

EQUIP

EQUIP - Foundations: How To Study

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Acknowledgments

Equip has been developed under the direction of Village Ministries International, Inc. Since its inception, the mission of VMI has been to reach villages and remote areas of the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Often, the window of opportunity for missionary activity is open for only a brief period of time. Our organization's goal has been to identify gifted men native to these areas and equip them to carry on the delivery of sound Bible teaching after foreign involvement is discontinued, thus "making disciples" in fulfillment of the Great Commission given to us by our Lord and Savior.

Equip was conceived as a way to extend the reach of VMI in providing Bible training materials to these parts of the world where this training was so desperately desired but not available. Through this ministry, VMI is able to efficiently and effectively support a rapidly growing number of indigenous pastors and teachers with sound Bible training and teaching materials. There are many people we need to thank for their dedication and efforts in preparing this material. First and foremost, we acknowledge our Lord Jesus Christ who in His grace has provided our so great salvation and everything pertaining to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). Secondly, as with any effort of this nature, there are also many who selflessly offered of their time, talents and gifts in bringing this vision to reality. They are the invisible heroes.

Preface

Equip is a study program developed by VMI that was designed to assist the new student of the Word of God to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet 3:18)." Therefore, the emphasis throughout the Equip study program is not only to understand the significance and depth of God's Word but also to aid the student in the development of his own spiritual life.

Equip is also designed so that it may easily be taught to others once the student has absorbed the principles into his own soul. It is a valuable tool for "making disciples" in fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20).

The First Phase of our journey will cover the preparation that is necessary for the new student to explore the Bible. We call this Foundations, which denotes the importance of these basic principles.

The first segment of Foundations contains a basic introduction to the Bible, fifteen principles of interpretation, and how to prepare a Bible lesson. This is designed to teach the student how to "Study" the Scriptures and then to effectively teach others.

Segment Two contains a book-by-book "Survey" of God's Word

Segment Three is an introduction to some of the basic doctrines of Scripture, the "System."

Equip will also assist the advanced student to more fully understand God's Word. Care has been taken to challenge any student, no matter their level of knowledge, to further research the Holy Scriptures.

All Scripture quotations (unless indicated) are from The New American Standard Bible, as this translation follows more closely the original Greek and Hebrew languages used by the authors of Scripture.

Welcome to the excitement of God's Word!

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SECTION I - INTRODUCTION

LESSON 1: PERSONAL PREPARATION

SIX PRINCIPLES OF PERSONAL PREPARATION FOR BIBLE STUDY

1. BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST.

Personal preparation in the study of the Scripture cannot be overemphasized. First and foremost the student must believe in Jesus Christ as his Savior, because the "natural man" (that is the man without Christ), cannot accept or understand the things of God (1 Cor 2:14). The Spirit of God allows the student of the Word to discern spiritual things. Your salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone (Eph 2:8-9).

2. ACCEPT THAT THE BIBLE IS DIVINELY INSPIRED.

God's Word proclaims itself to be divinely inspired (2 Tim 3:16-17). Any study of the Word ought to begin by acknowledging that fact. No "leap" of faith is necessary; just a mere "step" that this study will more fully explore as it progresses.

3. PRAY

Prayer is necessary for wisdom in understanding Scripture. God's Word instructs that if anyone lacks wisdom, and asks for it, God will give it freely (James 1:5). Sincere prayer for correct knowledge and discernment will be answered because these things are clearly within God's will (1 John 5:14 compare [cf.] Matt 7:7-8).

4. STUDY DILIGENTLY AND HAVE PATIENCE.

Since many passages of God's Word are not readily understood, diligence and patience are necessary when studying (2 Tim 2:15). When we, as limited human beings, attempt to understand the unlimited mind of God, we must be aware that even a competent grasp will take some time.

5. CONSISTENTLY CONFESS YOUR SINS.

It is also important to confess sin consistently, permitting God to cleanse our lives, so that a greater fellowship with him may be attained (1 John 1:6-10). Realizing the need to confess our sins keeps us consistently sensitive to any thought, speech, or action that is not in accord with God's will.

6. BE WILLING TO LIVE GOD'S WILL.

The Lord Jesus Christ said, "if anyone is willing to do His [God's] will, he shall know of the teaching" (John 7:17). If the objective is to develop a relationship with the Living God, then any knowledge gained ought to support and clarify that relationship. Knowledge without love results in pride (1 Cor 8:1). If your objective is simply an intellectual quest and not a relationship with the Living God, then the knowledge you gain will be lacking and distorted.

FIVE BENEFITS OF PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY FROM GOD'S WORD:

1. GREATER FAITH.

The greatest theologian of the Church, the apostle Paul, said of himself that he, "walked by faith and not by sight" (2 Cor 5:7). We all enter into salvation by grace through faith (Eph 2:8-9); and according to Paul, just as we have entered, so are we to walk (Col 2:6-7). Learning God's Word increases faith.

2. NEW KNOWLEDGE.

There is new knowledge to be gained from God's Word as we "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 3:14-18). This knowledge leads us to a greater appreciation of His grace.

But along with growing in knowledge, we grow in faith as we "hear" God's Word through the Scriptures (Rom 10:17) and trust Him for everything.

3. PURIFICATION OF OUR LIFE.

God's Word is necessary for the purification of our lives, because His Word is Truth (John 17:17). Although we are Believers, we do have problems with sin in our lives (1 John 1:6-10), so we must learn God's Word in order to determine what sin(s) may be present. We then can pray intelligently for healing and cleansing (Ps 51).

Please note that Christians have often "added to" God's Word and made these additions a basis of righteousness. This is called "legalism," which means that men have made their own laws the standard of righteousness. The Lord Jesus Christ clearly challenged this practice (Mark 7:1-13), so we must be careful to pay careful attention to God's stated standards.

4. POWER IN MINISTRY.

With the Holy Spirit at work in our lives as we study the "mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:14-16), there will be power in our ministry (Eph 2:10). We are in a war with Satan and his forces, therefore we need power beyond our own strength and ability (Eph 6:10-18). The power comes from our submission to God's will because it is God who is at work in us, "to will and to work His good pleasure" (Php 2:13).

5. EQUIPMENT FOR SERVICE

With this knowledge of God's Word, we can practice the truth in the name of the Lord Jesus (Col 3:16-17), and proclaim it to a lost and dying world (John 17:17-19; Heb 5:12). A primary objective for the communication of God's Word is, "equipping the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph 4:11-13). To "equip" others requires that we must first be equipped ourselves. Accordingly, this introduction is to guide the

student while he must study God's Word directly to make maximum progress.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

- 1 In your own words, list the principles involved in your preparation to study the Bible.
- 2 List the Bible verses that those principles came from.
- 3 Look up each verse and restate the principle in your own words.
- 4 What do you want to gain from the study of God's Word?

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SECTION I - INTRODUCTION

LESSON 2: THE BIBLE

WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

1 THE WRITTEN WORD OF GOD

The Bible was written by more than forty authors whose lives spanned over 1,500 years, which means the Bible is not simply a common book. Jesus Christ called it "The Book" (Heb. 10:7). Without it man cannot know the absolute standard of righteousness, nor the need for grace in his life. God chose to have His words written down so that His standards would be clear. The written Word is accepted by faith and proven by history (events that have already occurred).

The great majority of people use translations of the Bible from the original languages of Scripture. Most of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew. The only exceptions are found in the Book of Daniel - chapters 2 through 7, and in the Book of Ezra - chapters 4 through 7. These chapters were written in a sister language to the Hebrew called Aramaic, which was the language spoken by most of the Jews at the time these books were written. All of the New Testament is written in Koine (common) Greek.

2 THE INSPIRED WORD OF GOD

Every single part of the Bible is inspired by God (2 Tim 3:16-17), and is thus profitable. "Inspiration" is more than human genius, illumination and revelation because it is divinely initiated. It is "God's breath" expressing itself through a human personality.

"Revelation" means to give new information.

"Illumination" occurs when the Holy Spirit makes "Revelation" understandable for the student of the Word.

3 THE REVELATION OF THE LIVING WORD OF GOD.

The Bible is the written revelation of the Living Word of God - our Lord Jesus Christ. The written Word is not the living Word; it is the divine description of the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb 4:12 cf. John 5:39-47).

This is an important distinction to make. The paper and ink do not contain the power, but the Power behind the paper and ink is the Spirit of God making the difference in people's lives. To view the words as powerful in and of themselves, without being awestruck by the Author (Heb 12:2), misses the point.

THE DIVISIONS OF THE BIBLE:

1 THE TWO MAJOR DIVISIONS.

The Bible is divided into two Testaments, the Old and the New.

There are 66 total books, 39 in the Old Testament, written by over 30 different authors, and 27 in the New Testament, written by 10 authors. There are 1,189 chapters, 929 in the Old Testament, and 260 chapters in the New Testament. The Old Testament contains 23,214 verses; the New Testament contains 7,959 verses (for a total of 31,173 verses of Scripture).

