

Principles of Bible Study

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LESSON 1

INTRODUCTION

This study is designed to introduce the student to basic facts about the Bible and also to introduce some principles that should be employed in one's search of the Holy Scriptures. We are told in 2 Timothy 2:15 to "handle accurately the word of truth." There are indeed some basic guidelines found in the Scripture to equip the student of the Word so as to fulfill the exhortation to deal correctly with God's Word.

PERSONAL PREPARATION FOR BIBLE STUDY

Personal preparation in the study of the Scripture cannot be overemphasized. First and foremost, we must have believed in Jesus Christ as our Savior because the "natural man" cannot accept or understand the things of the Spirit of God. They are spiritually appraised (1 Cor 2:14).

God's word claims that it is divinely inspired (2 Tim 3:16-17) so we must begin our study by accepting that statement as fact. This is not a leap of faith as some would have you believe, but is indeed just a step of faith which we will see as this study progresses.

We also must pray for wisdom in understanding the Scriptures. God's Word tells us if we lack wisdom to ask for it, because God will give it to us freely (James 1:5). Passionate prayer for correct knowledge and discernment will be answered because it is clearly within God's will (1 John 5:14 cf Mat 7:7-8).

We also must be willing to be diligent and patient in our study (2 Tim 2:15), because many things of God's Word are not readily discernible. When we realize that we are finite beings trying to comprehend the infinite mind of God in a small way, it is easy to see that it will take some time.

Your spiritual life is also of great importance in your desire to know. The Lord Jesus Christ said that "if anyone is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching (John 7:17)." If what you desire is simply an intellectual quest and not a relationship with the living God, then the knowledge you gain will always be lacking and distorted. Sadly, many people study God's word so that they can walk by sight, but the greatest theologian of the Church, the Apostle Paul, said

that he "walked by faith and not by sight (2 Cor 5:7)." We enter into salvation by grace through faith (Eph 2:8-9), and as we have entered, so we are to walk (Col 2:6), therefore we are to learn God's word in order to have a greater faith.

It is also important that we consistently confess our sins and permit God to do the cleansing of our lives, so that greater fellowship may be attained with Him (1 John 1:6-10).

WHAT IS TO BE GAINED FROM GOD'S WORD

There is a profound 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). Along with this is our growth in faith as we "hear" God's Word through the Scriptures (Rom 10:17). God's Word is necessary for the purification of our lives because it is His Word which is truth (John 17:17). As we prepare to serve Him, we must put on His armor, which is done by the Holy Spirit (Eph 6:17). With His Spirit at work in our lives we will also have power in ministry (Eph 2:10). With this knowledge of His 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).

WHAT IS THE BIBLE

The Bible is not simply another book. Jesus Christ called it "The Book (Heb 10:7)." Without it man cannot know the absolute standard of righteousness and the need for grace in his life.

The Bible is the written revelation of the Living Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ (Heb 4:12 cf John 5:39-47). It is accepted by faith and proved by history.

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 and illumination. Illumination is the influence of the Holy Spirit upon the student of the Word. Inspiration is more than revelation which means to take the veil off, it is divinely initiated. The veil may be removed from a bride, but the bride is yet to be fully understood. Inspiration is "God's breath" expressing itself through a human personality.

The Old Testament was written for the most part in Hebrew, except for Daniel Chapters Two through Seven and Ezra Chapters Four through Seven which were written in a sister language to

the Hebrew, which is Aramaic. All of the New Testament is written in Koine (common) Greek.

THE DIVISIONS OF THE BIBLE

The Bible is divided into two Testaments, the old and the new. A "testament" is a covenant or contract. The "Old" Testament looks at the original covenants that God made with man concerning the coming Messiah. The New Testament looks at the arrival of the Messiah and the new contracts that were made.

There are 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament, for a total of 66 books that are in the Bible. There are 1,189 chapters with 929 of them in the Old Testament and the other 260 chapters located in the New Testament. The Old Testament contains 23,214 verses and the New Testament contains 7,959 verses for a total of 31,173 verses of Scripture. The 39 books of the Old Testament were written by over 30 authors. The 27 books of the New Testament were written by 10 authors.

