

How to Study the Bible

Week Two

February 8, 2009

Charting & Interpretation

*Elisha prayed, and said,
"LORD, I pray, open his
eyes that he may see."
(2 Kings 6:17)*



*His delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day
and night. He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That
brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And
whatever he does shall prosper. (Ps 1:2-3)*


Calvary Chapel
O F R O S W E L L

Observation



What Do I See?

Interpretation



What Does It Mean?

Application



How Does It Work?

So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped *them* to understand the reading. (*Ne 8:8*)

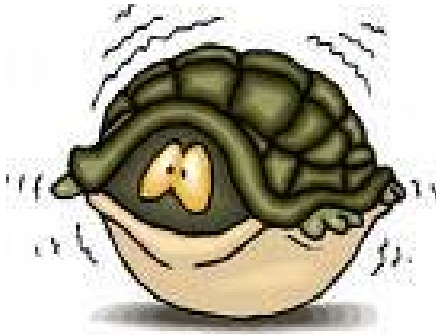
Review

Lets begin with a quick review here. Basic Bible Study consists of three key aspects: Observation, Interpretation, and Application. We see this three fold aspect in our key verse Nehemiah 8:8.

Last time we began to look at the need to make good Observations. I told you then, as I remind you now, that your Bible study will never be greater than your observations. One of the premier keys to being a good Bible student, is to grow in your skills of observation. I hope that you have already begun to discover that this is amazingly true.

It is often easiest and best to take time with a verse or section making as many of the observations as you can first, before you jump to the next step of interpretation. This helps your mind to be focused on the need to observe and do it well. It's true that you can and should add more observations throughout the study as you glean more details. Yet, it is helpful to set time aside at the beginning to make as many observations as you.

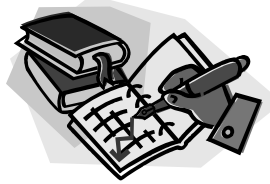
Once done, this leads us to the next area of Bible study....Interpretation! But before we talk about this, let me talk to you about a method I want to ask you to try—The Chart. Be open, it might sound difficult at first but it is not.



The Chart Method

This week, I want to introduce to you a method to help you study the Bible. What is a Method? Webster's dictionary defines a method as *"a systematic procedure or process for attaining an object, technique, or process of or for doing something"*

Follow this with me – what I want to show you this week is “A” method to help us study the Bible. But it is not “THE METHOD”. In other words, if you don't do it this way, or use this exact tool – it does not mean you are studying the Bible in a wrong way. This specific method is an option, a help to those who want it. It is a way to approach Bible study in a systematic way – that will help and keep us from missing many things in our Bible study.



Again – I want to make sure I am clear on this. I believe all REAL Bible study involves studying the Bible from the three fold process of Observation, Interpretation and Application. There are a lot of people who study the Bible who don't use these exact three terms, or think through them as a process – but they are doing it naturally. To study the Bible we need to focus on all three aspects! But the method I am going to teach you is ONE way to do this.

As for me, I am quite excited about teaching you this method and the possibilities with it. For years I have tried to teach people how to study the Bible. But I have often felt that I left it in a way that could be confusing and honestly even hard to do. I felt that I told them what they needed to do, but not always an easy way to begin putting into practice.

Several years ago, I was invited to go to India with Gospel for Asia to teach how to study the Bible in some of their training schools. In preparing for that, they showed us one of the tools that has been helpful for them there, using a simple chart method. As I familiarized myself with that tool, I was so impressed with the simplicity and the practicality of the method. I was excited to be able to teach that method in India, but also, it made me excited to



use a similar tool here in the church in Roswell. All that to say, this is where this specific method has come from, and I pray it is useful for you.

Now here is the honest assessment:

Some of you are going to love this method.

Some of you are already resistant to it and are thinking about not trying it.

Some of your are fearful that you will not be able to do this, that it will be to complicated.

Some of you will not like this method for you at all. Your personality and style will be very much different.



Can I challenge you – try it! Please, give this method of Bible study a chance. It may be that when we are done that you will not continue to use this exact method and that is fine. In fact, I hope you don't. I hope you take this and make it your own, molding it to your style, personality, habits and your methods. Yet, for now, for a few weeks at least—try this method and see if it gives you guidance on how to study the Bible.

The Chart



To describe this method simply, we will be seeking to use a chart in which to record our studies. The beauty of this is, it's so simple, you can do it with any kind of paper, notebook or perhaps even better on a computer. This does not require you to go out and buy someone's special book or materials.

Simply, in our chart – we are going to make three columns. The left column will be where we record our Observations, the middle our Interpretations and the right column where we record our Applications. The idea is to have your observations track all the way across the chart to your applications. This will make sure that you cover all the aspects of a verse and that you process all your observations.