A "testament" is a covenant or contract, something of value that has been offered by one party, then accepted by the recipient party. For example, when someone desires to purchase any product, an offer is made and then accepted or rejected. Once the offer is accepted, a covenant or contract has been made. The covenant contains promises that are to govern the relationship between the two parties.

Another good example is that of the marriage bond. Exchanged wedding vows are a covenant between the bride and the groom acting as the foundation of the relationship.

2 THE FIVE DIVISIONS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

The Old Testament contains the original covenants that God made with man concerning the coming Messiah. Later in our study we will examine the

covenants that God has made with man. The Old Testament is grouped into five divisions, as follows:

1. The Law, called the "Torah" or "Pentateuch", is comprised of five books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.
2. Historical books (twelve): Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther.
3. Poetical books (five): Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon.
4. Major Prophets (five): Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel and Daniel.
5. Minor Prophets (twelve): Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

3 THE THREE DIVISIONS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

The New Testament documents the arrival of the Messiah, and contains the new covenant made thereafter.

There is, of course, a variety of topics within the books. The historical books, for example, contain some prophecy (Matt 24, Mark 13, Luke 21), just as the book of prophecy contains some epistles (Rev 2-3). The general designation of any book is based simply on its overall content. The New Testament is grouped into three divisions, as follows:

1. The New Testament begins with five Historical books: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and the book of Acts.
2. The Historical books are followed by twenty-one Epistles (letters): Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, Hebrews, James and Jude.
3. There is one book of Prophecy: Revelation.

FOR PERSONAL STUDY

- 1 In your own words, what is the Bible?
- 2 What does the Bible say about itself?
- 3 Describe the difference between "Inspiration" and "Illumination."
- 4 What are the original languages of Scripture?
- 5 What is a Testament and how many are in the Bible?

6 What are the five major divisions of the Old Testament?

7 What are the three major divisions of the New Testament?

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SECTION I - INTRODUCTION

LESSON 3: AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The beauty of God's Word is in part due to its internal consistency, even though it was written by so many different authors over such a long period of time. History looks at events which happened in the past.

Paying attention to the sequence of the events outlined below, we see a marvelous motion through the unfolding, and then the folding up of human history. By looking at these major events, we can clearly trace the introduction and conclusion to such a marvelous story. Also, we gain some clear insights into a question philosophers have been asking for centuries: "Why are we here?"

The following overview is designed to be just that, an overview. We will spend the rest of our lives filling in the details. For now, let us learn from the major historical points that God has placed in front of us. Later in this lesson, we'll see an excellent overview of God's wonderfully consistent plan.

1 CREATION

In the beginning of the Bible, Genesis documents the original creation of the heavens and earth (Gen 1:1; 2 Pet 3:6). At the end of the Book in Revelation, the original creation is destroyed, making way for the creation of a "New Heaven and New Earth" (Rev 21-22).

2 SATAN'S REBELLION

Sometime before the creation of man, Satan rebelled against God, seeking to challenge Him (Isa 14:12-14; Ezek 28). The topic of this first rebellion is intricately woven throughout the Scriptures; and the ramifications of this conflict are not easily understood. What is easily understood is that a war goes on between God and Satan that has been going on since before man's creation (Rev 12).

Satan's final rebellion will occur after the 1,000 year reign of Jesus Christ on earth, just before the creation of the new heaven and earth (Rev 20:7-10).

3 EARTH AND MAN

God prepared the earth to be inhabited by man (Gen 1:2-2:3: as a footnote, the words "formless" [Hebrew TOHU] and "void" [Hebrew BOHU] mean, "uninhabitable," and, "void of population," respectively).

The problem is that there was an invader, Satan, who continually sought to challenge God. When the Lord imprisons Satan for the duration of the Millennial Kingdom (1,000 year reign of Jesus Christ, see Rev 20:1-3), He will then perfect earth for man (Isa 60-66).

4 THE FIRST AND LAST ADAM

The first man, Adam, was designed to be the head over all creation (Gen 1:28; 2:4-25). He was placed in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and keep it. The "last" Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:45), will establish a literal physical Headship for 1,000 years (Rev 20:4). He is "last" in the sense that there are no more men who will come into existence as a perfect being.

5 MAN'S BATTLE WITH SATAN

When Adam "fell" in the Garden of Eden, he became subject to Satan - the "ruler of this world" (Gen 3; John 12:31; 16:11). God will later subject Satan to Christ just before the Millennial Kingdom begins (Rev 20:1-3).

6 ALL OF MANKIND JUDGED

God permits man to descend into evil, but He will eventually deal with all mankind. In Genesis 4-10 we find the background that led to the great Flood, which occurred because of God's displeasure with mankind's disobedience (Gen 6:1-13). God will again deal with all mankind when Jesus Christ returns at the Second Advent, after the seven-year period of Tribulation. He will then separate the remainder of mankind into the "sheep (Believers)," and the "goats (unbelievers)" (Matt 25:31-46).

7 BABYLON.

After the Flood the earth was repopulated, but soon people began again to turn in the wrong direction - away from God. In Babylon, they constructed the Tower of Babel (Gen 11), which was indicative of their attempt to save themselves. They thought that if they could build a tower high enough, they could escape God's wrath (such as that of the Flood) by ascending to heaven and putting themselves on a level with God.

The foundation they built the tower upon was a religion known as "humanism," which supposes that man can save himself through religious and/or economic means. Beliefs such as this are the basis of all the world's

religious systems. Only Christianity realizes that man can't save himself, therefore man needs a Savior.

Some humanistic attitudes are displayed in the Bible by those who stand in opposition to the Living God. These attitudes were found in the Babylon of the past (Isa 47) and Tyre (Ezek 26-27), just to name two such examples that remain with us today. This is found in the world's religions which believe that man ascends to godhood in stages and thus saves himself. During the Tribulation, God will destroy the Babylonian organizations that have been created (Rev 17-18).

8 ISRAEL

After dispersing the people from Babel and distributing various languages to the nations, the Lord called Abraham to be the founder of a new nation, Israel (Gen 12). Through the miraculous conception of his son, Isaac, and then his grandson, Jacob, the promise made to Abraham about the Messiah was continued (Gen 22:1-18; 28:14). The people of Israel were eventually removed from their land and dispersed throughout the world for their idolatrous practices, but the Lord's promises remained.

Israel will be supernaturally regathered after the Tribulation and blessed with the Millennial Kingdom (Matt 24:29-31).

9 THE ADVENTS OF JESUS CHRIST

The First Advent of Jesus Christ took place at the perfect time in God's plan for history (1 Tim 2:6). The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John relate the wonderful history of Jesus' birth, ministry, death, burial, and resurrection. Jesus Christ was clearly the "Suffering Servant" so beautifully foretold in Isaiah 53.

The Second Advent of Jesus Christ will take place after the Tribulation, when Christ actually sets foot on the earth again and conquers His enemies (Zech 14:1-8; Rev 19:11-19), thus ushering in the Millennial Kingdom. This time He will come as the "Conquering King."

10 OPPOSING MINISTRIES

The Gospels also beautifully portray the public ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John). Christ's ministry was one of service to others (Matt 20:28).

This is in clear contrast to the ministry of the Antichrist (also known as the "man of lawlessness") who will have a "ministry" of self-service, seeking to draw all attention and worship to himself (2 Thess 2:1-12; Rev 6-16).

11 THE CHURCH

After the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ to the right hand of God the Father, the Church was "called out" to spread the good news of

forgiveness of sins through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Acts of the Apostles).

The Church bears the responsibility for "making disciples of all the nations" (Matt 28:18-20), until she is "called" up for the marriage to her Lord the Bridegroom (1 Thess 4:13-18; 1 Cor 15:50-58; Rev 19:7-10).

SUMMARY

When we pay attention to the sequence of the events just described, we see a marvelous pattern emerge. It is the unfolding and then the folding up of human history. It is illustrated by the following chart, "Overview of the Bible." Match the numbers together and you will see the overview of God's plan.