In the Old Testament, the first five books, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy are called the "Torah (Law)," and also called the "Pentateuch." The Pentateuch is followed by twelve Historical books: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther. The next grouping contains five Poetical books: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon. The poetical books are followed by the five Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel and Daniel. Twelve Minor Prophets then conclude the Old Testament: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Johan, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

The New Testament begins with five Historical books: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and the Book of Acts. The Historical books are followed by 21 Epistles and one book of Prophecy (Revelation).

AN OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE

- A. Creation of the heavens and earth. Gen 1:1; 2 Pet 3:6
- B. Satan's First Rebellion. Gen 1:2 cf Isa 45:18 cf Isa 14:12-14
- C. Earth prepared for Man. Gen 1:2-2:3
- D. The Headship of the First Man. Gen 2:4-25
- E. Man's subjection to Satan. Gen 3
- F. Mankind dealt with as a whole. Gen 4-10

- G. Construction of Babylon. Gen 11
- H. Israel called and blessed. Gen 12
- I. Times of the Gentiles.
- J. First Advent of Jesus Christ.
- K. Ministry of Jesus Christ.
- L. Church called out.
- M. Church called up.
- N. Ministry of Antichrist.
- O. Second Advent of Christ.
- P. Times of Gentiles-close of Tribulation.
- Q. Israel recalled and blessed.
- R. Destruction of Babylonian systems.
- S. Mankind dealt with as a whole.
- T. God's subjection of Satan.
- U. Headship of Second Adam.
- V. Earth perfected for man.
- W. Satan's Final Rebellion.
- X. New Heavens and Earth.

BEGINNING TO STUDY THE BIBLE

As we seek to understand the Bible, we must constantly seek answers to the questions, "who," "what," "when," "where," "why," and "how?" The answers to these questions must always be considered in view of two more questions, "how does this let us develop a relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ," and "how then shall we live?"

We are going to take a simple look at principles that we must keep in mind while studying the Bible. These principles 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 up in all respects in our Lord (Eph 4:11-16).

LESSON 2

15 BASIC PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

PRINCIPLE #1: INTERPRET BASED ON DIVINE ESSENCE.

This principle recognizes the Essence of God and that His Essence is not compromised. It is thus vitally important to know the basic characteristics of God's Essence. As you, the student, come to know Him to a greater degree (not just about Him,

compare Philippians 3:10), you will become more proficient in understanding what He has to say.

We will now go through a brief introduction of the Essence of God. Please realize and consider that these verses are only representative of many verses that are found in the Scriptures that document God's Character. For the sake of simplicity, only a few of His qualities are mentioned. Also, you will find three verses given with each quality. The first bracket () will denote the verses that are for the Father, the second < > will be the verses for the Son, and the third bracket [] will be for the Holy Spirit.

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].

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].

God is JUST meaning that 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 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].

God is ETERNAL LIFE meaning that He always has been and always will be. (Isa 57:15), < John 8:54; 1 John 5:11-12; Mic 5:2; Rev 1:8,17 >, [Heb 9:14].

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].

God is OMNIPRESENT meaning that He is everywhere at the same time and with the same intensity. (Prov 15:3; 2 Chr 2:6), < Matt 18:20; 28:20 >, [Psa 139:7-16].

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

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].

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

PRINCIPLE # 2: INTERPRET CHRISTOLOGICALLY.

This principle is based on the fact that all history, both angelic and human, is focused on Jesus Christ. It recognizes that Jesus Christ is the Creator of all things (John 1:1,3,14; Col 1:16-17), the Alpha and Omega (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 relates to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is found in every book of the Bible:

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 Messenger of Jehovah. (3:15-30)

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

Samuel: He is the Despised and Rejected King. (1 Sam 16-19)????????

