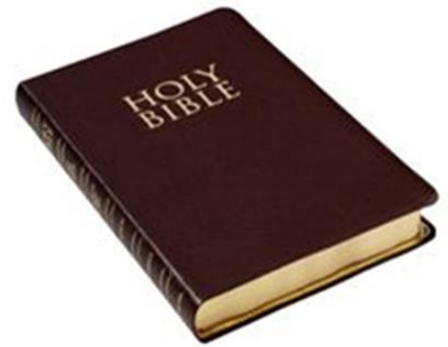


# Principles for interpreting the Bible

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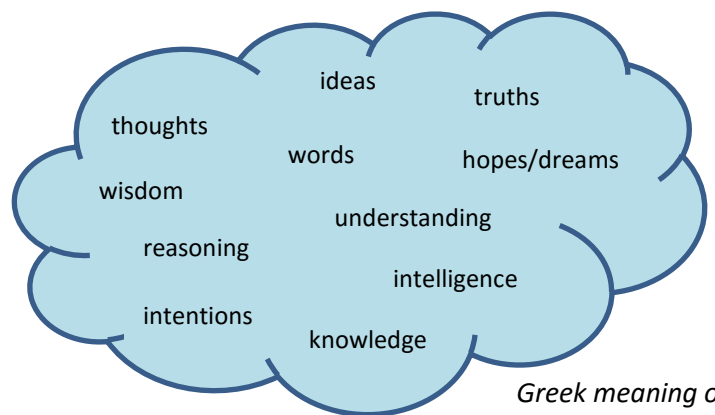


We are so privileged to be able to read the Bible because it enables us to hear and understand the word of God. Down through the centuries Christians have not always had this privilege, but today we have easy access to the Bible and lots of wonderful resources to help us study and interpret it. (Hopefully under the leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit). In this study we will explore the nature of the Bible and how we can interpret it in a valid way so that we understand more and more of God's word and its truths.

## The Word of God

The word "word" in Greek is **logos**, a very widely used word. *Logos* can be translated "word", "utterance", "cause", "intent", "work", "reason", "intelligence", "knowledge", "wisdom".

English words like "biology" – the study of living things; "psychology" – the study of the mind and soul, and "geology" – the study of the earth, are all based on the old Greek word *logos*.



Greek meaning of the word "logos".

It is vitally important that Christians understand what the *logos* (word) of God is:

**The logos (word) of God is the reasoning, intelligent, guiding, correcting, controlling mind and wisdom of God.**

The *logos* (Word) of God is part of the essence of God's being. It is His wisdom, His reasoning and His intelligence.

*In the beginning was the Word (logos), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. John 1:1.*

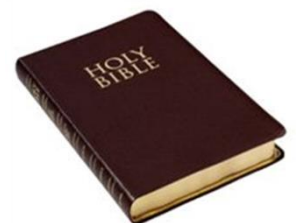
John 1 shows us that **by this logos God created everything in the universe** and now sustains it. And then it goes on to say that **the logos (Word) became flesh in Jesus Christ!**



*In the beginning was the Word (logos), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:1-5,14.*

Jesus is the *logos* (Word) of God! In Jesus is found the whole mind, wisdom, truth and intelligence of God. (Which is why He could say: *I am the truth.* John 14:6).

But where can we learn about the *logos* (Word) of God – the reasoning, intelligent, guiding, correcting, controlling mind and wisdom of God that is revealed in Jesus Christ? Primarily from the Bible!



How? By the Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit's role is to reveal the *logos* (Word) of God to us. He is the "*Spirit of truth*" who Jesus said would "*testify about Me*", John 15:26, and who would "*teach you all things*". John 14:26.

When the Holy Spirit takes the *logos* (Word) of God and reveals it to us it is called a *rhema* – a spoken voice from God. Most Christians have experienced this when they have been reading their Bible, and suddenly parts of it "come alive". The Holy Spirit reveals truths out of the *logos* of God through the written words of the Bible and the result is that our spirits are fed from the wisdom, reasoning and intelligence of God. How wonderful!

### Logos

*For the word (logos) of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Hebrews 4:12.*

### Rhema

*Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word (rhema) that comes from the mouth of God. Matthew 4:4.*

*Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word (rhema) of Christ. Romans 10:17.*

*Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word (rhema) of God. Ephesians 6:17.*

### The Bible is inspired by God

When Christians say that the Bible is inspired, they are saying that it is "God breathed."

*All Scripture is God-breathed (inspired by God) and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness; so that all God's people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17.*

But what is meant by the word "Scripture" in this verse? Most Christians would say it is the 66-book Bible that we use today, but is it?

### Scripture

The Greek word for "Scripture" is *graphé* meaning "writings". When Jesus, Paul and Peter used the word "Scripture" they didn't mean the Bible that we use today. e.g. in Matthew 21:42, 2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 3:16. (No parts of the New Testament were written in Jesus' time and only part of it in Peter and Paul's time, so they couldn't have meant the 66-book Bible we use today). So what did Jesus, Paul and Peter mean when they used the word *graphé*?