1. Creation of the original heavens and earth. Gen 1:1; 2 Pet 3:61. Creation of a new heaven and earth. Rev 21-22
2. Satan's first rebellion. Isa 14:12-14; Eze 28. Satan's final rebellion. Rev 20: 7-10
3. Earth prepared for man. Gen 1:2-2:33. Earth perfected for man. Isa 60-66
4. The Headship of the First Adam. Gen 2:4-25. The Headship of the Last Adam. Rev 20:4
5. Man subjected to Satan. Gen 3. Satan subjected to Christ. Rev 20:1-3
6. All of mankind judged. Gen 4-10. All of mankind judged. Matt 25:31-46
7. Construction of the Tower of Babel. Gen 11. Destruction of Babylonian organizations. Rev 17-18
8. Israel called as a nation. Gen 12. Israel regathered as a nation. Matt 24:29-31
9. First Advent of Jesus Christ. Matt, Mark, Luke, John. Second Advent of Jesus Christ. Rev 19:11-19
10. Ministry of Jesus Christ. Matt, Mark, Luke, John. Ministry of the Antichrist. 2 Thess 2:1-12; Rev 6-16
11. Church called out. Acts. Church called up. 1 Thess 4:13-18; 1 Cor 15:50-58 (Adapted from J. Edwin Hartill, Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics, pg. 9)

FOR PERSONAL STUDY

1 After looking closely at the outline found in the "Overview of the Bible", what are your observations?

2 Commit this Overview to memory.

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SECTION I - INTRODUCTION

LESSON 4: A CHRONOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

Chronology refers to the sequence of historical events. It is extremely important to the Bible student because it is essential to understand the time relationship between major events in order to understand many passages in God's Word. It helps us to answer the question "When." In this lesson our objective will be to learn the sequence of key Biblical events and the span of time between them.

The student will also be introduced to the time of writing of each book of the Bible, so that he may develop a general understanding of the scope of God's revelation to man.

Dates that have "B.C." after them refer to the years "before Christ." Those that have "A.D." refer to the years after Christ (A.D. was taken from the Latin, Anno Domini, which means "in the year of our Lord).

The dates given are based on a literal understanding of God's Word. At this point in our study we are more interested in learning the sequence of events.

TEN MAJOR EVENTS AND THEIR DATES.

1. THE FALL OF ADAM (3898 BC).

A literal understanding of the genealogies (sequences of birth) that are given in God's Word lets us arrive at a date around 3898 B.C. for the fall of Adam. The Biblical chronology is given in such a way that we must work forward from our starting point. When we discuss the 4th year of Solomon (later in our study), we are able to take the dates backward to this point of beginning.

2 THE FLOOD OF NOAH (2242 BC).

When we follow the genealogy of Genesis 5, we find that a span of 1,656 years elapsed from the fall of Adam to the Flood. This gives us a date of 2242 B.C.

3 THE PROMISE TO ABRAHAM (1875 B.C.).

The genealogy given to us in Genesis 11:10-26 establishes that Abraham was born 292 years after the Flood, or 1948 years after Adam. This would indicate that he was born in 1950 B.C. We learn from Genesis 12:4 that Abraham was 75 years old when he received the promise from God that became the Abrahamic Covenant. This would mean that the promise was made in 1875 B.C.

4 THE EXODUS OF ISRAEL (1445 B.C.).

Genesis 12-50 reveals to us information concerning the direct descendants of Abraham. The children of Jacob (Abraham's grandson) moved to Egypt where they were eventually enslaved by the Egyptians (Exodus 1). God delivered them from Egyptian slavery by the hand of Moses. The apostle Paul tells us that a span of 430 years had passed from the promise to Abraham to the giving of The Law (Gal 3:17). This dates the Exodus in 1445 B.C. or 2,378 years after Adam.

5 THE FOURTH YEAR OF SOLOMON (965 B.C.).

Solomon was the third king of Israel, following his father David and King Saul. In 1 Kings 6:1 we are told that 480 years had elapsed from the Exodus to the fourth year of Solomon when he began to build the Temple. This lets us calculate the date as 965 B.C. or 2,858 years after Adam.

We are able to date the fourth year of Solomon from other historical records. This lets us establish a fixed date by which we may work backwards and establish the dates previously mentioned for the Exodus, the Promise to Abraham, The Flood and Adam.

6 THE FALL OF THE NORTHERN KINGDOM (721 B.C.).

After the death of Solomon, Israel split into two separate kingdoms which became known as the "Northern Kingdom" or Israel, and the "Southern Kingdom" or Judah. The Northern Kingdom fell to the Assyrian Empire in 721 B.C. and ceased to be a kingdom.

7 THE FALL OF THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM (586 B.C.).

The Southern Kingdom fell to the Babylonian Empire in 586 B.C. and was taken into exile for 70 years before the Israelites were able to return to their homeland in 516 B.C.

8 THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST (4 B.C.).

The "B.C." and "A.D." system of dating was not developed until the sixth century after our Lord came. It was designed to reference all historical dates to His birth. When the Church established this system, it was based on an incorrect understanding of when King Herod lived (who was mentioned in the Bible as being in power when Jesus was born-Luke 1:5). Much later it was discovered that a mistake of 4 or 5 years had been made, but the system was already well established so instead of trying to change all the dates that had previously been established with new dates, it was decided to just say that Jesus was born in 4 or 5 B.C.

9 THE DEATH, BURIAL AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST (33 A.D.).

The majority of Bible scholars establish the date of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ at 33 A.D.

10 THE LAST BOOK OF THE BIBLE (96 A.D.).

This date is related to the apostle John's exile to the Isle of Patmos (Rev 1:9), during the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian, where the Bible was completed (Rev 22:18-19).

CHRONOLOGY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS.

1 ADAM TO THE FLOOD (3898-2242 B.C.).

Genesis 1-5

2 THE FLOOD TO THE PROMISE TO ABRAHAM (2242-1875 B.C.).

Genesis 6-12

3 THE PROMISE TO ABRAHAM TO THE EXODUS (1875-1445 B.C.).

Genesis 12-50, Book of Job

4 THE EXODUS TO THE FOURTH YEAR OF SOLOMON (1445-965 B.C.).

Exodus.

Leviticus.

Numbers.

Deuteronomy.

Joshua.

Judges.

Ruth.

1 Samuel.

2 Samuel.

1 Kings 1-5.

Psalms.

1 Chronicles.

5 THE FOURTH YEAR OF SOLOMON TO THE FALL OF THE NORTHERN KINGDOM AND SOUTHERN KINGDOM (965-586 B.C.).

History.

1 Kings 6-22.

2 Kings.

2 Chronicles

Poetry.

Proverbs.

Ecclesiastes.

Song of Solomon.

Prophecy.

Obadiah.

Joel.

Jonah.

Amos.

Hosea.

Micah.

Isaiah.

Nahum.

Zephaniah.

Habakkuk.

6 THE BABYLONIAN EXILE (586-516 B.C.).

Jeremiah.

Lamentations.

Ezekiel.

Daniel.

7 AFTER THE EXILE (516-400 B.C.).

History.

Ezra.

Nehemiah.

Esther.

Prophecy.

Haggai.

Zechariah.

Malachi.

C CHRONOLOGY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS.

The sequence in which the authors wrote the various inspired New Testament books (referred to as inscripturation) is generally viewed to be as follows:

HISTORY OF THE LIFE OF CHRIST AND THE EARLY CHURCH (55 - 85 A.D.).

Matthew.

Luke.

Mark.

Acts.

John.

EPISTLES FOR THE CHURCH (46 - 85 A.D.).

James.

Galatians.

1 Thessalonians.

2 Thessalonians.

1 Corinthians.

2 Corinthians.

Romans.

Philemon.

Ephesians.

Colossians.

Philippians.

1 Timothy.

Titus.

2 Timothy.

Hebrews.

1 Peter.

2 Peter.

Jude.

1 John.

2 John.

3 John.

Prophecy (96 A.D.)

Revelation.

FOR PERSONAL STUDY

1 Memorize the ten major events of the Bible's chronology and their dates in the correct sequence.

2 Why is it important to know the sequence of the major events of the Bible?

3 Abraham married his half-sister, Sarah (Gen 20:12). If such a marriage was prohibited by the Mosaic Law (Lev 18:9), why was this marriage permitted? (Read Rom 4:15, 5:13)

EQUIP - Foundations: How To Study

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SECTION I - INTRODUCTION

LESSON 5: PREPARING TO STUDY THE BIBLE

In the last two lessons we were introduced to the importance of knowing significant events that occurred in the past (Lesson 3) as well as the sequence in which they occurred (Lesson 4). We were laying a foundation to help us answer an important question one must ask when studying the Bible-the question "When?" As we seek to understand the Bible, we find ourselves constantly searching for answers to questions we have. There are some basic questions which we must ask and answer because they are important to "handling accurately the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15). God invites us to bring all of our questions to Him (Matt 7:7-8).

The basic questions that we must ask of every verse are very simple: who, what, when, where, why, and how? The answers must be considered while keeping in mind the two primary questions concerning the Christian Life: How does this help us develop a close, personal relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ (Php 3:10)? And, how then shall we live (John 7:17)?

SIX BASIC QUESTIONS FOR EVERY VERSE:

1 "WHO?"

As we ask the question, "who?" we are seeking to determine who is doing the speaking and to whom it is addressed. One example is found in Genesis 22:2 when God told Abraham to sacrifice his son, his only son, to Him. God spoke directly to Abraham, not anyone else in this case, so we, as hearers of the Word, are not under that particular order.

2 "WHAT?"

