

## **Biblical Foundations II-A: General Principles for How to Study, and Studying Biblical Letters** **Pre-Reading Review and New Material**

In order to read a book, we must read its paragraphs. In order to read a paragraph, we must read its sentences. In order to read its sentences, we must read its words. In order to read its words, we must understand the alphabet with which those words are built. In other words, we have to begin at the beginning, and we have to build slowly, seeking understanding at the most basic levels before moving on to understanding the whole. This is how we accomplish sound interpretation.

Every reader is an interpreter, but not every reader has been taught good interpretive skills. We are all commanded to study to show ourselves approved to rightly handle God's word (2 Timothy 2:15) and God does not *expect* us to do what He will not *equip* us to do. In fact, He promised that His Holy Spirit would teach us all things (John 14)! Therefore, we can trust His promise as we begin to learn how to study to correctly interpret His word.

There are two levels to most bible study. On one level, we approach scripture from a distance as the audience on the outside looking in from a merely observational vantage point in order to understand what we're reading. On the second level we enter the scripture where we feel it; where it mimics our lives and speaks to our hearts. Information leads understanding. Understanding leads application, (even when all the leading work has been in error!) Heart work and head work are not mutually exclusive when it comes to study of God's word. Both are equally important. And in order to get it **right** at the heart, we have to get it **right** from the text. We start at a distance, and we move toward center, even as God's word is doing the same in our lives.

At the most outer edge from which we can begin to observe the Bible text **we first need to understand what the text is.**

### **The Bible is the Word of God given in human words within human history**

- God's own words breathed out through the **inspired** work of men
- **eternal** in relevance

(See *Biblical Foundations I – Bible Basics, Week 2* <https://fellowshipnwa.org/page/951?Item=5483>)

**The Bible is a translation (in its modern format) and therefore, an interpretation:** the end result of scholarly interpretive work where the translator or translation committee has taken all the problems of language and culture into consideration and made a choice in how to express the first author's words clearly in our own language. **A good Bible translation is the first and primary tool for sound understanding and interpretation.** Trust the people more skilled than you are, but use more than one translation when you study! (See *Biblical Foundations I – Bible Basics, Week 3 - 4* <https://fellowshipnwa.org/page/951?Item=5483>)

**The Bible is a story,** and though man compiled, organized, and divided the scripture into the parts now reflected by modern bibles (books, chapters, verses...), the *inspired* word of God is meant to be read as one cohesive story, unified in its message and its revelation of the God of creation and the Savior of the world. **That one story provides the Metanarrative:** the "big picture" into which all the smaller scenes fit, each one serving the larger purpose of telling that story. The Bible's specific Metanarrative tells the story of ***how God is acting with people in history from creation to the fall, to redemption, and ultimately to the final consummation and restoration of His plan for the world.*** (See *Biblical Foundations I – Bible Basics, Week 5* <https://fellowshipnwa.org/page/951?Item=5483>)

*"[God] made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ".* Ephesians 1:9-10 (emphasis added)

***And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning Himself.*** Luke 24:27 (emphasis added)

**The Metanarrative told simply:**

God wants to **dwelt** with His people, so He creates a **place**, and appoints **mankind** to be His **representatives** in that place: to care for it, to be its priest and ruler, and to expand it. Mankind faces **choices**, and when they fail to let God rule, they face consequences, but always within the **promise** that a better man is coming to take their place. This is the pattern of the Metanarrative and all the other smaller narratives that comprise it.

And so, we recognize that as modern readers **the Bible was written for us, but not to us about us.** It is about the work that God is doing to bring redemption to His creation.