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

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)
 Ezekial: 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 Smitten Shepherd. (13:7)
 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 Father's Partner. (V17-19)
 Hebrews: He is the Rest of Faith and Fulfiller of Types. (9; 11; 12:1,2)
 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. (V7)
 3 John: He is the Personification of Truth. (V3,4)
 Jude: He is the Believer's Security. (V24,25)
 Revelation: He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. (19:11-16)

PRINCIPLE #3: INTERPRET DISCRIMINATELY.

This principle instructs us to make distinctions where God makes distinctions. In other words, we are to recognize Biblical differences such as faith and works, being accepted and being acceptable, salvation and rewards, the believer's security and walk, Law and Grace, and a host of others. The Bible makes many distinctions and challenges us to find out the reasons why God chose to establish them as different.

PRINCIPLE #4: INTERPRET TO FIND OUT HOW TO LIVE. JOHN 7:17

This principle comes from a direct statement of Jesus Christ. If one truly wants to "know" God's Word, then one must be willing to "do" His Word. This principle encompasses the requirement of intellectual honesty in one's study of God's Word. We must seek to set aside our biases and honestly want illumination from the Spirit of God (1 Cor 2:14).

It is quite easy to form a personal opinion and then go in search of proof in the Bible. With that attitude, one can prove almost anything, because it makes one blind to passages could lead in other directions. This principle involves a personal soul-searching, looking at the purity of our motives.

Proper application has to come from proper interpretation. There may be many applications, but there is only one correct interpretation of a verse.

There can be many hindrances to proper interpretation of God's Word. Carnality as seen in the desire for the applause of men, vanity and

biases are just a few of the hindrances. Also, study without prayer and regularity can also contribute to incorrect interpretations.

One's method of interpretation can also hinder accuracy. There are some who believe that only certain Christians can interpret God's word, but the Bible says that all Believers are priests (1 Pet 2:5,9) and that interpretation is a spiritual matter (1 Cor 2:10-16). Some believe that the Bible is all allegory or mythology. If that is the case then Jesus did not really die for our sins, be buried and then resurrected. We are in trouble if it did not literally happen (1 Cor 15).

Some believe that reason is to be the absolute guide, but man's reasoning abilities cannot fully fathom the infinite God (Prov 3:5-6). The Jews of the first century had some problems in their reasoning that contributed to the fact that they missed Jesus as the Messiah. Consider the conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees that is 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 quotes Psalm 110:1 and asks how Messiah can be David's "LORD" and still be David's "son." The answer is that Messiah must be both God and man. Kind of goes against reason doesn't it? But seriously true.

A strictly literal method that does not consider figures of speech can also hinder interpretation. The chief example being the Song of Solomon.

To make the proper application:

1. PRAY.
2. Understand the PASSAGE.
3. Determine the PRINCIPLE.
4. Identify personal PROBLEMS.
5. Develop a PLAN to deal with the problems.
6. Check consistently for PROGRESS.
7. PRAY.

Why do I fail?

1. Resistance to change.
2. Disobedience.
3. Pressure to conform to worldly standards.
4. No interest in application.
5. Redefine sin.
6. Substitution of emotion for volition.
7. Fogged thinking by prejudice, bias or laziness.

PRINCIPLE #5: INTERPRET FROM PRIMARY PASSAGES.

This principle recognizes that God has declared His primary attitude on any subject that is vital to our spiritual life. Many times in the Word, God gathers together the scattered fragments that have to do with a particular truth and places them in a summary passage.

Some examples:

- A. The Resurrection. 1 Cor 15
- B. The Tongue. James 3
- C. The Restoration of Israel. Rom 11
- D. Triumphs of the Faith. Heb 11
- E. God's discipline of His children. Heb 12:1-11
- F. The Church. Eph 1-3
- G. Righteousness by faith. Rom 3:10-21
- H. Law. Ex 20
- I. Full Armor of God. Eph 6:10-17
- J. Spiritual Gifts. 1 Cor 12-14

PRINCIPLE # 6: INTERPRET BASED ON CONTEXT.

This principle is based on the fact that every sentence or verse in the Bible has something that comes before and/or something that follows. God gives light upon a subject either through passages that are nearby and have established the theme or passages that are similar in subject although they may be in another part of the Bible.

