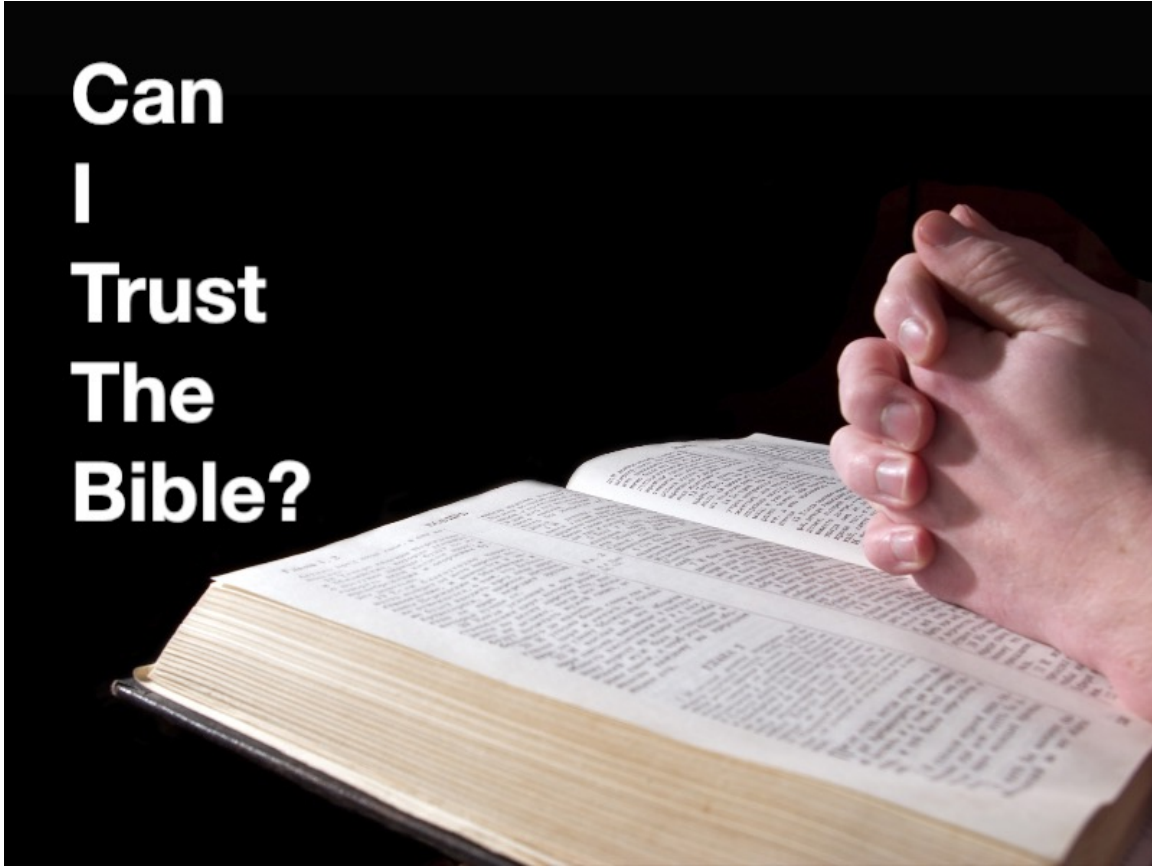


Can I Trust The Bible?



Part 2

By

Mark McGee

Chapters

Can I Trust The Bible 7	3
Rightly Dividing The Word Of Truth 7	8
Can I Trust The Bible 8	12
Rightly Dividing The Word Of Truth 8	15
Can I Trust The Bible 9	19
Rightly Dividing The Word Of Truth 9	22
Can I Trust The Bible 10	25
Rightly Dividing The Word Of Truth 10	28
Can I Trust The Bible 11	32
Rightly Dividing The Word Of Truth 11	35
Can I Trust The Bible 12	38
Rightly Dividing The Word Of Truth 12	41

Can I Trust The Bible 7

Prophets hold a special place in the writing and preservation of the Bible. They were so important that God told Moses to tell Israel they could know whether a prophet was speaking for God or not by the simple fact that everything they said had to come true.

“And if you say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?’— when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.” Deuteronomy 18:21-22

Another way Israel would know whether a prophet was from God or not was who he called the people to worship.