Technical note on this. If you are doing this on paper – make sure you leave room in between your observations so that you have plenty of room for interpretations and applications. (This will all

make sense once you start – I promise).

To start with—you simply want to start a chart with three columns, titling each column with Observation, Interpretation, and then Application.

Observation	Interpretation	Application

As you can see in the chart below, the idea is that you place your observation in the left column. Then we will be talking about how you interpret your observations—those details you would write in the middle column. Then lastly, in the right column, you would trace the application to the things you have been seeing.

Observation	Interpretation	Application
Here you would record an observation	Then here you would make notes of interpretation. Things like definitions, etc.	Then here – how it would and does apply to you.
Leaving space – you then make your next observation	Then here interpretation	And of course – application

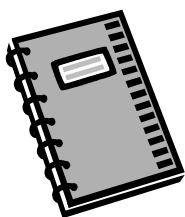
Now, how you decide to exactly lay out your chart is up to you. Some of you will want to use different color pens and such for different sections and the like. Others will use ruler paper and more. Honestly, there are thousands of options!

Some of you may want to actually do this on a computer. This is probably the easiest way. If you don't use a computer for your Bible study – that is fine, don't feel pressured to do so. But if you do – then using Microsoft Word, or WordPerfect or even a spread sheet program – like Microsoft Excel comes in very handy!



If you use a Word Processor – then you will want to use its Table function – to create a table with three columns – and multiple rows. (it is always easy to add more rows – just go to your table menu and selecting – add a row)

One of the benefits of using a computer for this charting – is that your rows can easily grow or shrink to fit any notes you have. But again – please understand – you do not have to use a computer. You can use any kind of notebook paper or journal that you like – that fits your style and preference – but the idea is to force yourself to make the columns. This keeps you focused on asking all the right questions. If you use paper, again, the key will be to make sure you leave room for your interpretations and applications between each observation.



Again – the main benefit to using this method is that in a very simple way – it will help you keep focused on making good observations, interpreting those and then moving to application. The danger is that when we don't use such a method – we can very easily miss much of what the Holy Spirit might be wanting to show us in our study.

Now with this tool in our “belt”, lets begin to tackle the next step of our Bible Study—Interpretation.

Interpretation

To interpret something is to explain or tell the meaning of it. The simple goal is to not just notice what is there in a passage – but what it means! Now you will take the observations you discovered in the first part of the Bible study and seek to figure out what they mean.

It means Something

The first thing need to have clearly in our mind is — it does mean something! It means something very specific. It tells it to us this way in the Bible

And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:19-21)

Notice the words I have underlined. As we approach a passage, it does not have a “private interpretation”. It cannot legitimately mean something to one person and something else to someone else. A passage can have many applications to different lives – but it has a single meaning. It is possible to struggle with discovering the meaning of the verse in question, and such interpretations can be debated—yet the clear point is that ultimately—it means one thing. It is this clear understanding of a verse that we are seeking to discover.

One of the questions that needs to be asked in seeking the interpretation of a passage is: What was God saying through the writer to the original recipients? This is key – because the danger is thinking a verse means something that would not apply in the original time it was written.

Another question would be: What does this passage mean throughout the history of the church, or even the church all over the world today? In other words – it needs to mean the same thing. It can’t mean one thing to an American Christian in the 21st century

and something different to a Chinese Christian in the 21st Century and something else to an 18th century Englishman and something else to a slave in the first century in Rome. This verse means one thing. It may have different applications in different settings – but we need to discover that single and clear meaning of a passage.

In seeking to discover the interpretation of a passage, also know this - interpretation is a science. What I mean is, it's not guess work, nor open to opinion. There are definite ways we can come to understand what a passage means. That is what we want to understand in this section.

Five Keys for Interpretation

There are five key areas that we will look at in order to discover this meaning. For simplicity and hopefully memory sake we will use five “C’s” for the five different aspects of interpretation: Content, Context, Christ, Compare, and Consult.

Now on a technical note – if you have read other books or heard others studies on how to interpret a passage, they may have had more or less categories of interpretation. I have one book that has 25 aspects of interpretation instead of our five. Yet, for the most part, they can easily be grouped into these five broad categories. I believe in these five you will be able to cover the most important elements and have a solid basis for understanding the Bible. These categories are described briefly below:

Content: This means we will focus on the content in the verse itself. Specifically we will be seeking to understand the meaning of the words and phrases in our passage.

Context: Every passage has a context. This is probably the most abused concept in Bible study. People constantly take verses out of their context to mean things other than what they mean in the Bible. So the key will be to see the context of each verse – what goes before it and after it. Even the purpose of the book in which the verse is found is pertinent here. Furthermore, any historical and cultural context that we can add to our understanding will be very helpful.

