It's good to use numerous translations when you're studying Scripture.
- A Study Bible includes book introductions, footnotes, maps, and more within the text to clarify the meanings of words, offers cultural background information, and communicates ideas within the passage.
- A Bible dictionary will help you discover the meaning of a biblical word in a passage you're studying.
- Bible encyclopedias and Bible dictionaries are similar, but encyclopedias have much more in-depth content.
- Understanding the manners and customs of Bible times is crucial for knowing the audience, recognizing cultural issues within a text, and

ensure we don't apply our 21st-century mindset to an ancient Hebrew world.

- A concordance is a useful tool for cross-referencing words and uncovering their specific meaning in the original Hebrew or Greek.
- Bible maps are vital because they will develop your understanding of biblical towns and locations, allowing you to see the distances and relationships between journeys.
- A Bible commentary is a systematic interpretation of Scripture written by a specific author or authors.
- A lexicon is a dictionary of foreign languages.

### **Key Terms to Remember**

- *Dynamic equivalence* uses thought-for-thought translation methods.
- *Formal equivalence* translations tend to focus on translating the meaning of sentences and phrases.
- *Optimal equivalence* seeks to achieve a balance of linguistic precision and readability in contemporary English.
- *Paraphrased* versions offer easy readability and contemporary language, but lack the accuracy and sometimes add thoughts.

**Now, let's JUST DO IT!**

# Chapter Three

## Acclimation: Adjust to the Biblical Climate

The first of the *Three A's of Biblical Interpretation* is Acclimation. Acclimation is a *physiological adjustment by an organism to environmental change*.<sup>28</sup> Mountain climbers understand the importance of acclimation because the air pressure decreases in higher altitudes. As a result, the oxygen partial pressure declines, as well.<sup>29</sup> What does this mean? If you don't get acclimated, you're guaranteed to get altitude sickness, which can make you very sick or kill you.

You don't suddenly wake up one morning and decide that you want to climb the 29,032-foot-high Mount Everest. A lot of training and preparation must occur before you even show up to the base of the mountain, including strength training, cardiovascular training, and flexibility training. You need to buy the proper clothes and boots that can withstand the cold. Remember: Even if you hire a Sherpa to carry your gear as you climb, beginning your ascent up the 5.4984-mile-high mountain will be unlike anything you've ever done.

You don't suddenly wake up one morning  
and decide that you want to climb  
the 29,032-foot-high Mount Everest.

Now, I'm a marathon runner, and I can run 5.4894 miles in about 45 minutes. (I didn't say I was world-class.) How difficult can it be to climb that high? How long does it take? One day? Three days? A week? According to the British Mountaineering Council, the average summit takes two months.<sup>30</sup> The race to the summit is one step at a time. In 2017, 381 permits were issued to climb,<sup>31</sup> but only eleven people reached the summit,

while six died trying.<sup>32</sup> Mountain climbing requires a higher level of commitment in every stage to succeed.

Mountain climbing and biblical interpretation are similar on several fronts. First, a mountain climber would never begin their first ascent by climbing Mount Everest. They would start with a smaller hill or a much less strenuous mountain. Just as in mountain climbing, you can't wake up one day and become a biblical scholar on the Book of Revelation. Sure, anyone can open a Bible, read it, and have thoughts about what it says, but that doesn't mean their conclusions will be correct. I've said for years: A little biblical knowledge can be a dangerous thing! When people start making statements like, "Well, this is what this passage means to me," I get nervous because it's usually followed up by them missing the point altogether. Biblical interpretation isn't for lazy people, but know you have to start somewhere.

## A little biblical knowledge can be a dangerous thing!

Secondly, mountain climbing and biblical interpretation both require acclimation. There are hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people who have climbed mountains and may even call themselves a "mountain climber." However, only 381 attempted to climb the pinnacle of mountain climbing. Similarly, there are millions of people all over the world who have read the Bible and may call themselves a believer. However, when it comes down to it, many are not willing to put in the work it takes to make it up the "mountain." In complete transparency, my life would be a lot easier if I weren't writing this book. I teach these principles in seminars all over the world. Yet, I'm willing to put in the work because I want to help you succeed in your climb. In a sense, I'm your biblical Sherpa.

Thirdly, the process of acclimation is about taking small steps forward. If you tried to run up the mountain all at once, you'll lose your breath and

either quit soon or die. Likewise, don't try to interpret the entire Bible in a day, week, month, or even year. Take one baby step forward every day. I've seen too many excited people who come to faith in Christ, and they try to make up for years of neglect by reading the Bible all at once. If you try to do everything at once, you're going to burnout. However, with every small step forward, you'll be closer to achieving your goal.

**Side Note:** Altitude sickness is a real thing! My wife, Becky, and I went skiing in Colorado in 2016 at Arapahoe Basin and she got extremely sick from altitude sickness at only 13,050ft!

There's a real need for acclimation in mountain climbing and biblical interpretation. As such, for the remainder of this chapter, I'm going to give you three acclimation steps to prepare you to ascend the mountain, and I'll follow that up in chapter four by showing you how to put into practice what you have learned.

## **Acclimation Step #1: Determining Your Destination**

If you want to study the Bible, then your first destination must be the Bible. Sounds obvious, right? It should be, but it's not always. Ask yourself: When was the last time someone first recommended that you read the Bible when you wanted to know more about the Bible? Typically, our default button is to recommend the latest popular book or reference guide, and there's nothing wrong with those. In fact, this book IS one of *those* books.

**IMPORTANT:** As you seek to interpret Scripture, understand there are many great books *about* the Bible and resources to help you understand it, but the best way to study the Bible is by intentionally opening it up to encounter God through His Word. Make your first love The Book, not books about The Book. *Biblical Interpretation Made Easy* is a book designed to help you understand and love the Bible more, but you must focus your main affection on The Bible!



## Make your first love The Book, not books about The Book.

Now, before you can discern what any verse or passage means, you need first to understand the main message of the Bible. I remember taking a hermeneutics class in college and the textbook stated that the Bible's main message was "the people of God." I was just a young college student who didn't have a lot of knowledge, but that didn't "feel" right to me. It seemed to unrightfully elevate humanity to a level we don't deserve. That couldn't be the answer.

I've also read numerous theologians who believe the Bible's central message is Jesus Christ, God's Son and the Savior of the world. Who can argue with that suggestion? It seems overtly obvious that everything throughout Scripture points to Jesus, so if you see every verse and passage through that lens, you cannot fail! There is undoubtedly merit for this position.

However, as you advance this idea and read His words, it's apparent Jesus had a singular message: The Kingdom of God. Think about Jesus' response when His disciples asked Him to teach them to pray in Matthew 6:9-13. Part of His prayer in Matthew 6:10 was "your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Then, in Matthew 6:33, Jesus told them to, "Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need."

The Gospel writers recorded Jesus using the phrase "Kingdom of God" 59 times, with Luke referencing it 32 times.<sup>33</sup> If Jesus, who was the Word of God (John 1:1), focused His message on the Kingdom of God, this MUST be the main message of the Bible.

**IMPORTANT:** The perfect revelation of the Kingdom of God was Jesus, God's Son, coming to earth to redeem humanity. "God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church (Ephesians 1:22)."

**What is the Kingdom of God?** There are three dimensions to the Kingdom of God. First, God rules over all things because He created all things (Genesis 1:1, Colossians 1:16). Psalm 103:19 states, "The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all." (Side note: The Jews wouldn't write out the name Jehovah because they had such fear of God. Instead, they used Lord in the Old Testament. This reference was Jesus, but God.) Therefore, the Kingdom of God reigns Supreme over the Word of God.

Secondly, the kingdom of God is a spiritual rule over the lives of individuals who willingly invite it in and submit to God's authority. When you asked Jesus to forgive you of your sins, the Kingdom of God came within and among you (Luke 17:21). Though He is a King who has all authority and could demand His subjects do what He wants, He allows all people to choose whether they will accept or reject His rule. As such, the Kingdom of God reigns over and in you as you study the Bible.

Finally, the Kingdom of God refers to the coming Millennial reign of Christ on the earth following the rapture and tribulation (Revelation 20). Several of the Old Testament prophets proclaimed this, including Daniel (Daniel 2:44), Obadiah (1:21), Habakkuk (Habakkuk 2:14), Micah (Micah 4:2), and Zechariah (Zechariah 14:9). The physical and literal reign of Christ on earth will serve as a confirmation of His Word.

**Why is understanding the Kingdom of God necessary for biblical interpretation?** The way you approach the Scriptures will color your conclusions. Remember: The same God who created the heavens and the earth is the same God who has established His Word that will remain forever

(1 Peter 1:25). As you're studying through every verse and passage in the Bible, the foundational truth God reigns over every individual, nation, circumstance, and outcome. God is victorious every time! He's watching over His Word to carry out His plans (Jeremiah 1:12).

## The way you approach the Scriptures will color your conclusions.

**SIDE NOTE:** Depending on the translation you read, Matthew uses the phrase “Kingdom of heaven” instead of the Kingdom of God. Be aware theologians believe these are the same concept.

### **Acclimation Step #2: Measuring Your Motivation**

Motivation plays a critical role in acclimation, as it does in everything we do in life. Many people will never get in excellent physical condition because they don't want to get out of bed an hour earlier each day. It may seem like it's more comfortable to do nothing, but eventually, your body will pay for your decisions down the road. I exercise 5-6 times per week, and I don't always feel like working out, but I do it anyway because I know there are present and future health benefits. Being healthy and looking my best is my motivation when I don't want to exercise.

Go back to our mountain climber example: For the mountain climber who desires to reach the summit, motivation drives them at every stage of the process. Knowing the lack of oxygen will present a significant challenge, they put their bodies through rigorous cardiovascular training. Knowing the need for lower body strength, they do squats when no one is looking. They eat proper foods and drink the right liquids to help them recover. What is their motivation? They want to ascend to the top of the mountain, but they must be able to descend, as well. Did you know: Three-quarters of all falls of climbers occur when people are coming down a mountain?<sup>34</sup>

What is your motivation for studying the Bible? When you open the pages, what is the outcome you're hoping to see? People have shared many reasons with me as to why they study the Bible, and here's a list of the seven types of people and their responses I've heard:

- **Motivational Reason #1 – The Habitual:** The Habitual study the Bible because they believe the principles in God's Word will help them a become better person. Ultimately, developing habits that translate into moral living is the end goal of their learning. They use the Bible to formulate a set of principles for living.
- **Motivational Reason #2 – The Hearers:** The Hearers study the Bible to find answers to some of life's most challenging questions. They *hear* it but don't necessarily *do* what it says.
- **Motivational Reason #3 – The Historians:** The Historians the Bible as a best-selling history book to be studied. They seek insights from ancient civilizations and customs to support their understanding of the world, but they're too educated to allow it to affect them. They're too smart for such nonsense.
- **Motivational Reason #4 – The “Have To’s”:** The “Have To’s” are students who are “forced” to read the Bible for a class or kids whose parents make them. Isn't that awful? Well, that's what they think anyway. Unfortunately, they may read and study the Bible because they have to “check a box” to get a grade. (Some of you may be reading this text for your course right now, so I want to encourage you to do more with this book than to “just get through it.” I promise you'll be glad later in life if you value God's Word now.)
- **Motivational Reason #5 – The Haters:** On the opposite end of the spectrum, The Haters study the Bible because they want to “hate on it” and disprove what it says. They will hang on to every little word that could be a potential inaccuracy or inconsistency, and if they see

anything that may remotely look out of place, they'll declare their findings to the world.

- **Motivational Reason #6 – The Holier:** The Holier study the Bible because they believe they are more spiritual than you are, so they ingest the Word for the sake of appearance. You can count on them to know more than you about every biblical topic, and they aren't afraid to let you know it. Not only can they give you the chapter and verse, but they can also tell you the Hebrew or Greek tense of each word off the top of their head. They're quite impressive to themselves.
- **Motivational Reason #7 – The Hungry:** The Hungry are the people who study the Bible because they want to know God more each day! They understand the need for wisdom and knowledge but know that encountering God through His Word is the only way to arrive at such a place. The main goal of their study is to become like Jesus, as God transforms them from the inside-out. They take a balanced approach to biblical interpretation, desiring to learn from the Old Testament and New Testament.

As you look at the list of motivational reasons for studying the Bible, which one applies to you? Be honest. If you don't have the right motivation, stop now and ask the Holy Spirit to redirect your thoughts and attitudes. Just like the mountain climber uses their motivation to wake up early to train daily with the view of reaching the summit, your motivation and training will impact your altitude, so zero in on why you want to climb.

Don't just go to God's Word when you *need* something; go because you want to know God and become more like Jesus. Connect every dot to Jesus.

### **Acclimation Step #3: Selecting the Scriptures**

When I was a kid, I can still remember the Bible Promise Book my mom had sitting just above our sink. For those of you who aren't familiar with what one of these is, it's a small wooden box with approximately 200 Bible

verses in it printed on multi-colored rectangular pieces of heavy cardstock paper. The idea was that every time you'd go to the sink, you'd pull a Bible verse out and read it. It's always good to read the Bible, but it can become dangerous when you take a single verse from a passage and don't know what everything around it says.

The concept is very similar to what I refer to as "Bible roulette," where a person is seeking a "word" from God, and so they open up their Bible and point their finger to the first verse they see as if that is God's word for the day. Can you see a potential problem at all with this "method?" What if you opened it up to Matthew 27:5 and read, "Then Judas threw the silver coins down in the Temple and went out and hanged himself." Well, that can't be what God is saying, so let me look for another verse. How about Luke 10:37, "Then Jesus said, "Yes, now go and do the same." Is God saying you should hang yourself like Judas?

Look, I know that's an extreme example, but there are a number of Bible verses that get taken out of context on a regular basis because people pick and choose a single verse and choose it as a life verse. Here are six examples of verses that often get misused by the Bible reader:

- **Philippians 4:13** – For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.
- **Jeremiah 29:11** – For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope."
- **Matthew 7:1** – "Do not judge others, and you will not be judged.
- **Matthew 18:18** – "I tell you the truth, whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.
- **Matthew 18:20** – For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them."

- **Leviticus 19:28** – Do not mark your skin with tattoos. I am the Lord.

You'll notice that Acclimation Step #3 uses the plural form of the word "Scriptures." Why? Don't miss this important point: Any time you study the Bible, you should *select a passage*, rather than a single verse to make sure that verse remains in context.

Any time you study the Bible, you should *select a passage*, rather than a single verse to make sure that verse remains in context.

### **What is context and why is it important?**

*Context* means that *the message of a verse or passage first meant something to the original audience before it can, or does, mean anything to us*. Dr. D.A. Carson said his father taught him that "a text out of context becomes a pretext for a proof-text."<sup>35</sup> Let me break that down for you. Oxford Languages explains that a pretext is "a reason given in justification of a course of action that is not the real reason."<sup>36</sup> A proof-text is a verse someone uses to prove a point they are trying to make. Therefore, if you remove the original meaning from a verse, you twist the Scriptures to fit your personal agenda.

This truth may shock you, but every Bible verse and passage only has one meaning. However, it can have more than one application. We will examine this point in further detail later in the book, and I'll give you examples of how to find the singular meaning and make proper applications.

Every Bible verse and passage only has one meaning. However, it can have more than one application.

## **What is a Passage and How Do I Choose One?**

Before I address how to choose a passage, I want to make sure you understand how to find what a passage is, including where it begins and ends. As an example, open your Bible to Matthew 5. There are 48 verses in this chapter, broken down into nine passages that have bolded titles before the first verse in the passage begins. For example, Matthew 5:3-12 is a passage titled “The Beatitudes” in my Bible. (Each Bible may have slightly different passage titles.) The second passage is Matthew 5:13-16, “Teaching About Salt and Light.” I could go on, but you get the picture. Bolded titles will divide each passage.

Now that’s been established, how do you choose a passage? Daily Bible reading has been a part of my life for over three decades. At first, I didn’t really have a strategy or plan for choosing a Scripture. I’d open up the Bible and start reading. However, in the last several years, I’ve had an epiphany of sorts. I realized that there are two ways I’ve ended up studying Scripture: 1) Passages I choose and 2) Passages that choose me.

### **Ways I Choose a Passage**

- The Holy Spirit puts something on my mind in prayer.
- There’s a topic that interests me, like miracles or forgiveness.
- I have a specific need to be addressed in my life.
- I just open the Bible and read to know God more and God will speak to me through His Word.
- I have a question I need an answer to from God’s Word.

### **Ways Passages That Choose Me**

- The passage from a pastor’s sermon causes me to think about what He said. (You’re not checking up on the pastor to correct him, but you want to always be sure you’re being taught the truth.)



- My daily devotional reading dictates what I'll be reading because I systematically read the entire Bible through each year.
- I have a specific assignment to accomplish that requires I'm prepared to teach others.

**SIDE NOTE FOR NEW CHRISTIANS:** If you're a new Christian and want to start studying the Bible, I suggest you start in the Book of John first (or any other Gospel – Matthew, Mark, or Luke), so you can learn about Jesus. If you want to read in the Old Testament, the best place to start is in the Book of Genesis.

## **ACCLIMATION**

Acclimation is critical for biblical interpretation because it provides the foundation for all other activities that will take place. Look, I understand that you're ready to start the process **RIGHT NOW**, and we will in Chapter Four, but the acclimation steps each deal with heart issues. It's crucial to align your heart with God's Word, so the outcome of what you study will be Christ-like character and God-honoring decisions.

With that in mind, let's put each one of these principles into practice!

### **Key Thoughts**

- **Acclimation Step #1** is Determining Your Destination.
- **Acclimation Step #2** is Measuring your Motivation.
- **Acclimation Step #3** is Selecting the Scriptures.
- As you seek to interpret Scripture, understand there are many great books *about* the Bible and resources to help you understand it, but the best way to study the Bible is by intentionally opening it up to encounter God through His Word.
- Jesus had a singular message: The Kingdom of God.

- **The Habitual** study the Bible because they believe the principles in God's Word will help them become a better person.
- **The Hearers** study the Bible to find answers to some of life's most challenging questions.
- **The Historians** study the Bible as a best-selling history book to be studied.
- **The "Have To's"** are students who are "forced" to read the Bible for a class or kids whose parents make them.
- **The Haters** study the Bible because they want to "hate on it" and disprove what it says.
- **The Holier** study the Bible because they believe they are more spiritual than you are, so they ingest the Word for the sake of appearance.
- **The Hungry** are the people who study the Bible because they want to know God more each day!
- Every Bible verse and passage only has one meaning. However, it can have more than one application.