#### Old Testament

The word "Scripture" or "writings" that Jesus referred to is the **Tanakh** (equivalent to our Old Testament). It included:

- The Torah - the written Law found in the first five books of the Tanakh. It is based on 631 mitzvot (commandments) that God gave to the Jewish people through Moses. These include the 10 commandments.
- The Nevi'im - the prophets like Joshua, Judges, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel and Ezekiel.
- The Ketuvim - other writings like Psalms, Nehemiah, Chronicles and Daniel.

Then, in addition to the written Tanakh the Jewish scriptures included the oral Torah or **Halakha** (Rabbinical law). It was developed by the Rabbis and described various customs and traditions. The Halakha was passed on orally and was later recorded in the main text of Judaism, the **Talmud**, together with the **Mishnah**, which provided commentaries on how to apply it. The Talmud was completed about 200AD and the canon of the Tanakh finalised, but commentaries on the scriptures continue through the **Gemara** (5th century) and the **Midrash**, through to today.

#### New Testament

When we come to the New Testament we find that that many different books were included or excluded as the canon of Scripture has developed:

- From the very earliest times of the Christian church the Eastern, Roman and Coptic churches all had different canons. (There is no book of Revelation in some Eastern Orthodox Bibles even today).
- The canon for the 27 book New Testament that we have today was suggested by Athanasius in 367AD and agreed by a Church Council in 393AD and affirmed in 397 and 419AD. 15-17 extra books were included but were considered non-canonical.

<b>Athanasius</b> (b. 296)	<b>Origen</b> (b. 185)	<b>Irenaeus</b> (b. 130)	<b>Marcion*</b> (b. 85)
Matthew	Matthew	Matthew	
Mark	Mark	Mark	
Luke	Luke	Luke	Luke
John	John	John	
Acts	Acts	Acts	
Romans	Romans	Romans	Romans
1 Corinthians	1 Corinthians	1 Corinthians	1 Corinthians
2 Corinthians	2 Corinthians	2 Corinthians	2 Corinthians
Galatians	Galatians	Galatians	Galatians
Ephesians	Ephesians	Ephesians	Ephesians
Philippians	Philippians	Philippians	Philippians
Colossians	Colossians	Colossians	Colossians
1 Thessalonians	1 Thessalonians	1 Thessalonians	1 Thessalonians
2 Thessalonians	2 Thessalonians	2 Thessalonians	2 Thessalonians
1 Timothy	1 Timothy	1 Timothy	
2 Timothy	2 Timothy	2 Timothy	
Titus	Titus	Titus	
Philemon	Philemon	Philemon	Philemon
Hebrews	Hebrews	<i>Hebrews</i>	
James	<i>James</i>	<i>James</i>	
1 Peter	1 Peter	1 Peter	
2 Peter	<i>2 Peter</i>	<i>2 Peter</i>	
1 John	1 John	1 John	
2 John	<i>2 John</i>	<i>2 John</i>	
3 John	<i>3 John</i>	<i>3 John</i>	
Jude	<i>Jude</i>	<i>Jude</i>	
Revelation	Revelation	Revelation	

*Red means not included or disputed*

- Martin Luther tried to remove Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation from the canon and the extra books. He labelled them “Apocrypha” meaning “hidden”.
- The Roman Catholic Church added 12 Apocryphal books to their canon in 1597AD. This means Catholic New Testaments now contain 39 books and Protestant New Testaments contain 27 books.

So the “writings”(Scripture) referred to in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 have meant many different things over the years! They certainly didn’t mean the 66-book Bible used by Protestants today, and verses like 2 Peter 3:16 indicate that a range of “writings” were being used by the early Christians as “Scriptures”.

*All Scripture (writings) is God-breathed (inspired by God) and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness; so that all God’s people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

2 Timothy 3:16-17

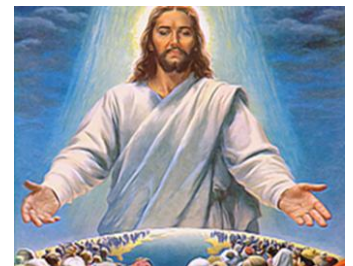
Now let’s look at the word “inspired”. The Greek word for "inspired" is *theopneustos*, which means "God breathed." God used the personality and abilities of human writers to record what He wanted to be recorded in the Bible to achieve His purpose: *for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness; so that all God’s people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

That’s why there are different books (Greek: *biblos*), different languages (Old Testament – Hebrew; New Testament – Greek and a little Aramaic); different types of books with different purposes (history, poetry, prophecy, ‘wisdom literature’, apocalyptic visions, letters, prayers, songs, ....); different writing styles, etc.

