

Asian Crescent

How to Study the Bible Conference

How To Study The Bible

- I. Bible Study Misconceptions
 - A. Professional expertise required
 - B. Anyone can interpret the Bible, no training needed
 - C. A passage of scripture can mean different things to different people.

- II. Bible Study Perspective
 - A. Bible is literature
 - 1. Can only be understood as literature
 - 2. Vocabulary, grammar, forms, images and metaphors, culture, etc.
 - 3. Ancient literature presents special challenges
 - B. Perspicuity of scripture: anyone can understand the basic message of the Bible
 - C. No private interpretation: no one can understand everything perfectly; correct interpretation comes through the body of Christ.
 - D. God speaks through scripture
 - E. How God speaks through literature
 - 1. God wants to be understood
 - 2. God uses ordinary speech
 - 3. God speaks in human language
 - 4. God speaks through translations
 - 5. God has a clear message (one meaning)
 - F. Scripture conveys moral responsibility

- III. Broad Types of Literature
 - A. Narrative (story)
 - 1. History (Genesis, Judges, Nehemiah)
 - 2. Parable. (Judges 9:7-15, 2 Samuel 12:1-4, Luke 15:4-6)
 - 3. Narrative is a series of events; the event is the main structural element
 - B. Discourse (command and instruction)
 - 1. Epistles. (Romans, Philippians)
 - 2. Sermons. (Matthew 5-7, Acts 2:14-36)
 - 3. Proverbs. (Proverbs, Matthew 7:1?)
 - 4. Discourse is a series of propositions; the proposition is the main structural element
 - C. Poetry and Apocalyptic
 - 1. Psalms
 - 2. Prophets (Isaiah, Joel)
 - 3. Revelation
 - 4. Poetry is a series of images; the image is the main structural element

- IV. Importance of correctly identifying the type of literature
 - A. Respond correctly
 - 1. Learn from history
 - 2. Obey commands
 - 3. Adjust perspective by poetry
 - B. Avoid embarrassing mistakes
 - 1. Blindly obeying history (Acts 2:41-47; Luke 9:57-62)
 - 2. Taking poetry “literally” (Isaiah 13:1, 9-13)
 - C. Identify false teaching
 - 1. Genesis and Daniel as unhistorical
- V. The Universal Study Process
 - A. Three basic parts
 - 1. Observation
 - a. What is there? What does it say?
 - b. Gathering the facts
 - 2. Interpretation
 - a. What do these facts mean?
 - b. Understanding the facts
 - 3. Application
 - a. What can/should we do now?
 - b. Profiting from our study
 - B. Used in any field of study: science, literature, farming, construction, etc.
 - C. Real examples
 - 1. Genetics
 - a. Observe characteristics of human genes
 - b. Interpret the data to find which gene produces insulin
 - c. Apply this gene to a bacterium to produce large quantities of insulin for human consumption
 - 2. Literature
 - a. Observe all the ways Jane Austin portrays the clergy in her novels
 - b. Interpret the data to draw conclusions about her view of the clergy
 - c. Apply your finding to a senior thesis so you pass the course
 - 3. Daily life
 - a. Observe that the traffic light is red
 - b. Interpret that to mean you should stop
 - c. Apply your foot to the brake
 - D. OIA is not so much a Bible study method, as it is a description of how we successfully relate to the world around us
 - 1. Often when we read the Bible we expect a meaning to jump out at us
 - 2. We need to slow down and read it carefully

VI. Observation – What does it say?

A. Observing narratives

1. Focus on the events
2. Look for the facts within the events
3. Details: who, what, when, where, how
4. Clearly grasp the sequence of events
5. Notice the *stated* purpose or reason behind events
6. Notice the manner and method by which events occur

B. Observing discourse

1. Focus on the propositions
2. Look for the literary relationships within the propositions
3. Repetition of words and concepts
4. Contrast of words and concepts
5. Cause and effect
6. Progression of general to particular, particular to general
7. Note the particular words chosen
8. Note the structure of the sentences and the whole passage

C. Observing poetry

1. Focus on the images
2. Look for the parallelism
3. Repetition
4. Contrast
5. Comparison
6. Notice the use of metaphors, similes, and personification
7. Note the canonical use of the images
8. Note how the images are arranged to create the whole picture

D. General observation

1. Each genre will make some use of the characteristic elements of the others
 - a. Narratives will contain repeated and contrasted words and ideas, and will use metaphors to describe people and events
 - b. Discourse passages will use events and poems to illustrate and reinforce propositions
 - c. Poetry will have historical events and propositions as their subjects
2. The basic genre of a passage is determinative in interpreting it
 - a. Exodus and Numbers, not Psalm 106, determine the sequence of events in Israel's departure from Egypt
 - b. Psalms determines how we ought to respond to that event
3. Always note the author and original audience, including their cultural setting
4. Always note references to other parts of scripture

VII. Interpretation – What does it mean?

A. The goal of interpretation

1. To discover the main point of the passage
2. Not to decode secret messages or to clear up all possible ambiguities

B. Examine the parts: events, propositions, images

1. What is the overall meaning of this event, proposition, or image?
2. Narrative interpretation
 - a. Why did he do _____?
 - b. Why did _____ happen?
 - c. Why were _____ involved?
 - d. Was this event good or bad?
 - e. Why did the author include this event?
3. Discourse interpretation
 - a. Why was this word used?
 - b. Why was the sentence written this way?
 - c. Why did the author include this statement?
4. Poetry interpretation
 - a. Why is this metaphor/simile/personification used here?
 - b. What does the parallelism show us?
 - c. What response does this image evoke?
 - d. Why did the author include this image?

C. Examine the relationship between the parts (within the passage).

1. How are these events/statements/images connected to each other?
 - a. Repetition? Contrast? Intensification? Conclusion? Progression?
2. What is the meaning of this repetition/contrast/etc.?
3. Narrative: what events caused other events?
4. Discourse: what propositions implied other propositions?
5. Poetry: how do these images create a whole picture?

D. Determine the *main point* of the whole (passage)

1. What is the meaning of the whole passage?
2. The main point is *the primary timeless principle* revealed in this ancient text.
3. Make a tentative decision about the main point
4. Test it against your initial conclusions (See III. A. and B.)
 - a. Ask “Does each verse contribute to the main point?”
 - b. If not, you may have a *secondary point*
5. Modify tentative main point
6. Test it again
7. Adopt final conclusion about the meaning of the whole passage
8. This is the author's *main point* of the passage

VIII. Application – How does it apply to me?

- A. Flesh out in our 21st century context how the timeless principle of the main point works out
- B. New things to believe and remember – about God, man, the world, the church, etc.
- C. New things to do
- D. Specific plan of obedience

IX. Last words

- A. Narrative passages tell us what other people did; they do not tell us what to do – we must figure out from the story which principles to apply to our lives
 - 1. Luke 10:29-37 – What happened: Samaritan cared for the wounded traveler
 - 2. Possible application – Help those stranded along the road
- B. Discourse passages tell us in general what to do – we are left to decide the specifics of applications
 - 1. Romans 13:1 – General command: obey authorities
 - 2. One specific – Do your homework, pay your taxes
- C. Poetic passages paint pictures; they are more evocative than instructive, yet they do contain some commands – we must think about where we fit into the picture
 - 1. Psalm 1 – Picture: The righteous are a strong tree, the unrighteous are chaff
 - 2. Application – Are you righteous or unrighteous; fruitful or worthless?