## Key Terms

- *Acclimation* is a physiological adjustment by an organism to environmental change.
- *Context* means that the message of a verse or passage first meant something to the original audience before it can, or does, mean anything to us.
- A *pretext* is "a reason given in justification of a course of action that is not the real reason."
- A *proof-text* is a verse someone uses to prove a point they are trying to make.

# Chapter Four

## Acclimation: Putting it into Practice

One of the biggest mistakes people make initially in biblical interpretation is bringing our personal bias to a passage before reading it. We make assumptions about the Scriptures because we've heard them taught in our churches or heard "biblical phrases" thrown around in conversation for years. For example, we all know that Mary rode on a donkey to Bethlehem before Jesus was born in the Gospels, right? Well, it would seem to make sense that she did, but there's not a Bible verse that tells us she did. Has someone ever quoted the "Bible verse" to you: "Spare the rod and spoil the child?" It sounds like Proverbs 13:24, but it's not. A 17th-century poet, Samuel Butler, actually wrote those words.<sup>37</sup> (I could go on and give you, literally, hundreds of other examples, but you get the picture.)

**One of the biggest mistakes people make initially in biblical interpretation is bringing our personal bias to a passage before reading it.**

If you're going to interpret the Bible correctly, you have to lay aside what you "think you know" about the passage and allow it to speak for itself. The end goal here is to answer the question: What does the passage say?

For now, we're not going to concern ourselves with reading what other people have written in commentaries or with notes in a Study Bible about the passage. Just as God spoke to other people, He can speak to you through His Word! We've Determined our Destination, and we're going to the Scriptures. At this point, you need to read, listen, hear, and discern the message from the Scriptures. Clear your mind of all your preconceived notions and start fresh. The Bible is going to speak to you.

The first rule of biblical interpretation is that we must interpret the Bible literally. *Literal interpretation* emphasizes that a biblical text is interpreted according to the “plain meaning” conveyed by its grammatical and historical context.<sup>38</sup> Rather than seeking some deep Scriptural point God is trying to make, accept His Word as it is written. For instance, when Matthew 1 and Luke 1 write that Mary was a virgin, I’m not looking for the hidden spiritual meaning. Their words were a confirmation of Isaiah’s words in Isaiah 7:14. The conclusion is plain and straightforward: Mary was a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus.

Let me show you how I practice biblical interpretation at this stage, permitting the text speak to me through *literal interpretation*.

### **What Does the Passage Say?**

#### **PRACTICE #1: SELECTING THE SCRIPTURES.**

I’ve chosen Ephesians 1:15-23, and we will use this passage throughout the book to illustrate each point. Here’s how I selected this passage:

- I’m interested in biblical prayers because I like to pray the Scriptures, as well as learn patterns for my personal prayer life.
- I decided to search for prayers by the Apostle Paul because he was a church leader who often prayed for his people. As a church leader and Bible college president, I want to identify ways to better pray for those in my ministry.
- I did a quick Google search for “Prayers prayed by the Apostle Paul in the Bible.” In the Google search, I came across a blog post by Kevin Halloran titled, “A Complete List of the Apostle Paul’s Prayers in the Bible.” On the page, he had a complete list of each prayer prayed by Paul broken down by verse.

- I read each prayer and cross-referenced it with the Bible to make sure it was accurate. (I didn't assume what was written was true just because it was on the internet. Trust, but verify.)
- I selected Ephesians 1:15-23 because Paul's prayer was exactly what I want for those under my leadership.

The reasons I shared with you are the basis for Measuring my Motivation. I've Selected my Scriptures.

## **PRACTICE #2: READING THE PASSAGE.**

Remember: I know where the passage begins and ends because it has the bolded title, **“Paul's Prayer for Spiritual Wisdom,”** and it goes through the end of the chapter at verse 23. As I read through a passage the first time, here are four key activities I do every time:

- Pray and ask for the Holy Spirit to lead me into all truth (John 16:13).
- Remove all the distractions around me. (You need to focus to hear.)
- Read each verse slowly. (Take your time and be intentional.)
- Read every word out loud. (You'll want to do this alone.)

Practice doing these four things before and as you get into the passage.

### **Paul's Prayer for Spiritual Wisdom**

#### **Ephesians 1:15-23**

15 Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God's people everywhere, 16 I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, 17 asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. 18 I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has

given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance.

19 I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God’s power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power 20 that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God’s right hand in the heavenly realms. 21 Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. 22 God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church. 23 And the church is his body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself.

### **PRACTICE #3: RE-READING THE PASSAGE, HIGHLIGHTING WORDS, AND TAKING NOTES**

Next, I’ll re-read the passage three more times, and as I’m doing it, I’ll highlight key words or phrases in the text. Make sure you only highlight essential words. “I” is fundamental for knowing who is writing, but it’s not what you’re looking for initially. As a general rule, you should avoid highlighting common words that don’t help find meaning, like “the.” What words “stick out” to you? What words interest you? Let me show you an example of words and phrases I’ve highlighted from this passage.

#### **Ephesians 1:15-23**

15 Ever since I first heard of your **strong faith** in the Lord Jesus and your **love for God’s people** everywhere, 16 I have not stopped **thanking** God for you. **I pray** for you constantly, 17 asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you **spiritual wisdom** and **insight** so that you might **grow** in your **knowledge of God**. 18 **I pray** that your hearts will be **flooded with light** so that you can understand the **confident hope** he has

given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious **inheritance**.

19 **I also pray** that you will understand the incredible greatness of **God's power** for us who **believe** him. This is the same **mighty power** 20 that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. 21 Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. 22 God has put all things **under the authority of Christ** and has made him **head** over all things for the benefit of the church. 23 And the church is his body; it is made **full and complete** by Christ, who **fills** all things everywhere with himself.

**Side Note:** Some of you may prefer to do this in your Bible, and that's great. I would suggest getting different color highlighters to differentiate between words and phrases to study. When I do this as I'm preparing for a sermon, I'll assign a different color to each word or phrase to easily distinguish between them.

**Why did I highlight each word or phrase?** Highlighting each word or phrase helps me to do what Steve Covey wrote about in 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. He wrote, "The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing."<sup>39</sup> You can find the main thing through observing the obvious, looking for descriptive words, and recognize repeated words or phrases.

- **Observe the obvious.** The title of the passage is "Paul's Prayer for Spiritual Wisdom," so we know it's a prayer and one that focuses on wisdom. Now, as I read through this passage, I observed Paul's use of several words that struck me, including faith, love, thanking, wisdom, insight, hope, knowledge, power, believe, and authority. Each of these words describes a characteristic of the church, Paul's desire for the church, or reveals something about God.

- **Look for descriptive words.** The words “strong,” “mighty,” and “confident” were descriptive words linked to “faith,” “power,” and “hope.” The use of these labels tells me that these words are not just ordinary words, but there is an extraordinary dimension.
- **Recognize repeated words or phrases.** Over nine verses, Paul mentioned the name of “God” seven times, “Christ” four times, used the word “pray” three times, and “understand” two times. He also used the phrase “all things” three times. Pay attention when words or phrases get repeated in a short passage because they are intentional and have meaning.

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they are intentional and have meaning.

#### **INITIAL NOTES I TOOK FROM EPHESIANS 1:15-23**

- Paul remarked how this church was known for their strong faith and love of God’s people (v. 15).
- Paul thanked God and constantly prayed for them (v. 16).
- Paul asked God to give them spiritual wisdom so they could grow in knowledge of Him (v. 17).
- Paul prayed for their understanding of their hope (v. 18).
- Paul prayed for them to know God’s power, which is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead (v. 19-20).
- Jesus is above everything because God placed all things under His authority (v. 21-22).
- The church is made complete by Christ (v. 23).

Now, as you look at my notes, what stands out to you? There’s nothing remarkable about what I did; I merely observed what was in the passage.



You don't have to be a theologian to interpret the Bible; you just have to be observant. Pay attention, and the Bible will speak to you because it's God Word for you. God isn't trying to trick you with word play or hide His message, so only a few can understand.

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you just have to be observant. Pay attention, and the  
Bible will speak to you because it's God Word for you.

#### **PRACTICE #4: READ THE PASSAGES IMMEDIATELY BEFORE AND AFTER.**

One way to make sure you keep what you're reading in context is to read the passages immediately before and after your passage. Now, the same principles we applied to the main passage are the same ones we will apply to both of these. You'll want to identify any specific points of connections between the main passage with those before and after. For the sake of space, I will only highlight the similarities. However, I'd encourage you to

#### **THE PASSAGE PRECEDING**

With respect to Ephesians 1:15-23, the passage immediately preceding it is Ephesians 1:3-14.

#### **Ephesians 1:3-14**

##### **Spiritual Blessings (Passage title)**

3 **All** praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus **Christ**, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with **Christ**. 4 Even before he made the world, God **loved** us and chose us **in Christ** to be holy and without fault in his eyes. 5 God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through

Jesus **Christ**. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. 6 So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. 7 He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. 8 He has showered his kindness on us, along with **all wisdom** and **understanding**.

9 God has now revealed to us his mysterious will regarding **Christ**—which is to fulfill his own good plan. 10 And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the **authority** of **Christ**—everything in heaven and on earth. 11 Furthermore, because we are united with **Christ**, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us in advance, and he makes everything work out according to his plan.

12 God’s purpose was that we Jews who were the first to trust **in Christ** would bring praise and glory to God. 13 And now you Gentiles have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you **believed in Christ**, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. 14 The Spirit is God’s guarantee that he will give us the **inheritance** he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify him.

- **Observe the obvious.** The title of the passage is “Spiritual Blessings,” so we can know Paul’s message has nothing to do with material blessings. Don’t even try to make a connection because that would miss the point. With every word that he writes, Paul is overflowing in his praise of God’s love, kindness, grace, and more.
- **Look for descriptive words.** The words “spiritual,” “glorious,” “rich,” and “showered” were descriptive words linked to “blessings,” “grace,” and “kindness.” In every instance, they refer to who God is and what God has done, not anything that man can do.

- **Look for repeated words or phrases.** Over twelve verses, Paul mentioned the name of “God” ten times and “Christ” nine times. He specifically used the phrases “in Christ” three times and “with Christ” two times. Think about this: In two passages in Ephesians, Paul mentions the names of “God” 17 times and “Christ” 13 times. Is that significant? Absolutely, and it tells us that God and Christ are at the center of Paul’s message to the Ephesians. Also, don’t miss out on the fact that both passages contain the words “inheritance” and “understanding.” That’s significant and may indicate a potential theme to explore.

### **INITIAL NOTES I TOOK FROM EPHESIANS 1:3-14:**

- Paul reserves his praise for God-alone (v.3, 6, 12, 14).
- God loved and chose His people (v. 4).
- God adopted us through Jesus (v. 5).
- God is rich in kindness, grace, forgiveness, wisdom, and understanding (v. 7-8).
- God’s plan was Jesus (v. 9-10).
- God has given us an inheritance (v. 11).
- God’s purpose was to save the Jews and Gentiles (v. 12-13).
- The Spirit is God’s guarantee to us of our inheritance (v. 14).

### **THE PASSAGE FOLLOWING**

Now, I told you the main passage ended with the end of the chapter, so what do you do then? Did you know that when each book of the Bible was written, it didn’t have chapter divisions? Stephen Langton, an Archbishop of Canterbury, created the chapter divisions in our Bibles in 1227 AD, and The Wycliffe English Bible of 1382 AD was the first Bible to use it.<sup>40</sup>

The Book of Ephesians was a letter, and the letter was sent to the church as one document. So, we can seamlessly go to the first passage of the next

chapter. However, if your passage is another Old or New Testament book and you're changing chapters, you may only need to read the passage before OR after to keep it in context. As you change chapters, sometimes the events will be directly related, but other times there may be a completely different storyline or a considerable amount of time in-between events.

With that in mind, let's go ahead and look at the passage following our main one in Ephesians 2:1-10 and apply the same principles as we did before.

## **Made Alive with Christ**

### **Ephesians 2:1-10**

1 Once you were **dead** because of your disobedience and your many **sins**. 2 You used to live in **sin**, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey **God**. 3 All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our **sinful** nature. By our very nature we were subject to **God's** anger, just like everyone else.

4 But **God** is so **rich** in **mercy**, and he **loved** us so much, 5 that even though we were **dead** because of our **sins**, he gave us life when he **raised Christ** from the **dead**. (It is only by **God's grace** that you have been **saved**!) 6 For he **raised** us from the **dead** along with **Christ** and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are **united** with **Christ Jesus**. 7 So **God** can point to us in all future ages as examples of the **incredible wealth** of his **grace** and **kindness** toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with **Christ Jesus**.

8 **God saved** you by his **grace** when you **believed**. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from **God**. 9 **Salvation** is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. 10 For we are **God's masterpiece**. He has created us anew in **Christ Jesus**, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

- **Observe the obvious.** The title of the passage is “Made Alive with Christ.” Logically, to be “made alive” requires that you must have first been dead. So, when we read the word “dead” four times, we know Paul’s referring to a spiritual condition, not a physical one. The main point of the passage is God has saved us from our sins (spiritual death) and made us alive through Christ.
- **Look for descriptive words.** The words “sinful,” “rich,” and “incredible” were descriptive words linked to “nature,” “mercy,” “grace,” and “wealth.” In every instance, they refer to who God is and what God has done, not anything that man can do. Rich is a recurring theme in each of the passages we’ve read, so I’ll pay close attention to it moving forward.
- **Look for repeated words or phrases.** We again see Paul reference the name of “God” eight more times and “Christ” five additional times. That brings the total mentions of “God” to 25 times and “Christ” to 15 times in the main passage and those preceding and following it. Paul makes it extremely clear that God and Christ are the ones that have done the work of salvation, not us.

## INITIAL NOTES I TOOK FROM EPHESIANS 2:1-10:

- The Ephesians “were” dead and living in their sin (v.1-).
- Their sin made the subject to God’s anger, like everyone (v. 3).
- BUT GOD is rich mercy (v. 4).
- God raised us from our sinful selves like He resurrected Jesus (v. 5-6).
- God is grace and kindness is also for future generations (v. 7).
- God gave us the gift of salvation; there’s nothing we can do (v. 8-9).
- God has created us to do good works (v. 10).

What have I done through all of this work? I’ve laid the foundation for the rest of my study. I’ve identified key words and phrases I need to research and

## Key Thoughts

- One of the biggest mistakes people make initially in biblical interpretation is bringing our bias to a passage before reading it.
- If you're going to interpret the Bible correctly, you have to lay aside what you "think you know" about the passage and allow it to speak for itself.
- The first rule of biblical interpretation is that we must interpret the Bible literally.
- Four key activities to do before reading a passage for the first time are pray and ask for the Holy Spirit to lead you, remove all the distractions, read each verse slowly, and read every word out loud.
- You can find the main thing through observing the obvious, looking for descriptive words, and recognize repeated words or phrases.
- Pay attention when words or phrases get repeated in a short passage because they are intentional and have meaning.
- You don't have to be a theologian to interpret the Bible; you just have to be observant. Pay attention, and the Bible will speak to you because it's God Word for you.
- Stephen Langton, an Archbishop of Canterbury, created the chapter divisions in our Bibles in 1227 AD, and The Wycliffe English Bible of 1382 AD was the first Bible to use it.

## Key Term

- *Literal interpretation* emphasizes that a biblical text is interpreted according to the "plain meaning" conveyed by its grammatical and historical context.

# Chapter Five

## Analysis: The Heart of Biblical Interpretation

As we shift to chapter five, the process of biblical interpretation gets more technical but exciting, as we address the second of the *Three A's of Biblical Interpretation: Analysis*. *Analysis* is the process of examining something by separating it into parts and studying their interrelations.<sup>41</sup> This chapter is my favorite because it's the heart of biblical interpretation! As I've done throughout the book, I'll take the problematic principles and make them simple. Million-Dollar Words Alert: There are four terms related to biblical interpretation you should know, and they are:

**Hermeneutics** (*her-meh-new-tiks*): *Hermeneutics* comes from a Greek root meaning "interpreter" or "interpret."<sup>42</sup> As such, *biblical hermeneutics* is the study of how to correctly and accurately interpret the Bible. Hermeneutics is both science and art because there's a process whereby we can understand the biblical passage, and we can develop a specific skill set in the process.

**Exegesis** (*ek-si-jee-sis*): *Exegesis* is an "explanation or interpretation of a text or portion of a text, especially of the Bible."<sup>43</sup> The main goal of exegesis is that you'll be able to draw out the message from the text after you've become familiar with the passage. A person who practices exegesis is known as an exegete (*ek-si-jeet*).

**Eisegesis** (*eye-si-jee-sis*): *Eisegesis* is "an interpretation, especially of Scripture, that expresses the interpreter's own ideas, bias, or the like, rather than the meaning of the text."<sup>44</sup> WARNING: Approaching any verse or passage with a personal bias will inevitably result in you not reaching the right or full conclusion.

**Speculagesis** (*spec-u-luh-jee-sis*): *Speculagesis* is what takes place when people aren't sure what a verse or passage means, but they're not going to

let that stop them from speculating about it anyway. (This is a word I created.) I've seen this happen far too often from a stage where a pastor or speaker is preaching or teaching and sound authoritative, but they guessed wrong.

*Speculagesis* also occurs when someone leading a Bible study asks the question, "What does this mean to you?" I'm always polite, but I want to say, "It doesn't matter what the passage means to you. What did it mean to the original audience, and how can we apply that to our lives?" Don't be a "*Speculagete*!" Don't be lazy. Be willing to do the work required to uncover the truth. The bottom line is: You'll get as much out of biblical interpretation as you put into it.

## You'll get as much out of biblical interpretation as you put into it.

As you begin the Analyzation stage, your goal will be similar to that of an investigative journalist who wants to get to the bottom of the story, so they can accurately report the truth. In journalism school, professors teach students to ask the "Five W's" to answer each story's fundamental question: Who? What? When? Where? Why? (We will ask the "How" question when we get to the final of the *Three A's of Biblical Interpretation*, Application.)

Dr. Mary Dowd shared the following qualities of a good newspaper journalist; qualities that should also be evident in every exegete:

- **Ethics and Integrity:** A solid ethical core characterizes a good journalist. Fairness, objectivity and honesty matter when reporting everything from local referendums and proposed state tax increases to presidential elections.