**The first principle to understand when reading the Bible is that IT IS NOT ABOUT US.**

**Further, the entire Bible was written by ancient middle eastern men, to an ancient middle eastern audience living in an ancient middle eastern context, about ancient middle eastern events happening in the ancient middle east. The modern reader begins on the outside looking in.**

*“The Bible is for us. It is the principal source for how to believe and behave as disciples of Jesus Christ. The Bible exists for us to have a God-centered view of creation, to hear God’s promises, to know God’s words of warning and encouragement, to have the words of Jesus, to hear the apostles’ testimony about Jesus, and to look ahead to the kingdom in all its future fullness. The private and public reading of the Bible is for us in the sense that it is for our training, our edification, our transformation, and our encouragement. The Bible is for us since the Bible enables God to speak to people across the tide of history, through our manifold cultures and languages, and in a way that truly transcends human differences.... However, even though the Bible is for us, it was not written to us, nor was it written about us.” Seven Things I Wish Christians Knew About the Bible”, Michael F. Bird, Zondervan 2021  
(See *Biblical Foundations I – Bible Basics, Week 6* <https://fellowshipnwa.org/page/951?Item=5483>)*

As we approach a reading or study of scripture we also recognize that **the Bible is internally varied** in form and function and uses almost every type of written communication (narrative, history, genealogies, chronicles, laws, poetry, proverbs, prophecies, riddles, drama, biographies, parables, letters, sermons, and apocalypses...) and that **the Bible is culturally limited. It has Cultural Relativity and is:**

- **historically particular** (spoken through humans in human language within human history)
- **conditioned** (affected and purposed by the language, time, geography, and culture in which it was written)
- God’s word to us was **first** of all His word to them (in their language, to/in/about their culture, to/in/about their context)

And so, **the work of Bible study is first of all to come to understand the author’s original intended message to the first audience in their time and place**, and we do that through the practice of **Exegesis**.

**Exegesis** comes from two Greek roots. “Ek” or “ex” means “out of.” The other part of the word comes from the Greek word, “ago”, which means “to lead”. Exegesis is a process of **leading out of the text** a valid understanding. To do that we first have to go in to get it, and when we enter the story, we come empty handed so that we can carry the meaning home.

An opposite word is **“eisegesis”** which means to **read into the text**. Many readers, teachers, and preachers, in their eagerness to find or say something useful about a passage of scripture, begin from what they **already** believe or what **they** want to say rather than beginning in the text with what the text says. They carry the baggage of pre-conception and previous teaching into the story, and so are not free

to carry out the true meaning. Good exegesis keeps the Bible reader from forcing an application never intended by the writer. ***Exegesis then is the careful, systematic study of Scripture to discover the author's original, intended meaning for there and then.*** [https://www.bobyoungrresources.com/bible/booklet\\_double-exegesis-for-beginners.pdf](https://www.bobyoungrresources.com/bible/booklet_double-exegesis-for-beginners.pdf)

**As we stand at the edge of our text and the work of exegesis, we must recognize that every reader is an interpreter.**

**Consider:** What do you think you bring to a piece of writing as you read it? What might cause you to do eisegeses rather than exegesis? **What kinds of particular “cultural relativity” impact your reading?**

Bias; agendas; social status, economic status, cultural environment, experience, family, race, age, gender, education, life-stage and etc. all create our own cultural relativity. These are things we have to work hard to leave behind when we approach scripture because they will affect how we understand ancient writing – they can lead to eisegesis rather than exegesis. We have to train ourselves to enter a biblical text and see from the point of view of the *first* author and audience, putting ourselves in their shoes, in their place, in their time. Good interpretation then requires us first to study. Study demands that we **delay the impulse to begin immediately looking for a personal 21<sup>st</sup> Century take-away.**

#### **Guardrails for Exegesis:**

When the plain sense of scripture makes the most sense, **seek no other sense** (usually!). As you approach the text, do so **first** simply to see what it says on its plain common-sense face.

**Abandon** pride, socio-political agendas, hyper-spirituality, sign-seeking, future-telling, personal bias etc. as much as possible.

**Seek the community of believers** where Bible interpretation can be done in open, honest biblical community where the interpreter and interpretation are held accountable to sound practice.

**And so, there are some General Principles for Exegesis** that we should understand before we approach any text of scripture.