“If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods’—which you have not known—‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.” Deuteronomy 13:1-3

The penalty for a false prophet was the same in both cases – death.

“But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.” Deuteronomy 18:20

“But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the LORD your God.” Deuteronomy 13:5

The Bible was written by **true prophets** of God. Jesus spoke many times about the Word of God containing the Law and Prophets (e.g. Matthew 5:17; 7:12; 22:40; Luke 24:44). The people of Israel at the time of Jesus also saw the Bible being made up of the Law and Prophets (e.g. John 1:45) Moses, who wrote the Law, was a prophet of God, as were the prophets who wrote the Prophetic portions of the Hebrew Bible (Isaiah – Malachi).

This is important to our being able to trust the Bible we hold in our hands. God designed an amazing system of true prophets speaking and writing God’s Word and scribes carefully and accurately copying the words of the prophets through the centuries.

Prophets were also important in the preservation of the Hebrew Bible. The people of Israel often ignored God’s Word and the reading of the Hebrew Bible was forgotten by the people. God raised up prophets to restore the importance of reading and obeying God’s Word. We see

through the careful chain of God calling specific people to be His prophets that the Lord was preserving His Word.

The Kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrian Empire about 722 BC. The writer of Kings tells us that the written Law was still in existence at that time.

“Now the king of Assyria went throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria and besieged it for three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria, and placed them in Halah and by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes ... Yet the LORD testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of His prophets, every seer, saying, ‘Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets.’ Nevertheless they would not hear, but stiffened their necks, like the necks of their fathers, who did not believe in the LORD their God.” 2 Kings 17:5-6, 12-14

Hosea was a prophet of God to the Kingdom of Israel during the middle and late part of the 8th century BC until the time the Assyrian army captured the land. Amos also prophesied against Israel during the early and middle part of the 8th century BC. Isaiah and Micah were prophets of God to the Kingdom of Judah during the same time period (middle to late 8th century BC). The Law and other Holy

Writings were available for the people of Israel and Judah to read during that century. The prophets Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, and Jeremiah were contemporaries during the late 7th century BC and the Law and other Holy Writings were available for the people of Judah to read. The prophets Ezekiel and Obadiah were contemporaries during the early part of the 6th century BC and the Law and other Holy Writings were available for the people of Judah to read. The prophet Daniel lived in captivity under the Babylonians and Persians and spoke about the availability of the Law. Haggai and Zechariah prophesied in Judah during the late part of the 6th century BC. Malachi prophesied during the middle to late 5th century BC. The Law and other Holy Writings were available to the people of Judah during those times. Among the very last Words God spoke to Judah were these – *“Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, With the statutes and judgments.”* (Malachi 4:4)

Malachi, the last prophet of the Old Testament, wrote this at the beginning of his prophetic account - *“The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.”* The word “burden” is the Hebrew *massa* and means “prophecy, oracle, load, burden, tribute to be carried.” It was not easy to be a prophet of God. The prophetic messages God gave them to speak to others was often a heavy burden to carry and deliver.

One other note before we leave the Old Testament Writings is about Ezra and Nehemiah, who were contemporaries of Malachi. Ezra was a Hebrew priest and scribe and returned with a remnant of Hebrew priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and the Nethinim from captivity in Babylon to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. Nehemiah was cupbearer for the king of Babylon and returned with more Hebrews to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem several years after Ezra. Copies of the Law and other Holy Writings were available for the people of Judah to read during that time.

I am thankful to God for how He designed the careful and supernatural system of Speaking, Writing and Preserving His Word from ancient times. We can be assured through this process that the Books of the Old Testament we hold in our hands are the actual Words of the Living God.

Rightly Dividing The Word of Truth 7

Who inspired the Apostle Paul to write the Letters included as Scripture in the New Testament? That's right – the **Holy Spirit** did. When Paul told Timothy, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth,” he was writing what the Holy Spirit told him to write (2 Timothy 2:15). It is the Holy Spirit saying to us, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” The Spirit of God wants us to be diligent to present ourself approved to God. He wants us to present ourself to God as a worker who does not need to be ashamed. The Spirit of God wants us to rightly divide the Word of Truth. Simple and direct. That's God's Will for us.