"What" deals with the reality of the thing being said. Jesus Christ is referred to in Revelation 5 as "the Lamb." This does not mean that He is a shaggy, four-footed creature, but refers to His sacrifice for sin (John 1:29) which is the "reality."

3 "WHEN?"

The "when" question refers us to the time frame to which a particular passage may refer. For instance, Abraham's marriage to his half sister Sarah might be interpreted as immoral until the reader understands that this marriage occurred before the giving of the Mosaic Law, which forbade such practice. Since personal sin is not an issue when there is no law (Rom 4:15), we conclude that in Abraham's case, incestuous marriage was not sin. Clear answers to the question "when" is crucial to complete understanding.

4 "WHERE?"

"Where" deals with the geography and frequently the culture in which a passage was written. Frequently in the Bible we find the phrase "up to Jerusalem." In many cultures, the phrase "up to" has come to mean to

travel north. However, the Biblical intent has to do with elevation and not direction. When Jesus came from Galilee and was going "up to Jerusalem," He was actually traveling south, but going higher up in elevation.

5 "WHY?"

The "why" question is often the most difficult question to answer. The answer is most often found through studying other passages. If one reads the phrase in Isaiah 7:14 which says, "Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel," an obvious question would be "why a virgin?" We might just answer the question with, "that's the way God wanted to do it." That answer, while correct, is not complete.

As we look for the answer we will find the passage in Romans 5 that addresses the effect the sin of Adam had on the human race. We find that through the man, Adam, each member of the human race is given a Sin Nature. If Jesus had had an earthly father, He too would have had a Sin Nature. The answer to "why", in this case, is crucial to Christ's qualifications to pay for sin.

6 "HOW?"

The question of "how" is often difficult to answer as well. We might ask, "How did Jesus walk on water?" The answer is simply that He depended upon the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:18). We also might ask, "How does God control history when mankind has the freedom of choice?" That question is not as easily answered and we will explore it later in our study.

WHAT IF WE CAN'T ANSWER THEM ALL?

These questions and their answers are important. We must remember, however, that our relationship with the Living God is based on faith (Eph 2:8-9; Col 2:6). We won't get all of the answers that we seek in this lifetime, but God has promised that eventually all of our questions will be answered (1 Cor 13:12).

TWO IMPORTANT PERSONAL QUESTIONS:

1 HOW WILL THIS HELP DEVELOP MY RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST?

This is one of the most important questions we can ask. The knowledge that we have gained through the study of God's Word must be united with faith (Heb 11:6), so that our relationship with the Lord will grow. We must trust God's Word as accurate and dependable. The result will be a relationship with the Lord that is grounded in His love and is beyond human knowledge. The apostle Paul said it clearly in Ephesians 3:14-19 when he wrote:

"For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according

to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God."

If we are simply studying God's Word for intellectual reasons and not seeking to grow in our love for God and others (Mark 12:29-31), we are becoming arrogant (1 Cor 8:1). The apostle Paul, who knew more theology than any other man on earth (2 Cor 12:1-4), expressed his greatest desire in saying, "that I may know Him" (Php 3:10). Paul, as a Pharisee, had already been on an intellectual quest, but, as a Christian, began a quest for a vital relationship with the Living God.

Look for God's promises, and trust them, so that you might "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 3:18).

2 HOW THEN SHALL WE LIVE?

Once we come to understand the meaning of the verses we are studying, we must seek to understand how it applies to everyday life. We are given a beautiful example of this concept in Hebrews 12:1-3. Read the first two verses:

"Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

The illustration the writer of Hebrews chose in these two verses is that of running a race. People in the stands are watching (the heroes of Chapter 11). The race is for speed and distance, and to the victor goes the seat of honor. The contestant removes any additional weight that would slow him down, or any obstacles that could trip him up. His eyes are on the finish line, where the One (Jesus Christ) who has already run His race, and won, stands. Potential joy becomes more important than any fatigue experienced, so the runner endures.

The writer then applies these two verses to our lives in verse three. He writes:

"For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart."

When we face trials and opposition, pain and sorrow, shame and disgrace for the cause of Christ, we are to consider our Leader and be encouraged by Him! Realize that, "we do not have a great high priest who cannot

sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15).

WHERE ARE WE GOING NEXT IN OUR STUDY?

Beginning with the next section, we will take a simple look at principles we ought to keep in mind while studying the Bible. These foundational principles of interpretation have been revealed by the Holy Spirit Himself through the written Word. They are principles that we are to pass on from one generation to the next (2 Tim 2:2) so that we all might grow in all respects in our Lord (Eph 4:11-16).

Let God's Word make a difference in your life.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

- 1 Why is it important to ask questions of God's Word?
- 2 Write from memory the six basic questions for every verse that we are to ask.
- 3 Write from memory the two important personal questions.
- 4 Read 1 Peter 5:1-4 and then answer all the questions posed in this lesson.

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SECTION II - BASIC PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

LESSON 1: Principle One - Interpret Based on Divine Essence

This principle recognizes the basic characteristics of God's essence, also known as His attributes, as vitally important to correct interpretation. His essence is never compromised, nor inconsistent with itself. This principle is based on the fact that the more we fully appreciate the awesome nature of God (Php 3:10), the more skilled we will be in understanding what He has to say.

The fact that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all possess the same essence is Biblical proof of the Trinity. The term "Trinity" refers to the fact that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three manifestations of one God. They have basically three roles. The Father is the Planner (Acts 2:23), the Son is the Agent (John 5:36), and the Holy Spirit is the Revealer (John 16:13). While we may study their different roles, we must not seek to divide the Trinity. There is only One God (Deut 6:4); since the Father, Son and Holy Spirit all share the characteristics that only God can possess, they are all God, and are One.

We will analyze the Trinity in much more detail in later lessons.

TEN CHARACTERISTICS OF DIVINE ESSENCE:

In this lesson, the first bracket () will denote the verses that refer to God the Father, the second < >, the verses for the Son, and the third [], the Holy Spirit.

1 SOVEREIGNTY.

God is SOVEREIGN, meaning that He is King and acts accordingly. (Dan 4:17; 1 Tim 1:17; Ps 47:2,7), < Rev 19:16; John 5:21 >, [Zech 4:6; 1 Pet 4:14; 1 Cor 12:11].

Sovereignty is the exercise of supreme authority within a limited sphere. God, free from external control, is the supreme authority over all creation. He is the Creator, not the created (Rom 1:20,25).

God has the authority to establish His own plan, His own laws, and His own judgments. In short, He has the authority to act as He chooses to act, although His purposes may be hard to understand.

2 RIGHTEOUSNESS.

God is absolute righteousness, meaning that He is perfect in every way. (John 17:25; 1 John 1:5), < 1 John 2:1; Luke 1:35; Heb 7:26 >, [Isa 32:15-18; Ps 143:10; Neh 9:20]. He is the standard of righteousness in every regard. He is morally complete, setting the standard we are to imitate (Eph 5:1).

3 JUSTICE.

God is JUST. He is totally and completely fair. (Isa 45:21; Job 37:23), < John 5:22,30; Rev 19:11 >, [Isa 4:4; 28:6]. God's justice is a response to the demands of His righteousness. God is not a "respector of persons" (Rom 2:11), He shows no partiality. Where sin, which is a violation of His law, occurs (Rom 5:13), His Justice must be satisfied.

Man is not able to satisfy the righteousness of God, and therefore needs a Messiah who can "propitiate" (appease) the Justice of God. This "propitiation" was accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross when He died to pay for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:1-2).

4 LOVE.

God is LOVE, meaning that perfect and unconditional love is found in Him. (1 John 4:8-10; Titus 3:4; John 17:24-26), < John 15:9 >, [Gal 5:22].

This characteristic of God is the basis for sending Jesus Christ to redeem mankind (John 3:16). Love is what kept the Lord on the cross to pay for our sins <Luke 23:34>; and it is the first element in the "fruit" of the Holy Spirit [Gal 5:22].

Love means doing what is right and best for others, even if doing so is accompanied with unpleasant feelings. Christians are to partake of God's love and spread it to others so that all might come to know God (John 13:34-35).

5 ETERNAL LIFE.

God is ETERNAL LIFE. He always has been and always will be. (Isa 57:15), < John 8:58; 1 John 5:11-12; Mic 5:2; Rev 1:8,17 >, [Heb 9:14].

Eternal life has no beginning or end. We as Christians actually possess everlasting life, which has a beginning point, but no end. God's Eternal Life teaches that He is not ever subject to death.

6 OMNIPOTENT - ALL POWERFUL.

God is OMNIPOTENT, meaning that He has the power to do anything. (Mark 14:36; 1 Pet 1:5), < Matt 28:18; Rev 19:6 >, [2 Tim 1:7; Rom 15:13].

An example of His Omnipotence is found in the creation of the heavens and earth (Gen 1:1). We are told that the "word of His mouth," created the heavens, and His "breath," all their hosts (Ps 33:6).