Overall our Protestant Bible contains 66 books, and Christians believe that they were all inspired by God. The 66 books were written by about 40 people over a period of about 1500 years. This process of inspiration was not a mechanical dictation where the writer simply wrote down what was heard. The writers of the Bible wrote what, how, and when they wanted, but God was guiding them so that what they wrote achieved His purposes.

Very early in Church history the Christian church recognized that the Bible was inspired because they recognized the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking through it. The church did not give us the Scriptures. The Christian church just recognized the divine authority of the Christian Scriptures.

So how can we know the *logos* of God – His reasoning, intelligent, guiding, correcting, controlling, mind and wisdom - the *logos* that was revealed in Jesus?



Through the **inspiration of the Bible**



and the



**revelation of the Holy Spirit.**

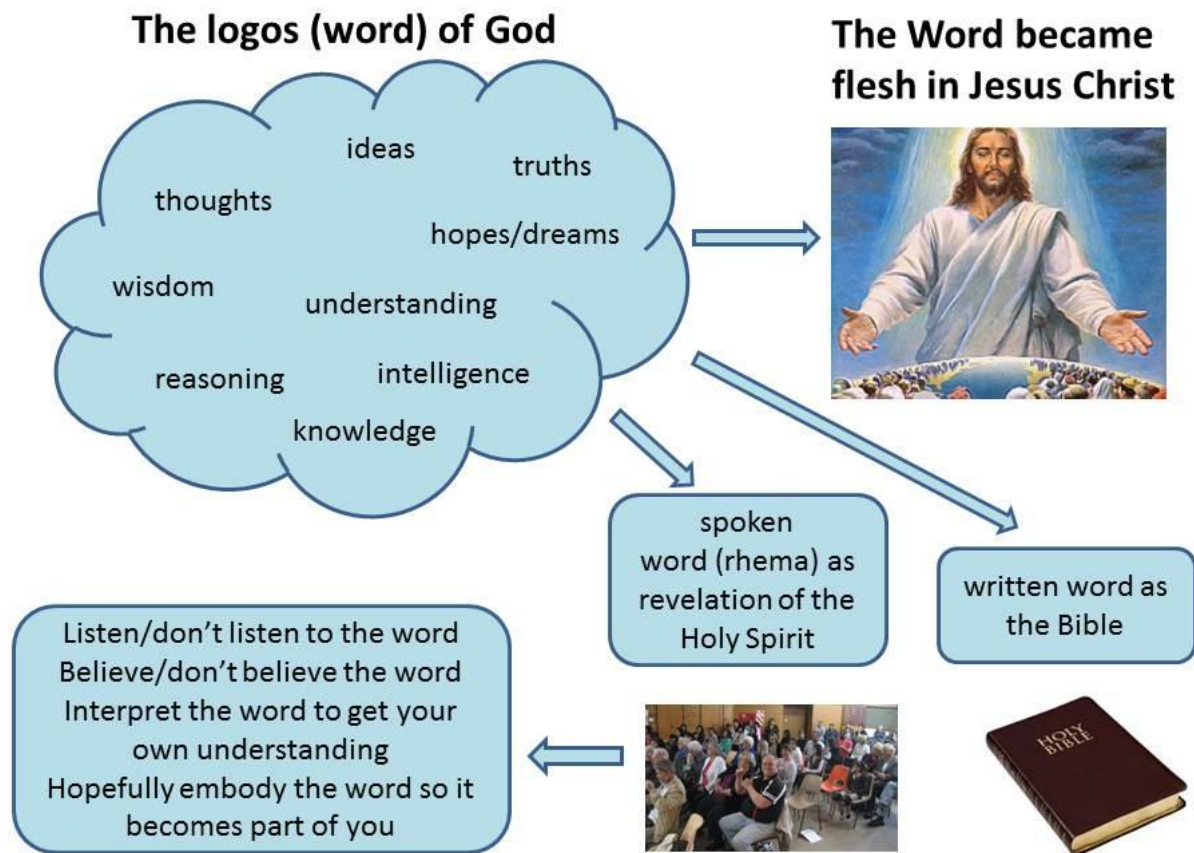
We believe that the Bible is God’s writing (*graphé* – scripture); that it was inspired by God, and that in it we can find the *logos* Word of God – His reasoning, intelligent, guiding, correcting, controlling, mind and wisdom – that was embodied in Jesus and is revealed to us by the Holy Spirit.

When we hear the *logos* (Word) of God revealed to us as a *rhema* by the Holy Spirit, we can’t prove that it is God speaking to us. But we can believe it; trust it; act on it and build our Christian lives on it. And then we will find it is true! And the more time we spend in the Bible, the more easily we will recognise the voice of the Holy Spirit as He communicates the *logos* of God to us.