Rightly dividing means “cutting straight, handling correctly,” God's Word. We start the straight cutting by reading every Book of the Bible from the beginning (e.g. Genesis 1:1; Luke 1:1; Romans 1:1). Our concern is accurate exegesis (critical explanation or interpretation of a text). We study the Word of Truth in context (the parts of something written or spoken that immediately precede and follow a word or passage and clarify its meaning). Would we read an important letter from a friend or family member by starting somewhere in the middle or toward the end? Not if we wanted to understand the purpose and intent of the writer. The same is true with the Bible. We start at the beginning and read it carefully all the way to the end. As we are reading the Bible in context, we observe everything. We take notes

about everything we see. Then we ask questions about what we see. Answering those questions will lead us to begin the process of interpreting the meaning of the words we've read.

Many years ago I heard someone say that every verse of the Bible can be interpreted in many ways – as many ways as there are people who read it. Does that make sense to you? Did the Holy Spirit inspire the writing of the Bible for the purpose of everyone coming up with their own individual truths? If I say to you, “the building across the street is on fire,” how many ways can my words be interpreted? If I say the same words to 20 people who are standing nearby, could they come up with 20 different interpretations of the meaning of “the building across the street is on fire?” Can anyone believe my words mean something other than the fact that the building across the street is on fire? Can someone interpret it as “the building across the street is not on fire?” Can another person interpret my words as “the building across the street used to be on fire, but that happened a long time ago?” Can someone else interpret my words as “the building across the street may one day be on fire, but it is not on fire today?” I think not. I was quite clear – “the building across the street is on fire.” Here's an example from the New Testament. Matthew wrote this in his Gospel account – “From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.” (Matthew 16:21) How many different interpretations of this verse can we have if we rightly divide the Word of Truth? What I see is that beginning at that time Jesus told His disciples that He had

to go to Jerusalem, had to suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, had to be killed, and had to be raised the third day. Can we interpret this verse to mean that John the Baptist began to show to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and die at the hands of the elders and priests and scribes? Can we interpret the verse to mean that Jesus told some strangers that He was traveling to Nazareth? Can we interpret the verse to mean that Jesus told His disciples that He was going to Jerusalem to meet with elders and chief priests about opening a restaurant? Can we interpret the verse to mean that Jesus told some priests He was going to Bethel to die at the hands of His disciples? Can we interpret the verse to mean that Jesus told His disciples He was going to Jerusalem to join with the elders and chief priests and scribes to get their advice about how best to bring in the Kingdom? Can we interpret the verse to mean that Jesus told His disciples He was going to Jerusalem to fake His death and then start a family with Mary Magdalene? Can we interpret the verse to mean that Jesus told His disciples He was going to Jerusalem to die from pneumonia and remain in the grave? Of course not. All of those interpretations are ridiculous because the meaning of the verse is clear. Jesus told His disciples that He “must” go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.

Why can't we do that with every verse in the Bible? You think it's impossible? Then why does God tell us to rightly divide the Word of Truth? Why does God tell us to be workers who do not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth, if that's not possible? You

think it's hard to rightly divide the Word of Truth? It is. That's why the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to use the word "worker" (ergates – laborer). The word was used for people who were hired to work outside all day long, especially those who labored in the fields. Yes, rightly dividing the Word of Truth is hard work. It's also rewarding. God rewards those who labor for Him with His approval. Most importantly, it brings glory to God!

Can I Trust The Bible 8

The prophet Malachi ministered toward the end of the 5th century BC. God used Malachi to speak His last Words to the people of Israel for more than 400 years. God left them with the promise of a “messenger” who would come to Israel and “prepare the way” of the Lord. Did God’s messenger ever come to Israel? Did he prepare the way of the Lord? Did the Lord come to Israel? If so, when? In what Form? How do we know?

The answer is, **YES!** God’s messenger did come to Israel during the early part of the 1st century AD. We also know that he did prepare the way of the Lord and that the Lord did come to Israel in the Form of a Man. We know because of what is written in the New Testament.

The New Testament, as Christians call it, picks up where the Old Testament leaves off. The writers of the New Testament claim, just as the writers of the Old Testament did, that what they wrote was the Word of God. In fact, the New Testament introduces us to the **Word of God**. His Name is Jesus Christ.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness of Him and

cried out, saying, 'This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.' And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.'" John 1:1-4, 14-18

That's quite a claim for anyone to make – that God became Flesh and lived among men. Here's another claim that has rocked the world of religion for 2,000 years.