**The purpose of Bible study is to know and glorify God.**

**Every time we approach the Bible it should be with prayer and in dependence on the Spirit. We cannot understand God's word without God's Spirit. (1 Corinthians 2)**

**Every text in the Bible was written by an *eastern* author, to an *eastern* audience, in an *eastern* context, about *eastern* events.** It is not written **to** us or **about** us (except in a few specific places), but it is **for** us. We must do the work of understanding the **first author, audience, and context** to understand how the message written to them, is also for us.

**The text is selective and limited.** The Author assumes the first Audience understands the history, the context, the practices, the people, the geography... and does not explain them to the modern reader. We must do the work of discovery or live in the tension! We can be certain that ***what God wants us to know, He communicates with clarity.***

**Not every text, passage, story, psalm, person, illustration... is prescriptive or normative.** *The values and morals of the first writer and audience determine the correct understanding of events and behaviors of the people within.* The Author assumes the **first** Audience understands the Law and can discern right from wrong in the text based on what is done and said in the text.

He does not always overtly disclose these conclusions to the modern reader. We must do the work of *discerning comparison*.

**The Author of the text has a particular, specific, and limited message.** God is the first Author; it is His message we are looking for as expressed in the text by the human agent. Therefore, the text can't mean *now* what it *never* meant; there is no subjective personal message to the modern reader ('what it says *to me...*'). God's message is the same to us as it was to the first audience – there is no legitimacy to a “personal revelation” of scripture.

Further, no one book within the canon contains the *whole* Truth. We have to do the work of hearing the intended message of the particular text and fitting it into the whole story God is telling.

(There are caveats to this. Revelation is progressive in nature – 1 Cor. 2 – and so there are some things that the first human author could not have conceived as he wrote, but which are made clear in looking back from this side of the Cross. The Eternal Author has always been revealing Himself, His son, and His plan, and as New Testament believers, we have the privilege of seeing the shadows of the First Testament fulfilled in the New. The message is still limited, but it may sometimes go beyond what the first human author could imagine.)

With those **principles** as our guides, and our **guardrails** in place, we can now begin.

**The steps for the common Bible reader (one who does not read Hebrew or Greek) for good exegesis of any Biblical text leading to sound interpretation include:**

- Plain reading (no bible helps employed from footnotes, commentary, etc...) of the whole text, with the aim of understanding its plain sense
- Understanding the literary genre and literary context
  - Understanding the place of this text in the larger whole
  - Understanding the structure, grammar, and vocabulary
- Understanding the writer, recipients, plot, characters, dialogue, scenes/settings/contexts... of the text
- Understanding the historical and cultural contexts of the author and audience
- Identifying, understanding, and applying the doctrine and theology presented in the text

These steps work hand-in-hand and are **not always sequential, but are often overlapping and simultaneous**. We can categorize these steps into three primary groups: **Historical Context, Literary Context/Structure, and Hermeneutics**, but again, pursuing the details within these groups will not always work sequentially; study is sometimes organic, so we attempt to formulate a logical path of study, but we allow flexibility.

The basic content or details we are looking for in each of these groups are as follows.

**Historical Context** – When reading, again, we must recognize that events happen within a historical framework, and **submit** to that starting point even as we work to bridge the gaps between that place in history and our own.

**We ask:**

- What is the history, time, culture... of the **author**, the **audience**, and the **characters** within?
- What does the author assume his audience knows that perhaps a modern reader will not?

(He is **selective and limited** when choosing the details he will include in his writing, and he does so based on what his **first** audience knows.)

- What is the occasion of the writing – what has happened to initiate the writing (if it can be discerned internally)?
  - How are the writer and the audience/characters being affected by the Historical context and the occasion for writing?
- Etc....