7 OMNIPRESENT - AT ALL PLACES.

God is OMNIPRESENT, meaning that He is everywhere at the same time with the same intensity. (Prov 15:3; 2 Chr 2:6), < Matt 18:20; 28:20 >, [Ps 139:7-16]. This does not mean that God is everything (Pantheism), but that He is everywhere. This concept shows us the personal nature of God.

We also see from this characteristic that God is in all places at the same intensity (Ps 139:7-17). The fact that He is Omnipresent means that He could manifest Himself at more than one place at the same time.

8 OMNISCIENT - ALL KNOWING.

God is OMNISCIENT. He knows everything: past, present and future. (Ps 139:1-6; Heb 4:13), < John 2:24-25; 18:4; Matt 9:4 >, [1 Cor 2:10-11; Isa 11:2].

He knows the outcome of all things; not only the actualities, but all the possibilities. He knows all of the effects, throughout all of time, that each decision will bring. His eternal plan has considered all of these factors (Rom 8:28-30).

9 IMMUTABLE - UNCHANGING.

God is IMMUTABLE, meaning that the aspects of His Essence never change. (James 1:17; Heb 6:17; Mal 3:6), < Heb 13:8 >, [1 Cor 12:4; Eph 1:13].

This characteristic is beneficial to mankind since God must always do what He promises. He will not change His mind; since He said, "There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1), we can be fully confident that He will not change His mind. He promised eternal life to those who trust in Jesus Christ, therefore, we know that He will not amend this gospel (John 3:16). If God did alter His promises, then He would be a liar, thus unrighteous (Heb 6:17-18).

Everything else in the universe is changing. God is the only constant. This is why hope in him can be an "anchor" for our souls (Heb 6:19).

10 TRUTHFUL.

God is absolute TRUTH. (Deut 32:4; John 7:28; 17:3), < John 14:6; 1 John 5:20 >, [1 John 5:7,8; 4:6; John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13].

This characteristic tells us that everything God utters is totally believable (Num 23:19). It is in fact impossible for God to lie (Titus 1:2).

The Truth is that God manifested Himself in the person of Jesus Christ <John 14:6>. Throughout history truth has been sought simply in the form of an idea (what one thinks may be truth), a statement (what one claims to be truth), or a principle (a fundamental belief). This is why anything that mankind deems to be truth, must be compared with the words of Jesus Christ <1 Tim 6:3>.

FOR PERSONAL STUDY

- 1 Explain in your own words the Biblical proof of the Trinity.
- 2 Does any part of creation possess all of these attributes?
- 3 Memorize the ten attributes of God discussed in this lesson.
- 4 Read John 3 and identify as many of these attributes as you are able.

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SECTION II - BASIC PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

LESSON 2: Principle Two - Interpret Christologically

In order to interpret Christologically, we must realize that all of history is focused around Jesus Christ. This principle recognizes that Jesus Christ is the Creator of all things (John 1:1,3,14; Col 1:16-17), the Alpha and Omega - "the beginning and end" (Rev 1:8), the one and only God who became man (Php 2:6-8).

As we seek to understand God's Word, we must determine how our interpretation of a given passage conforms to the Truth of the Lord Jesus

Christ. One way to do this is to determine what each person, place, thing or event in Scripture teaches us about our Lord. We are encouraged to study and look for "the good things," the real truth, our Lord Jesus Christ; not just to look to the old Law, which was merely a "shadow" of these good things (Heb 10:1, Jn 14:6). All of the people, places and events in the Old Testament were placed there by God as examples to help us understand and learn about Him (1 Cor 10:1-6).

An example of a person teaching us about the Lord would be found in the prophet Jonah. As you may remember, Jonah did not want to go to the Assyrians as he had been commanded by God. Instead, he got on a ship and went in another direction. A storm occurred and Jonah was thrown overboard where he was swallowed by a great fish and three days later vomited up on an Assyrian beach where he then decided to comply with God's commands. The three days and nights came to be the "sign of the prophet Jonah" (Matt 12:39-40) which spoke of the time that Jesus would be in the tomb.

A place can also teach us about the Lord. Jesus was to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2) which means "house of bread." Jesus was indeed bread, that came down out of heaven and the Person who would sustain spiritual life (John 6:35).

There are many things which are directly designed to teach us about the Lord. The Tabernacle and Temple fall into this category. If we just consider the Holy Place where the Table of Shewbread, the Golden Lampstand, and the golden Altar of Incense were located, we can easily determine that they represent Jesus. Again, He is the Bread (John 6:35). He is also the "Light of the world" (John 8:12) and the One who hears our prayers (incense represents the prayers of the saints {Rev 8:3-4} and prayer is a "sacrifice" {Heb 13:15-16}).

Events like the offerings made by the Levitical priests also teach us about the Lord. All of the offerings (described in Lev 1-7) were designed to point us to Jesus as the "one offering for all time" (Heb 10:10-12). He indeed was the "lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29).

The student can also look at the main themes of each book in the Bible and see that Jesus Christ is the main subject.

Genesis He is the Creator and Seed of the woman. (1:1; 3:15)

Exodus He is the Lamb of God slain for sinners. (Ch. 12)

Leviticus He is our High Priest. (entire book)

Numbers He is the Star out of Jacob. (24:17)

Deuteronomy He is the Prophet like unto Moses. (18:15)

Joshua He is the Captain of the Lord's Hosts. (5:13-15)

Judges He is The Judge. (11:27)

Ruth He is our Kinsman Redeemer. (Ch. 3)

Samuel He is the Lord of Kings. (2 Sam 7:18-20)

Kings/Chronicles He is the Lord of Heaven and Earth. (Entire books)

Ezra He is the Restorer. (1:1)

Nehemiah He is Faithful. (9:32)

Esther He is our Mordecai. (Ch. 10)

Job He is our Risen and Returning Redeemer. (19:25)

Psalms He is the Blessed Man of 1.

He is the Son of God of 2.

He is the Crucified One of 22.

He is the Risen One of 23.

He is the Coming One of 24.

He is the Reigning One of 72.

He is the Leader of Praise of 150.

Proverbs He is our Wisdom. (Ch. 4)

Ecclesiastes He is the Forgotten Wise Man. (9:14-15)

Song of Solomon He is "my Beloved." (2:16)

Isaiah He is our Suffering Substitute. (53)

Jeremiah He is the Lord our Righteousness. (23:6)

Lamentations He is the Man of Sorrows. (1:12-18)

Ezekiel He is the Throne Sitter. (1:26)

Daniel He is the Smiting Stone. (2:34)

Hosea He is David's Greater King. (3:5)

Joel He is the Lord of Bounty. (2:18-19)

Amos He is the Rescuer of Israel. (3:12)

Obadiah He is the Deliverer upon Mount Zion. (V17)

Jonah He is the Buried and Risen Savior. (Entire book)

Micah He is the Everlasting God. (5:2)

Nahum He is our Stronghold in the Day of Wrath. (1:7)

Habakkuk He is the Anchor of our Faith. (2:4)

Zephaniah He is in the Midst for Judgment and Cleansing. (3:5,15)

Haggai He is the Smiting Shepherd. (2:17)

Zechariah He is the Branch. (3:8)

Malachi He is the Sun of Righteousness. (4:2)

Matthew He is the King of the Jews. (2:1)

Mark He is the Servant of Jehovah. (Entire book)

Luke He is the Perfect Son of Man. (3:38; 4:1-13)

John He is the Son of God. (1:1)

Acts He is the Ascended Lord. (1:8-9)

Romans He is our Righteousness. (3:22)

1 Corinthians He is the First-Fruits from the dead. (15:20)

2 Corinthians He is made Sin for us. (5:21)

Galatians He is the End of the Law. (3:10,13)

Ephesians He is our Armor. (6:11-18)

Philippians He is the Supplier of Every Need. (4:19)

Colossians He is the Preeminent One. (1:18)

1 Thessalonians He is our Returning Lord. (4:15-18)

2 Thessalonians He is the World's Returning Judge. (1:7-9)

1 Timothy He is the Mediator. (2:5)

2 Timothy He is the Bestower of Crowns. (4:8)

Titus He is our Great God and Savior. (2:13)

Philemon He is the Prisoner's Partner. (1:9)

Hebrews He is the Rest of Faith and Fulfiller of Types. (9-11)

James He is Lord of Sabaoth. (5:4)

1 Peter He is the Theme of Old Testament Prophecy. (1:10-11)

2 Peter He is the Long Suffering Savior. (3:9)

1 John He is the Word of Life. (1:1)

2 John He is the Target of the Antichrist. (1:7)

3 John He is the Personification of Truth. (1:3-4)

Jude He is the Believer's Security. (1:24-25)

Revelation He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. (19:11-16)

(The above adapted from R.T. Ketcham, DD; found in J. Edwin Hartill's Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics)

FOR PERSONAL STUDY

1 Read Psalm 22 and Matt 27:45-46. Describe how David represented Jesus Christ. (Person)

2 Read Exodus 1 and Matt 2:13-20. Describe the significance of Egypt in the life of Christ. (Place)

3 Read Exodus 26:31-35 and Hebrews 10:20. Describe how the veil of the Tabernacle represents Jesus. (Thing)

4 Read Genesis 22 and Hebrews 11:17-19. Show the similarities between the sacrifice of Isaac and the sacrifice of Jesus. (Event)

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SECTION II - BASIC PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

LESSON 3: Principle Three - Interpret the Differences

This principle instructs us to consider differences where God establishes them. In other words, we are to recognize the Biblical difference between such concepts as faith and works, salvation and sin, law and grace, and

many others. The Bible makes many distinctions. Our challenge is to realize these differences in our interpretation.