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know.' Thomas said to Him, 'Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.' Philip said to Him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who

has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves." John 14:1-11

This is possibly the biggest stumbling block to people becoming Christians. I've talked with so many people who say they admire what they've heard about Jesus, but as soon as they hear that Jesus taught He was the only Way to God they don't believe it. People love the idea of a God who loves everybody and welcomes everyone into Heaven no matter what they believe or how they live their lives. They view Christianity as unloving and "narrow minded." They don't want to believe in a God Who would judge people for their sins and sentence them to eternity in hell, so they attack the credibility of the Writings that make those claims. The New Testament, they say, isn't true so the claims it makes about their guilt and God's Judgment are not true.

Christian, can the New Testament stand up to the credibility test? Is it or is it not the Word of God? How can we know for sure? Can we prove it? We'll see in the next part of our study.

Rightly Dividing The Word of Truth 8

The Church began to have problems with interpretation early in its history. The Apostle Paul wrote several letters to individual churches during the middle of the 1st century AD to address wrong interpretation and disobedience to God's revealed Truth. Jesus told the Apostle John to write letters to seven churches at the end of the 1st century AD to address wrong interpretation and disobedience to God's revealed Truth. Major disagreements about interpreting the Bible eventually divided the Church into many splinter pieces during the early centuries of Christianity until we now have thousands of divisions (denominations) and most Christians struggle to understand how to do something God told us was vital to our spiritual health – **rightly divide the Word of Truth.**

What if true followers of Christ around the world made right division of the Word the priority in their lives? What if we worked hard, as Paul asked us to do in 2 Timothy 2:15, and became very good at interpreting God's Word correctly? What do you think might happen in the Church if Christians understood and obeyed the Truth of God's Word? What if the Church reversed the divisions of the last 2,000 years and came together to fulfill the Lord's prayer for us – "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe

that You sent Me.” (John 17:20-21) Can you imagine the joy in Heaven and on earth if the Church was united again around the Word of God? What a powerful force we would be for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The first phase of methodical, inductive Bible study is to carefully **observe** everything in a passage of Scripture. The second phase is **interpretation**. As we’ve seen in previous studies, the bridge between observation and interpretation is **questions** for interpretation. The questions we ask are based on our observations of terms, structure, general literary forms, and atmosphere (Methodical Bible Study, p. 97, Dr. Robert Traina, 1952). When I was first learning how to interpret Scripture, I used a simple chart that had observations on the left half of a piece of paper and questions for interpretation on the right half. It helped me to see what I was “seeing.”

Important! Don’t make interpretations during the observation and interpretive question phases of your study. Be patient and wait until you have seen, asked and answered – then you can interpret.

Most Christians don’t see themselves as **interpreters** of Scripture, but they are. Even if they allow someone else to do the interpreting for them (e.g. pastor, teacher, evangelist, prophet, missionary), they have still interpreted Scripture by believing what they were taught. The process of “rightly dividing the Word of Truth” is personal interpretation of Scripture. Some Christians have told me that is a

dangerous proposition because we'd never have agreement on anything in the Bible if every Christian came up with their own interpretation, but I think the opposite is true. The Holy Spirit inspired the writing of Scripture and knows the meaning for every word and verse in the Bible. I believe He wants all of us to know that meaning and has given us the way to accomplish it.

Steps to Interpreting Scripture Accurately

The process of accurate interpretation of Scripture is to **hear from the Holy Spirit** throughout your study. Talk with the Spirit Who lives in you as you begin your time of study and share your thoughts and ideas with Him as you read every word. Ask Him to help you during the observation phase to see everything fully and clearly. Ask Him to help you ask the right questions that will lead to the right answers that will lead you to the right interpretation of every verse of the Scripture the Spirit inspired. He will bring incredible light into your study and you will literally **hear** from Him. Some of the most exciting moments in my life have been when God's Spirit taught me personally. I can't imagine a better Teacher.