**Literary Context/Structure** – Words have meaning only within the framework of sentences, and sentences have meaning in relation to the surrounding sentences, and paragraphs, book, and collection. The literary context is how the author has chosen to craft his writing, and where the text is situated within the larger bodies of writing and the bigger story. *“Every text is, in some way, a dialogue with a previous text.” Seven Things I Wish Christians Knew About the Bible”, Michael F. Bird, Zondervan 2021*

**We ask:**

- Where **is** this passage in the bigger story, and how does it **fit** there?
  - Where/how does it communicate and contribute to the writer’s point, the passage’s message, the whole book’s purpose, the three levels of story, and the metanarrative etc.
- How does the author craft his book?
  - What literary style (genre) has he chosen to deliver his message? (And why?)
    - What guardrails and principles should be applied for reading the genre?
  - How is it structured and organized, and what devices does he employ?
    - How does he break it into episodes, scenes, arguments, stanzas... and for what purpose – to communicate what message?
    - What is the progression of thought – where is he going with that and what is his point?
    - What is its plot (if a narrative)?
    - What words has he intentionally chosen and for what purpose?

Etc....

**Hermeneutics** - *Hermeneutics is the theory and methodology of interpretation, especially the interpretation of biblical texts (wiki)*. We will cover this and its methods later in the course. For now, it is enough to understand that hermeneutics is that last step in good exegesis: Identifying, understanding, and applying the doctrine and theology presented in the text.

These are the guiding forces that protect and direct our study of God’s word. We are now prepared to take our first practical steps. Those steps are outlined in a somewhat systematic method below, but again, this will work itself out organically as you learn the basics after which you can use this as a flexible guideline only.

**Biblical Foundations II-A: General Principles for How to Study, and Studying Biblical Letters**  
**General Steps of Exegesis – A Flexible Guide**

**Establish the Literary Genre**

- What **type of writing** does this appear to be?
  - Consider and apply all the rules for a *plain reading* of the specific genre of writing. (narrative, poetry, wisdom, prophesy, law, history, gospel, letter/epistle, apocalypse...)

Do a Plain Reading, without stopping, if possible. If you have a reader's Bible, or a reading Bible without the interruptions of unnatural breaks, that is suggested for this first reading. If you are studying only a short passage, it is still recommended that you read the book's whole context.

- Seek the plain sense of the whole text and summarize that in your notes if you can.

**Establish Literary Contexts**

- Where is the text **situated within the larger bodies of writing** chronologically, and/or as it resides within paragraph, section, book, Testament, canon, and Metanarrative?
  - What is **the story before**, and how does that inform the reading of this text?
  - Where does this fit into the Author's whole body of writing?

**Examine the basic Literary Structure.** It is helpful to notice the organization or structure at this point, but only from the surface level.

- What is the **simple** plot arc, letter construction, parallelism/stanza construction etc....

**Understand the People (Author/Audience/Characters)**

- What are their backgrounds and how will those affect the person as they write/hear/act?
- What are their relationships to one another and how will/does that affect the tone etc. of the text?

**\*Examine the Historical Context**

- Where are the author/audience/characters situated in **time, culture, and geography**?
  - How will/do these contexts affect the text?
- \*This is sometimes not clear until after Annotating the text and doing further study. (See next)

**Interrogate and Annotate** the text. (Ask questions and make notes.)

Identify and note/mark key ideas within the text with SNOTS (Small Notes On The Side)

Who

What

Where –All indications of location

When –All significant indications of time (before, after, when, then, while, once, in the time, on the day, during, meanwhile...)

Why

How

Things that seem important (!)

Things that seem surprising (\*)

Things you don't understand (?)

Words you need to define (\_\_\_)

**\*Consider the ABCs**

**Examine the Literary Structure further**

- How does the author craft his writing? Trace his argument, plot the story, follow the parallelism, identify the orthodoxy/orthopraxy...

- **Make a more detailed outline** by sections of thought, paragraphs, episodes, scenes, settings, arguments, stanza...

**Consider the Grammar clues and Mark or Note: Key Words** or phrases that help define the message of the text

- **Repeated words, phrases, ideas, themes**

- **Sequences** (furthermore, in addition, moreover, first, second, third, finally, again, also, and, besides, further, in the first place, last, likewise, next, then, too...)

- **Linking and transitions** (FANBOYS - for, and, neither/nor, but, or, yet, so; like/unlike; nevertheless; furthermore; indeed; although; additionally; also; moreover; furthermore; again; further; then; besides; too; similarly; correspondingly; regarding...)