So, as Christians we can

- listen/not listen to the Word of God
- believe/not believe the Word of God
- (hopefully) live out and embody the Word so it becomes part of our lives.

If we are to learn more of the *logos* of God we need to interpret the Bible in a valid way, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.



## Exegesis and hermeneutics

**Exegesis** is the process of trying to find the original meaning of parts of the Bible:

- What did it mean when it was originally written?
- What was the message the original author was intending to convey?
- What was the message the readers/recipients would take from it?
- What was the Word of God to the original readers/recipients in their situation?

**Hermeneutics** is the process of interpreting parts of the Bible so that they have meaning for us today.

- What does it mean to us today?
- What is relevant for us in our situation?
- What is the Word of God for us today?

If we are to interpret the Bible in a valid way, any hermeneutics must be based on thorough exegesis, under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Here is our guiding scripture:

***Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word (logos) of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15.***

### Some examples:

*Whatever you ask of God, God will give you.* NKJV. *God will give you whatever you ask.* NIV. John 11:22.

Sounds good! But will (or does) God really give us everything we ask of Him? What if we ask for things outside of His will? The words in this verse were spoken by Martha, not by Jesus. Reading them in context we see that Martha believed that if Jesus asked anything of God it would be given to Him. Quite different to us asking things of God! Always read parts of the Bible in their context!

*Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you.* Proverbs 4:25.

Really! Surely this doesn't mean we are only to look straight ahead and are never to look to the left or the right. In context it is not about where our eyes are looking but on how we are to focus on gaining wisdom.

*Money is the answer for everything.* Ecclesiastes 10:19.

Ecclesiastes records the thoughts of the Teacher, not of God. (1:1,2). The Teacher may think that money is the answer to everything, and that life is meaningless. God doesn't!

*God said "Honour your Father and Mother" and "Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death".* Quoted by Jesus in Matthew 15:4, based on Leviticus 20:9.

Most Christians would agree with the first part of this verse but not the second. In context, Jesus is quoting from the Old Testament Law which has been fulfilled in Christ and is no longer applicable. Jesus' "new commandment" of love makes the old Law redundant. See Romans Chapters 1-11, Mark 12:29-31; John 13:34,35; John 14:15-27; Matthew 5:17-20, 22:37-39; Ephesians 2:14-18, Colossians 2:6-23; Hebrews 10:1-18; James 2:8-13; 1 John 3 etc.

*If your right eye causes you to sin gouge it out and throw it away.* Matthew 5:29.

If Jesus meant this literally there shouldn't be too many Christians with right eyes!

We shall now look at a number of hermeneutical principles that will help us interpret the Bible in a valid way. We'll do this by commenting on representative Bible verses in the light of each principle.

***Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15.***

## **1. Acknowledge that we all come to the Bible with preconceptions and biases. Open yourself to the Holy Spirit so that He can reveal the truth of God's logos (word) to you.**

Areas where Christians have preconceptions and biases include:

- creation/evolution
- liberal/evangelical views of salvation/Jesus/the resurrection
- election; predestination; salvation by works/grace
- once saved always saved/the saved can fall away and be lost
- exercise of spiritual gifts, especially speaking in tongues
- order of events at the second coming: pre-, post-, a-millennial; rapture, judgment
- Christian Zionism/replacement theology
- sacraments
- role of women

*"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts".* Isaiah 55:8,9.

- Church authority
- submission.

**Always remember that you can only ever know the tiniest part of the *logos* of God. Stay open to the Holy Spirit so that He can reveal further understanding of the *logos* of God. No matter how well you think you know God's Word, or how firmly you believe something, or how "right" you think you are, you can always learn more of God's Word, through the revelation of the Holy Spirit.**

- 2. The Bible was written in Hebrew or Greek and was translated into Latin and then into English. It is based on many different manuscripts with variations introduced as they were copied over the centuries. Use a variety of translations based on the most authoritative manuscripts. Recognise that paraphrased versions like *The Message*, or *The Living Bible* try to give a general understanding in today's English, and don't attempt to translate the originals accurately.**

*The Word was first, the Word present to God, God present to the Word. The Word was God, in readiness for God from day one. The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish. John 1 from *The Message*.*

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1 from the NIV.*

- 3. Find the meaning of words as they were understood in their original languages.**

The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, and the New Testament in Greek. The meaning of words in both of these languages can be easily found using [www.biblehub.com](http://www.biblehub.com) or a concordance. The original meaning of words may be quite different to how they are used today, especially if they have gained traditional meanings. e.g.

**Word** *logos* - word, utterance, cause, intent, work, reason, intelligence, wisdom. The *logos* (word) of God is the reasoning, intelligent, guiding, correcting, controlling, mind and wisdom of God.

**Worship** *proskuneó* - to do reverence to, go down on knees before, do obeisance to, bow down before, fall down and kiss. (Quite different to how the word "worship" is used today, where it means "attending a Church service", or "singing Christian songs to the Lord".