- **Courage and Boldness:** Good journalists push themselves to dig deeper and ask tough questions. They put personal feelings aside to boldly unearth the truth about newsworthy people, places and events.
- **Expert Communication Skills:** Along with impeccable character, newspaper journalists must be skilled communicators to interview sources and write in-depth stories. Newspaper journalists include background information and needed detail to give context to a more nuanced understanding of the issue by the reader.
- **Knowledge of Technology:** Newspaper journalists include background information and needed detail to give context to a more nuanced understanding of the issue by the reader.
- **Investigative Skills:** Good newspaper journalists have an analytical mind and base stories on evidence and facts, not emotion. Critical thinking skills are crucial when weighing conflicting accounts of an incident and assessing the credibility of sources. They exercise sound judgment when blogging or writing yet unverified information on the newspaper's website during a breaking story.<sup>45</sup>

**SIDE NOTE:** I semi-jokingly say, for those who don't know what a newspaper is, it's a giant print publication with folded sheets of paper. Newspapers have become the dinosaur of news since the advent of the internet and social media, but it doesn't lessen the importance of the principles written by Dr. Dowd.

Now, let's take these qualities of a good newspaper journalist and apply them to your role as an exegete in the process of biblical interpretation.

- **Ethics and Integrity:** You have a responsibility to be fair, objective, and honest when you're investigating each verse and passage. Your first job is to report on the "story," not to write yourself in it.

- **Courage and Boldness:** You must ask the difficult questions to uncover the truth about the author, audience, people, and places in the Scripture, so you can fully understand the “story.”
- **Expert Communication Skills:** You must be willing to do the hard work and locate credible sources to “interview,” finding out everything they have to say and then reaching your conclusion. You’ll include background information and necessary details to give context to the hearer or reader, taking their understanding to a deeper level.
- **Knowledge of Technology:** Technology is your friend. You will use the online tools given in chapter two to apply them to your acclimation observations in chapters three and four and what you’ll learn in this chapter. However, you can’t allow technology and other people’s words to take the place of the work you must do.
- **Investigative Skills:** You can’t enter the process of biblical interpretation already “knowing” the outcome of the “story.” That’s what’s known as “fake news.” Instead, you must base your conclusions on facts, not emotions, and rely on the Holy Spirit and critical thinking skills to discern the Truth when confronted by conflicting resources.

You can’t enter the process of biblical interpretation already “knowing” the outcome of the “story.” That’s what’s known as “fake news.”

Now you understand the foundational principles for this chapter, let’s examine how you can ask and apply the “Five W’s” to biblical interpretation.

### **QUESTION #1: WHO WAS THE AUTHOR AND AUDIENCE?**

Before a verse or passage can mean something to you or me, it first meant something to an individual or group of people in the day in which it was

written. As I stated previously, God is the Author of the Bible. However, there are approximately 40 men who wrote or contributed to the various books of the Bible.

Why is this important for us? Think about the answer to this question in terms of books you read today. The title of the book may get your attention, but inevitably you probably go to the About the Author page to find out who is writing the book. You want to know what qualifies them to write the book and understand their background. As you understand their history and qualifications, it helps you better approach the text.

The same holds true concerning the Bible. As an investigative journalist, you'll want to uncover the life history and qualifications of the person writing to assess their credibility. When you understand the story of Moses' life, it will help you better grasp the challenges he and God's people faced in the Books of the Law. You could easily read Paul's epistles and get something from each, but as you read about his Damascus Road story in Acts 9 and the trials he wrote about in 2 Corinthians 11:16-33, it becomes more meaningful.

## **The “Authors” of the Bible**

God worked through the personalities and styles of human authors to accomplish His Divine purpose, and you need to get to know each author. Here's a quick reference list of the books of the Bible with their traditional author(s) listed to the right (Note: This doesn't replace your responsibility to research each author):

### **THE OLD TESTAMENT (39 books)**

#### **The Books of the Law (The Pentateuch)**

- Genesis – Moses
- Exodus – Moses
- Leviticus – Moses

- Numbers – Moses
- Deuteronomy – Moses

### **The Books of History**

- Joshua – Joshua (other than parts relating to his death)
- Judges – Samuel, Nathan, Gad
- Ruth – Samuel, Nathan, Gad
- 1 Samuel – Samuel, Nathan, Gad
- 2 Samuel – Samuel, Nathan, Gad
- 1 Kings – Jeremiah
- 2 Kings – Jeremiah
- 1 Chronicles – Ezra
- 2 Chronicles – Ezra
- Ezra – Ezra
- Nehemiah – Nehemiah and Ezra
- Esther – Mordecai

### **The Books of Poetry (aka The Wisdom Literature)**

- Job – Job, but many believe Moses compiled the book
- Psalms – David, Asaph, Ezra, the sons of Korah, Heman, Ethan, and Moses
- Proverbs – Solomon, Agur (chapter 30), and Lemuel (chapter 31)
- Ecclesiastes – Solomon
- Song of Solomon – Solomon (I agree, although there's some debate)

### **The Major Prophets**

- Isaiah – Isaiah
- Jeremiah – Jeremiah
- Lamentations – Jeremiah
- Ezekiel – Ezekiel
- Daniel – Daniel

### **The Major Prophets**

- Hosea – Hosea

- Joel – Joel
- Amos – Amos
- Obadiah – Obadiah
- Jonah – Jonah
- Micah – Micah
- Nahum – Nahum
- Habakkuk – Habakkuk
- Zephaniah – Zephaniah
- Haggai – Haggai
- Zechariah – Zechariah
- Malachi – Malachi

## **THE NEW TESTAMENT (27 books)**

### **The Narratives (The Gospels and Acts)**

- Matthew – Matthew
- Mark – Mark
- Luke – Luke
- John – John
- Acts – Luke

### **Paul's Epistles**

- Romans – Paul
- 1 Corinthians – Paul
- 2 Corinthians – Paul
- Galatians – Paul
- Ephesians – Paul
- Philippians – Paul
- Colossians – Paul
- 1 Thessalonians – Paul
- 2 Thessalonians – Paul
- 1 Timothy – Paul
- 2 Timothy – Paul
- Titus – Paul

- Philemon – Paul

## **General Epistles**

- Hebrews – the author is unknown, although many scholars believe it could have been Paul or someone closely connected with him like Luke, Barnabas, Apollos, or Epaphroditus
- James – James, the brother of Jesus and Jude
- 1 Peter – Peter
- 2 Peter – Peter
- 1 John – The Apostle John
- 2 John – The Apostle John
- 3 John – The Apostle John
- Jude – Jude, the brother of Jesus and James

## **Prophecy**

- Revelation – The Apostle John

## **The Audience of the Bible**

As equally important as the author is the audience addressed in the book. In writing this book, I have an intended audience. While I'd like to reach everyone, my primary target audience isn't people who speak Portuguese only and live in Mozambique. While I speak some Brazilian Portuguese (*mais ou menos*), this book is written in English and is meant for English speakers who want to learn more about biblical interpretation. I also want my book to be accessible to all readers, so it's not written in a more formal style. I know some scholars won't use this as their leading resource on biblical interpretation, and that's OK. This book is for you! You are my audience (as are your friends you need to tell about this book)!

Similarly, every book of the Bible had a specific audience who understood why the message was written and sent. The author had an original meaning and intent in writing to his audience. Each audience spoke specific languages, engaged in particular cultural practices, and lived much

differently from you and me. Consider the four Gospels: Each of them had a mission to write about Jesus, but every one of them had a significantly different audience they were addressing. As such, you need to find out all you can about their background to understand the audience better, not to miss the message.

### **Where can I find this information on the author and audience?**

There are several resources that will help you uncover information about the author and audience:

- **The Bible:** The Bible is the first place to go for information about the Bible. Look first for clues in the text. For instance, Paul letters will include a greeting that identifies his audience. Many verses identify a person or place that may provide you with vital information.
- **A Study Bible:** Study Bibles will have information about the author and audience at the beginning of book. I have a study Bible on my phone and the app has ample background information for each book.
- **Bible Encyclopedia:** Bible encyclopedias provide you with insight into specific people and places and quickly and accurately discover the most important details you need.
- **Manners and Customs:** The manners and customs resources are valuable for knowing what life was like in the Old and New Testaments. Think about this: Since the Bible covers over 1,5000 years of history, the manners and customs changed during those times. Now, exponentially multiply that comparison and fast-forward to the 21st-century, and you'll understand why you need to understand their manners and customs to interpret the meaning accurately.

The Bible is the first place to go  
for information about the Bible.

**SUGGESTION:** While it's not required, I would suggest you memorize the books of the Bibles, along with their authors. Having this knowledge is helpful you ever need to give the background of a book as you teach or are talking about the Bible with others.

## **QUESTION #2: WHAT WAS THE GENRE?**

Do you remember the word *genre* from high school English class? Webster's defines the *genre* as "a category of artistic, musical, or literary composition characterized by a particular style, form, or content."<sup>46</sup> When I talk about the *biblical genre*, I'm talking about the biblical book's form or writing.

When I listed each book of the Bible, you may have noticed I broke the 66 books down into nine divisions: The Books of the Law, The Book of History, The Books of Poetry, The Major Prophets, The Minor Prophets, The Narratives, Paul's Epistles, General Epistles, and Prophecy. Those nine divisions actually comprise the seven forms of biblical genre:

### **Seven Forms of Biblical Genre:**

- **Genre Form #1 – The Law:** God gave His people The Law to establish the foundations of holy living and to turn their hearts toward Him. The problem with the religious leaders is that they made The Law about outward actions and added over 900 of their laws to the 613 laws God gave.
- **Genre Form #2 – History:** The Old Testament contains the historical background of the people of God. Interestingly, God had the authors include all of the bad, as well as the good, in the historical books. This fact is an internal proof as to why the Bible is Truth.
- **Genre Form #3 – Poetry:** When you and I think of poetry, we think about words that rhyme at the end of a line. (That was accidentally on purpose.) Hebrew poetry is much different! It's concise, highly



structured, and is characterized by parallelism (two lines that deliberately contrast thoughts or have intentional repetition.)<sup>47</sup>

- **Genre Form #4 – Prophecy:** Biblical prophecy is not like fortune-telling; it has the two aspects, forth-telling and foretelling. Forth-telling is when a person speaks at the moment what God wants them to say, while foretelling is revealing God's will concerning future events. It's critical to know the difference between the types of prophecy and how it impacted them then and us now. SIDE NOTE: The difference between the label of major and minor prophets is the amount of content, not that the minor prophets were in a lower league and trying to work their way up to the “big leagues.”
- **Genre Form #5 – Genealogy:** Genealogy is that long list of unpronounceable people's names that you come across in the Bible. While they may be hard to read, God has a purpose for including them to not only allow you to know a person's family tree but to preserve the royal lines that led to Jesus.
- **Genre Form #6 – Narratives:** The easiest of all the biblical genres to read and understand is the narratives because it's made up of stories of ordinary people who did extraordinary things or faced overwhelming challenges. Whether reading about Moses in the Old Testament or Jesus in the New, we can receive insight into life through the stories of others.
- **Genre Form #7 – Epistles:** As the old joke says, the epistles aren't the wives of the apostles. An epistle is a letter to a specific individual or church that addressed an issue. The best way to read an epistle is to read it like you would a letter, all at once. You don't stop and read the first paragraph, and then read another paragraph the next day.

**Why is it important for you to know the genre?** If you misunderstand the genre, you will reach a wrong conclusion. Consider the impact genre makes in how you read today. For example, if you were to read *The Lord of the Rings* book trilogy as a non-fiction book, you may look for job opportunities with Frodo and his team to destroy the evil Ring of Power. If you were to

read the Babylon Bee satirical website as journalism, you may be misled to believe that the Kansas City Chiefs, the losing team at halftime, was suddenly awarded with 138,000 points at halftime of Super Bowl LV.

If you misunderstand the genre,  
you will reach a wrong conclusion.

**How can I determine the genre of a book or passage?** The quickest way to find the genre is to look at the beginning of your Study Bible or use your Bible Encyclopedia or Handbook to access this information. Additionally, you can find this information in a Lexicon, Bible Dictionary, or Concordance.

**IMPORTANT:** Three crucial terms you need to be familiar with as you consider the genre:

- **Parables:** “*Parables* are extended figures of comparison that often use short stories to teach a truth or answer a question. While the story in a parable is not historical, it is true to life, not a fairy tale.”<sup>48</sup> Jesus told 38 parables in the Gospels, and there are nine parables in the Old Testament.
- **Simile:** Just as in English class, a *simile* is a comparison of two contrasting ideas or thing using the words “as” or “like.” One illustration of this is from Isaiah 53:6, “All of us, like sheep, have strayed away.”
- **Metaphors:** A *metaphor* is a direct or implied comparison of two contrasting ideas or things. An example of this is found in Psalm 100:3, “We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.”
- **Allegory:** “An *allegory* is a literary tool that uses characters, places, and events to symbolize people and ideas.”<sup>49</sup> Several examples of biblical allegory include Jesus as the Lamb of God (John 1:29), the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), and the two covenants (Galatians 4:24).

### **QUESTION #3: WHEN WAS IT WRITTEN?**

Think about the role dates play in your life. Your birthday is a date you can't forget, reminding you every year of your age. If you're married, try forgetting the date of your anniversary and see how that goes over. If you've had a loved one who has passed away, you may memorialize the date of their passing each year. Dates are important for many reasons because they tell the stories and history of our lives.

Similarly, knowing the writing date of a book is essential for understanding the historical context. For instance, did you know that the Bible isn't in chronological order (the order written by date)? Genesis wasn't the first book of the Bible written; instead, Job probably was, meaning it took place before Noah and The Flood. The Old Testament books cover a period from approximately 1445 BC to 331 BC, and that the New Testament covers a timeframe from 45 AD to 95 AD.<sup>50</sup> Knowing the date of writing will help you research outside historical sources to compare to the events occurring in the Bible during that period.

**How can I find the date of the writing?** Many Bibles have this information readily accessible at the front of the book of the Bible you want to study, as well as your Study Bible. However, my favorite and easiest resource for finding this information is in any of the three Bible dictionaries provided in chapter two.

### **QUESTION #4: WHERE WAS IT WRITTEN TO AND FROM?**

Do you remember where you were on 9/11 when the first plane struck the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City? I do. I was speaking with a person at the front desk of Gold's Gym in Garland, Texas, on my way out when I looked up and saw the news on the TV. That picture is imprinted forever on my mind.

**Side Note:** I realize some of you may have been babies or not even born at the time. Don't miss the point: Everyone will have a 9/11 type experience in your lifetime, and you will remember where you were at the time.

When the news reporters went to cover the story, did their location matter? Undeniably. When the newspapers wrote about the Twin Towers imploding to the ground, killing 2,606 people,<sup>51</sup> would it have been irresponsible for a journalist to leave the location of the story out? Unquestionably. 9/11 was a horrendous day for all Americans, but for those who lived in New York City and lost loved ones, it was life-shattering. I was at Ground Zero a week after the attack, counseling family members and speaking with members of the police and fire departments. I'll never forget those moments, listening to desperate family members search for their loved ones whose ashes lay under a heap of rubble.

It's one thing to read a story, but completely different when you know where that story took place. It will give you perspective. The location of the writing of the biblical book matters because there are people, places, and events with a direct connection to the story.

**It's one thing to read a story, but completely  
different when you know where that  
story took place. It will give you perspective.**

You need perspective for understanding your passage, so don't be sloppy and reach the simple conclusion that Paul wrote Ephesians to a church in modern-day Turkey. That's a good start but miserably inadequate. Where was Ephesus located, and why was that important? What was it like then? Was there anything that stood out about the city from an economic or religious standpoint? Ask the tough questions to find out more, so you can tell others the "story!"

**How can I find where a biblical book was written?** At the risk of sounding like a broken record, I like the Bible Dictionary as my main resource because it has a wealth of knowledge in one place. However, I also use manners and customs, and maps as supplemental resources. I use maps so I can see where the location is in relationship to other biblical towns.

### **QUESTION #5: WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?**

The final investigative question is, “Why was it important?” Let me ask you: Why do journalists write stories? In most instances, I’d suggest they write to inform or engage their audience. While some like to shock, entertain, and encourage their readers, most writers' purpose is to share a particular message with the hope of connecting to their audience. They want to evoke an emotional response and call the reader to action.

Since God is the Author of the Bible, His intention was always to communicate His message to all people using His people, human authors. God wants to speak with His Creation and call them into the action of entering a relationship with Him.

Beyond that overarching design is the role of human authors in the writing of each book. God gave them a purpose and the words to communicate, and the messages were quite different. For instance, Moses wrote to remind the Israelites of God’s faithfulness and instruct them concerning God’s Law, while Paul wrote the Epistles to teach and bring correction to the New Testament Church (with a capital C). The “why” always drives the “what” in biblical interpretation.

**The “why” always drives  
the “what” in biblical interpretation.**

**How can I find why a biblical book was written and why it’s important?**  
Every tool in the toolbox is useful, in varying degrees, for finding why a

book was written. Often, especially in the New Testament, the writer's purpose is typically stated in the first three to five verses.

As you get into the specific passage, you start to identify words and a message that was important to the writer. At this point, you'll use the Lexicon to gain a greater understanding of each word to discern the meaning.

## **ANALYZATION**

You're a reporter with a responsibility to report on the most remarkable story, God's story. You want to make sure you get every detail right because your life depends on it, as do the lives of your readers and listeners. The research behind the story is always the most challenging part of the process. Be honest: Analyzation doesn't sound fun. However, it will take you to the heart of biblical interpretation. It may seem challenging right now, but it will become less complicated with time and practice, and the results are out of this world!

### **Key Thoughts**

- You'll get as much out of biblical interpretation as you put into it.
- In journalism school, professors teach students to ask the "Five W's" to answer each story's fundamental question: Who? What? When? Where? Why? These same questions can be applied to biblical interpretation.
- The 66 books of the Bible break down into nine divisions: The Books of the Law, The Book of History, The Books of Poetry, The Major Prophets, The Minor Prophets, The Narratives, Paul's Epistles, General Epistles, and Prophecy.
- The seven forms of biblical genre are The Law, History, Poetry, Prophecy, Narratives, Genealogy, and Epistles.