- **Comparison/contrast** (but, as, than, like/likewise, so(also), yet, however, despite, instead, even so, similarly, nor, also, either, neither, nevertheless...)

- **Conditional** (If/then...sometimes the “then” is only implied; as/so long as; providing; or; otherwise; suppose/supposing; if only; in case of...)

- **Purpose, conclusions, summaries** (for, therefore, for this reason, accordingly, hence, then, finally, consequently, and so, to, so that, in order that/to...)

- **Exhortations indicating doctrine/orthodoxy** (modal verbs: will, would, shall, should, can, could, may, might and must... *and their opposites* )

- **Commands indicating orthopraxy** (imperative verbs EG: go, do likewise, live, walk, stand, stay, discharge, enforce, respect, rebuke, teach, keep, call attention, refuse, permit...)

- **Prepositions** (by, in, with...), **adjectives** (a, an, the...), **pronouns**

- **Summarize the main idea of each division you make, and its supporting points** using the Grammar clues to guide you.

**Identify the author’s assumptions** of his first audience. Remember that the author is **selective and limited** in choosing the details he includes in his writing. The text has **cultural relativity** – it is **historically particular and conditioned** by its time. (Consider who the writer is speaking to. They would understand these details!)

What problem/practice is implied? (This is often the **Occasion** for writing, and it will influence the tone of the writing and reveal **the Author’s specific message** to the first audience.)

What cultural practice needs more explanation?

What historical data needs clarification?

Etc....

**Determine the Occasion** of the writing using your outline if **it is still unclear**.

- What is the whole book’s **purpose**? Why is the author writing this **book**? What **problem, situation, or question** does he want to address or answer? What **occasion** prompted him to write? What story does he want to tell? What doctrine does he want to establish, what change does he want to inspire...?

### Interpret

- What is the author's overall **message to the first audience**; what is the point of the text?
  - Looking at your outline, consider: Why does the author include **this, here, now**? What does that reveal about his purpose for writing and his overall message?
  - How does each section support his message and drive his purpose forward?
  - How does the author's purpose inform the reading of this text (if it is a limited passage)?
- What is the **orthodoxy** if applicable?
- What is the **orthopraxy** if applicable?

**Apply Hermeneutics** - Employ all the principles for appropriate application and contextualization. See separate handout for detailed guidelines.

- What is the **Task Theology**?
  - What are the **Comparable Particulars**?
    - What is **timeless and applicable to all people, everywhere, and always**?
    - What is **limited and specific** to that limited and specific problem there-and-then?
  - How does the message affect our Christian worldview?
  - How does the message apply to your life specifically?
- Consult a commentary or your Bible's tools to check your conclusions or for clarification.

Consider the **Literary Context after this text**.

- How does this text inform or extend the message of the section, book, and metanarrative?
- Investigate connections where this text reminded you of another. Consider how the two inform and impact one another.

## The Letter to the Colossians

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

2 To God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people-- 5 the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel 6 that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world--just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. 7 You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, 8 and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, 10 so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, 12 and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

16 For in Him all things were created:

things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible,

whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities;

all things have been created through Him and for Him.

17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

18 And He is the head of the body, the church;

He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead,

so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Him,

20 and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things,

whether things on earth or things in heaven,

by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.

21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation-- 23 if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

24 Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. 25 I have become its servant

by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness-- 26 the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. 27 To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. 29 To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

1 I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. 2 My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. 5 For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.

6 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, 7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. 8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ. 9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, 10 and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. 11 In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not

performed by human hands. Your whole self-ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. 13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. 15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. 17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. 18 Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. 19 They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

20 Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: 21 "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? 22 These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. 23 Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. 7 You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. 8 But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. 9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. 11 Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

18 Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. 20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged. 22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, 24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. 25 Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favoritism. 1 Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. 3 And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. 4 Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. 5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. 6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

7 Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. 8 I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. 9 He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here.

10 My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.) 11 Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my co-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me. 12 Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. 13 I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. 14 Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings. 15 Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. 16 After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea. 17 Tell Archippus: "See to it that you complete the ministry you have received in the Lord."