We should never take a verse out of its contextual setting and give it a foreign meaning, which would be allegory. If a verse is taken out of context, the Bible can be used to prove almost anything.

The Near Context includes those verses within the same paragraph. For example, in Galatians 5:1 we are told, "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 put the term "slavery" into the meaning of our culture. Slavery frequently refers to being physically under the domination of a person or political entity. In the context though, we see that the slavery involved is spiritual. It is referring to those who are enslaved by the rituals of the Law, as seen in circumcision, and are not "free" to "serve one another in love (5:13)."

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 the one taken and the one left. 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 gives the answer. In a context 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.

The previous example also shows the importance of studying verse by verse through a book, in order to understand and maintain the context. It one went first to Matthew 24, the answer would be difficult to find. If one had read the entire book up to Matthew 24, the answer would have already been given.

The Remote Context looks at passages from the rest of the Bible that have a bearing on the passage under consideration because they deal with the same subject. If we do concordance studies on a particular word, such as grace or faith or love, we will be led to all the remote passages that contain that particular word. A concordance is a book that lists, by individual word, passages where that word is found. An "exhaustive" concordance will list all the passages. The Remote Context recognizes the internal consistency of the Word of God.

Often times the Remote Context must be consulted in the interpretation of prophecy, types and symbols. For example, the Veil in the Tabernacle (Ex 26:31-35) that separates the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies is interpreted in Hebrews 10:20 to represent 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 that is interpreted in context, or else that "doctrine" is subject to question.

PRINCIPLE # 7: INTERPRET COMPARATIVELY.

This principle also recognizes the internal consistency of the Word of God and points us to the importance of comparing Scripture with Scripture in order to arrive at correct meanings. We must compare similar topics such as grace and mercy and also different topics such as God and Satan. When we compare the similarities and the differences, we are putting together a portrait that has been cut into pieces and sometimes there is a great number of pieces. This is where theology is developed. 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 something within the 31,000+ verses and 773,000+ words of Scripture may have been overlooked. The sheer mass of what one is trying to understand should keep the interpreter humble.

As we compare Scripture with Scripture we come to find out that major theological issues are considered in many parts of the Bible. One example is the issue of "Justification by Faith (Gen 15:6; Rom 3-4)," which is mentioned in several different places.

This principle also teaches us to beware of building theology or doctrine on only one passage or on an uncertain text. From Mark 16:9 on the text is very uncertain. Some people have built a theology of "snake handling" from that passage. That approach to theology could indeed "bite" them.

The importance of interpreting the Word by comparing Scripture with Scripture is clearly seen in passages such as Gen 1:1-2 and Isa 45:18. Genesis 1:1-2 says, "In the beginning God created (Hebrew BARA') the heavens and the earth. And the earth was formless (Hebrew TOHU) and void (Hebrew BOHU)." A simple reading of this passage would give the impression that God created the heavens and earth in a state of being formless and void (of population). Isaiah 45:18 though says, "For thus says the Lord, who created (Hebrew BARA') the heavens (He is the God who

formed the earth and made it, He established it and did not create (BARA') it a waste place (TOHU) , but formed it to be inhabited), I am the Lord, and there is none else." This passage tells us that God did not create the earth "formless and void." The seeming contradiction must be considered in one's theological viewpoint. This recognizes the harmony of God's Word as both statements must be true. The question to us then is "How?"

Some people just ignore the Isaiah passage and hope it will go away, but it won't. This author sees a Gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 in which the Fall of Satan occurred as recorded in Isaiah 14:12-14 and Ezekial 28, and that the earth was judged as a result of Satan's Fall. The description of events then in Genesis 1 & 2 are the result of God restoring the earth and not the original creation of it. In any event, the position you hold must recognize and properly handle all the verses on a given subject.

PRINCIPLE #8: INTERPRET HARMONIOUSLY.

This principle recognizes the truthfulness and faithfulness of God and 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 an organic unity, framed and inspired by the Living God.

