

HOW TO STUDY YOUR BIBLE

(INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE ON HERMENEUTICS)

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." 2 Timothy 2:15
(The King James Bible is the only Bible in English which commands believers to study it!)

There are a number of ways to study your Bible. In this course we will attempt to look closely at several of those approaches. Of course a proper study of the Bible demands a proper understanding of the Bible. Therefore any legitimate study of the Scriptures includes *interpretation*.

According to the Encarta World English Dictionary, "*Hermeneutics is the science and methodology of interpreting texts, especially the books of the Bible.*" Someone has said that you can make the Bible teach anything. That may be true if you disregard proper hermeneutical principles and the purpose for which the Bible was written, its subjects, time element, and other important essentials. But a proper study of Scripture adheres to certain fixed elements which mandate strict rules to guarantee a correct conclusion.

A practical approach to the study of the Bible is a rule stated simply and succinctly: "*If the plain sense makes good sense, seek no other sense or you will have nonsense.*" If this rule was followed much confusion regarding the clear teaching of Scripture would be avoided.

The Bible obviously includes certain metaphors, similes, figures of speech, word pictures, types, and hyperbole, as does most any document. However, as with any document, those images are usually explained or understood by studying carefully the context, colloquialisms, the setting, the time frame, the persons addressed, etc.

Metaphor = an application of a word or phrase to somebody or something that is not meant literally but to make a comparison, e.g., saying that somebody is a snake or a dog.

Simile = a figure of speech that draws a comparison between two different things, especially a phrase containing the word "like" or "as," e.g. "as white as a sheet." From the Latin "simile" – a like thing. This is often done in Scripture.

Synonym = words of closely related meaning, e.g., huge, vast, immense, enormous, mammoth,

Antonym = a word so opposed in meaning to another word, its equal in breadth or range of application, that it negates or nullifies every single one of its applications. In other words an antonym is an exact opposite.

Homonym = a word with the same spelling or sound but has a different meaning, e.g., "fleet" (a group of vehicles) or "fleet" (swift), or the verb "sow" (plant seeds) and "sow" (female pig).

Figure of speech = an expression or use of language in a non-literal sense in order to achieve a particular effect, e.g., "it's raining cats and dogs." Metaphors, similes, and hyperbole are all common figures of speech.

Hyperbole = deliberate and obvious exaggeration used for effect, e.g., "I could eat a million of these."

Type = a category of things or people whose members share some qualities, e.g., Joseph in the O.T. has no sin recorded of him, therefore in that respect he is a "type" of Christ.

Symbol = something that stands for or represents something else, e.g., a dragon represents Satan in the Bible.

Colloquialism: an informal word or phrase that is more common in conversation than in formal speech or writing. In Philadelphia "Yo" can mean "hello" or "hi there."

Allegory = a work in which the characters and events are to be understood as representing other things and symbolically expressing a deeper, often spiritual, moral or political meaning.

All of the above forms of speech may be used at one time or another in the Bible. Therefore it is imperative that every word be studied in its context and with an understanding of who is writing, to whom the passage is written, the historical setting, etc. to achieve a correct interpretation of a given verse or section of Scripture. This is often referred to as the grammatical-historical interpretation approach to the study and interpretation of Scripture.

When Fundamentalists (or preferably "Bible believers") claim a literal interpretation of the Bible, their critics accuse them of being literalists or Pharisees who "strain at a gnat and swallow a camel" (hyperbole). However the truth is that although we do in fact approach the study of Scripture using the literal method of interpretation we do make room for the above use of language. In other words we read and understand the Bible just as we do any other historical document. It is the way we read a newspaper, a novel or any other report, making allowance for grammatical mechanisms which may enrich the report and/or deepen our understanding.

When a Bible believer reads "one thousand years" in the King James Bible, he takes that as a reference to 1000 years! That is the literal approach to studying the Scriptures. When others see that number used in Scripture they spiritualize it or call it an allegory to make it mean anything other than 1000 years. Thus they become Amillennialists, that is, those who do NOT believe in a literal 1000 year reign of Christ over the earth. In other words they take an allegorical approach to the interpretation of the Scriptures. Thus, Adam and Eve in Eden is simply a moral story; the people and place were not literal. The Flood of Noah's day was simply a figurative story to emphasize a spiritual point - it never really happened, or if it did it could not have been anything more than a local flood involving a few people and animals, not a worldwide cataclysmic event such as the Bible portrays it. And of course if that is true there will be no *second* worldwide cataclysmic event wherein the entire world will be consumed by "fervent heat" and experience a global meltdown. (Talk about global warming! - Oh, excuse me - that will be the second real "global warming" event. The first will be when the heat of the sun is turned up during the Tribulation Period. Something else those who allegorize the Scriptures do not believe in!)

So, as we launch this important study about studying your Bible, we will approach it with holy reverence knowing that God meant what He said and said what He meant. Our task will be to take a hermeneutical approach which will enable us to comprehend His words and His message to *us*. Although we know the Scriptures were written over a period of over 1600 years, by many authors, in at least two major languages and that they were written in a historical context, to several different groups of people, we understand that every Scripture was written for our admonition and our learning as well. So, not only will we learn how to correctly interpret the Word and words of God, but we will also learn how to apply them to our needs, circumstances and personal problems.

We serve a BIG God Who had us in mind when He wrote the Bible - and also when He sent His Son to die for us.

As with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus after the death and resurrection of our Savior, we need to listen to His words in *every section of the Scripture* so we can find Him there.

"And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself... And He said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning Me." Luke 24:27 & 44