18 I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

## Epistle Summary Worksheet

<b>Book or Passage in view:</b>	<b>Author:</b> <b>Recipient(s):</b>
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<b>Author's <u>Purpose/Occasion</u> for writing:</b>
<b>Verse(s) supporting this:</b>

<b>Context</b> (Summary of the historical and cultural timing and background influences)
<b>Author's context:</b>
<b>Recipient(s)'s context:</b>

<b>Literary Context</b>
<b>Date written:</b>
<b>Chronology</b> (where it resides in the story of the New Testament):
<b>Supporting Texts</b> (Other books that directly inform the understanding of this one):

## Literary Structure

Greeting

Prayer/Thanksgiving

Body

Farewell

Key Words:

## Hermeneutics/Contextualization/Application

The Author's message to the **First Audience**:

The **Theology** of the passage/book. What does it tell us about God and the work of Jesus?

The **Orthodoxy (doctrine)** of the passage/book.

The **timeless** commands or expectations (**Orthopraxy**) for believers *there and then* that is ***the same*** in its ***particulars*** to *here and now*.

How this affects or applies to my worldview:

How this applies to my life:

## Word Studies

We want to have a real understanding of the words that we think are “key” to the scripture we are studying. While the definitions may seem obvious, you have to remember that English is not the original language of the Bible, and its transliteration from Greek, Aramaic (New Testament) and Hebrew (Old Testament) words is often inadequate. Any word that we don’t fully understand should be investigated. And any word that is *too familiar* should be defined. If you can’t define an English word in your scripture passage to a child, then you should look it up, whether in an English dictionary or through your study tools in the original language...or both!

<https://blueletterbible.org>

<https://biblehub.com/>

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/>

### Basic Guardrails:

- Don’t limit your understanding to *only* the English definition. The English translation doesn’t always communicate the whole thought of the original language.
- Don’t define a word in the original language by its roots. Use a holistic approach.
- Consider whether your understanding is based on a modern interpretation foreign to the original author. (EG: *dynamis* in Greek does not translate to dynamite in English)
- Narrow the definition to its closest specific meaning rather than accepting all meanings of the word as valid and applicable. The author had only one meaning in mind.
- Don’t assume that every use of the word carries the same meaning. Meaning is driven by the context in which the word resides (sentence, paragraph, book...).
- Eliminate bias. The word means what it means, not what you’d *like* it to mean.

### Steps:

**Consider the context of the word and summarize your own understanding of the word** as it is used there. What range of possibilities exist before your research?

### Compare translations and record differences.

**Look up the plain English meaning in an English dictionary.** The Bible translators have labored over this choice in trying to discover (not *determine*) and translate as precisely as possible what the first author was trying to communicate by choosing that word in that context in his language. Trust their work.

- Record the English definition that seems to best suit the context around this word.

**Look up the word in its original language using a Concordance in an online resource** (not your Bible’s!). **(The following instructions are for [blueletterbible.org](https://blueletterbible.org))** If you have a reference book like *Strong’s*, feel free to use it, but know that BLB will save you much time, is more precise, and the instructions below will not apply to using the book. If you prefer another online resource, feel free to use it and become familiar with how to get to the best meaning for the word in view in the specific context you’re studying.

- Open **blueletterbible.org** and enter the word into the search box (click the green square)
- Click the **Tools** button next to the passage you’re studying where the word is used
- From the Interlinear box that opens, find the word(s), and select the **Strong’s** number
- Record the Greek word and listen to it pronounced by clicking on the little speaker.
- What type of word is it? (Adjective, Noun, Verb...)

- Read the entry from Vine's Expository Dictionary and make notes about the word meaning
  - Record the other simple definitions given there (**Outline of Biblical Usage, Strong's**)
    - When you come to **Thayer's** – **jump to the scripture index**, click on your verse, and it will return you to the exact Greek grammar for that specific usage. If there is no link, consider the best use by context.
    - Look at some of the other ways **that usage** is applied by hovering over verses given there.
    - **Record the specific definition of your usage**, make note of at least a few cross-references and then write the definition into the sentence where the word is used.