### **Key Terms**

- *Analyzation* is the process of examining something by separating it into parts and studying their interrelations.
- *Biblical hermeneutics* is the study of how to correctly and accurately interpret the Bible.
- *Exegesis* is an “explanation or interpretation of a text or portion of a text, especially of the Bible.”
- *Eisegesis* is “an interpretation, especially of Scripture, that expresses the interpreter's own ideas, bias, or the like, rather than the meaning of the text.”
- *Parables*: Parables are extended figures of comparison that often use short stories to teach a truth or answer a question.
- *Simile*: Just as in English class, a simile is a comparison of two contrasting ideas or thing using the words “as” or “like.”
- *Metaphor*: A metaphor is a direct or implied comparison of two contrasting ideas or things.
- An *allegory* is a literary tool that uses characters, places, and events to symbolize people and ideas.

# Chapter Six

## Analyzation: The Five “W’s”

When I was a kid, I hated rules. I didn’t want to clean my room before I went out to play. I thought my parents were dictators for making me take a bath and brush my teeth before I went to bed. As a kid, I thought rules were stupid, and I couldn’t wait to get out of the house, so I could live as I wanted.

Then, I grew up and became a college student who “knew everything.” With age, I thought, came a new perspective on life, but one thing that didn’t change was my despising of rules. I hated the dress code at our college in 1986 because we couldn’t wear jeans and tennis into the main building until after 3 pm. (Apparently, the Holy Spirit left the building at 3 pm sharp each day, and He had a strict dress code.) I thought the hair policy that didn’t allow the back of my hair to touch my collar. How could I have “Bon Jovi” hair without it touching my collar? Some of you are reading this, and you’re thinking to yourself, “Yeah, those rules were pretty stupid,” especially in light of what they’re wearing there today.

For years, I lived life by the motto, “Rules are meant to be broken,” and I broke more than I care to remember. However, life has taught me that rules are in place to protect me from injury. Traffic signs and lights are put in place to ensure the safe flow of traffic coming from all directions. Signs at the Grand Canyon warning me not to get too close to the edge are not there to prohibit me from taking a breathtaking selfie; they’re there so I won’t fall over the edge of the cliff and die. You may think rules are stupid, and some probably are, but rules are in place are for a reason.

You may think rules are stupid,  
and some probably are, but rules  
are in place are for a reason.



When it comes to biblical interpretation, there are *Seven Rules of Biblical Interpretation* I want to share with you to protect you from error that can potentially have eternal consequences. These rules are not given to pour water on the fire of your passion for Jesus; it's quite the opposite. Proper biblical interpretation will put additional logs on the fire, so you will burn longer and hotter.

**WARNING:** As you go through the Analyzation stage, don't get so anal about the rules of analyzation that you get *paralysis by analysis*. *Paralysis by analysis* occurs when you overthink an outcome. There's great value in study, but don't waste time getting educated beyond your intelligence.

**Remember:** The Bible isn't a puzzle; it's a prized possession, given to you and me to know God and become more like Jesus. Don't complicate it! With that in mind, let's briefly look at the *Seven Rules of Biblical Interpretation*:

**Rule #1: The Rule of Continuity.** Remember: The overall message of the Bible is the Kingdom of God. So, as I consider my passage, my conclusions must have a direct connection to the Kingdom of God.

**Rule #2: The Rule of Christ.** Every verse and passage, at some level, will point to Jesus. The Old Testament anticipates Christ in every genre, while the New Testament reveals His life, ministry, impact, and future glory.

**Rule #3: The Rule of Creed:** A creed is a core belief. What is our creed? Our creed is Sola Scriptura, which *means that Scripture alone is authoritative for the Christian's faith and practice*.<sup>52</sup> While we consider other resources, we begin by using Scripture to interpret Scripture. If a resource conflicts with the Bible, the Bible will always have the final say!

If a resource conflicts with the Bible,  
the Bible will always have the final say!

**Rule #4: The Rule of Context.** Context is king, so you need to become well-acquainted with the author, audience, and genre to help you identify the author's original intent. The context ultimately determines the meaning and application (which we will address in chapter seven).

**Rule #5: The Rule of Consistency.** Any finding you have must be consistent with the rest of Scripture. In other words, God won't give one message in one passage and then contradict Himself in another. Remember: Use the rule of consistency, not the exception to reach your conclusions.

**Rule #6: The Rule of Comprehension.** As you read, use logic and apply both the *deductive* and *inductive methods*. The *deductive method* of Bible study involves choosing a topic and researching and finding biblical passages that support the topic. In this method, you move from general observations to specific conclusions. The *inductive method* (which we are doing, and I recommend) chooses a verse or a passage, breaks it down, and observes the parts to draw out the meaning and reach a conclusion. Christians should always use their brains as part of the process.

**Rule #7: The Rule of Continuance.** The Rule of Continuance is what some people refer to as the *progressive revelation* of God in Scripture. "*Progressive revelation* is the teaching that God has revealed Himself and His will through the Scriptures with increasing clarity as more and more of the Scriptures were written."<sup>53</sup> One example of this would be the Old Testament blood sacrifice system, which ended when Jesus gave His life as a sacrifice for our sins on the cross (Hebrews 9:13-14).

**Side Note:** *Progressive revelation* ended with the Bible. So-called "new revelations" by man today end in the creation of cults or false doctrine. God's Word is, was, and will always be our final and final authority for life.

Now you understand the rules, let's get to the work of Analyzation, applying the "Five W's" to our passage from Ephesians 1:15-23.

**Special Note:** We will only use the highlighted words from the Acclimation notes in chapters three and four to answer question five. We will use the remaining in the final stage to merge our Acclimation and Analyzation to form our Application.

## **QUESTION #1: WHO WAS THE AUTHOR AND AUDIENCE?**

To understand a passage, we must first understand the people. To accomplish this, I will check several sources and find out what they have to say. Remember: The first place I'm going to go to is the Bible because Scripture is the best place to interpret Scripture.

To understand a passage, we must  
first understand the people.

Is there anything in the text that will tell me who the author may be? Since my passage is Ephesians 1:15-23, the best place for me to go is back to the beginning of the book. Here are my observations from the text and additional resources regarding the author:

### ***Who was the Author?***

- *The first observation I make immediately before the Ephesians 1 passage begins is the bolded passage title: “Greetings from Paul.”* Logically, someone named Paul is the author of this book.
- *Secondly, I go to the text at the beginning and the end of the book.* Are there any internal textual clues that tell me who wrote it? In this case, Ephesians 1:1 plainly states: “This letter is from Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus.” I also check at the end of the book, but there is no additional mention of Paul in Ephesians 6. However, there is another internal evidence that Paul is the author in Ephesians 3:1: “When I think of all this, I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the benefit of you Gentiles...”

- *Thirdly, I go to the front of my Study Bible to see if I can find more information about Paul.* In the introduction to the book, it confirms Paul is the author, although some later scholars have tried to prove it was someone else. (My general rule of thumb in these cases is I'm not going to prioritize the beliefs of modern-day scholars who are trying to revise the biblical text and testimony of the first-century church fathers. Their written and oral histories support the authorship of Paul.)
- *Fourthly, I go to my Bible Encyclopedia and type in "Ephesians."* In this case, there are two entries. The first refers to the "people of Ephesus," while the second to the "Book of Ephesians." I choose the latter because that entry addresses who wrote the book. At the beginning of the article, they give clear and compelling external and internal evidence as to why Paul is the author.

**My Conclusion:** Since internal evidence from the Book of Ephesians concurs with my Study Bible and the Bible Encyclopedia, the Apostle Paul is unquestionably the author.

**Side Note:** It's not required, but I would suggest that you do a background study on them after you determine the author. For example, you can learn a lot about Paul's life from Acts 9 or by using a Bible Encyclopedia. Every bit of information you uncover will help the process. The more you know about the author, the more accurate you'll be in interpreting a passage.

The more you know about the author, the more accurate you'll be in interpreting a passage.

***Who was the Audience?***

- *The first thing I'm going to do is immediately return to the biblical text.* After Paul introduces himself, he then identifies his audience: "I (Paul) am writing to God's holy people in Ephesus, who are faithful followers

of Christ Jesus.” Using common sense, you will observe the message is for God’s holy people in Ephesus.” So, this book is written to Christians in Ephesus.

- *Secondly, I go back to my Study Bible to see if I can learn anything about the Ephesians.* It relates two biblical passages from Acts 19:8-10 and 20:31 that speak about Paul’s relationship to Ephesus and the miracles God did through him there. So, Paul had a direct connection with these people.
- *Thirdly, I return to my Bible Encyclopedia to the first entry on “Ephesians” because it deals with the people.* Here is what I find: Ephesians were the “natives or residents of the city of Ephesus who were adherents of the cult of the goddess Diana. A Jew or a Christian, though a native of Ephesus, would probably have been designated as such, rather than as an Ephesian.”<sup>54</sup> NOTICE: There is a cult of the goddess Diana in Ephesus, so that seems to be highly relevant to understanding the audience. As such, I need to research that information further.
- *Fourthly, I typed in “Diana” in my Bible Encyclopedia.* I learned that Diana was the most worshipped goddess in Ephesus and that temple prostitutes were part of their worship. The Ephesians believed Diana would bring them long life, prosperity in trade, fertility, and sexual fulfillment. Understanding this background is essential to comprehend the mindset of “God’s holy people in Ephesus.”

**My Conclusions:** Paul wrote the Book of Ephesians to Christians living in Ephesus's sexually charged society, but they remained holy. The Ephesians believed the goddess Diana would prosper them in every area of their lives, so they didn’t need any other “god” to interfere with their lives.

**Side Note:** Having this knowledge makes a difference in how you’ll read the Book of Ephesians, as well as the real-life application you’ll make later.

## QUESTION #2: WHAT WAS THE GENRE?

To determine the genre, I'll use the following resources: My Bible, Study Bible, Bible Encyclopedia, Bible Dictionary, and Concordance. I always use check several sources to make sure they are all in agreement before I reach my conclusion.

- *The first resource I use is my Bible, looking for textual clues of the types of genre.* Paul makes it clear that this is a letter in Ephesians 1:1: “This **letter** is from Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus.” You’ll remember that from our list of seven types of genre in chapter five, an Epistle is also called a letter. Now, there’s a temptation to stop here because the Scripture made the genre clear. However, I want to be sure that I’m not “reading into” the verse and allowing my bias in any way to cause me to misunderstand. So, I’ll confirm my finding with other resources.
- *Secondly, I look at my Study Bible.* Their text explaining the book refers to it as a letter. Yet, I also see another highlighted tab called “Paul’s letters.” I clicked on it and read the following: “This letter is likely a circular letter means to be shared among the churches in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey).”<sup>55</sup>
- *Thirdly, I reference my Bible Encyclopedia and find 19 references to the Book of Ephesians being a letter.* Again, external and internal evidence support this claim of it being a letter.
- *Fourthly, I go to Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology for further confirmation.* According to Baker’s, Ephesians “was a circular letter, intended for other churches in addition to the one in Ephesus.” Again, their conclusion is it’s a letter.
- *Finally, I go to The Enduring Word Bible Commentary by David Guzik.* Guzik states, “Paul’s letter to the Ephesians is different compared to many of the other New Testament letters he wrote. Like Romans, Ephesians was not written so much to address problems in a particular

church; more so, it was written to explain some of the great themes and doctrines of Christianity.”<sup>56</sup>

**My Conclusion:** The genre of the Book of Ephesians is 100% a letter, or epistle, written by Paul to “God’s holy people at Ephesus.”

### **QUESTION #3: WHEN WAS IT WRITTEN?**

Why is it important to know when it was written? It’s important because you may be able to find specific historical events from the same time period that will help you discover meaning. So, to find when it was written, I will use my Bible, Study Bible, and all three Bible Dictionaries to help discern the date of writing.

- *First, I will look for the date of the writing at the front of the Book of Ephesians to see if Bible has a brief historical outline of it.* Mine does not, so I’m moving on to the next resource. If yours does, make a note of the date for comparison against others.
- *Secondly, I’m going to check my Faithlife Study Bible.* Their conclusion is that the Book of Ephesians was likely composed around 54-57 AD.<sup>57</sup>
- *Thirdly, I go to my Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology and view the “Book of Ephesians” entry.* Baker believes Paul may have written Ephesians around the same he wrote Colossians, 60 AD.<sup>58</sup>
- *Fourthly, I look to Easton’s Bible Dictionary.* Easton agrees with Baker that the time of writing is around 60 AD.<sup>59</sup>
- *Fifthly, I check that information against Smith’s Bible Dictionary.* Smith believed it was written around 62 AD.<sup>60</sup>

**My Conclusion:** Ephesians was written between 54-62 AD. We will consider specific information around the time of the writing as we answer the next investigative question.

### **QUESTION #4: WHERE WAS IT WRITTEN TO AND FROM?**

Knowing where it was written to and from will help establish the all-around setting for the book. The resources I use to answer this question are my Bible, Bible Dictionary, manners and customs, and maps. (I'll also use a Bible Encyclopedia to help understand where Paul wrote it.)

## **Where it was Written to**

- *First, I start with my Bible to see if the text tells me where it was written.* In Ephesians 1:1, Paul writes, "I am writing to God's holy people in Ephesus, who are faithful followers of Christ Jesus." So, we know it's written to Ephesus.
- *Secondly, to find out information about Ephesus, I search "Ephesus" in a Bible Dictionary.* For this illustration, I'm using Easton's Bible Dictionary. Here is what Easton wrote: Ephesus was "the capital of proconsular Asia, which was the western part of Asia Minor. It was colonized principally from Athens. In the time of the Romans, it bore the title of 'the first and greatest metropolis of Asia.' It was distinguished for the Temple of Diana (q.v.), who there had her chief shrine; and for its theatre, which was the largest in the world, capable of containing 50,000 spectators. It was, like all ancient theatres, open to the sky. Here were exhibited the fights of wild beasts and of men with beasts. (Comp. 1 Cor. 4:9; 9:24, 25; 15:32.)"<sup>61</sup> You can research other Bible Dictionaries as well for additional information, but this is incredibly valuable.
- *Thirdly, I looked Fred Wight's Manners and Customs of Bible Lands because I was intrigued by the large theater and gladiator fights, or sporting events.* He wrote the following about them: "One of the chief forms of amusement among the Romans of the early Christian era was to condemn criminals, and especially Christians, to fight with lions, bears, elephants, or tigers in the amphitheaters of the empire before huge crowds of spectators. The crowds would urge on the beast by throwing



darts or by shouting in a mad spirit. and then watch the poor victim torn to pieces by the animal.”<sup>62</sup> Does that seem important? Absolutely!

- *Finally, I look at the maps to see the location of where Ephesus is on a map.* I used the link to the Bible maps provided in chapter two to find Ephesus, and here’s what I found: <https://www.studylight.org/pastoral-resources/bible-maps-archive.html>. (BTW, you can also perform a Google search of “Ancient Ephesus map in Bible times.”) Ephesus is a seaport town on the eastern coast of modern-day Turkey. The fact it was a seaport most likely contributed to it becoming a metropolis.

**Side Note:** Easton’s Bible Dictionary also had a map of Ephesus, displaying its proximity to the sea. You can often find maps in Bible Dictionaries and Bible Encyclopedias, so that may help reduce your study time.

## Where it was Written From

Now, we know where it’s written to, but we don’t know where it’s written from by Paul. Sometimes there may be significance in this fact, and other times not as much. Let’s search for the answer.

- *Again, I start with my Bible and find Paul calls himself a prisoner of Christ Jesus in Ephesians 3:1.* So, I ask myself if Paul was an actual prisoner.
- *Secondly, I reference the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia and here is what they wrote:* “To understand its central theme we must remember that Paul, the prisoner of the Lord, is writing in the calm of his imprisonment, far from the noise and turmoil, the conflict and strife, that marked his earlier life. He is now able to look out on the church and get a view of it in its wholeness, to see the part it is to play in God’s scheme for the restoration of the human race, to see God’s purpose in it and for it and its relation to Him.”<sup>63</sup>
- *Thirdly, I reference Smith’s Bible Dictionary to confirm the finding of my Bible Encyclopedia.* Here’s what Smith wrote: “The Epistle to the

Ephesians was written by the apostle St. Paul, during his first captivity at Rome.”<sup>64</sup>

**My Conclusion:** Ephesians was written by Paul to the church (God’s holy people) at Ephesus from a prison cell, most likely in Rome.

## **QUESTION #5: WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?**

A writer can have a great story, but it’s meaningless unless they can connect it, making others realize why its important. For us, we find the importance through key words Paul uses. We will use the *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance*.

At this stage, I will go back and look at the keywords I highlighted in chapter four. Now, I don’t have space or time to address each word right now, so I will limit my research to 13 words. However, I’m defining these words to understand what Paul meant in writing them, so I can prepare to apply them in the Application stage. To refresh your memory on the highlighted words, here is the passage:

### **Ephesians 1:15-23**

15 Ever since I first heard of your **strong faith** in the Lord Jesus and your **love for God’s people** everywhere, 16 I have not stopped **thanking** God for you. **I pray** for you constantly, 17 asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you **spiritual wisdom** and **insight** so that you might **grow** in your **knowledge of God**. 18 **I pray** that your hearts will be **flooded with light** so that you can understand the **confident hope** he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious **inheritance**.

19 **I also pray** that you will understand the incredible greatness of **God’s power** for us who **believe** him. This is the same **mighty power** 20 that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God’s

right hand in the heavenly realms. 21 Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. 22 God has put all things **under the authority of Christ** and has made him **head** over all things for the benefit of the church. 23 And the church is his body; it is made **full and complete** by Christ, who **fills** all things everywhere with himself.

**Special Note:** Every definition comes from the *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, but I'm only going to use one footnote from the main dictionary page. These are not my definitions. I will state the English word, followed by the italicized Greek word, Strong's number, and definition. (Remember: The New Testament was written in Greek.) It's also essential to make sure that your Strong's number matches the actual word used in the verse you're studying. There are often multiple Greek words used for one English word, so you must be sure to choose the correct one.

Often times there are multiple Greek words  
used for one English word, so you  
must be sure to choose the correct one.