An example of realizing differences is exemplified in the study of faith and works. We are told in Ephesians 2:8-10:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

Clearly salvation is by grace through faith, not of works. Yet the importance of works is not negated. Works are not meant for salvation, but are important to the Christian life.

Faith has no merit in itself, because all the merit is found in the object of the faith. For one to have faith in faith is actually to have trust in oneself. We know that we all have sin and thus trusting ourselves is really not a wise choice of objects (Rom 3:23).

If a heavy adult were going to swing from cliff to cliff over a large hole and someone handed him a small piece of twine that is attached to a small branch, it would be difficult to have faith because there would not be sufficient merit in the object. However, if a strong rope were attached to a large branch, the faith would be easier to have because there is sufficient merit in the object.

Jesus Christ, who bore our sins in His body on the cross and rose from the dead, has more than sufficient merit to be the object of our faith.

Works involve actions that are good in their very nature, such as helping the poor (Gal 2:10). But, even good actions will not save us (Titus 3:5). Works are designed by God to be a display of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, we will give an account for the works we have done in the name of Jesus Christ, and we will be rewarded for them accordingly (2 Cor 5:10). Works should be done out of thanksgiving for what the Lord has done for us. They should not be done with an attitude toward personal gain.

Another difference we might consider is between the security of the Believer's salvation and the reality of sin in his life.

We are told that the Lord did the greatest work for us when He died to save us even while we were His enemies. Should we expect any less of Him now that we are members of His family (Rom 5:6-10)?

The Bible makes it clear that Believers can and do sin after they are saved.

"If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:8-10).

It should be clear that this passage refers to Believers. We do not have to read very far in the New Testament to discover the warnings to Believers against our tendency to sin. The question arises, do we as Believers lose our salvation when involved in sin, or not?

In the book of Romans, as well as many other books of the Bible, salvation is attested to be an eternal fact. Paul said, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death" (Rom 8:1-2). The Corinthian church became heavily involved in a multitude of sins. Paul called them "fleshly" (1 Cor 3:1-2), but never referred to them as "unsaved." He even refers to them as a "church" composed of "saints" (1 Cor 1:2).

Clearly, Christians may fall into sinful lifestyles. Equally clear is that our salvation cannot be lost: "If we are faithless, He remains faithful" (2 Tim 2:13).

A Christian's sinful lifestyle is certainly not without repercussions (consequences). It leads to loss of rewards: "if we deny Him, He also will deny us" (2 Tim 2:12). The immediate context confirms that we will not reign with Him, if we deny Him.

From these two illustrations, we can begin to see certain differences that God has established within His Word. We will spend a lifetime discovering them and seeking to understand the relationships between the various concepts involved with them.

FOR PERSONAL STUDY

- 1 What are some other differences that come to mind?
- 2 Select one of them and seek to determine why it is Biblically different.

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SECTION II - BASIC PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

LESSON 4: Principle Four - Interpret to Find Out How to Live

This principle comes from a direct statement of Jesus Christ found in John 7:17. If we truly want to "know" God's Word, then we must be willing to "do" His Word. This principle encompasses the necessity of intellectual honesty in the study of God's Word. We must seek to set aside our bias and our preconceived ideas and honestly seek illumination from the Spirit of God (1 Cor 2:14). Applying this principle involves personal soul searching, for example, to evaluate the purity of our motives (2 Cor 13:5).

It is easy for us to hold personal bias, or form unwarranted opinions, and then go searching for a Biblical proof of them. However, that approach can "prove" almost anything, because it makes us blind to passages that could lead in other directions, or to passages that urge us to seek balance.

For example, one might look at King David's actions concerning Bathsheba, the wife of one of his most loyal warriors (2 Sam 11). Some people might try to use that passage to prove that it is acceptable for a person in power to commit murder and adultery. One simply needs to read the next chapter and compare it with the "Ten Commandments" (Ex 20:1-17) to determine that murder and adultery are not an acceptable lifestyle to our God. David was retained as king because of God's grace displayed toward David's repentance (Ps 51).

Proper application of God's Word has to come from proper interpretation. There may be many applications, but there is only one correct interpretation of any particular verse. For example, 1 Timothy 3:1-7 gives the qualifications for an "overseer" in the church. The interpretation concerns real requirements for one who is to hold that position. The application considers that the "overseer" should not be a "new convert," and that the listed qualifications represent qualities of maturity, which should be the objective for all men in the church, especially its leaders.

SIX HINDRANCES TO PROPER INTERPRETATION:

There can be many hindrances to the proper interpretation of God's Word. We will examine six of them that lead to mistakes in interpretation. Remember that no one is immune from mistakes. It is wise, in addition, to remember the admonition from Paul found in 1 Corinthians 10:12, "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."

1 CARNALITY.

The first hindrance to proper interpretation is Carnality. Carnality involves an ongoing sinful lifestyle and is often referred to as "fleshly" (1 Cor 3:3). It means that the Believer has chosen to pursue sin through "deeds of the flesh" rather than be led by the Holy Spirit and see His fruit (Gal 5:19-23). This is life with unconfessed sin (1 John 1:9) and lack of repentance (2 Cor 12:21).

If one who studies God's Word is involved in deeds of the flesh - immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing and things like these (Gal 5:19-21) - then his interpretation will surely be flawed. For instance, a teacher who is involved in sexual immorality would clearly have the tendency to distort passages that deal with that subject.

Since truth is revealed by the Holy Spirit (John 16:13) and the "fleshly" man has chosen to pursue a path of life apart from the leading of the Holy Spirit

(if even for a short period of time), the "fleshly" man will get a distorted understanding of truth since he is not "spiritually appraising" the Word.

The "fleshly" man is similar to the "natural man" (1 Cor 2:14), but slightly different. The "natural man" refers to an unbeliever who, "does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised" (1 Cor 2:14). The "natural man" does not have access to the Spirit while the "fleshly/carnal" man is not in fellowship with the Spirit. Neither will be able to correctly understand God's Word.

2 VANITY.

Vanity is the quest for fame or recognition, found in the one who desires the applause of men. Vanity can also directly lead to improper interpretation. We are warned in Proverbs 16:18: "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling." This is good advice for the interpreter.

While it is true that we should diligently study God's Word, it is also true that we must "handle it accurately" (2 Tim 2:15). Our study must be guided by our love for the Lord and others (Mark 12:29-31), not a desire to be recognized for our insightful pondering. Learning something "new," which expands our personal understanding is necessary to spiritual growth, but if we search God's Word for new information to impress others, we are searching in vain because our motives are not pure.

We should not be so proud of our "method" of study that we think it guarantees accurate interpretation, lest we forget the primary role of the Holy Spirit in understanding God's Word.

3 BIAS.

The third hindrance to proper interpretation is personal bias. Bias is a prejudice based on individual preferences and it basically distorts the text with a negative attitude: "I don't want something to be this way." If such an attitude is strong enough, it may distort portions of God's Word.

Sadly, some have used their own personal prejudices in an attempt to justify with God's Word such horrific attitudes like racism - even though the Bible is clearly against it.

"For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Gal 3:27-29).

If God were prejudiced, then no Gentiles (non-Jews) would be saved.

4 LACK OF CONSISTENCY.

When we try to interpret God's Word, but are not consistent in several "SPIRITUAL" practices, we can succumb to incorrect interpretations.

A The Practice of Consistent Self-Evaluation and Confession:

We are told in 2 Corinthians 13:5 to, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!" We are to place not only our actions but our motives before the Lord for comparison with His standards. When we find that we have failed, we must place the failure before the Lord and be cleansed. 1 John 1:9 reads, "If we confess our sins, He [God] is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Failure to carry out this practice leads to carnality, which produces distortion and error in the interpretation of God's Word.

B The Practice of Consistent Prayer:

We are told in Matthew 7:7-8, "Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened." We should consistently pray for understanding and retention of God's Word.

Failure to carry out this practice leads to a break in fellowship with God the Father, whose Word you are trying to interpret.

C The Practice of Consistent Study

We are told in 2 Timothy 2:15 that an important part of handling accurately the Word of God is diligence: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth."