**Consider how this impacts your understanding** of that word in your passage of text.

## Word Study Worksheet

**Word:**

**Other Translations Use:**

**Passage/Verse:**

**English definition or potential definitions (be sure to cite your reference source):**

**Definitions specific to this use in this context (be sure to cite your reference source):**

**Some cross-references with same use/meaning (preferably by the same author):**

**Passage rewritten using definition:**

## Context Study (Where, When: Setting of the Text, Author, Audience)

During your Annotating, mark your text whenever **time** is mentioned or there is an **indication of or transition in timing**. These could be **events or holidays**. (Word clues: then, now, when, during, after, etc.)

Also underline the **names of setting/location**.

### PLACES

**Name of the place central to the passage of study.**

Other places mentioned in this passage which related directly to the context.

Using your resources, **search for the place name(s) to find its first mention in scripture.**

From the results, search for and **record the meaning of that name. (Word Study)**

**Follow the subsequent references** listed from your initial search and **record what you discover about this place from other passages of scripture where it is mentioned. What other significant things have happened there and how might that affect your understanding of this passage? Keep track of references as you make notes.**

**Look at the maps provided in your Bible's tools to trace journeys. Read supplemental information that may contribute to your understanding of the topography, distances, climate etc...**

**Using an encyclopedia, Bible Handbook, Dictionary or other reference material** search for further information that may help you understand the context's influence on this passage of study and the people therein.

### TIMING

**The time/timing (literally or by what event) central to the passage of study, and/or the range of dates/time the passage or book covers.**

**Repeat the same practice as earlier concerning the first mention of this time (if it is holiday/event-related) in the Bible and subsequent references.**

**What do you learn about this event that might contribute to your understanding of the passage of study? Keep track of references as you make notes.** (Using encyclopedias and handbooks, this can be an extensive process depending on how thorough you want to be. Consider the purpose for your study and make adjustments as appropriate. Ask yourself how in-depth you really need to know this material. Are you teaching, or just learning? How much does it impact your understanding of the text to understand this background? Etc. You are only limited here and in character studies by your own time, interest, and endurance!)

When you feel you have a good understanding of the time and location, begin to **apply what you know** to what you're studying. Consider things like:

**What does the name tell you about the place by definition?** (EG: Bethlehem means House of Bread. Sets an expectation of abundance and provision, harvest and plenty. How does that bear out in your passage?)

**What is the history of the place – who settled it, what interaction did/do they have with Israel or individuals in Israel's history? What happened there that has impacted the Nation of Israel and how?**

**What is the political/religious culture/influences there?**

**What geographical features will impact the passage, its characters, etc.**

**What is the economic situation of the people in this place and time?**

**How have/will these things influence/impact the passage of study and the people therein?**

Remember that historical/geographical context study extends to the **Author and Audience** of the passage you're studying. The Author will be influenced and affected by the time and location in which they are writing (Think: **Paul in prison in Rome**). The Audience will be influenced and affected by the time and location in which they are reading (Think: Israelites after the Exodus). You'll want to consider the layers there and **repeat the same steps for the location of the Author at the time of writing, and the Audience at the time of hearing/reading if they are different from your passage's direct context.**

The more you understand the influences of the context affecting the passage of scripture in view, the closer you will come to understanding its message.

**Complete the Context Summary Worksheet with the data you've collected (for each place/time concerning this passage of study) and attach to it any notes you've made from your research.** You can refer back to these when you encounter this same or similar context in other reading.

## Context Study Worksheet

**Passage/Book of study:**

**Context Summary applies to Author, Audience, Passage/Book** (circle or underline)

**Name of the Place central to this Author, Audience, Passage/Book:** (If there are more than one, list them in brackets then complete separate research and Worksheets for each.)