**Faith** – *Pistis* #4102: persuasion, i.e. credence; moral conviction, especially reliance upon Christ for salvation

**Love** – *Agape* #26: affection, good will, love, benevolence

**Thanking** – *Eucharisteo* #2168: to be grateful, i.e. (actively) to express gratitude (towards)

**Pray** – *Proseuché* #4335: prayer (worship); by implication, an oratory

**Wisdom** – *Sophias* #4678: wisdom (higher or lower, worldly or spiritual)

**Insight** – *Apokalupsis* #602: disclosure:--appearing, coming, lighten, manifestation, be revealed, revelation

**Hearts flooded with light** – *Photizo* #5461: to shed rays, i.e. to shine or (transitively) to brighten up (literally or figuratively):--enlighten, illuminate, (bring to, give) light, make to see

**Confident hope** – *Elpis* #1680: (to anticipate, usually with pleasure); expectation (abstractly or concretely) or confidence:--faith, hope

**Power** – *Dunamis* #1411: force (literally or figuratively); specially, miraculous power (usually by implication, a miracle itself):--ability, abundance, meaning, might(-ily, -y, -y deed), (worker of) miracle(-s), power, strength, violence, mighty (wonderful) work

**Believe** – *Pisteu* #4100: to have faith (in, upon, or with respect to, a person or thing), i.e. credit; by implication, to entrust (especially one's spiritual well-being to Christ):--believe(-r), commit (to trust), put in trust with

**Mighty power** – *Ischus* #2479: from a derivative of is (force; compare *eschon*, a form of 2192); forcefulness (literally or figuratively):--ability, might(-ily), power, strength

**Authority of Christ** – *Hupotasso* #5293: to subordinate; reflexively, to obey:--be under obedience (obedient), put under, subdue unto, (be, make) subject (to, unto), be (put) in subjection (to, under), submit self unto

**The Church is His body** – *Ekklesia* #1577: a calling out, i.e. (concretely) a popular meeting, especially a religious congregation (Jewish synagogue, or Christian community of members on earth or saints in heaven or both):--assembly, church<sup>65</sup>

**My Conclusion:** This passage is important because it shows the character of the people in church at Ephesus during difficult times.

## ANALYZATION

Analysis isn't a difficult process, but it's a necessary one on three levels. First, if you take shortcuts in biblical interpretation, you'll likely end up at a wrong destination, which can directly impact your relationship with God when you take His Word out of context. Next, you can lead someone else into heresy if you don't what the Bible says and means. Consider the eternal destiny of your family, friends, and church as you study. Finally, if you post false doctrine on social media or write a blog, you may do irreparable spiritual to those you don't know. Words matter. We've seen that on social media and presidential elections. However, God's Word matters far more!

### Key Thoughts

- The *Seven Rules of Biblical Interpretation* are the Rules of Continuity, Christ, Creed, Context, Consistency, Comprehension, and Continuance.
- If a resource conflicts with the Bible, the Bible will always have the final say!
- To understand a passage, we must first understand the people.
- The more you know about the author, the more accurate you'll be in interpreting a passage.
- Ephesians was written by Paul to the church (God's holy people) at Ephesus from a prison cell, most likely in Rome.
- Often times there are multiple Greek words used for one English word, so you must be sure to choose the correct one.

### Key Term

- *Progressive revelation* is the teaching that God has revealed Himself and His will through the Scriptures with increasing clarity as more and more of the Scriptures were written.

# Chapter Seven

## Application: The Game Plan for Winning

I'm a big college football fan, specifically of the University of Southern California Trojans. Fight on! I love all things USC because I'm originally from Southern California, and I've followed them my entire life. I was blessed to take my dad to the national championship game in Miami in 2005 to see the Trojans destroy the University of Oklahoma 55-19. Peter Carroll put together one of the greatest game plans in the history of college football. I've been with them through the great years of John McKay, John Robinson, and Pete Carroll. However, I've also been with them through the less than stellar years with coaches who will remain nameless, so I don't get sued. (They know who they are.)

In football, just like every other sport, the game plan plays a major role in the final result. Coaches watch the game film all year long to determine how they can develop a winning game plan against each opponent. Everything they study is purposeful. They look to exploit every vulnerability of their rival without wasting time and focusing on only what matters for victory. The full game film goes through the "cutting process," where they remove unnecessary plays and details. When they finish studying and the film is ready, they share it with the players in the form of a game plan to help them win on game day. Can you imagine what it would be like if the coach and players watched the film, learned what they needed to do, but didn't apply any of it in a game? (Actually, I can because that's what USC did for most of the 1980s.)

Knowledge alone isn't enough, whether in college football or in studying the Bible. You can earn a PhD in Biblical Studies and still not know God. It may qualify you to be highly successful on Jeopardy, but you'll be majorly disappointing in eternity. For the biblical exegete, Application *must*

be the result of the Acclimation and Analyzation process. Let me be crystal clear: The ultimate goal of Application is action leading to *Transformation*.

## The ultimate goal of Application is action leading to *Transformation*.

Before I address the questions of Application, I want to share two words and their definitions that are important for you to know and four types of Application you will make:

### TWO IMPORTANT WORDS AND DEFINITIONS

- **Transcultural Truth:** A *transcultural truth* is one that applies to any culture at any time and offers the same outcome to every person. (Some people substitute this phrase with “Universal Truths.”) For example, salvation is a *transcultural truth* because it applies to everyone. In Romans 10:9, Paul told the Romans, “If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Salvation is available for every person on every continent and of every social standing. It wasn’t a time-bound offer only for Christians living in Jerusalem in 31 AD.
- **Culture-Related Truth:** *Culture-related truths* are those that specifically addressed an issue at the time of the writing. One example of this would be in 1 Corinthians 16:20 where Paul wrote, “All the brothers and sisters here send greetings to you. Greet each other with a sacred kiss.” (The King James Version says, “Holy kiss.”) When I was in high school, I tried to convince several girls that I was “just trying to be biblical” when they came to church. However, I was making a misapplication to make the Bible say what I wanted it to say. A kiss was a standard greeting during Paul’s day, as it is in many countries today. Paul was instructing them to not romantically kiss each other; rather, have integrity in how you conduct yourself.

Before you can make an Application, you must understand whether the text you are reading was a *trans-cultural truth* or a *culture-related truth*. When Paul wrote his letter to the church at Philippi, he gave an appeal in his closing that shows the need for Application:

### **Philippians 4:9**

Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.

In Philippians, Paul addressed a problem of division in the church and used his life as an example of how they should live. So, when he tells them to practice what they “learned and received” from him, he’s telling them to make an Application. Though Paul’s message was to a specific church, the principle from the verse can apply in our lives, as well. Without application, the Bible is just another really good book.

Without application, the Bible  
is just another really good book.

### **FOUR TYPES OF BIBLICAL APPLICATION**

There are many types of Application, but they all fall under one or more of the four types of biblical Application. They are:

- **Kingdom Application** is *how the passage related to and advances the Kingdom of God*. Does your application honor Jesus and draw attention to God? How is God elevated and Jesus exalted? If your application takes away from the Kingdom of God in any way, then your application is wrong. Start over again. Remember: The Kingdom of God is the theme of the Bible, so you must ALWAYS connect it.



- **Historical Application** is *the recognition that the people, places, and events recorded in the Bible are real and genuinely occurred*. You need to ask yourself initially: Who were these people, places, or events, and why did they matter? How did what was written in the passage apply in their historical context? What did God want them to understand and what was their application? Don't miss the importance of this Application because if these events and people are not real, then the entire Bible is a lie.
- **Corporate Application** is *how the application impacts the Body of Christ*. Most often, it will take the form of doctrinal application that provides instruction for how the church is to live and interact. The four Gospels and New Testament epistles are foundational for teaching doctrine regarding salvation, baptism, healing, and more. Use Scripture to interpret Scripture when it comes to establishing doctrine. Ask yourself: Can your application be supported by multiple passages? Remember: NEVER make a doctrine from only one verse of Scripture.
- **Personal Application** is *how the Bible applies in your 21<sup>st</sup>-century world*. The Bible is relevant for your life today, and it has everything you need to live a godly, holy life (2 Peter 1:3). Is there something we can learn from the people, places, and events that will lead us to love God more and follow His commands? Are there specific commands like those Jesus gave in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 that are applicable?

**NEVER make a doctrine  
from only one verse of Scripture.**

## **DEVELOPING AN APPLICATION GAME PLAN**

It's time to develop the game plan for Application with actions leading to transformation. If you've skipped anything from the previous steps of

Acclimation and Analyzation, you're going to fumble your Application. Every game plan in football must account for offense, defense, and special teams; it must cover all aspects of the game, which our questions will do because we want to be thorough and accurate. Remember: Having a game plan is only as good as your willingness to develop, implement, and participate in it.

**A game plan is only as good as your willingness to develop, implement, and participate in it.**

### **The Five W Questions Revisited**

To make a correct application we have to transfer the message from “then and there” to “here and now,” moving the biblical text to our 21<sup>st</sup>-century world. (Remember: There will ALWAYS be a Kingdom Application.) We can accomplish this through revisiting the Five “W” questions:

#### ***Question #1: Who is this message for?***

As you're studying, you need to identify who this Application is for and how you will communicate it to them, unless it's for you. (In that case, just let yourself know.) If the passage is historical or written to an individual, you're sure to find a Personal Application. If it's is for a group of people or a church, there is undoubtedly a Corporate Application.

As a pastor, I preached between 45 and 50 Sundays per year. Before studying for every message, I always asked the Holy Spirit to show me His message through God's Word and help me accurately apply it to life. Inevitably, every Sunday, many people would come to me after the service and tell me some like, “This message was for me today.” And it was for every one of them! There was Personal and Corporate Application.

At the same time, before I ever preached a message to others, the Holy Spirit led *me* into Truth, teaching *me* and speaking a Personal Application for *me* to implement. It's not that I was being "Me-Centric," I knew I couldn't preach a message I wasn't willing to live first. Let that be a good rule of thumb for you, as well: Don't study a passage with the desired outcome in mind of God changing other people; let God transform you first!

**Side Note:** If you have a "message from God" for a person or group of people, you don't have to qualify it with, "God gave me a word for you." Jesus didn't do this, and you don't need to either because the word will either be confirmed as truth or a lie based on the outcome. Here's the best word to give to someone that will never fail. Get ready, get ready, get ready: God's word. The Bible is a direct message from God.

***Question #2: What ancient truths and principles are relevant or meaningful to our 21<sup>st</sup>-century world?***

To determine what is relevant or meaningful, stick to the main concepts and themes of a passage. Don't make the mistake of over-information or trying to find a hidden meaning behind a passage. Stick with the obvious.

Not everything you read is relevant for application, nor does every word in every verse have some hidden meaning that needs an expression in our current day. Some verses are just part of the story. For instance, in 1 Samuel 24:3, we find Saul went into a cave to relieve himself. The fact Saul relieved himself IS a *transcultural truth* because everyone does that at some point. However, we don't need a message or blog post entitled "Sweet Relief." It probably was sweet relief at that moment for Saul and you and me at times, but let's focus on the meaningful things. What was God trying to say through this verse? Saul had to go to the bathroom. Enough said.

Let me give you an example from real life: I heard someone preach recently from 1 Samuel 17 concerning David and Goliath, and they asked the

audience, “Have you ever wondered why David had five stones in his bag?” I thought to myself, “Well, yes, I have.” Then they got a proud look on their face and said, “It’s because he had one for Goliath and one for each of his brothers.” People LITERALLY started clapping and saying, “Amen!” Wow, that sounded powerful, but I instantly told my wife, “That’s not true.”

Now, I hate to ruin a “good” sermon, but they had problems on, at least, two levels. First, I let me point out the obvious: Goliath only had three brothers (2 Samuel 21:18-22 and 1 Chronicles 20:5), so David only needed four stones, unless his faith was unsure, or he didn’t have good aim. (I wrote that jokingly, but it’s probably been preached.) Maybe he threw a practice stone at a bald eagle and hit it, giving him the confidence he needed to kill Goliath. (That’s every bit as plausible as the “five-stone” theory.) Secondly, the biggest problem they had is the Bible doesn’t say that in the text. They were practicing “Speculagesis” as I addressed in chapter five and wasted the time of me and others with an obscure and irrelevant interpretation. “Fortunately,” they didn’t have an Application for their “point.” It was neither relevant nor meaningful.

***Question #3: When do I know if I should make an Application or just move on to another thought?***

Think of my previous example about the five stones: Why did the number of stones matter? The point was God used a young shepherd boy to deliver His people from their enemy, the Philistines. I can think of many other applications to make from this passage:

- God can use anyone to accomplish His purposes (David was a shepherd who fought the giant, while the king watched from a distance)
- There will always be “giants” in life that will taunt you, but you have to listen to what God says, not them (Goliath taunted the Israelites and fear paralyzed them, but David listened to God)

- Don't allow someone else to put something on you that doesn't fit (Saul tried to put his armor on David)
- Your greatest weapon is your confidence in God's ability, not yours (Saul had bigger weapons, but David trusted in God more than his slingshot)
- If you want to defeat giants, you have to first win when no one else is watching (David defeated lions and bears in the field protecting sheep when no one else was looking)
- Don't allow your pride to be your downfall (Saul took his enemy for granted and trusted in his strength to bring victory)

Those six simple examples of applications took me less than five minutes to develop. I could have spent time focusing on the roasted grain and these ten loaves of bread his father, Jesse, asked him to take to his brothers. Did that matter? Was the type of food more important than the fact David was obedient to his father? David's obedience in the small things put him in a position where God could use him to do great things. (I can do this all day.)

Don't spend time addressing trivial issues from obscure words or phrases in a passage. Don't read a country into a biblical prophecy that wasn't a country during Bible times. Focus on what matters. Don't major on the minors in Application!

## Don't major on the minors in Application!

***Question #4: Where do I see similarities between the biblical culture and the current culture?***

Connecting the similarities of an ancient culture with ours can be difficult, so you have to be careful when making this transition. At this point, you'll need to rely on your Bible Dictionaries, Bible Encyclopedias, and Manners and Customs resources.

For the sake of our discussion, let's take a simple verse from the words of Paul to Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:9: And I want women to be modest in their appearance. They should wear decent and appropriate clothing and not draw attention to themselves by the way they fix their hair or by wearing gold or pearls or expensive clothes.

What jumped out at you immediately as you read this verse? Paul tells women to be modest in their appearance. I'm sure many today will read that verse and wonder who gave Paul the authority to write those "sexist words" to women. He needs to focus on the length of his own robe. (BTW, God gave Paul the authority to write what he wrote.)

What similarities do we see between Paul's culture and ours? There are women (and men) who dress in such a way that draws attention to themselves. If Paul were writing this today and wanted to get very specific, he might write, "Women, don't go around wearing short shorts with words on your rear end to draw attention to yourselves. Also, guys, there's never an occasion where a Speedo is the right choice. I'm just saying." (I'm sure Paul wouldn't phrase it as eloquently as I just did, but you get the point.) Dressing modestly is always a right choice in any culture.

Admittedly, 1 Timothy 2:9 is an outlier truth that I refer to as a transcultural/culture-related truth, which occurs when a biblical author addresses a specific problem or issue, but the concept remains applicable today.

Let me give you another biblical example from the words of Jesus about love in John 13:34-35: 34 So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. 35 Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples. Are there any similarities from concerning "love" in their culture and our culture? Absolutely! In order to understand the similarities though, I need

to first define the word “love” in its proper context. There are four primary Greek words in the New Testament for love and they are:

#### 4 Greek Words for Love

- **Eros** is the sexual love between a man and a woman that Paul wrote about in 1 Corinthians 7:8-9.
- **Phileo** is a brotherly love that was referred to when Jesus wept over Lazarus in John 10:36. (It’s the root word of our city Philadelphia which is known as the City of Brotherly Love.)
- **Storge** is familial love, like that of brothers and sisters, that Paul wrote about in Romans 12:10.
- **Agape** is a no strings attached love that prefers others above self as God demonstrated for us in John 3:16 when He sent Jesus.

Can you see a way to connect these words to our 21<sup>st</sup>-century world? Unquestionably! I would use my research to talk about how the world defines love and then talk about how God defines it in His Word. Love can also be applied to every relationship in life. You’ll find similarities in most cases because people are people, and we have the same thoughts, feelings, and emotions they experienced.

You’ll find similarities in most cases because people are people, and we have the same thoughts, feelings, and emotions they experienced.

***Question #5: Why are these transcultural truths or culture-related truths applicable for our culture?***

You need to answer the “why” question to help you understand God’s intent for sharing this with the original audience and determine how His message is still useful in your world. Since *transcultural truths* and *culture-related*

*truths* serve a different purpose in Scripture, we must think differently about how we'll apply them.

*Transcultural Truths:* You need to apply *transcultural truths* because they hold the major themes of the Bible. They are God's main messages for us concerning the Kingdom of God: Salvation, love, forgiveness, grace, faith, mercy, compassion, serving, and more. Why do we relate these? Because that's what God communicated to us through His Word, and that message is valid for every culture.

*Culture-Related Truths:* You should apply *culture-related truths* when they lead you and others to live obediently to God and become more like Jesus. Be very careful when applying these truths because the Bible does allow liberty regarding some issues. I've heard people use 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, telling others that their body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, as to why they shouldn't smoke. You've got to protect the body, right? Yes, we all should, but many of those people making that argument overeat. Don't apply a culture-related truth to someone else if the Bible is clear on a subject; apply it to yourself. If you disagree with someone else's choices and there's no clear biblical text calling their issue a sin, pray for them and let the Holy Spirit change them. You can't "fix" them.

## **APPLICATION**

Application meets at the intersection of Acclimation and Analyzation. Without Application, the rest of the process is an exercise in merely gaining knowledge. Through Application we invite the Bible in conjunction with the Holy Spirit to change our lives. Don't ever become so full of knowledge that you allow it to desensitize you to the power of God's Word!

Application meets at the intersection  
of Acclimation and Analyzation.



Remember the author's message from Hebrews 4:12: 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. When it exposes you, don't resist the call to change as it does all of us!

## Key Thoughts

- The ultimate goal of Application is action leading to *Transformation*.
- Before you can make an Application, you must understand whether the text you are reading was a *trans-cultural truth* or a *culture-related truth*.
- Without application, the Bible is just another really good book.
- NEVER make a doctrine from only one verse of Scripture.
- Don't major on the minors in Application!
- Application meets the intersection of Acclimation and Analyzation.

## Key Terms

- A *transcultural truth* is one that applies to any culture at any time and offers the same outcome to every person.
- *Culture-related truths* are those that specifically addressed an issue at the time of the writing.
- *Kingdom Application* is how the passage relates to and advances the Kingdom of God.
- *Historical Application* is the recognition that the people, places, and events recorded in the Bible are real and genuinely occurred.
- *Corporate Application* is how the application impacts the Body of Christ.
- *Personal Application* is how the Bible applies in your 21<sup>st</sup>-century world.