**Scriptures:** *graphé* - writings. "Scripture" is equated with the Bible, but this is not justified from the original meaning of the word.

**Church:** *ekklesia* - assembly, congregation of called out ones. The original Greek word for "Church" (*kyriakos*) is never used in the New Testament, so every time you read "Church" in your Bible it is actually a mistranslation. The word *kyriakos* (meaning "house of God") was substituted for *ekklesia* sometime after the Church had been institutionalised as the state religion of Rome and its meaning has persisted through to today. It is not valid to equate the institutional Church with the *ekklesia*, the "called out ones" who constitute the Body of Christ.

**Pastor:** *poimen* - shepherd, feeder, protector of a flock. This word is translated as "shepherd" every time it is used in the Bible, except in Ephesians 4:11 where it is translated as "Pastor". Unfortunately this has led to the word "Pastor" coming to mean "leader of an institutional Church" with all of the power and authority that this role (unjustifiably) carries.

**Deacon:** *diaconos* – servant, minister, administrator, waiter, one who serves. The word "Deacon" has also taken on a quite different meaning in the institutional Church to its original meaning. It has become a role in the Church, as compared to being a servant in any area of life.

The original meanings of Greek words contain cultural and grammatical nuances that can never be adequately conveyed when translated into English. Sometimes a number of different Greek or Hebrew words are translated with the same English word because English just doesn't have the words to convey the original meanings! An example of this is the word "Service" which is translated from three different Greek words, all with different shades of meaning.

**Service:**

*latreia* – service rendered to God, sacred duty

*leitourgia* – ritual, charitable gift, public service, ministry

*diakonia* – service, ministry, administration, waiting upon others.

**When you find the meaning of words as they were understood in their original languages the Bible takes on a whole new level of meaning and insight! For valid interpretation of the Bible it is always best to have a concordance at hand so you can look up the original meanings of words.**

**4. God used many different people and approaches in bringing together the books in our Bible: history, poetry, prophecies, prayers, parables, apocalyptic visions, stories, letters, songs, thoughts, etc. Read and interpret each type of book accordingly.**

**History:** *Go back to your country and your relatives and I will make you prosper.* Genesis 32:10.

This is not saying that you should go back to where you came from if you want to prosper. It was said by God to Jacob, and is recorded as part of his history. It is not relevant to anyone else.

**Poetry:** *He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.* Psalm 91:1.

This is poetic language. God doesn't have a shadow! You will have your own interpretation of what it means to rest in God's shadow and it won't be anything literal.

**Prophecy:** *The LORD Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel.* Isaiah 7:14.

This has a strong sense that God Himself is speaking through the prophet Isaiah. The prophecy points toward the future and brings a new revelation of God's purposes for His people. It doesn't matter that in its fulfillment Jesus was named 'Jesus', not 'Immanuel'. There is a deeper message in the name 'Immanuel' because it means that 'God is with us'.

**Prayer:** *Test me O Lord and try me, examine my heart and mind; for your love is ever before me, and I walk continually in your truth.* Psalm 26:2,3.

David may have thought that he walked continually in God's truth but he certainly wasn't when he was seducing Bathsheba, or sending Uriah the Hittite to his death. This is a personal prayer of David and should be interpreted as such. It is not saying that you or anyone else walk continually in God's truth.

**Parable:** *The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed .... It is the smallest of all seeds... When it grows it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree...* Matthew 13:31,32.

Mustard seeds are not the smallest seeds and mustard trees are not the largest garden plants. This is a story that Jesus told to bring forth a truth about the Kingdom of God. The details are not meant to be scientifically accurate. They are there to help make the point.

**Apocalyptic vision:** *Fallen is Babylon the great. Come out of her my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues. Give back to her what she has given and pay her back double for what she has done.* Revelation 18:2, 4-6.

This is typical apocalyptic language. You have to interpret who or what Babylon is, and what coming out of her means. Then you have to decide what 'coming out of Babylon' involves in your daily life, and whether it is relevant for you or not. Most Christians would have no idea how, in practice, they would pay Babylon back double for her sins!



**Story:** *When your children sinned against Him (God) He gave them over to the penalty of their sin. But if you look to God and plead with the Almighty; if you are pure and upright, even now He will rouse Himself on your behalf and restore you to your rightful place.* Job 8:4-6.

This sounds good, but in the story of Job these words were said by Bildad, one of Job's so called 'friends'. Bildad was actually giving Job very bad advice which would have brought him under condemnation if he took the advice on board. In fact, this kind of advice was later rejected by Job and also by God! If we thought Bildad's words were the word of God we too would come under condemnation as he is saying that suffering is the result of sin, which is not always true.

**Letter:** *Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak but must be in submission, as the law says.* 1 Corinthians 14:34.