**Meaning of the Name:**

**Significance:**

**Timing of this particular Author, Audience, Passage/Book (events or dates):**

**People who live in this place at this time, and their relationship with Israel if any:**

**Historical events significant to the place, and their impact on Israel if any:**

**Political/religious culture of the place at this time:**

**Economic situation of the people in this place at this time if applicable:**

**Geographical features of the place as they affect the Author, Audience, Passage/Book** (consider distance traveled as it applies):

**Neighboring locations that impact or influence this one and how (potential additional study):**

**Summarize how the context and timing have/will influence/impact the Author, Audience, Passage/Book.**

## Character Study – (Who: Author, Audience, Narrative Characters)

This study is most efficiently done using an online resource like [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org). Your bible's own tools (dictionary, encyclopedia, indexes, concordance) and reference resources can add extensively to what you begin by using an online resource. Be sure to read all passages of scripture in their full context (going before and after the verse as far as necessary to get the whole train of thought).

**What does the first Plain Reading reveal about this author/audience/character? Record any basic facts the book/passage tells you.**

**Using your resources, search for the person's name to find their first mention in scripture.**

**From the results, search for and record the meaning of their name. (Word Study)**

**Follow the subsequent references listed from your initial search and record what you discover about their story *up to* the passage in view.**

If you are studying **an entire book** authored by this person, or their entire portion of the narrative, then **continue to read** through the references listed to get a complete biographical sketch. Often you can skim these to find the high points, the turning points, and the conclusion, but **be sure to go to the scriptures referenced and read those passages in their context**. Make notes, sketch an outline, diagram a plot... in some way keep track of what you are learning as you go.

- This can be an extensive process depending on how thorough you want to be. Consider the purpose for your study and make adjustments as appropriate. Ask yourself how in-depth you really need to know this material. Are you teaching, or just learning? How much does it impact your understanding of the text to understand this background? Etc. You are only limited here and in context study by your own time, interest, and endurance!

- If this person's name changes in the course of their life (this happens often!) then continue your search using their new name.

**Using your preliminary notes, now summarize** what you found in your research.

What are **the basic facts** of their life?

- family (these may require their own mini-character study)
- friends, peers, helpers (see above)
- occupation (consult bible resources for understanding of that work)
- home (location in early life and later life, consult your bible resources for Historical/Cultural influences)
- call and conversion, or absence of
- role in the community (Israel/Church)

How have/will all these influences and experiences affect the person's **character/conduct in your passage of study?**

What is the **progression of their life in whole, or leading to the point where you pick up their story?**

**Record what you consider the life event(s) that influenced them most significantly.**

**How this will impact them physically, spiritually, and emotionally going forward? Consider:**

What **wound** have they suffered and how might that affect them?

What lie will they be tempted to believe?

What resulting flaw/fear might that lead to?

What significant **success** have they experienced and how might that affect them?

What Truth have they adopted?

What resulting strength has that given them?

What resulting boldness might it produce?

**Think now about the text you're studying. How will this Character Study impact what you're reading there?**

Once you've done your own study and drawn some conclusions, consult the **Character Profile** provided by your Bible and/or **footnotes**, a **commentary, dictionary**, or **Bible encyclopedia** (whether online or physical) to check your conclusions. **Note any corrections you need to make.**

**Complete the Character Summary Worksheet with the data you've collected and attach to it any notes you've made from your research.** You can refer back to these when you encounter this Author's other work, or these same people/characters in other narrative accounts.

## Character Study Worksheet

Name: (include first address)

Name change (include address):

Meaning of their name:

Meaning of new name:

How the meaning informs their character:

How this change affects their identity:

Their role in this study (Author, Audience, Main Character, Secondary Character, etc.)

### Basic Biographical Sketch

**Home** (location in early life, later life, and their basic Historical/Cultural influences):

**Family:**

**Friends/Peers/Helpers:**

**Occupation:**

**Call and conversion, or absense of:**

**Role in the community** (Israel/Church):

### Basic Outline of their Biblical Story

**Major Influences**

(explain their effect/impact on this person)

**People:**

**Context** (political/religious/cultural):

**Context** (geographical):

**Major Life Events** (successes/failures, call & conversion, conflicts etc.):

**Other discoveries:**