# Chapter Eight

## Application: I Love It When a Game Plan Comes Together!

From 1983 to 1987, one of the top 10 shows on TV was *The A-Team*. As a teen, I looked forward to Tuesday nights to hear the announcer come on with the most anticipated words of my TV-watching week:

“In 1972, a crack commando unit was sent to prison by a military court for a crime they didn't commit. These men promptly escaped from a maximum-security stockade to the Los Angeles underground. Today, still wanted by the government, they survive as soldiers of fortune. If you have a problem, if no one else can help, and if you can find them, maybe you can hire... the A-Team.”<sup>66</sup>

What made the show so interesting was the diverse backgrounds of the main characters. *The A-Team* consisted of four former Vietnam veterans who were part of the same commando unit, but now they lived as mercenaries. Templeton “Face” Peck was the good-looking, smooth-talking ladies’ man who was a war hero. H. M. “Howling Mad” Murdock was the baseball cap-wearing, mentally insane chopper pilot who regularly escaped the VA psychiatric ward to help on a mission. Murdock also had an invisible dog named Billy. Then there was B.A. Baracus, played by Mr. T, the mohawk-sporting, mechanically-gifted tough guy known for saying, “Shut up, fool!” He was a cultural icon whose catchphrase from *Rocky III*, “I pity the fool,” was uttered by virtually every person alive on the planet.

Finally, the leader of this ragtag squad was John “Hannibal” Smith. Hannibal was the levelheaded, grey-haired, cigar-smoking “brains” of the outfit. Since the team always found themselves running from the law or criminals, he was responsible for getting them out of trouble. Inevitably, when it seemed as if they had no hope, Hannibal came up with a sure-fire plan that saved the day. Then, when they were safe, he would chomp on his

cigar, look at one of the other men with a smile and tell them, “I love it when a plan comes together!” (Google videos of “I love it when a plan comes together” to see what I’m talking about.) It was the coolest show on TV not named *Miami Vice*. (Although that’s not saying much after watching the 1980s re-runs.)

Let me slightly change Hannibal’s words for our mission: I love it when a game plan comes together! You’re not quite there yet, but you’re close. The first seven chapters of this book detail how you can create the game plan, but chapter eight is about playing the game.

Now it’s time to implement the processes of Acclimation and Analyzation to make our Application. (I’m going to revisit the relevant information I learned from my previous study and put it all together in one place, so you don’t have to go back and forth in the book.)

## ACCLIMATION

**PASSAGE** (with bolded words I observed as meaningful)

### Paul’s Prayer for Spiritual Wisdom

#### Ephesians 1:15-23

15 Ever since I first heard of your **strong faith** in the Lord Jesus and your **love for God’s people** everywhere, 16 I have not stopped **thanking** God for you. **I pray** for you constantly, 17 asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you **spiritual wisdom** and **insight** so that you might **grow** in your **knowledge of God**. 18 **I pray** that your hearts will be **flooded with light** so that you can understand the **confident hope** he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious **inheritance**.

19 **I also pray** that you will understand the incredible greatness of **God's power** for us who **believe** him. This is the same **mighty power** 20 that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. 21 Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. 22 God has put all things **under the authority of Christ** and has made him **head** over all things for the benefit of the church. 23 And the church is his body; it is made **full and complete** by Christ, who **fills** all things everywhere with himself.

Remember: You don't have to make an application just because you have highlighted a word or phrase. As you get into your study, you will likely find yourself focusing on a specific passage.

### **HOW I SELECTED THE PASSAGE (motivation)**

- I'm interested in biblical prayers because I like to pray the Scriptures, as well as learn patterns for my personal prayer life.
- I decided to search for prayers by the Apostle Paul because he was a church leader who often prayed for his people. As a church leader and Bible college president, I want to identify ways to better pray for those in my ministry.
- I did a quick Google search for "Prayers prayed by the Apostle Paul in the Bible."
- I read each prayer and cross-referenced it with the Bible to make sure it was accurate. (I didn't assume what was written was true just because it was on the internet. Trust, but verify.)
- I selected Ephesians 1:15-23 because Paul's prayer was exactly what I want for those under my leadership.

### **INITIAL NOTES I TOOK FROM EPHESIANS 1:15-23 (observations)**

- Paul remarked how this church was known for their strong faith and love of God's people (v. 15).
- Paul thanked God and constantly prayed for them (v. 16).
- Paul asked God to give them spiritual wisdom so they could grow in knowledge of Him (v. 17).
- Paul prayed for their understanding of their hope (v. 18).
- Paul prayed for them to know God's power, which is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead (v. 19-20).
- Jesus is above everything because God placed all things under His authority (v. 21-22).
- The church is made complete by Christ (v. 23).

## **ANALYZATION**

### **Question #1: Who was the author and the audience?**

The Apostle Paul is the author. Paul wrote the Book of Ephesians to Christians living in Ephesus's sexually charged society, but they remained holy. The Ephesians believed the goddess Diana would prosper them in every area of their lives, so they didn't need any other "god" to interfere with their lives.

### **Question #2: What was the genre?**

The genre of the Book of Ephesians is 100% a letter, or epistle, written by Paul to "God's holy people at Ephesus."

### **Question #3: When was it written?**

Ephesians was written between 54-62 AD. We will consider specific information around the time of the writing as we answer the next investigative question.

### **Question #4: Where was it written to and from?**

Ephesians was written by Paul to the church (God's holy people) at Ephesus from a prison cell, most likely in Rome.

### **Question #5: Why is it important?**

This passage is important because it shows the character of the people in church at Ephesus during difficult times.

## **APPLICATION**

### **Question #1: Who is this message for?**

Ephesians is a letter written to God's holy people at Ephesus. God's people mentioned in Ephesians 1:1 was the church. So, this informs you that the message of this passage will be applicable to any church. As such, there will be a corporate application. However, the church isn't just a building; it consists of individuals, so there will also be a personal application.

### **Question #2: What ancient truths and principles are relevant or meaningful to our 21<sup>st</sup>-century world?**

Remember: You're looking for the obvious at this point. From my study, what do I see?

- *Paul mentioned prayer for the Ephesians three times and prayer for God's people is still relevant for us today.* Since my motivation was wanting to learn more about biblical prayer so I can pray these things over my people, I will draw out every meaningful word or phrase.
- *The character traits of the Ephesians Paul mentions are those we should strive for in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century.* Many of the words I highlighted relate to the character qualities of the Ephesians. These should also be evident in every believer in the 21st-century.
- *Paul addresses several doctrinal issues that relate to God.* Just a refresher: The fundamental meaning of doctrine is "teaching."<sup>67</sup>

Doctrine is necessary for forming a biblical worldview, so I'll definitely include it in my final application.

**Question #3: When do I know if I should make an Application or just move on to another thought?**

For this exercise, I will state the defined word first and then respond with an observation of how I can make an application. Remember: You're making observations based on your study.

**Faith** – *Pistis* #4102: persuasion, i.e. credence; moral conviction, especially reliance upon Christ for salvation

- ***Faith Observation:*** The Ephesians' strong faith was the first mention Paul made in his prayer. They had firm convictions that allowed them to live as God's holy people. Paul should know about this because he was writing them from prison.
- ***Application:*** Our faith should be evident to everyone, regardless of our circumstances.

**Love** – *Agape* #26: affection, good will, love, benevolence

- ***Love Observation:*** Paul heard about the Ephesians' love for God's people everywhere; their authentic, genuine affection for others. The fact Paul heard about this from someone else lets you know that people were talking about them in a good way. That talk was their testimony to the world around them.
- ***Application:*** People will notice whether or not your love is genuine, so live in such a way that people will talk about your authentic love for others.

**Thanking** – *Eucharisteo* #2168: to be grateful, i.e. (actively) to express gratitude (towards)

- **Thanking Observation:** The impact of the Ephesians' lives must have been huge because Paul didn't stop thanking God for them. Paul's gratitude came from their faith and love.
- **Application:** We need to express our thankfulness to God and others for the things we see in their lives.

**Pray** – *Proseuché* #4335: prayer (worship); by implication, an oratory

- **Pray Observation:** Paul tells the Ephesians he's praying for them, but not just a general, "I'm praying for you." He specifically prayed for them to understand who God is in three tangible ways: spiritual wisdom, hope, and power.
- **Application:** You need to pray specifically for your family, friends, and God's people everywhere to understand what God wants them to know. Your prayer may be for a general or specific situation, but we must pray over God's people!

**Wisdom** – *Sophias* #4678: wisdom (higher or lower, worldly or spiritual)

- **Wisdom Observation:** Paul prayed God would give the Ephesians wisdom, but not just any kind; he prayed for spiritual wisdom. Spiritual wisdom will help them see life through God's eyes and make God-honoring decisions.
- **Application:** You need to pray for God to give you His wisdom to make the decisions He wants you to make. What are some specific areas in your life that you and others need His understanding? The answers are endless.

**Insight** – *Apokalupsis* #602: disclosure--appearing, coming, lighten, manifestation, be revealed, revelation

- **Insight Observation:** Paul also prayed God would disclose or reveal the hidden things to them at that time. Paul knew the Ephesians



would face challenges in the future, but a fresh revelation from God, of Himself, would help them overcome.

- **Application:** You need to pray that God will give you insights to help you prepare for future events that you're not even aware of right now. Position yourself to hear from God, which means you must listen to The Bible and for His still, small voice inside.

**Hearts flooded with light** – *Photizo* #5461: to shed rays, i.e. to shine or (transitively) to brighten up (literally or figuratively):--enlighten, illuminate, (bring to, give) light, make to see

- **Hearts Flooded with Light Observation:** The word "*photizo*" shows how God wants to brighten up the picture of His plan for the Ephesians. When the lights come on, they will help them more clearly to see the details. We also need God's light to come on in our lives to enable us to see His plan for us.
- **Application:** You should pray that God will bring light to the pictures of His plan and will. We've all felt like we've been in the dark before regarding what God wants, but then He'll allow something to happen that lets us see His bigger picture for us.

**Confident hope** – *Elpis* #1680: (to anticipate, usually with pleasure); expectation (abstractly or concretely) or confidence:--faith, hope

- **Confident Hope Observation:** Paul wants the Ephesians to live an expectant life, knowing they have a future with Jesus in heaven.
- **Application:** We all need to focus on eternity. We must live our lives in such a way that we demonstrate that eternity is our focus. If we're going to live like this, then it should effect all the decisions we make, including the investments of our time, talent, and treasures.

**Power** – *Dunamis* #1411: force (literally or figuratively); specially, miraculous power (usually by implication, a miracle itself):--ability,

abundance, meaning, might(-ily, -y, -y deed), (worker of) miracle(-s), power, strength, violence, mighty (wonderful) work

- ***Power Observation:*** Paul's use of the word "dunamis" is the root word of our English word "dynamite." However, he wasn't referring to human power to accomplish anything. This power belongs to God, and whenever He is present, there is potential for a miracle. Paul wants them to know God's power because seeing Him like this will give them a hope-filled life.
- ***Application:*** You must recognize God's power to do anything at any moment and live with an expectation that He will step into your life when you need Him the most.

**Believe** – *Pisteu* #4100: to have faith (in, upon, or with respect to, a person or thing), i.e. credit; by implication, to entrust (especially one's spiritual well-being to Christ):--believe(-r), commit (to trust), put in trust with

- ***Believe Observation:*** To believe for Paul was more than mere head knowledge; it meant trusting your life to him. He wants them to commit themselves completely to God.
- ***Application:*** Your belief in God's power is that you know that you not only believe that God CAN do something; you know He WILL do what He says in His Word!

**Mighty power** – *Ischus* #2479: from a derivative of is (force; compare eschon, a form of 2192); forcefulness (literally or figuratively):--ability, might(-ily), power, strength

- ***Mighty Power Observation:*** Paul again refers to the word "power," but this time it's in connection with the resurrection of Jesus. Notice how he also uses a descriptive word in front of it, taking it to the next level. In looking at it from a human perspective, seeing

someone raised from the dead would make you and me think differently about how we use the word “power.”

- ***Application:*** You need to look at your life through the lens of resurrection. What has God already resurrected in you, and what still needs resurrection?

**Authority of Christ** – *Hupotasso* #5293: to subordinate; reflexively, to obey:--be under obedience (obedient), put under, subdue unto, (be, make) subject (to, unto), be (put) in subjection (to, under), submit self unto

- ***Authority of Christ Observation:*** Paul wants the Ephesians to know that Jesus has authority over all things in creation, including the church. He relates that being under the Head is a benefit to and for them.
- ***Application:*** You need to willingly obey and subject yourself to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Why should you make this decision? The result will be for your benefit, whether physically, spiritually, emotionally, or relationally.

**The Church is His body** – *Ekklesia* #1577: a calling out, i.e. (concretely) a popular meeting, especially a religious congregation (Jewish synagogue, or Christian community of members on earth or saints in heaven or both):-assembly, church

- ***The Church is His Body Observation:*** Paul desires for the Ephesians to know the church is a big deal! They’re Christ’s body living among the world. The church has nothing to do with physical structures. Instead, they’re the people of God living out the will of God in the world He created.
- ***Application:*** If the church is a big deal for the Ephesians, then it’s a big deal for you too. You need to find one where you can invest your life, serving in the Kingdom of God. You NEED the church to help you navigate life and become more like Jesus.

#### **Question #4: Where do I see similarities between the biblical culture and the current culture?**

Here are three similarities between their culture and our culture I've observed:

- Ephesus was a sexually charged society that worshipped false gods.
- Their society was hostile to Christians and we see that hostility growing in our world.
- God's holy people were a part of their society and they are in ours too.

#### **Question #5: Why are these transcultural truths or culture-related truths applicable for our culture?**

To assess this, let's go back and look at the four types of application before we make our final application:

**Kingdom Application:** God placed Jesus over everything in this world, including the church and my life.

**Historical Application:** God's people must live holy lives, regardless of the hostilities against us or when we face discouraging life circumstances.

**Corporate Application:** The church needs to understand the hope we have in Christ, God's mighty power to accomplish His purposes, through and our identity as His body. As God's body, we must live in a way that honors God.

**Personal Application:** I want my personal testimony to be that I have a strong faith in the Lord Jesus and that I love God's people everywhere. I need to grow in the areas of faith, love, thanking, wisdom, insight, hope, knowledge, power, and belief.

#### **FINAL APPLICATION: THE "SO WHAT?" QUESTIONS**

OK, I've got all this information and a lot of observations, but so what? What you want to know right now is: How can all this information lead to transformation in my life?

As a pastor and leader for over 35 years, I've preached countless of messages worldwide in front of audiences of thousands and as few as two people. (I have to admit, the time there were only two people was quite awkward.) Preaching was the easiest part for me, but biblical interpretation took time. At the end my study, I could always stand in front of people and know I am preaching the Truth. I've always done what Paul encouraged Timothy to do in 2 Timothy 2:15: Work hard so you can present yourself to God and receive his approval. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth.

In every instance, as I wrote my message, I always asked myself the question: What do you want people to think, feel, know, and do? You can also apply these questions to the final application phase to connect what you've learned with real life.

#### **FOUR “SO WHAT” RESPONSE QUESTIONS**

##### **“So what” do you need to think?**

- ***You have a testimony, whether you realize it or not.*** Let me ask: What would Paul “have heard” about your life? What are other people saying about your testimony?
- ***God wants you to pray for other believers, so they can grow in their understanding of Him.*** Who are you praying for currently? Are you praying only for God to do something for them or in them?

##### **“So what” do you need to feel?**

- ***You should be thankful for the people God has put in your life. Don't them for granted.*** Instead, express your appreciation and tell them the

good things you see. Also, express your gratitude to God for His incredible greatness. List all the ways you've experienced His greatness in your life.

- ***You need to experience awe in knowing that you serve a miracle-working God who has no limitations.*** If you want to see God's mighty power, look up in the sky at night see the moon. Take a moment and slowly breathe in the breath he gave you.

**“So what” do you need to know?**

- ***You should know that your confident hope isn't just wishful thinking; it's the eternal reality that is promised for the people of God.*** God wants to shed light in your life so you can understand what this really means because you will live differently if you look at life through the lens of heaven.
- ***You need to know how great the God is that you're serving.*** I'm not just talking about half-heartedly singing the Chris Tomlin worship song, “How Great is our God.” I'm talking about seeing God as the Creator of the Universe and who has infinite resources to meet your physical, spiritual, emotional, or financial needs at any time.

**“So what” do you need to do?**

- ***Even though Jesus is over everything, you must allow Him to rule over every area of your life.*** Make that personal. What does that look like for you? Let me ask: How are you investing your time, talent, and treasures? Do your actions and investments match up to the faith you profess? Honestly assess your life and prioritize Jesus as #1 in every area.
- ***You need to pray over the people God has entrusted in your life and ministry.*** If you don't have one, you should start a prayer journal and list the names of the people you're praying for and the reason why you're praying for them.

- ***You need to be thankful whenever you see God working in someone's life and let them know you recognize God's goodness in them.*** Who are three people you can thank God for today? How can you communicate your thoughts and feelings to them?
- ***The church and its people are only made complete by living "in Christ."*** If you settle for anything less it will be like buying a knock-off purse; it looks real from a distance, but the closer you get, the easier it is to spot a fake. Don't settle for counterfeit (fake) religion.

## **APPLICATION CONCLUSION**

Application isn't difficult; it just requires time and effort to be accurate. As you can see from Ephesians 1:15-23, there are many applications that can be made and there were still many more. As you do the work of Acclimation and Analyzation to make the Application, you'll join me in saying: I love it when a game plan comes together!

# Chapter Nine

## Rightly Reading the Biblical Text Through 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Eyes

Years ago, I read a list of advertising campaigns that were very popular in the US but failed internationally because the marketing company didn't account for the language and culture into account ahead of time. Some of the famous fails noted by Inc. 5000 and The Language Blog include:

- KFC made Chinese consumers a bit apprehensive when "finger licking good" was translated as "eat your fingers off."
- Mercedes-Benz entered the Chinese market under the brand name "Bensi," which means "rush to die."
- Pepsi's slogan "Pepsi Brings You Back to Life" was debuted in China as "Pepsi Brings You Back from the Grave."
- Ikea products were marketed in Thailand with Swedish names that in the Thai language mean "sex" and "getting to third base."
- Coca-Cola's brand name, when first marketed in China, was sometimes translated as "Bite The Wax Tadpole."
- When Proctor & Gamble started selling Pampers diapers in Japan, they realized that the problem was the packaging, which featured an image of a stork delivering a baby. The reference was completely lost on Japanese parents, since the story isn't part of Japanese culture – instead their story goes that giant floating peaches deliver babies.<sup>68 69</sup>

As you look at the six examples I used, does anything in particular stand out to you? The one common thread is that all of these advertising fails were Western countries marketing to the Eastern world.