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to address particular issues in a particular church relating to the culture of the time. To take verses like these ones out of that context and apply them to all women in churches contradicts many other parts of the New Testament. "As the law says" in this verse refers not to the Torah, but the Rabbinical law. If all Christian women are to be silent and submissive under this law it brings them into bondage to a law that Christ has freed us from. Also *in the Churches* doesn't say "in Church services". It relates to those who are part of the church. A literal application to today would mean that Christian women should always be silent all of the time because they are always part of the Christian Church! Misinterpretation of verses like this have resulted in unjustified bondage for Christian women over many centuries.

**Song:** *I cry to You for help, O Lord; in the morning my prayer comes to You. Why O Lord do you reject me and hide Your face from me? From my youth I have been afflicted and close to death; I have suffered Your terrors and am in despair.* Psalm 88: 13.

This is a song about sickness written and sung by one of the sons of Korah. Hopefully you don't write or sing songs like this one! The song reflects how the writer was feeling at the time, and its words are certainly not Gods words, or reflective of the nature of God.

**Thought:** *"Meaningless, meaningless", says the Teacher, "Utterly meaningless. Everything is meaningless".* Ecclesiastes 1:2.

These are the thoughts of the Teacher (possibly Solomon). He may well have been having a bad day when he wrote down these thoughts. Fortunately at the end of Ecclesiastes there is a sense of pointing to God and a little hope. To take the words of the Teacher in his misery and attribute them to God misses the whole point of this book. It is wisdom literature and is to be interpreted as such.

Wisdom literature is a genre of literature common in the Ancient Near East. It uses wise sayings to teach about God and life and give insight about nature and reality. Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon are all classified as wisdom literature.

**God can bring His *logos* to you through history, poetry, prophecy, prayers, parables, apocalyptic visions, stories, letters, songs, thoughts, etc. That's why you can gain revelation from every part of the Bible, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. (But make sure that you interpret all of these genres in a valid way or you could get ideas that are a long way from the *logos* of God).**

## 5. Read verses and sections of the Bible in their historical and cultural context.

**Historical context:** *Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house.* Malachi 3:10.

In its historical context tithing refers to the collection of the tenth part of produce (not money) that was gathered and stored in the temple storehouse to provide for priests and Levites who couldn't own land. Numbers 18:21, Deuteronomy 12:17-19; 14:22-29. Nehemiah 10:37,38;13:12. 2 Chronicles 31:5-12. To make more of tithing than this is to seriously misinterpret the Bible and has brought many of God's people into significant bondage. This verse is not talking about giving a tenth of your income (before tax) to your local church!

**Cultural context:** *And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*  
1 Corinthians 13:13.

1 Corinthians is often called the “love chapter” because it clearly describes attributes of selfless *agape* love. As such it is often read at weddings or similar occasions. In context, though, this chapter is about how spiritual gifts should be exercised. The church at Corinth was having problems in the use of their spiritual gifts so in chapters 12-14 Paul showed how the gifts could be exercised in a *better way – the way of love*. Understanding this cultural context makes the whole chapter more meaningful. Speaking in tongues, prophesying, doing miracles etc. without love *gains nothing*.

**You can easily find the historical and cultural context of any part of the Bible in Study Bibles, commentaries, software like *Illumina* or *Glo*, or on websites like [www.biblehub.com](http://www.biblehub.com) or [www.biblestudytools.com](http://www.biblestudytools.com)**

**6. The Bible describes the history of the nation of Israel, and is set in Israel. Jesus was a Jewish rabbi and the disciples who first spread the gospel were all Jews. The Bible cannot be understood apart from its Jewish roots so always interpret the Bible in its Jewish cultural context.**

**Jewish words:** *Those who spare the rod hate their children, but those who love them are careful to discipline them.* Proverbs 13:24.

This verse is not about smacking of children! The Hebrew word for ‘rod’ is the same as in Psalm 23:4: *Your rod and your staff they comfort me*. Jewish parents and Jewish shepherds were careful to guide those in their care and to protect and comfort them, not beat them with rods. The focus of the word ‘discipline’ is instruction and correction, not punishment.

**Jewish rabbi’s style:** *If your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.* Matthew 18:9.

One of the main teaching techniques that all Jewish Rabbis used was exaggeration. Jesus is using this technique here. He’s exaggerating to make a point, not telling us to gouge out our eyes if we see something that tempts us to sin.

**Jewish customs:** *If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town.* Matthew 10:14.

When pious Jews left Gentile cities or homes they often shook the dust from their feet, trying to leave the unclean Gentile practices behind. When Jesus sent out his disciples He sent them to Jewish homes in Jewish lands. In a complete reversal of the Jewish custom Jesus told the disciples to shake the dust off their feet if their message wasn’t received. Paul and Barnabas did this when they were expelled from Pisidia by unbelieving Jews. (Acts 13:50-51). Understanding the Jewish custom makes Jesus’ words so much more poignant.

