

# UNDERSTANDING THE SCRIPTURES

*(Ezra 7:10 NCV) Ezra had worked hard to know and obey the Teachings of the LORD and to teach his rules and commands to the Israelites.*

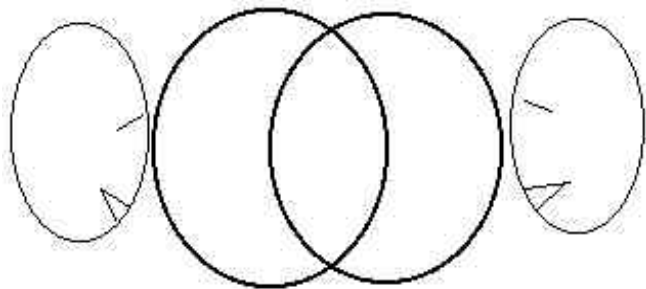
*(Psa 119:99 NIV) I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes.*

The Word of God is the basis of our authority and faith. We are told to \_\_\_\_\_ on it (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 4:4; 1Tim. 4:15); to \_\_\_\_\_ it (James 1:25 NCV “*But the truly happy people are those who carefully study God's perfect law that makes people free, and they continue to study it. They do not forget what they heard, but they obey what God's teaching says. Those who do this will be made happy*”); to \_\_\_\_\_ it (Deut. 4:1; Matt. 15:3); to read it, minister it, and love it (Psalm 119:159).

## The Need For Interpretation

The process of communication involves three basic things:

1. The Communicator (encoder)
2. The Message (code)
3. The Recipient (decoder)



In understanding Scripture, there is always interpretation, or *decoding*. The fact that we have so many modern English translations bears out that there is a demand to understand Scripture in the simplest possible English.

## A Framework For Understanding Scripture

The key to understanding Scripture is \_\_\_\_\_ . There are layers of context.

1. The surrounding verses.
2. The theme of the chapter.
3. The theme of the book.
4. The original audience's circumstances.
5. The time, place and historical setting.

The law of context determines how we interpret a verse of Scripture. We also use it to ask the following question- *Does this interpretation of this particular verse fit the overall message of Scripture?* If our interpretation of one verse doesn't agree with the overall message of Scripture, then we need to re-evaluate our interpretation.

### **Determining Context-**

1. Bible commentaries
2. Bible commentaries; Bible Encyclopaedias; some Bible Handbooks
3. Bible Handbooks; Bible Dictionaries; Bible Surveys
4. & 5. Bible Commentaries; Specialised Books on the particular Biblical Book

### **The Nature of a “Testament”**

The Bible is known as containing two *testaments*, but in fact the correct terminology is \_\_\_\_\_ . The Bible is actually *one* testament, made up of two main *covenants*.

*(Heb 9:16 NKJV) For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator.*

A covenant was an agreement between two parties. A testament was the gracious act of one party toward another. It could only be enacted upon the death of that party. It involves- *the testator, the inheritance, the will (which contained the promises and conditions), and the heir.*

## How To Read A Book

We are to read letter by letter, and then word by word. Perhaps when we started out reading we took our pointer finger and pointed at the word we were reading. Then one day our teacher told us not to point at the words any more, just to read them. There are a number of flaws in this system.

1. It is slow.
2. It discourages concentration.
3. It is not natural.

It is slow because we respond much faster to symbols than to groups of letters. For eg.-



It discourages concentration because we are capable of taking in vast amounts of information, more than mere text alone can satisfy.

It is not natural because a language has to be particularly learnt, while symbols have more of an international flavour.

Understanding these principles can help us to read better. In fact “speed reading” is based on these concepts. To turn words into symbols we must do the following-

- (i) Point at the words we are reading, as we are reading them.
- (ii) Stop sounding the words out - *c a t* = “cat”, instead: “cat” =”cat”
- (iii) Deliberately move quicker and sharpen your concentration.

Of course *reading* and *studying* are slightly different. Studying demands more attention to detail. Most people only know how to read slowly, and then call that *study*. Study does not have to slow. Try the following tips when wanting to study a book-

- (i) Use a highlighter colouring system to make some passages stand out for future reference.
- (ii) Get the gist of the book before you read it. Read the back cover first. Read about the author. Read the chapter headings in the table of contents. Doing this gives a feel for the book.
- (iii) If you are answering questions about the book, read all the questions first.
- (iv) If time permits, read the book first, then go through it again to gain the detail that you skipped over the first time. Its amazing how much you'll pick up the second time through.

## Building A Reference Library

The fruit of learning is not to necessarily retain details in a photographic memory bank, but to know where to get the information should the need arise. Albert Einstein didn't even know his own phone number, but he knew where to get it from!

For the Christian leader, there are some things that are essential to have access to. These include books, journals and magazines. Even Paul the apostle treasured these things (2Tim. 4:13). It is recommended that the leader build their library to include at least books from these categories-

- A variety of Bible translations
- Bible Commentaries
- Bible Dictionary
- Bible Encyclopaedia
- Bible Handbooks
- Systematic Doctrine/Theology
- Concordance
- Biographies