Why is this important for biblical interpretation? The Bible was written by Middle Eastern authors with an oriental (Eastern) worldview. So, if you read the Bible through your 21<sup>st</sup>-century Western world eyes and mindset, you're likely to misinterpret and misapply the message, much like the advertisers.



## The Bible was written by Middle Eastern authors with an oriental (Eastern) worldview.

**Side Note:** In case you don't know, a *worldview* is “the framework from which we view reality and make sense of life and the world.”<sup>70</sup> We say someone has a *biblical worldview* when they base how they see life through the lens of the Bible. In 2017, the Barna Research Group's research found that only 17% of Christians who consider their faith important and attend church regularly actually have a *biblical worldview*.

Now the Hebrews being a part of an oriental culture may be new for some reading this book. When most people think of the Orient, it typically includes countries and regions like Japan, China, North and South Korea, Hong Kong, Vietnam, and Taiwan. However, the Eastern world traditionally consists all of East and Southeast Asia (e.g. China, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Singapore), the Near East, the Eurasian Steppe, the Greater Middle East, and South Asia (Afghanistan and the Indian subcontinent).<sup>71</sup> As such, Israel is an oriental (Eastern) culture.

There are significant language and cultural differences between the Eastern and Western worlds. When you add in as many as 3,500 years of how the world has changed since the writing of the biblical texts, you can see how reading the Bible through 21st-century eyes could result in errors. Let me show you a few examples of the differences between Eastern biblical culture and our current culture difference and its impact on meaning.

- **No Room in the Inn:** I remember as a child reading the account of the birth of Jesus in Luke 2 and coming across verse seven from the King James Version. “And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.”<sup>72</sup> When I was a kid, the most popular hotel

chain was the Holiday Inn. So, when I read or heard that, I felt sad that Jesus couldn't get into a two-bed room with green decorations.

**Reality:** The Greek word for *inn* is “katalyma” and it means *a guest chamber*.<sup>73</sup> It wasn't a freestanding commercial structure where families would travel to when they came in from out of town. It was common back then for people to add a room to their house and allow travelers to stay to make extra money. The concept is similar to that of a bed and breakfast in our world today.

If you read this verse through the lens of 21<sup>st</sup>-century eyes, you may have a completely different picture than what took place. How would this knowledge change your view of this passage and perhaps even the application?

- **Mansions in Heaven:** Growing up in church in the 1970s and 1980s, we sang a lot of hymns because the modern worship chorus styles were only beginning. One of the hymns I can still hear ringing in my head to this day is “Mansion Over the Hilltop.” The words to the chorus are:

I've got a mansion just over the hilltop  
In that bright land where we'll never grow old  
And some day yonder we will never more wander  
But walk on streets that are purest gold<sup>74</sup>

I can still hear Sister Bessie May (fictional name, but a real story) singing to the top of her lungs with tears streaming down her face. So, as a kid, I wanted a mansion over the hilltop, too, because it sure sounded better than my three-bedroom, two-bath home we lived in at the time. I could picture the view from my palatial heavenly estate overlooking the streets of gold. I imagined my heavenly home being much like what Jeff Bezos lives in now.

**Reality:** John 14:2 was the foundation for the song where Jesus said, “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>75</sup> There’s just one big problem: The word “mansions” in the Greek is “mone” (mon-ay’) and it means a staying, abiding, dwelling, or abode.<sup>76</sup> (When I first saw the pronunciation, my initial thought was “show me the mone.”) A “mone” was a room, not a two-story, ten-bedroom, fifteen-bath home.

In Eastern culture during that time, when a person invited someone else to move in, they would build a room onto their house. So, when Jesus spoke about a mansion, He referred to the rooms His father would build on so we could all live with Him.

How does this change the meaning of the John 14:2? It makes it much more personal. God doesn’t want to build you an isolated home where you’re living on your own; He wants you to live with Him, which is far different than just building someone a home.

- **The Prodigal Son:** In Luke 15:11-32, Jesus tells the parable of The Prodigal Son to express the love of the Heavenly Father for His children, and His willingness to forgive them. As the story goes, a young man came to his father and asked him for his inheritance before his father died. The father gave it to him, and he wasted all his money on sinful living. He found himself feeding pigs and eating their food when he decided to go home and ask the father to allow him to work as a hired servant.

However, in Luke 15:20-24, we see this exchange between the father and son: “20 So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. 21 His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and

I am no longer worthy of being called your son. '22 But his father said to the servants, 'Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. 23 And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, 24 for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.' So the party began.”

If we view these verses through our 21<sup>st</sup>-century lens, we can identify with father who would be so incredibly happy their son came home and would give anything for that to happen. It's a great story and ending, but it misses the fullness of the message of the day.

**Reality:** There are many things about this story that would have offended people in oriental culture. First, if a young man came and asked his father for his inheritance, he may give it to him, but he wouldn't be welcome back into the home. Secondly, a father would have never run to his son following such an interaction. If he allowed him back, the father would sit and wait for the son to come to him. The idea of an older man running to a son was unheard of in that day. Thirdly, there wouldn't have been a party under these circumstances. The father would make the son beg for a place back under his roof.

**IMPORTANT:** Kenneth Bailey noted this regarding parables in the Eastern culture: “As westerners, we tend to universalize our culture. Parables do speak to everyone, but we need to understand the Middle East context—or parables become ethics, not theology.”<sup>77</sup>

As westerners, we tend to universalize our culture. Parables do speak to everyone, but we need to understand the Middle East context—or parables become ethics, not theology.

Put yourself in their position for a moment: Consider how people living in an Eastern context would have heard this story and combine it with Bailey's words. How does this change the reading? You'll find Jesus wasn't just telling a story; He was changing the ethics for the listener, as He demonstrated the Father's love and forgiveness.

Think about this: I've only given you three examples of how reading the text through 21st-century eyes can cause you to miss the full effect of the Word of God. How would reading the Bible like this change your understanding of Scripture? Can you understand why you shouldn't randomly ask a person what the Scripture means to them before its first studied and understood?

Obviously, there's no way I can give you every example of this in the Bible, but I do want to give you an overview of the most important concepts for you to consider. You can find many of these distinctions on a Manners and Customs book or a Biblical Encyclopedia. Remember: Use your resources to gain knowledge.

## **Differences Between the Western World and Eastern World**

Most people reading this book live in the Western world, including North and South America, most of Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. As a Westerner from America, I recognize that Westerners tend to act as if we're superior to other cultures, including me in the past. Throughout my travels on five continents, I've learned that I understand much more when I quietly listen to what others have to say and observe the social context. So, I ask questions to know why people whose culture is different from mine react and respond like they do in a given setting. If you're going to learn about the another, you can't be ready always to give advice or point out how they can do things much easier if they do them like you do them in your country. It may be accurate, but it won't help advance the learning of another culture.

The same process applies as you look to understand what the Bible means through an Eastern world lens. Let me share five primary differences between the biblical Eastern and 21<sup>st</sup>-century Western world that will impact your reading and understanding of a biblical passage:

**Difference #1 – Me vs. We:** The most glaring difference between Western and Eastern culture is that people from the West focus on “what’s best for me” as they look at life. Independence was the foundation for the formation of the United States of America, but Americans have taken the concept to a different level. The Baby Boomer generation, those born from 1946 through 1964, was given the nickname the “Me” generation as terms like “self-realization” and “self-fulfillment” became a mantra for how they saw life.<sup>78</sup>

The most glaring difference between Western and Eastern culture is that people from the West focus on “what’s best for me” as they look at life.

While the Baby Boomers may have started the trend, Millennials have taken the concept to an exponentially different stratosphere. Don’t believe me? Take one minute when you’re out in public and count all the Millennials taking selfies to capture the perfect image they want to portray on social media. (If you’re a Millennial, don’t be offended; stop being self-obsessed.) Occasionally, you may see the occasional two-person or group shots, but there’s a reason it’s called the *selfie*.

Conversely, people from the Eastern world in biblical times, and now, generally focus on the whole or the “we” of society. Thomas Visby Snitker noted how that in “Eastern cultures, relatedness, connectedness, and interdependence are sought, rooted in a concept of the self, not as a discrete entity but, rather, as inherently linked to others.”<sup>79</sup> Maha Kumaran wrote that “this distinction has been referred to as egocentric versus sociocentric

selves, individualism versus collectivism, and independence versus interdependence, and focuses on the extent to which the self is defined as an autonomous and unique individual or is seen as inextricably and fundamentally embedded within a larger social network.”<sup>80</sup>

Think of how these differences will impact reading the Bible without adding in the biblical context. A 21st-century Westerner who reads the Bible through the lens of their culture may unknowingly or unintentionally want to know what a verse or passage means to them. On the other hand, reading it through an Eastern mindset will want to know what they can learn to contribute to the greater whole.

**Difference #2 – Age:** Another meaningful difference between Western culture and biblical Eastern culture is how people view age. In the Western world, an emphasis is placed on youth and vitality, while people consider those aging as weaker, less important, and offering less in their contribution to society. The concept of *ageism*, which is “the stereotyping and discrimination against individuals or groups on the basis of their age,”<sup>81</sup> has even become a hallmark of many churches who discriminate based on age. (No one will come out and say it, but it’s a sad reality.) Put it in your context: Have you ever been to a nursing home? What were your thoughts? How have you treated your grandparents? Do you see them as being out of touch, or do you see them as offering wisdom and a wealth of life stories for you?

**In the Western world, an emphasis  
is placed on youth and vitality.**

In contrast, people living in the Eastern world “do indeed hold more positive societal views of aging than their Western counterparts.”<sup>82</sup> Age is honored as a source of wisdom and members of society are taught to show respect and defer to their elders whom they know and those they don’t know. Family members also have a responsibility to take care of their elders.

As you read through the Bible and see the ages of different people or hear the words “elder” or “old man” (or woman) mentioned, it should give you a greater appreciation for how they viewed age in biblical times.

**Difference #3 – Marriage and Weddings:** Marriage and weddings in the Western world are much different than in the Eastern world. In the West, people will meet someone, develop a relationship, experience love, get engaged, and get married for a lifetime. (At least that’s how it should go in theory.) My oldest daughter, Mikaela, got married on March 7, 2020, to Ronnie Baker. They were “friends” for quite some time, but I told her mom, Becky, I knew they would get married. When Ronnie asked my permission to marry Mikaela (yes, some young gentlemen still do this), I gave him my blessing. They got to choose everything about the wedding including the venue, dress, food, music and much more. Trust me, it was MUCH, MUCH more. The point is: They made the choices, as is common in the Western world.

In the Eastern world, marriage and weddings are generally much different. Arranged marriages were, and still are, common in the Eastern world. The fathers of the couple or tribal elders typically are the ones who determine them because they see themselves as having more wisdom in making these types of decisions. As far as they’re concerned, love will come after the marriage takes place.

In many Eastern cultures, the father of the bride still pays for a dowry, or bride price, to their daughter’s family. W. Smith wrote that “the reason for the bride price or wedding dowry seems to be that it is used as a compensation to the parents of the bride for the loss of her labor after leaving their home.”<sup>83</sup> Some cultures even promote marrying family members, as is seen throughout the Old Testament.

Understanding these cultural marriage differences is important both historically and practically when you read about marriage in the Bible. This



is especially true of the Old Testament where you see many parents sending out their workers to find a mate for their children.

**Difference #4 – Family:** Another area where differences exist is in the area of family. Western society places value on the nuclear family, known as the immediate family. The concept of the “traditional family” is declining. “One parent households, cohabitation, same-sex families, and voluntary childless couples are increasingly common.”<sup>84</sup> There has also been a shift in Western society where the family unit revolves around the children. Parents busily take their children from event-to-event or competition-to-competition and schedule their lives accordingly. (That’s not a healthy approach in the long run.)

In Eastern and biblical culture, the family unit revolves around the patriarch, the family's father. Rather than emphasizing the nuclear family, they prioritize the extended family, often with multi-generations living in one household. The family also must work together for the rest of the family (see interdependence); a necessary point in biblical times because many family units depended on farming or other labor-intense jobs to support the family.

If you “read in” and seek to apply a 21st-century mentality on family, you’ll never understand the genuine importance relationships they played in Bible times. Family, including extended family, was everything for them.

**Difference #5 – Gender Roles:** The final difference I’m going to address is gender roles. A *gender role* is “the public image of being a particular gender that a person presents to others.”<sup>85</sup> Gender roles in Western society have been virtually eliminated, as all people are seen as being equal. In a Cancel-Culture society, it’s offensive to hold to any traditional beliefs regarding traditional gender roles.

**Side Note:** I'm 100% for equality in every sense of the word. At the same time, I don't believe it is offensive or wrong to recognize differences between males and females *do* exist. One is not more superior than another, nor more valuable in the eyes of God; we're different, and that's a beautiful thing because Genesis 1 shows how God created us to complement one another!

In the biblical Eastern world, gender roles were traditional. The man was the leader, as well as the protector of and provider for the home. The man had more visible societal responsibilities. Women, in contrast, had the duty of daily taking care of the family, including having and raising children and overseeing all aspects of the work of the home.

Understanding biblical gender roles is essential to know how God sees men and women. Please understand: God is not a sexist Deity who oppresses women. He loves everyone equally, but He created us differently; a fact supported by science and common sense.

**Special Note:** I intentionally stayed away from the larger conversation in Western society regarding the new list of genders, including 64 ways to identify in your gender. My position on gender identity is taken directly from the Bible in Genesis 1:27: "So God created human being in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

## CONCLUSION

Rightly reading the biblical text through 21st-century eyes requires that you check your mindset at the door and see the Bible through the eyes of the Hebrews (the Jews). You must acknowledge that our culture is much different from theirs and must not ignore its impact as you read the Bible. Rather than starting the process by asking what this passage means for you,

begin by asking what it meant to them. Don't allow the message to fail to hit its intended target and meaning.

### **Key Thoughts**

- The Bible was written by Middle Eastern authors with an oriental (Eastern) worldview. So, if you read the Bible through your 21<sup>st</sup>-century Western world eyes and mindset, you're likely to misinterpret and misapply the message.
- As westerners, we tend to universalize our culture. Parables do speak to everyone, but we need to understand the Middle East context—or parables become ethics, not theology.

### **Key Terms**

- A *worldview* is “the framework from which we view reality and make sense of life and the world.”
- We say someone has a *biblical worldview* when they base how they see life through the lens of the Bible.
- *Ageism* is “the stereotyping and discrimination against individuals or groups on the basis of their age.
- A *gender role* is “the public image of being a particular gender that a person presents to others.”

# Chapter Ten

## Everything Else, Including the Kitchen Sink

Growing up in the 1970s and 1980s, I repeatedly heard a phrase from adults around me that I never really appreciated until I became an adult: “Everything but the kitchen sink.” People would often state this phrase to describe how hard someone tried at a given task or as a comical observation regarding their life. Here are a few ways I specifically remember hearing it used:

- The pitcher threw everything at them today but the kitchen sink at them today.
- When our family went on vacation, my wife and daughters took everything but the kitchen sink in their luggage.
- When those people moved out, they left with everything but the kitchen sink.

If you take this phrase literally, then you can assume that cumbersome household appliances and large pieces of furniture were thrown at people or made several trips to the beach throughout the years. I always thought that was such a strange phrase. However, I learned the phrase's origin goes back to the early 1900s, and the first time it was in print was in The Syracuse Herald newspaper in 1918. The expression became a popular catchphrase during various wars to define the bombing and attack strategies of the military against their enemy.<sup>86</sup> Sometimes there's more to words than what you may literally see, so it's vital that you learn the meaning behind them.

Throughout this book, I've given you everything but the kitchen sink in importance that I've learned for practicing proper biblical interpretation, so the only thing I have left now is to present what's actually in the kitchen sink. There are five additional areas I want to cover in the biblical interpretation process, of which you need a basic understanding. They are:

- The **ROLE** of genre in biblical interpretation
- The **RESPONSE** to supposed biblical inaccuracies and critics
- The **RIGOROUS**, but not ridiculous, results from study
- The **RECKLESS** conjecture that can shipwreck faith
- The **RELIANCE** on the Holy Spirit in the process

**Side Note:** I'll spend more time on the first two areas, while sharing wisdom regarding the final three.

## **Role of different types of genre in biblical interpretation**

In chapter five, I shared the various types of genre in biblical interpretation. Now, I want to help you understand the role of each type of genre form in biblical interpretation.

**Genre #1 – The Law:** The Law's purpose is to give God's people a standard for righteous, holy living. The intricate details and commands (mitzvots) weren't about having long lists of rules to keep. Instead, they were foundational principles governing everyday life, instruction for the priestly duties, and guidelines for social responsibilities. Ultimately, the Law was given to direct man's heart to know and love God. As you read and interpret it, consider how God is concerned with every detail of our lives.

**Genre #2 – History:** The Historical Books are stories of God's people; they are His Story. Stories are essential to any culture, as humans have always communicated through storytelling. However, these aren't just any stories told, and they're not ancient myths and fables; these are historically accurate accounts that interlock with secular history. As you read and interpret it, consider how the ancient Hebrews' stories are similar to our stories. As you read and interpret biblical history, note the Hebrews' failures and successes (and surrounding peoples) and find ways to learn from both. Everyone has a story to tell, and we can all learn through stories.

**Genre #3 – Poetry:** Since approximately 1/3 of the Bible is made up of Hebrew poetry,<sup>87</sup> we must understand how to interpret it. Hebrew poetry is written in broken lines, so you need to examine the relationship between the lines. Pay special attention to the “little-big” words like but, that, or so that. Also, discern if the author is using figures of speech and the type of language. In the end, the relationship or contrast will dictate your interpretation and application. As you read and interpret Hebrew poetry, find the principle the author is making and connect the application to where we live.