**Try to see everything that you read in the Bible through Jewish eyes. This may mean that you have to find out more about Jewish culture, customs, ways of thinking and ways of approaching life.**



- 7. Read verses and sections of the Bible in their literary context. This includes the content (what the author was saying), the style, words, language and grammar, (how the author wrote it), limits (what the author was referring to), and the purpose (why the author wrote it and what he wanted the readers to understand from it).**

**Content:** *Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.* Acts 1:26.

This is simply a narrative of how the 12th disciple was chosen. It doesn't condone gambling, or set a precedent for how church leaders should be chosen.

**Style, words:** *There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot; ..... a time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace.* Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

This is wisdom literature, and records the thoughts of a wise teacher, probably Solomon. (See 1:1). There is no claim that these are God's words or thoughts, and the author isn't justifying or promoting things like war or hatred. He is simply stating his thoughts about what he has observed in life.

**Language and grammar:** *And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink ye all of it".* KJV. *Then He took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you".* NIV. Matthew 26:27.

'Drink ye all of it' and 'Drink from it, all of you' mean quite different things! The original Greek language and grammar make it clear that all of the disciples were all being given the opportunity to drink from the cup, not that the whole cup had to be drunk (as happens in some communion services today).

**Limits:** *The LORD said to Abram ..... 'I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you'.* Genesis 12:3.

This is a specific promise given by God to Abram before he was re-named Abraham. This verse has been applied to the modern nation of Israel, saying "If you bless Israel God will bless you, and if you curse Israel God will curse you". But the promise God made here had definite limits. It was made to Abram, and no-one else and there is nothing to indicate that God intended it to apply to Abraham's descendants or for it to carry on till today. If this were so it would have to apply to all of Abraham's descendants including the Israelites, Arabs and Christians. See Genesis 17:19, 20, Galatians 3:6-29. (Blessing of Israel is a still a very good thing to do, but saying that you will be blessed if you do so, or cursed if you don't is a serious misuse of this scripture).

**Purpose:** *Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.* 1 Timothy 5:23.

This was written by Paul to address a particular health concern that he had for Timothy. To apply it to anyone else or use it as a justification for Christians to drink alcohol goes way beyond its purpose.

**Every part of the Bible has a context! Any given verse is part of a passage, and a book, and every book is part of the total revelation that God gives throughout the Bible. Always read passages in their historical, cultural, Jewish, and literary contexts.**

- 8. Recognise that God's revelation within the Bible was progressive. Everything in the Old Testament was looking forward to its fulfilment in Christ, and everything in the New Testament is looking forward to its fulfilment in eternity. God's great plan for creating people was to fellowship with us in the "Kingdom of God".**

**The sacrificial system.** *Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.* Hebrews 10:11-14.

The Old Testament sacrificial system provided a way by which sin could be forgiven so the Israelites could have fellowship with God. It was an imperfect system and was superseded by the "one for all" sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross. All Old Testament passages about the sacrificial system need to be seen in this light.

**The Law.** *Your male and female slaves are to come from the nations around you; from them you may buy slaves. You may also buy some of the temporary residents living among you and members of the clans born in your country, and they will become your property.* Leviticus 25: 44,45.

*Slaves obey your earthly masters with respect and fear and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Masters, treat your slaves in the same way.* Ephesians 6:5,9.

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* Galatians 3:28.

These verses show the progressive nature of God's revelation with respect to the issue of slavery. Under the Old Testament law slavery was accepted and had various laws associated with its practice. In the New Testament slavery still existed so there were practical requirements for how Christians should behave. In Christ, though, there is no slavery. Many times in history slavery has been justified by reference to passages in both the Old and New Testaments but this is not valid, when you see the full revelation of God on this matter.

*All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith." The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.* Galatians 3:10-14, 24.

The Law was a central part of the Old Covenant that enabled God's people to fellowship with Him throughout the period of time described in the Old Testament. Jesus brought in a New Covenant and we are now under that covenant. Christ has fulfilled the law so in Him the requirements of the Old Covenant (including the Jewish Law) are no longer relevant to us.



**The Kingdom of God.** *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!* 2 Corinthians 5:17.

*"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever".* Revelation 11:15.

*Behold I make all things new.* Revelation 21:5.

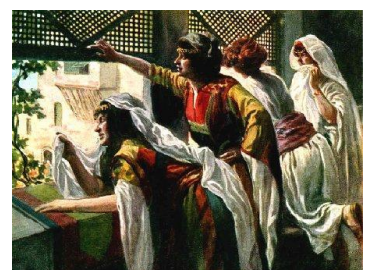
The New Testament finds its fulfilment in the Kingdom of God where everything is made new in Christ.