A lack of consistency in Bible study will lead to failures in keeping track of the context within which the specific verse is located.

5. FAULTY METHODOLOGY.

Our method of interpretation can also hinder accuracy. Our basic beliefs about the text will certainly affect the way we understand it. For instance if we don't believe that all of the Bible is inspired by God (2 Tim 3:16-17), then we might try to rationalize miraculous events with scientific reasoning. If we do believe that the entire Bible is literally true, then miracles must be interpreted as divine interventions in history.

There are some who believe that only certain Christians have been given the gift of interpreting God's Word. However, the Bible says that all Believers are priests (1 Pet 2:5,9). As priests we have access into the throne room of

God (Heb 4:16), where we can be taught directly by God the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:15).

Others distort the Bible with allegorical or mythological interpretations of passages that ought to be taken literally. Allegory refers to the insertion of foreign meaning into the text. If we claim the Flood of Noah was not literally a global worldwide catastrophe (flood), but instead a picture of the sufferings that mankind must endure, then we would be guilty of interpreting allegorically.

Mythology refers to narratives with a small amount of truth and a large amount of exaggeration. If we view the Flood of Noah as only a small, localized flood that was later exaggerated by the local inhabitants into a global disaster, we would be interpreting mythologically. One could say that in mythology there is a small amount of truth surrounded by a lot of lies.

Some even go so far as to apply allegorical and mythological interpretations to Jesus Christ, the Cross, and the Resurrection. If such interpretations were true, then Jesus did not really die for our sins, nor was he buried, nor resurrected for our redemption. According to the apostle Paul, we are in serious trouble if these events did not literally happen (1 Cor 15).

A purely literal method that does not consider figures of speech can also hinder interpretation. For example, the book entitled Song of Solomon is an extraordinary literary work, which interpreted literally makes absolutely no sense at all. Accordingly, the correct method involves a literal interpretation that recognizes figures of speech and typological language. We will discuss this more fully in Lesson 9, Section II.

6. FAULTY REASONING.

Human reasoning can never fully comprehend the infinite God. If we could completely understand God through human faculties, we would certainly become arrogant. We are told in Proverbs 3:5-7 to, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil." God wants us to walk by faith, and not by our own understanding.

We have been promised that one day we will fully comprehend our Lord. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:12, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully, just as I also have been fully known." All the unanswered questions about Scripture that we now have will one day be answered when we are face to face with our Lord (2 Cor 3:18).

The Jews of the first century had some problems relying on their ability to reason, which contributed to the tragic error of not recognizing Jesus as the Messiah. Consider the conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees recorded in Matthew 22:41-46:

"Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, 'What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?' They said to Him, 'The son of David.' He said to them, 'Then how does David in the Spirit call Him "Lord," saying, The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, until I put Thine enemies beneath Thy feet"'? 'If David then calls Him "Lord," how is He his son?' And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question."

Jesus quoted Psalm 110:1, asking the Pharisees how the Messiah can be David's "son," and simultaneously be David's "Lord." The answer is that the Messiah is both God and man; such reasoning seems to be contradictory, doesn't it?

FIVE STEPS TO A PROPER APPLICATION:

- 1 Pray for understanding, recollection, and proper application of spiritual principle(s)
- 2 Seek to correctly and fully understand the passage being considered. This involves studying the relationships that words have to sentences, sentences have to paragraphs, paragraphs have to chapters, and chapters have to books. This step will be examined in much greater detail later in the study.
- 3 Determine the spiritual principle that comes from the interpretation of a particular passage. A spiritual principle crosses all time frames and cultures. For example, sexual immorality (a physical relationship outside of marriage) is sin in all time frames and cultures. The spiritual principle is to avoid sexual immorality.
- 4 Honestly examine your life to see if you are in violation of any principle of scripture, and submit yourself to God for correction of the wrongdoing. Read Psalm 51 and note the elements of David's repentance concerning his sin with Bathsheba.
- 5 Walk in grace and faith "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him" (Col 2:6).

EIGHT WAYS TO FAIL THE APPLICATION:

- 1 Failure to rely on the Lord for the strength to carry out the application.
- 2 Resistance to changing attitudes or actions that conflict with God's truth.
- 3 Disobedience to the principles known to be correct.
- 4 Succumbing to the pressure of conforming to worldly standards.
- 5 Lack of interest in the application of God's Word to your life.
- 6 Redefining sin in such a way that it is legalistic or non-existent.
- 7 Substituting emotional feelings for wise choices.

8 Distortions of thinking due to prejudice, bias, or laziness.

FOR PERSONAL STUDY

- 1 What is an important requirement for truly knowing God's Word?
- 2 What is the difference between interpretation and application?
- 3 What things may hinder your personal ability to interpret the Bible?
- 4 What method of interpretation seems the most logical to you? Why?

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SECTION II - BASIC PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

LESSON 5: Principle Five - Interpret from Primary Passages

This principle recognizes that certain passages are to be read as the primary declaration of God's attitude on a subject, that is vital to our spiritual life. Many times in the Bible, God gathers together several scattered fragments that have to do with a particular truth and places them in one of these primary passages. Some examples include:

- The Resurrection of Jesus Christ. 1 Cor 15 · The Human Tongue. James 3
- The Restoration of Israel. Rom 11 · Triumphs of the Faith. Heb 11
- God's Discipline of His Children. Heb 12:1-11 · The Church. Eph 1-3
- Righteousness by Faith. Rom 3:10-21 · Law. Ex 20
- Full Armor of God. Eph 6:10-17 · Love. 1 Cor 13

This principle requires us to study the primary passage of Scripture to determine major principles and then go to related passages for additional information.

For example, the most extensive discourse in the Bible on the qualities of love is found in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a, where there are sixteen qualities so full of meaning that we could easily spend a week in classroom instruction on these verses alone. Consider that:

"Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails."

When we read Mark 12:29-31, we find that Jesus responded to a question concerning the greatest commandments:

"The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Since the Two Greatest Commandments involve the quality of love, seeking to know what love involves - so we can make correct evaluations of ourselves before God and others - is good common sense. The importance of love is found in Mark 12. Its manifestation is found in 1 Corinthians 13.

If you would like to test your application of "love" defined in the verses of 1 Corinthians 13, ask yourself these questions: "Am I patient?" "Am I kind?" "Am I jealous?"

Another example of this principle is found in the description of the "full armor of God" Ephesians 6:10-17. This is the only place where all of the Believer's spiritual armor is mentioned together. The belt that one "girds his loins with truth" is referred to in Isaiah 11:5. The "Breastplate" and "Helmet" are referred to in 1 Thessalonians 5:8. The "Sword" as part of one's "armor" is implied in Hebrews 4:12.

FOR PERSONAL STUDY

1 Why would it be considered important to first study the primary passage about any topic?

2 Study 1 Corinthians 15 for information on the Resurrection and write down your observations.

3 Look at the following verses. Find the portions that relate to the Resurrection and add them to your observations from question #2. Rom 4:24-25, 6:4-9, 7:4, 8:11, 33-34; 1 Cor 6:14; 2 Cor 1:8-10, 4:13-14, 5:14-15, Eph 1:18-21, 5:14-15, Col 2:9-12, 1Thess 1:9-10, 1 Pet 1:20-21, Rev 20:4-6, 12-13.

4 Look for information that seems to conflict and note it.

SECTION II - BASIC PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

LESSON 6: Principle Six - Interpret Based on Context

This principle is based on the fact that every word, sentence, or verse in the Bible has information preceding it and following it (except the very first and the very last word, sentence or verse). This principle pays careful attention to the physical location of each word and verse and the relationship to other words and verses. God sheds light upon a subject either through passages that are nearby - that establish the theme for that section - or through passages that are similar in subject in another part of the Bible.

We should never take a verse out of its contextual setting and give it a foreign meaning. Using verses out of context is a deceptive way to try to prove one's own ideas and promote personal agendas. This incorrect practice is a form of allegory, which we discussed in Section II Lesson 4.

Contextual interpretation basically means that readers determine who is speaking, who is the audience, what is the main theme of the passage, and in what time frame and place the teachings are valid. (The student may need to review Section I Lesson 5, "Preparing To Study The Bible.")

THREE TYPES OF CONTEXT:

1 THE NEAR CONTEXT.

The Near Context includes verses within the same paragraph. For example, Galatians 5:1 tells us, "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery." We might have a tendency to apply the term "slavery" to a particular culture in a particular place and time, since "slavery" frequently refers to being physically under the domination of a person or political entity. In context, however, we see that this verse refers to a kind of slavery that is spiritual. The passage refers to those who are enslaved by the rituals of The Law - specifically circumcision - and are not "free" to "serve one another in love" (Gal 5:13).