Christ. This is the central of our five keys, and in many ways, the central key to Bible study. Jesus said to the Pharisees that you search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have life, but these are they which testify of Me. That is –the whole of the Bible points to Jesus. He is the underwriting theme. So to rightly understand a passage, we need to see how it is pointing to Christ.

Compare: The Bible is a unity, and it does not contradict itself. God never changes. Therefore, to make sure we are not misunderstanding a verse, it is very helpful to see what other passages of the Bible say about events or teaching. With this, there is also a theological comparison or context that we want to think through. What that means is understanding the verse in question in context of what the Bible says about the same subject.

Consult. This is where we look what others have to say about the passage in question. Here you want to consult Study Bibles, Commentaries, Sermons and more. This is the last step of our interpretation process and it is so vital that it be the last thing we do. The danger today is that people often skip right to this. Yet doing that cuts off some of the riches parts of Bible Study.

Again, this all may sound a little bit odd or difficult, but it is not. I want to encourage you that this process is one that can and hopefully will become quite natural...and a joy. The aim is again, that you can understand the Bible, God wants you to. I am confident that you will be able to do so. In fact, this will be one of the most exciting parts – as you clearly begin to understand for yourself what God is saying.

Lets now seek to tackle the first of the “C”’s of our interpretation. Next week we will tackle the second “C”.

Interpretation: Content

As we consider how to interpret a passage – again we are using five “C” words to help us remember each area of interpretation.

C ontent
C ontext
C hrist
C ompare
C onsult

In this section let’s focus on how we interpret the content. As we look at our chart – the place we will seek to do this is in the interpretation column, next to the observations.

Observation	Interpretation	Application

In your observations, would be a list of words that you want to look up in your Bible study. Now in a perfect world, you would always have time to look up ever single word in every single verse of your Bible study. Sometimes that will be possible. When it is—I would have each and every word listed separately, or at least by phrase in the left hand column for me to look up and get details on.

Yet, honestly, we don’t always have that much time to put into a study, and sometimes the section we are tackling is too long to facilitate looking up each and every word. So—here is where good observation skills become more important—you should be able to pick out of a verse some of the key words or phrases that you know you need more details on, and list those in the left hand column of your chart.

It is those words that you have observed that we now want to focus on and seek to understand HOW to interpret them.

First – Focus. Just by focusing on the single observation will often bring many things to consider which you can write down. For example – maybe you are studying John 3:16.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...”

Perhaps you are seeking to interpret “God”. There are many things right off the top of your head you may write down – Creator, All Powerful, perfect, over all, etc. The idea is just to focus on that one word for a moment.

Secondly – definitions. Sometimes just looking up the English word in a dictionary can be of amazing help in seeking to understand a passage. You can record things from that in this column that help.

Thirdly – the original languages. It is important to remember that the Bible was not originally written in the English language. It was written in Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic. The problem with translations is that you can often miss nuances and definitions that are true in the original language. How do we handle this?

We live in a very blessed age! Because of technology and more – you can have access to some of the best resources on the original languages – and never have to learn those languages yourself! Truly it is a wonderful time.

How do we access these resources? There are two ways. One, via computer Bible programs and two through good resource books.

Lets take a brief moment to review both of these ways. We will begin with how to use books....but I want you to know now, that I highly recommend you seek to bring this part of the study into the computer age—it is amazingly helpful and fast.

Resource Books

There are several resources you should consider.

First of all, you will need a good concordance. A concordance simply takes most of the English words in your Bible and helps you find the corresponding Greek or Hebrew word. There are several different concordances out there – but the most common is the “*Exhaustive Strong’s Concordance*”. I would recommend this one – because many other resources are keyed to this. One thing you might need to understand is that Strong’s is keyed to the King James Version of the Bible, so you might need one of those also for your study – so you can locate the right word. This resource usually costs about \$20. If you are going to purchase one – make sure to get the most up-to-date copy. I believe they came out with an updated copy in 2001.

To use a concordance, you simply locate the word in the KJV translation that you are interested in looking up. Then, you look up that word in the concordance. The concordance will be arranged alphabetically. When you find the word in the concordance, you then look for the verse listed under and with that word in the concordance. Once you find that—you follow the reference to the right and you will see a number. This is your Strongs Number. Now, to look for the definition. You open up the back of the concordance, and the Strongs numbers are arranged numerically. Find your Strongs number and it will then give you a basic definition of the word you are looking for. We will show you how to do this in the class, but if you need further help, please don’t hesitate to ask.

Note – in almost all Bible software programs –this resource is included.

Second, you will want some good resources that go beyond a concordance. The Concordance will give you a brief definition – but not a great one. So you will want to go further. There are some great resources out there. Here are a few to consider:

Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words – is a great resource, easy to use and keyed to the English words. Usually about \$15.

Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume – sometimes called “Little Kittle” is a great resource. This resource is for the Greek language – or the New Testament. He actually wrote it as a ten volume set – but the ten volumes are a little overwhelming for most. This is an abridged version that is wonderful for giving background on the words and helping you to understand them. Now, its organized by the Greek words, but it has a reference section that will let you look it up once you have found the Strong’s number of your word. This is a wonderful resource. It usually costs about \$85.

Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, Two-Volume Edition. Similar to the previous resource, this one is for the Old Testament or the Hebrew Language. It is a wonderful resource for helping to understand the words. Again, it is organized by the Hebrew language – but also has a key so you can look it up from your Strong’s number. You can get this for about \$40. (It comes free in E-sword!)

There are other good books beyond these including these below:

Vincent's New Testament Word Studies, 4 Volumes

Word Studies in the Greek New Testament

Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the NT

Word Pictures in the New Testament 6 Volumes

Complete Word Study OT/NT by Spiros Zodhiates

Resource books are never cheap – but if you really want to understand the Bible, it seems key to seek to get at the original languages – at least a little bit.

Computer Programs

Honestly – the computer programs are by far the best and cheapest way to access these resources. The speed and ease with which we can do this in these days is wonderful. There are several really good programs out there. I cannot list how to use all those programs here—but I want you to know that these are cheaper than buying the books individually—and will literally save hours of study time if you can use them well.

E-SWORD. I am going to give you a copy of E-Sword in the class. This is a Bible program that is excellent and distributed free of charge. They do accept donations, and my hope is that if you like the program you will support them in this endeavor. Further, all the resources that I will give you are “public domain” and thus free of charge. But you can buy other books for E-sword that have royalties in order to use them—and it is well worth it to do so. Also they have more resources that are free online to download. I will give a brief demonstration of how to use E-Sword in class, but if you have trouble, please ask and I will help.

If you are going to buy any additions to this software, a couple I would suggest are these:

Bibles

- Amplified Bible—\$20
- New King James Version—\$14.99
- KJV with Strong's, Tense, Voice, Mood– free (have to find it)

Commentaries

- Believers Bible Commentary—\$19.99
- The Bible Knowledge Commentary—\$34.99
- Jon Courson's Application Commentary—NT- \$19.99
- Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee—\$39.99

Dictionaries

- The Complete Word Study Dictionary—\$40 (Awesome resource!)
- Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary-\$14.99

Their website is here—please check it out.

<http://www.e-sword.net/>

Quickverse makes a great product that is user friendly, which runs \$80 to \$250.

<http://www.quickverse.com/>

BIBLESOFT makes a program called PC Study Bible that is very good, and can run anywhere from \$50-\$400

<http://www.biblesoft.com/>

Logos Bible Software makes a great program that is one of the best as far as good resources. The initial cost on this program can run from \$150 to \$1,000. Then it has almost unlimited books that you can add to this – which is a great feature and often cheaper than their print counterparts.

<http://www.logos.com/>

BibleWorks is an extensive program that mainly focuses on the words in their original languages, but it is more geared to someone who has a working knowledge of those original languages. This program costs about \$300

<http://www.bibleworks.com/>

For MacIntosh Computers, you can use Parallels on your computer to run any of these. Further there are a few programs made for Mac. Logos is just getting into this, and that is exciting. Online Bible has a Mac version, which is good. There is also a program called Accordance that works good on Mac.

So which Bible software is right for you? Obviously, E-Sword's free status makes it worth checking out. But you may still want more – and to be honest, like most software out there – it becomes a user preference. Before spending a lot of money on a package – you might see if you can download a demo or find someone with the software you are considering to see if you will like it. But I will say this – any investment made here will be a good investment!

Other good locations to look for some of these software packages at cheaper costs are these:

www.rejoicesoftware.com

www.DiscountChristian.com

In Conclusion on Content

In conclusion of this section on Interpreting by Content – the goal is simply to seek to focus on the content! To notice, define and seek your very best to understand what the words are referring to. Just forcing yourself to do this, word by word or phrase by phrase will yield rich results, even if you don't have the resources mentioned or the time to look into all of them.

I don't want you to feel overwhelmed or that this is impossible for you to do. I really believe any and all effort you put forward will be rewarded.

With that – I draw you back to one of the most basic and yet most vital aspects of this all – seeking the Lord, asking Him, asking the Holy Spirit to help you. Think about it practically – if you were reading a book and were confused about what the author wrote, what would be the easiest and best way to find out what he or she meant? Perhaps obviously – it would be to ask the author! The Holy Spirit is the author of the Bible, He moved the writers to write what they recorded. So always, and continually the need is to seek Him in your study – to ask Him what He meant by the words and phrases He chose. You will be amazed how often He will open it up to you as You seek Him!

I pray you will do this and find the thrill of having God open up His Word to you!