**Recognise that God's revelation is progressive. Always interpret Old Testament passages in the light of their fulfilment in Christ in the New Testament, and New Testament passages in the light of their fulfilment in the Kingdom of God. Don't take verses, passages or books out of context from the rest of the Bible. The Bible is best interpreted by the rest of the Bible.**

## **9. Base doctrine on passages that were written for teaching, not on what happened in historical events.**

*After he left Hebron, David took more concubines and wives in Jerusalem, and more sons and daughters were born to him.* 2 Samuel 5:13.

This is not a justification of polygamy. Just because David and other Old Testament leaders had many wives it doesn't mean that we can. Unfortunately, Over the last few thousand years Old Testament practices and events like this



have been used to justify many harmful or evil practices, including slavery, rape, incest, lying, stealing, mistreatment of women and polygamy. Just because something happened in the Bible doesn't mean to say it is right or should be applied today.

*Elisha died and was buried. Now Moabite raiders used to enter the country every spring. Once while some Israelites were burying a man, suddenly they saw a band of raiders; so they threw the man's body into Elisha's tomb. When the body touched Elisha's bones, the man came to life and stood up on his feet. 2 Kings 13:20,21.*

*God did extraordinary miracles through Paul so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them. Acts 19:12.*

These kinds of events have been used to justify the use of relics and 'icons' as ways by which God moves. Today countless millions of people go around the world seeking healing by touching supposedly holy relics or icons. Far better to go to Jesus!

*All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions were their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. Acts 4:32-35.*

Just because members of the early church sold their houses and gave the proceeds to the poor doesn't mean all Christians should do this! (But if the Holy Spirit speaks to you about this kind of thing, that's a different story!).

*While Peter was still speaking the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers were astonished ...because they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Acts 10:44-46.*

Much 'doctrine' about speaking in tongues and receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit has come from analysing events that took place in Acts. This leads to a "you do this, this and this.... and then God will do this" approach. But God can't be put into tidy boxes or His ways reduced down to formulae. He does things in whatever ways He chooses.

**Just because something happened in the Bible in a particular way doesn't mean that we have to do it that way! Base doctrine on teaching, not on what happened in particular historical events.**

## **10. Recognise that God's *logos* is far greater than we can ever comprehend. Don't place your human limitations on God!**

*"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts".*  
Isaiah 55:8,9.

e.g. **God's chosen people**

*"And who is like Your people Israel, the one nation on the earth whom God went out to redeem as a people for Himself, to make a name for Himself - and to perform great and awesome wonders..... For You have established Your people Israel as Your very own forever; and You, O LORD, have become their God.*  
2 Samuel 7:23-24.

*The LORD Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance. Isaiah 19:25.*

*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Colossians 3:12.*

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

1 Peter 2:9,10.

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:28.*

There is no doubt that the Israelites are God's chosen people, and always will be. To a human mind God can only have one "chosen people" but these verses show that God is not limited in who He chooses to be His people. Egyptians are also His people, Assyrians are His handiwork, and all Christians are His chosen people. God's capabilities to love people are far greater than ours!

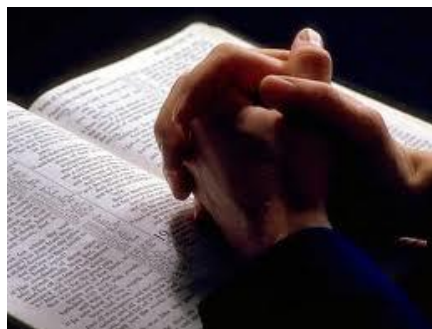
**God's *logos* is far bigger than we can ever comprehend so don't ever place your human limitations on Him. He is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine. Ephesians 3:20.**

**11. Always seek the revelation of the Holy Spirit. Because of its divine authorship and the revelation of the Holy Spirit, the Bible can have a "fuller meaning" than its human authors intended or could have foreseen. This is called the principle of *sensus plenior*.**

As you read and study the Bible the Holy Spirit can make it 'come alive' for you by way of a *rhema*, a spoken word. This revelation of the Holy Spirit brings God's truth to you and this imparts spiritual life.

*Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word (rhema) that comes from the mouth of God. Matthew 4:4.*

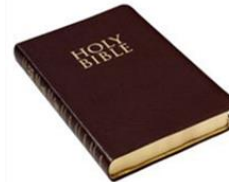
**The Holy Spirit can speak to you from any part of the Bible, even through the most unlikely verses. Always be open to the Holy Spirit as you are reading your Bible. You never know what the Holy Spirit might say to you!**



So how can we know the *logos* of God – His reasoning, intelligent, guiding, correcting, controlling, mind and wisdom - the *logos* that was revealed in Jesus?



Through the **inspiration of the Bible**



and the

**revelation of the Holy Spirit.**



But we need to interpret the Bible in a valid way. All practical applications to us (hermeneutics) must be based on thorough exegesis, under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

***For the word (logos) of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Hebrews 4:12***

***Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word (logos) of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15***