2 THE INTERMEDIATE CONTEXT.

The Intermediate Context includes those verses found within the same book. An example of this is found in Matthew 24:40, which says, "Then there shall be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left." The context concerns the subject of the "last days." The question involves who will be taken and who will be left behind? Will the righteous be taken and the wicked left, as at the Rapture of the Church; or will the wicked be taken and the righteous be left, as at the Second Advent when Christ establishes His literal Millennial Kingdom? The Near Context does not answer the question.

Matthew 13:49, however, gives the answer. In a passage also dealing with the "last days," we are told that the "wicked will be taken out from among the righteous." Thus the Intermediate Context has answered the question of who will be taken and who will be left behind. The passage is referring to the Second Advent.

This Intermediate Context informs us of the importance of studying verse by verse through a book in order to understand and maintain the context. If a student went first to Matthew 24, the answer to the above question would be difficult to find. But, if the student had read the entire book up to Matthew 24, the answer would have already been given.

3 THE REMOTE CONTEXT.

The Remote Context recognizes the internal consistency of the Word of God. It includes passages from the whole of the Bible that have a bearing on a particular passage under consideration.

A study of the Remote Context considers that a passage might be clarified by another distant portion of the Bible. Studies of a selected word, such as "grace," "faith," or "love," by means of a concordance, for example, lead to other, more remote passages containing that particular word. A concordance is a book that lists - by individual word -verses in which a given word may be found. An "exhaustive" concordance will give a list of every verse containing that word. See Lesson 5, Section III for more information about concordances.

Often times the Remote Context must be consulted for more advanced principles, such as the interpretation of prophecy, or the understanding of "types" and "symbols." For example, the Veil in the Tabernacle (Ex 26:31-35), which separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, is interpreted for us in Hebrews 10:20 to have represented the flesh of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Interpreting contextually is extremely important in our quest to "handle accurately the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15). When we make "doctrinal" statements, we must be able to prove them from Scripture to demonstrate that the Bible is harmonious in terms of its Near, Immediate and Remote Contexts. If our beliefs are not in harmony with all of Scripture, then the "doctrine" resulting from our study is questionable.

FOR PERSONAL STUDY

- 1 What is meant by "context"?
- 2 What are the three different kinds of context that we are to consider?
- 3 Will God's Truth violate any of those contexts?
- 4 Why would you never want to take a verse out of its context?
- 5 List as many qualities as you can find of a "model" or "example" church in 1 Thessalonians 1.

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SECTION II - BASIC PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

LESSON 7: Principle Seven - Interpret Comparatively

This principle of comparative interpretation focuses on the internal consistency of the Word of God, pointing us to the importance of comparing Scripture with Scripture to analyze similarities in subject matter, so that we might arrive at correct meanings.

It is important to compare subjects similar to one another, such as grace and mercy, and also subjects very different from one another, such as God and Satan. When we compare similarities and differences of subjects in remote contexts, we put together a picture that has been cut into pieces - sometimes a great number of pieces. Theology is developed by putting these pieces together.

Not only the novice (1 Tim 3:6), but also the experienced interpreter must be careful in the development of theology (Prov 3:5-6), realizing that important details within the 31,000+ verses of Scripture may have been overlooked. The sheer volume of material we are trying to understand should keep us aware of the potential for error, and therefore keep us humble.

As we compare Scripture with Scripture, we come to find out that a given theological issue is considered in many parts of the Bible. One example is the issue of "Justification by Faith" (Gen 15:6; Rom 3-4). When we find a contrasting passage that speaks of a "Justification by Works," such as found in James 2:14-26, we must consider both passages. When we put both passages together, we understand "works" as necessary in the plan of God, as an outgrowth of the faith that led to salvation, but not as a means to acquire salvation. This principle is also taught in Ephesians 2:8-10. We are "saved by grace through faith," and have been "created for good works."

This same principle teaches us to beware of building theology or doctrine on passages or textual readings of questionable intent. For example, the Greek text from Mark 16:9 to the end of the book is very uncertain. Some people have built doctrine on these passages, which has resulted in erroneous theology.

Another example of the importance of comparing Scripture with Scripture is seen in the identification of the "mystery" (namely, something unknown) which is referred to many times in the New Testament. Normally, if we were studying Ephesians 3 and ran into the word "mystery" we would try to answer the question, "what is the mystery?" Our answer, however, is found in Colossians 1:25-27, which says:

"Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God; that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

The "mystery" is identified by Scripture as a new intimate relationship with the Messiah. This relationship is for the new era known as the Church Age.

FOR PERSONAL STUDY

1 Why is it important to compare Scripture with Scripture?

2 What is important to note about major theological issues?

3 List some similar subjects you would like to compare.

4 List some different subjects you would like to consider.

EQUIP - Foundations: How To Study

SECTION II - BASIC PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

LESSON 8: Principle Eight - Interpret Harmoniously

This principle recognizes the truthfulness and faithfulness of God, that He is not the author of confusion (1 Cor 14:33). In other words there are no real contradictions in the Bible. The Bible is unified, framed and inspired by the Living God, thus all its components are consistent.

Disagreements concerning interpretations of Scripture are human in scope, not Divine. Many people base their emotional security on their own understanding of God's Word, but Scripture warns us against doing this (John 5:37; Prov 3:5-6; 2 Cor 5:7). We will never understand some things in the Bible clearly or completely until such time as we meet the Lord face to face (1 Cor 13:12). So, the issue for us is always that we walk by faith (Heb 11:6; Col 2:6), trusting God to lead us to our heavenly home.

When we come to understand how two seemingly contradictory verses actually complement one another, we gain wisdom. We are told in the first part of the book of Proverbs that when we learn to understand difficult statements and riddles, we become wise (Prov 1:2-6). This requires diligent study. For example, as we have already discussed, we must consider James 2, and the passage of Romans 3-4 to understand correctly the relationship between faith and works.

When looking for relationships between passages, we should be aware of indicators for time or place, realizing that every small detail may not have been written down, or that a problem may exist in the translation. Regardless, we must keep in mind that there are no true contradictions found in God's Word.

We should also realize that God's Word frequently states the same principle in different ways so that what is important might be more fully grasped. For example, Romans 3:23 says, "all have sinned..." likewise, the book of Leviticus commands all to bring sin offerings. Both passages essentially say the same thing.

What also becomes quite clear from the study of the Bible is that God directed the literary structure of His Word and its organization.

FOR PERSONAL STUDY

1 Why do we need to recognize the harmony of Scripture?

2 Why is it important to find the harmony?

3 Do you expect to find any real contradictions in Scripture?

SECTION II - BASIC PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

LESSON 9: Principle Nine - Interpret Literally

This is the principle under which God says what He means and means what He says. This is an extremely important principle because it guides us in our understanding of the Word. When we instruct our own children, we try to communicate as clearly as possible the things we want them to remember. Often we'll discuss something in many different ways so that their little minds will grasp it and not lose hold (Heb 1:1). Are we not God's children (1 John 3:1)? Is He not our "Daddy" ("ABBA" in Romans 8:15)? Literal interpretation means that we (as God's children) literally accept what God clearly says as the truth.

It makes sense to look in the Word for simple, clear, direct, and universal statements first. Obviously the clearer verses will shed light on passages that are unclear.

One example of a simple, clear, direct, and universal statement is found in Romans 8:1, which says, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." This verse is an accomplished fact. There are no uncertain words, such as "maybe," "might," or "if." Those who are "in Christ Jesus" are those who have received eternal life, according to Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Those who are saved face no condemnation.

We find the same type of statement in Romans 3:23 which says, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." The condition of sin, according to the Bible, is universal to mankind - with the exception of Jesus Christ (1 Pet 2:22). The Bible alone establishes the rule, thus, the Bible alone can offer the exception to the rule. We as students are not at liberty to make exceptions to the universal statements that God makes in His Word. Therefore, except for Jesus Christ, we are all sinners.

Automatically assuming "hidden" or "deeper" meanings of Scripture is irresponsible. As we have already discussed, an allegorical approach to Scripture tries to add to God's Word. A "mythological" approach tries to take away from God's Word. God has been careful to warn us against either (Rev 22:18-19), since they negate the importance of the literal meaning of God's Word.

The Bible is grounded in literal history and is thus significant to all of history (cf. 1 Cor 15). Failure to consider it literally has led to many theological distortions throughout the history of Israel and the Church.

Other examples of universal statements that we should remember are, Romans 8:35-39, John 3:16,18,36, Ephesians 2:8-10, 1 John 2:1-2, and Titus 3:5.

FOR PERSONAL STUDY

1 Study the following verses and summarize the clear principle(s) that are taught in each.

a Romans 8:35-39

b John 3:16

c John 3:18

d John 3:36

e Ephesians 2:8-10

f 1 John 2:1-2

g Titus 3:5.

2 Begin a list of other verses you find of this nature. (They apply to anyone, anywhere, anytime. They cross all cultures and all time frames. You will continue to add to this list as you study the Word.)