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

When we come to understand how two seemingly contradictory verses fit together, therein lies wisdom. We are told in the first part of the book of Proverbs that when we learn to understand enigmas and riddles, we can become wise. This field requires diligent study. For example, one must consider both the passages in James 2 and Romans 4 to correctly see the relationship between faith and works.

When looking for relationships between passages look for marks of time or place. Realize also that every small detail may not have been written down. Realize also that the problem may be in the

translation. In any event, there are no true contradictions found in God's Word.

PRINCIPLE #9: INTERPRET LITERALLY.

This is the principle under which God says what He means and means what He says. It is an extremely important principle because it guides us in our understanding of the Word. If you were going to instruct your child, wouldn't you want to communicate as clearly as possible the things you wanted them to remember? Would you communicate these items in many different ways so that they would get it (Heb 1:1)? Are we not His children (1 John 3:1) and He our "Daddy" ("ABBA" in Romans 8:15)?

It only makes sense to look for simple, universal, and direct statements. These obviously could shed light on some verses that may not be as clear. It does not make sense to automatically assume "hidden" or "deeper" meanings of Scripture. This has led to many distortions of God's Word through the centuries.

One example of a simple, clear direct statement is found in Roman 8:1 which says, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Other examples that you as a student might look up in order to familiarize yourself with this principle are Romans 3:23, Romans 8:35-39, John 3:16,18,36, Ephesians 2:8-9, I John 2:1-2, and Titus 3:5.

PRINCIPLE #10: INTERPRET VOLITIONALLY.

This principle looks at the freewill of mankind and the fact that God has made man responsible for his own decisions (John 3:18). This is clearly portrayed in the test set up for Adam and Eve in Genesis 2-3. God's Omniscience knew that they would eat, but God was not the Primary Cause of that forbidden dinner. They ate because they chose to eat from the forbidden tree, and were thus held responsible for their actions and driven from the Garden.

This principle also recognizes that the Word of God records some of the decisions of man but that just because it records them does not mean the decisions are condoned. We see this also in Genesis 2 and 3. God's Word recorded but did not condone the decision to eat the fruit.

PRINCIPLE #11: INTERPRET PROGRESSIVELY.

This principle teaches us that God revealed information over a period of time. For example, the first prophecy of the Messiah is found in

Genesis 3:15 as the "promised seed of the woman." The rest of the Old Testament is giving us more information about this "seed."

We should look at the point where the First Mention is made of a given subject and let it guide our understanding. For example, the business and subtlety of Satan are first seen in Genesis 3:1. As we learn more about the Serpent, we are guided by the fact that he is a deceiver who is the direct adversary of God. Many times we will find that the universal truth about a given subject is taught in conjunction with the first place it is mentioned.

PRINCIPLE #12: INTERPRET DISPENSATIONALLY.

This principle recognizes that there are particular periods of history in which God deals in a particular way with man in respect to man's responsibility. The divisions are derived from an interpretative study of Scripture and thus they are not set in concrete. There are several views as to exactly how the Dispensations are broken and these come partly from the fact that there are transition periods between Dispensations where some methods are carried for a time into the next time period until they fade.

One breakdown of the various Dispensations is seen in the following way: The Age of Innocence, from the creation of man to the Fall of man; The Age of Conscience from the Fall of man to the Flood of Noah; The Age of the Patriarchs from the Flood of Noah to the Exodus; The Age of Israel from the Exodus to the Day of Pentecost; The Age of the Church from the Day of Pentecost until the Rapture; The Tribulation Period which is the final seven years of the Age of Israel, from the Rapture to the Second Advent of Jesus Christ; and, the Millennium from the Second Advent to the Great White Throne.

There is a modern-day trend toward "hyper-Dispensationalism" which seek to put several small Dispensations within the larger framework. One must beware of this trend as it lacks serious Scriptural backing.