As I stated in chapter five, Hebrew poetry uses parallelism. Ask yourself: What, if any, parallelism exists and what type is it? Krisan Marotta outlined the eleven types of parallelism, and you should pay special attention when interpreting it:

- **Synonymous** - The second line repeats the idea of the first line, sometimes by negating its opposite. (Psalm 7:17)
- **Antithetic** - The two lines contrast each other (Psalm 1:6)
- **Emblematic** - One line serves as an “emblem” (a visual representation) of the other (Psalm 42:1)
- **Climactic** - The progressive building of ideas through several verses, reaching a climax. (e.g. each line may have the same words except for the last term. The second line completes the thought of the first line.) (Psalm 29:1-2)
- **Synthetic (Developmental)** - The second line further develops the idea of the first line. The two lines can work together to explain a broader image or work together for the same image. (Psalm 95:3)
- **Synthetic (Formal)** - Two parts joined together into a whole. (In a sense this is a catch-all category for all the verses that don’t fit the above descriptions.) (Psalm 2:6)

- **Intensification** - Verbs, nouns and numbers intensify. For example, “flow” to “gushed”; “darkness” to “gloom”; “a thousand” to “10 thousand” (Isaiah 48:21, Isaiah 59:9, Deuteronomy 32:30)
- **Focusing** - The second line narrows the meaning of the first line (e.g. “cities of Judea” to “streets of Jerusalem”) or dynamically heightens it. (Jeremiah 7:34, Proverbs 16:5)
- **Specification** - The second line gives a more concrete instance of the first lines. (Lamentations 1:2)
- **Dramatization** – The second line repeats the first with metaphors to dramatize the meaning. (Isaiah 59:9)
- **Sequential or Consequential** - The second line follows from the first or is a consequence of the first. (Proverbs 16:3)<sup>88</sup>

**Genre #4 – Prophecy:** Biblical prophecy is the one genre in which I’ve seen the most “Speculagesis” and error. In an attempt to read our generation into the story, pastors and teachers skipped past the immediate message for the biblical audience and rushed to find an application to ourselves. Think about this: First-century Christians took the words of Jesus and the prophetic writings literally. Their belief was he would establish His Kingdom on earth. When that didn’t happen, John Walvoord explained that “a school of theology that sprang up in Alexandria, Egypt, about AD 190, (and) attempted to combine biblical interpretation with the idealism of the Greek philosopher Plato. This resulted in those leaders taking the Bible as an extensive allegory and not literally.”<sup>89</sup>

**Biblical prophecy is the one genre in which  
I’ve seen the most “Speculagesis” and error.**

As you read and interpret biblical prophecy, look first for the prophetic words that have already been fulfilled. In the Old Testament, there are direct historical events that correspond to the prophecies, proving God’s words are

reliable. So, find their fulfillment and make the application. Future events from the Scriptures will happen, but don't waste your time speculating about them unless the Bible clearly defines them.

**Genre #5 – Genealogy:** Be honest: Genealogies sound boring as you read the unending list of names you can't pronounce. Yet, as you study the people in the lists, you will find some interesting information. For instance, there are four women listed in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus. Four; and look at their backgrounds! Genealogies didn't include women in that day, but the "kind" of women included in Jesus' would have been scandalous. However, there was a purpose. Think of it like this: Does it matter to you who your grandparents were? There's a reason why Ancestry.com is so popular in the world; people want to know their origin. Genealogies are the origins of family lines. As you read and interpret genealogies, find out why they were important in their families and the purpose for their inclusion. Then, make the association with why that matters to you.

**Genre #6 – Narratives:** Narratives are straightforward for following because, much like the Historical Books, they are stories. I always recommend that new believers start reading in the Gospels when they begin their faith journey because they need to learn first about Jesus. As you read and interpret narratives, examine the lives of the people involved since we're all alike on the most basic levels. Find how God changed their life and note how He can do the same for you.

**Genre #7 – Epistles:** The epistles were letters written to specific churches to teach, address moral issues, correct false teachings, or giving doctrinal instruction. As such, they're crucial for your personal development and in the spiritual growth of the church. As you read and interpret the epistles, first look at the message to the intended audience and its impact on them. Then, draw the meaning from it and bring it into our 21<sup>st</sup>-century world.

## **Response to Supposed Biblical Inaccuracies and Critics**



I feel responsible for making sure you know that many people don't believe the Bible, and they will do anything to argue against and seek to disprove its Truth. Here are three of the most common arguments against the Bible and my response to them.

**Argument Against the Bible #1: The Bible is full of contradictions and inaccuracies.** For whatever reason, our natural human tendency is to believe whatever sounds right, as long as someone makes their argument convincingly and with passion. When it comes to the Bible, highly-educated people have made it their life's mission to "expose" the contradictions and inaccuracies of the Bible. While their arguments sound "logical," they are uninformed and biased from the start.

When it comes to the Bible, highly-educated people have made it their life's mission to "expose" the contradictions and inaccuracies of the Bible. While their arguments sound "logical," they are uninformed and biased from the start.

Let me give you an example: The American Humanist Association is dedicated to "advancing progressive values and equality for humanists, atheists, and freethinkers." (Can you already sense a bias?) Their website provides a list of supposed contradictions on their website, seemingly "proving" the Bible's unreliability. While I don't have time to address each issue, I want to address one Old Testament and one New Testament "contradiction." All of these have simple answers when you understand how to interpret the Bible.

Here is the exact wording from their website: "The Bible is an unreliable authority because it contains numerous contradictions. Logically, if two statements are contradictory, at least one of them is false. The biblical

contradictions therefore prove that the book has many false statements and is not infallible.”<sup>90</sup> (This endnote will cover the “contradiction quotes, as well)

- **Old Testament “Contradiction”:** “The Old Testament is contradictory as to whether the Lord commanded the Israelites to sacrifice animals to him. At Jeremiah 7:22, God denies he ever gave the Israelites commandments about animal sacrifices. In contrast, Exodus 29:38-42 and many other verses depict God as requiring the Israelites to offer animal sacrifices.” If you take any verse out of context, you can make it say anything you want it to and “prove” a point. In this case, Jeremiah’s message was that God didn’t want their sacrifices; He wanted their heart. God indeed instituted animal sacrifices for the Old Testament, but false teachers told them that all they needed for forgiveness was more sacrifices. God wanted them to change the way they lived.
- **New Testament “Contradiction”:** “In the New Testament, there are contradictions between the genealogies of Jesus given in the first chapter of Matthew and the third chapter of Luke.” Whoa, is this another “gotcha” moment? No. Zondervan Academic provides three explanations for the differences. First, one of the genealogies is Mary’s. Since Luke emphasized Mary at the beginning of his Gospel, this is entirely plausible. Second, Matthew’s genealogy is royal or legal one, while Luke’s is a physical genealogy. Finally, Joseph had two fathers.<sup>91</sup> My personal opinion is that their second explanation is the most likely, given the audiences that Matthew and Luke were addressing were different. Since they each had a specific purpose in writing, it accounts for their approach to the genealogy. Regardless, both genealogies are correct. They don’t argue against their authenticity, only the supposed “discrepancies.”

Proverbs 18:17 sums up this argument: “The first to speak in court sounds right— until the cross-examination begins.”

**Argument Against the Bible #2: The Bible is a violent book filled with evil done by God's people and God Himself.** In a sense, they are correct because the Bible shows how human beings are sinful and, at times, evil. One of the reasons why I know the Bible is true is because it doesn't try to cover up the sins of God's people. As for the violence, it's easy for those of us sitting in our 21st-century world to point out others' actions then, but they lived in a different world from us. When 9/11 happened on our home soil, it changed how we saw terrorism; it was much more personal. When our troops began bombing those responsible for the attack, we understood there was a justification for our actions. Interestingly, many uninformed people have revised history and made it appear like we were the ones to blame for the attack, pointing to our hateful policies. It sounds logical, but it's not true.

Now, most God-critics point out His "unfair" judgment on people through the Flood or His commands to kill people groups. However, they fail to understand, or altogether ignore, that God is a God of Justice. How would you respond if someone killed your child? Would you be OK with it and continue with life, or would you demand justice? Although I can't imagine it, I have friends who were murder victims. I know their parents' response and my response; we all wanted man's justice, as well as Divine Justice.

**IMPORTANT:** The objectionable violence people point to is ALL in the Old Testament. Jesus came to the world to demonstrate how to show love, mercy, and grace to others. However, He didn't do away with Justice. He, and the New Testament writers, instead emphasized eternal Justice, whether people will go to heaven or hell. (We can get into an entirely different discussion regarding people who "identify" as Christians, but don't believe in hell.)

**Argument Against the Bible #3: The Bible contradicts scientific knowledge and common sense.** Science and the Bible will never contradict one another because God is the one who created the heavens and the earth, and He's the one who set the laws of nature into motion. God is a God of

scientific knowledge. In Genesis 1:28, God gave Adam and Eve dominion or authority over creation, so science finds its roots in the command of God. Paul also wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:21 to “test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good.” That verse applies to doctrine, which includes science since doctrine includes teaching or training about God.

The most significant scientific attack against the Bible is the story of Creation, with scientists instead pushing the *Big Bang Theory*. Just a reminder: “A theory is a carefully thought-out explanation for observations of the natural world that has been constructed using the scientific method, and which brings together many facts and hypotheses.”<sup>92</sup> A theory means you have a “good idea” something may have happened, but you’re not 100% sure. However, scientists arrogantly assert they’re infallibly right, and anyone who disagrees with them is misguided and wrong.

The scientific principle of *verifiability* states, “A statement is meaningful only if it is empirically verifiable.”<sup>93</sup> As such, it has to be observable and replicable. The *Big Bang Theory* can be neither. Scientists tried to reproduce it in the Superconducting Super Collider in Waxahachie, Texas but failed to finish the project due to budgetary issues.<sup>94</sup> The Large Hadron Collider in France set out to expand scientific knowledge regarding the origin of the world, but it was also labeled a failure by many.<sup>95</sup> If they can’t reproduce it, how can it be true?

Next, consider the logic argument against the *Big Bang Theory*. How can two atoms smash together and create everything you see, including human beings? (This is a major stretch, even for people who believe in evolution.) Yet, it’s “scientific,” right?

Science also violates its principles when it explains global warming as fact, noting the reduction in the size of polar ice caps over 200 million years ago. What quantifiable evidence do they have to validate their assumptions? Who was observing the data? Weather observations weren’t recorded in the

US until 1881, and the National Weather Service didn't even start tracking weather data until January 1917.<sup>96</sup>

Then, consider the words from Scientific American in their article titled *How Scientists Discovered the Staggering Complexity of Human Evolution*: “It is now clear that for most of the time over which humans have been evolving, multiple hominin species walked the earth. Between 3.6 million and 3.3 million years ago.”<sup>97</sup> While I could point scientific errors throughout the article, did you note that they narrowed down the timeframe to 300,000 years. 300,000?!? Like the comedian Nate Bargatze said, “I heard that scientist say that cockroaches are like 350 million years old? Are they, or do you know I don't know how to go figure that out?”<sup>98</sup>

I can expand these arguments through an entirely different book, but you get the picture. The very arguments the scientific community has against the Bible are the same ones that disprove their theories. Science contradicts science.

## Science contradicts science!

### **Rigorous, but not Ridiculous Results from Study**

I believe in the need for in-depth Bible study. However, I also recognize there are inherently two dangers in how rigorous Bible study can lead to ridiculous results.

**Danger #1 – Academically Awkward:** First, too much study can result in your becoming academically awkward. I've seen far too many hungry Bible students turn into robotic-like academicians who can no longer relate to real people. They seem more concerned about “proving their point” than relaying the principles in God's Word for godly living. They make people uncomfortable as they share their “deep truths” that only they could find.

Studying the Bible should never make you awkward. Instead, it should make you accessible and relational.

**Danger #2 – Educationally Superior, But Dry:** Secondly, an unhealthy focus on gaining knowledge can ruin your relationship with God. I've known too many people who went to seminary passionate about their relationship with God. However, they left with a noticeable attitude of educational superiority and as spiritually dry as West Texas in July. In their pursuit of knowledge, they lost their relationship with God. The study of God's Word should develop and direct your passion for Him. Don't allow your pursuit to become "the smartest person in the room" to kill your love of God.

## **Reckless Conjecture that can Shipwreck Faith**

Before I close, I need to remind you that biblical interpretation is a big responsibility. "Speculagesis" can result in someone walking away from their faith or never coming to it in the first place. God will hold you and me accountable for the things we teach others. You may think, "Well, I'm not a pastor, so that doesn't apply to me." However, you'd be wrong.

Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 18:6. "But if you cause one of these little ones who trusts in me to fall into sin, it would be better for you to have a large millstone tied around your neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea." Your teaching or sharing with others from the Bible will always have eternal consequences, either positively or negatively. Your life's testimony does matter, so be responsible and keep your conscience clear before God. Paul reminded Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:9: "Cling to your faith in Christ, and keep your conscience clear. For some people have deliberately violated their consciences; as a result, their faith has been shipwrecked." Don't allow your faith or the faith of others to be shipwrecked by lack of knowledge.

Don't allow your faith or the faith of others to be shipwrecked by lack of knowledge.

### **Reliance on the Holy Spirit**

Finally, throughout the book, I've mentioned the Holy Spirit. The reason why you've seen His name over and over is that you and I need Him to fully rely on Him to help us discern between Truth and error. Even if you didn't have any resource beyond the Holy Spirit, you would have more than enough.

Even if you didn't have any resource beyond the Holy Spirit, you would have more than enough.

In 2008, I led a group of men on a mission trip on the Amazon River in Brazil. We flew into the last city with roads and went 18 hours up the Amazon, and it was amazing. One of the lasting memories I have of the trip is of a 27-year-old pastor named Jocqua. Pastor Jocqua didn't have libraries of resources for preaching God's Word. Yet, as I listened to him preach, I was reminded of Acts 4:13 where it says: "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men with no special training in the Scriptures. They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus." Pastor Jocqua was led by the Holy Spirit, and it was evident he had been with Jesus.

I intentionally saved this point until the end of the book because if you'll be sensitive and listen to the Holy Spirit, He'll let you know if you're missing the mark. He's not going to come down and type letters on your computer keyboard or grab your pen and write for you, but He'll put a check in your spirit. He'll speak in a still, small voice. I know because He's done that for

me. So, pray and ask for His guidance and live with reliance on the Holy Spirit.

**If you'll be sensitive and listen to the Holy Spirit,  
He'll let you know if you're missing the mark.**

### **Key Thoughts**

- Biblical prophecy is the one genre in which I've seen the most "Speculagesis" and error.
- A school of theology that sprang up in Alexandria, Egypt, about AD 190, (and) attempted to combine biblical interpretation with the idealism of the Greek philosopher Plato. This resulted in those leaders taking the Bible as an extensive allegory and not literally.
- When it comes to the Bible, highly-educated people have made it their life's mission to "expose" the contradictions and inaccuracies of the Bible.
- Science contradicts science.
- Don't allow your faith or the faith of others to be shipwrecked by lack of knowledge.
- Even if you didn't have any resource beyond the Holy Spirit, you would have more than enough.
- If you'll be sensitive and listen to the Holy Spirit, He'll let you know if you're missing the mark.

### **Key Term**

The scientific principle of *verifiability* states, "A statement is meaningful only if it is empirically verifiable."



# About the Author

Dr. Kevin Harrison, the President and CEO of West Coast Bible College & Seminary ([www.westcoastbible.org](http://www.westcoastbible.org)), has spent over 35 years in church ministry, serving congregations in Texas, Florida, Mississippi, and Louisiana. He has extensive disaster relief leadership experience following the 9/11 attacks (2001), Hurricane Katrina (2005), the Haiti earthquake (2010), and the West, Texas fertilizer plant (2013).

He helped lead a national fine arts program through a period of growth from 15,000 to 50,000 students. He also served as the lead administrator for The Gathering Waco at Baylor's McLane Stadium in 2015, where over 30,000 people came together from all backgrounds. It's still the largest gathering of Christians in the history of Central Texas.

In 2006, Dr. Harrison founded WCBCS, a 100% online Bible college and seminary, where he's partnered with an incredible team to train thousands of leaders on six continents. In 2017, for his efforts, he was awarded an Outstanding Contribution to Education award from the Accreditation Services for International Colleges (ASIC) in the UK.

Kevin holds a Doctor of Ministry degree from Luther Rice Seminary, a Master of Business Administration from LSU-Shreveport, and a Bachelor of Science from Southwestern A/G University. He's a member of both *Sigma Alpha Pi* and *Sigma Iota Epsilon* honor societies that recognize leadership, success, and management.

Kevin's been married to his best friend, Becky Neel Harrison, since 1987. Becky is a graduate of Mississippi State University (Meridian) with a Bachelor of Business and Industry and a Master of Education from Southwestern A/G University.

Together they have two daughters, Mikaela (96) and Julianna (01). Mikaela ([www.projectfitmik.com](http://www.projectfitmik.com)), a 2019 honors graduate of Texas Christian University, is married to Ronnie Baker ([www.ronniebaker.us](http://www.ronniebaker.us)), a world-class Nike sprinter in the 60m and 100m. Julianna is a graduate of the Paul Mitchell School in Arlington, a licensed cosmetologist, and currently is a student at Arlington Baptist University, where she plays volleyball.

They also have an amazing dog, Chevy Colorado! He's probably the most incredible dog who has ever lived, and that's not an exaggeration.

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# ABOUT THE BOOK

Have you ever read something in the Bible and thought to yourself, “What does that mean? Why is that there? How is that even relevant to us today? Will I ever be able to understand the Bible?” If you answered “yes” to one, some, or all of the above, you’re not alone, and this book is for you.

It used to be that to study the Bible; you needed an extensive library of expensive books and an expensive piece of paper on the wall. However, that’s no longer the case. I’m going to provide you with many credible and practical resources for studying the Scriptures, and the best thing is, they’re online and free. I’ve spent my life learning and simplifying the complicated processes of interpretation, and when you finish this book, you’re going to understand how to interpret Scriptures just like me. You’ll have every tool and resource you need to understand and interpret the Bible and properly apply it to your life. The result is you’re going to get a low-cost, biblical interpretation education by studying 10 minutes a day for 15 days.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Kevin Harrison, the President and CEO of West Coast Bible College & Seminary ([www.westcoastbible.org](http://www.westcoastbible.org)), has spent over 35 years in church ministry. He has extensive disaster relief leadership experience following the 9/11 attacks (2001), Hurricane Katrina (2005), the Haiti earthquake (2010), and the West, Texas fertilizer plant (2013).

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