Extreme rigidity in this principle can lead to legalisms and the missing of many opportunities to serve in the Christian life. Some, for example, would see no value for the Church in the Sermon on the Mount, because Jesus spoke the principles during the Age of Israel. Yet, we are told by Paul

in 1 Timothy 6:3 that "sound doctrine" and "sound words" are those of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What we should really seek and cling to are the principles that cross Dispensations. For example, the forms and methods of the priesthood changed during the scope of the Bible, but the principles upon which they functioned remained the same.

PRINCIPLE #13: INTERPRET COVENANTALLY.

This principle recognizes the agreements or contracts made between God and men. There are conditional covenants that depend upon man's compliance and there are unconditional covenants that depend only upon God's Word.

Each covenant requires a study in itself. For now, the titles and locations of the covenants will be noted.

The Edenic Covenant made in the Garden of Eden between Adam and God, found in Genesis 1:28-30 and 2:15-17.

The Adamic Covenant which was made with Adam in the Garden after the Fall and before the expulsion, found in Genesis 3:14-19.

The Noahic Covenant found in Genesis 8:20-9:17 which is made with Noah after exiting the Ark.

The Abrahamic Covenant found in Genesis 12:1-3 with further additions and explanations given later, made with Abraham.

The Mosaic Covenant of Law made with Moses on Sinai found in Exodus 20 and many other passages in Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

The Davidic Covenant made with David found in 2 Samuel 7:8-19 and Psalm 89.

The Palestinian Covenant which is a continuation of the Mosaic Covenant found in Deuteronomy 30:1-10.

The New Covenant made with the House of Israel in Jeremiah 31:31 and Hebrews 8:8-12, based on the blood of Christ.

PRINCIPLE #14: INTERPRET SPECIFICALLY.

This principle recognizes that there are questions that must be answered in interpreting the Bible. For example, we must ask, "Who said this?" "To whom was it said?" "Under what circumstances was it said?" and "Who does this concern?" This principle recognizes that God has dealt with three classes of people in history, the Jews, the Gentiles

and the Church. Therefore, we must seek to determine who the recipients were.

PRINCIPLE #15: INTERPRET PROPHECY CAREFULLY.

This principle recognizes that the Bible very clearly foretells future events. The Bible also tells us very clearly that true prophecies come through men moved by the Spirit of God and that "no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation (2 Pet 1:19-21)." There are many fanciful attempts at interpretation of prophecy and sadly many are led astray. It is well known that cults often use special interpretations of prophecy as a means to win converts. Let us remember that as Believers in Jesus Christ, we are all priests. Beware of anyone with a new and fanciful interpretation that you are forced to believe in order to be accepted into the group.

The study of the interpretation of prophecy is almost a course to itself as it is readily seen that almost 1/3 of all Scripture is found in prophetic books. Some simple guidelines though will be of help.

First, see if the prophet gives his own interpretation like Jesus did in John 2:19-22 concerning the temple.

Next, see if facts in history give the interpretation, such as the Fall of Tyre of Ezekial 26, the Flood of Noah or Joseph's Dream concerning the famine.

Especially important is to determine if other inspired Scriptures give the interpretation.

In prophecy, we must recognize figures of speech, symbols and types and look for Biblical explanations. Remember that speculation is not interpretation. I believe that many times God tests us to see if we will try and turn a manmade speculation into a "doctrine." It is made quite clear by Scripture that some prophecy will not be understood until the appropriate time (Dan 12:4,8-10).

The interpreter of prophecy is actually putting together a large puzzle with many thousands of pieces (there are probably 10,000 verses of prophecy, not considering all the words). The picture that emerges must account for all the known facts and must take all pieces of evidence into consideration. It is not our privilege to discount facts that do not fit the picture we think we are going to see.

SOME OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

We must recognize that God may leap over centuries of time without making a comment that is inscripturated. He may also leap over centuries of time even within the same verse such as is seen in a comparison of Luke 4:18-21 with Isaiah 61:1-2.

Let us realize that God will frequently state the same principle in many different ways so that we can get it. For example, Romans 3:23 says that "all have sinned" and Leviticus commands all to bring sin offerings. They are saying the same thing.

It also becomes quite clear from the study of the Bible that God superintends the literary structure of His Word so that it is organized.

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