Interpretation begins with **defining terms**. God blessed me in my first year as a Christian with teachers who were proficient in Hebrew and Greek. Studying with them from the original languages of the Bible gave me a desire to learn how to do that myself. If you can, study with someone who knows Hebrew and Greek or take classes at a local Bible college or online. If you're not able to study the languages,

there are many online Hebrew and Greek websites you can use to learn more about specific terms in Scripture. Here are a few you may find helpful:

- Strong's Concordance with Hebrew and Greek Lexicon
- Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon
- New Testament Greek Lexicon

I began studying Greek and Hebrew long before the Internet was available to the public. I slowly purchased lexicons, dictionaries and linguistic keys that have helped me greatly through the years. I still use them and prefer them to the online versions. You may eventually want to build your own library of study aids.

I do not recommend you read commentaries about the Bible until you have completed your own interpretation. After you have heard from God's Spirit and know why you believe what you believe, reading commentaries by other Bible students may add to your understanding. However, if you read commentaries before the Spirit guides you to His interpretation, you may be misled by someone's wrong interpretation. The more you practice your interpretive skills, you will find your ability to rightly divide the Word of Truth improve. You will also be able to identify commentaries worth your time and those that aren't.

In our next study, we will look at how to get the right answers to the right questions for interpretation.

Can I Trust The Bible 9

The New Testament era began about 4 BC. That's approximately the year when God sent the angel Gabriel to the Hebrew priest Zacharias, the young Hebrew virgin Mary, and her espoused Hebrew husband Joseph. All of the events happened in the kingdom of Judea, when Herod was king. These and other facts brought out in the New Testament Gospel accounts give us excellent insight to the timing of the events, but can we trust the Gospel accounts as true historical documents? How do we know the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are really the Word of God? Even if we can trust the Gospel accounts as originally written, how do we know the copies we have in our New Testament today are the same as the original Autographs written more than 1,900 years ago?

Do you see what's at stake here? Christianity is based on the Person of Jesus Christ and the Revelation of Jesus Christ is based on what we read about Him in the New Testament. If we cannot trust the New Testament, we cannot trust Christianity. If we cannot trust Christianity, we cannot trust Christ. If we cannot trust Christ, we cannot trust God. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of the trustworthiness of the New Testament.

Based on the information we have from the Gospel accounts, Jesus was most likely born between 6 and 4 BC. Herod was king of Judea when Jesus was born and most historians believe Herod died about 4 BC. We know from Matthew 2 that Herod spoke with wise men from

the East who came to Jerusalem searching for the one *“born King of the Jews.”* This troubled Herod, so he asked the wise men to find the Child and then let him know where he could visit the Child to *“worship Him also.”* The wise men found Mary and Joseph and the Child Jesus, but were *“divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod.”* An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him to take Jesus and Mary to Egypt and *“stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.”* Joseph did as he was told and stayed in Egypt *“until the death of Herod.”* If Herod died in 4 BC, then the birth of Jesus would be 4 BC or earlier.

Based on the information we have in Luke’s Gospel account (Chapter 3), John the Baptist began his ministry *“in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests.”* The Roman world used the reigns of their Caesars as calendar notations, so we have a pretty good idea about when John the Baptist began his ministry. Using all of the historic data available from the lives of these ancient people, we come up with an approximate date of 26 – 29 AD. Tiberius Caesar began his co-regency with Augustus Caesar about 12 AD. Tiberius assumed sole regency upon the death of Augustus in 15 AD. The fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar could have been 26 AD or as late as 29 AD. All of the other rulers Luke mentioned support the dating of 26 – 29 AD for the beginning of John the Baptist’s

ministry.

According to all of the Gospel accounts, John the Baptist began his ministry before Jesus began His. Luke wrote that Jesus began His earthly ministry “*at about thirty years of age.*” If Jesus was born in 4 BC and began His ministry at the exact age of 30, that would have been in the year 26 AD, which would fit within the dating for John the Baptist’s ministry dates. The fact that Luke wrote Jesus began His ministry “at about thirty years of age,” could mean the Lord was 30, 31 32, or even 33 when He was baptized by John the Baptist. All of the information Luke presents fits well with the historical information available. The accuracy of Luke’s history in both of his Letters to a friend named Theophilus (Gospel of Luke and Book of Acts) is an important part of knowing whether we can trust the accuracy of the New Testament.

Rightly Dividing The Word Of Truth 9

In our last study, we looked at the importance of hearing from the Holy Spirit through the process of observing and interpreting the Scripture He inspired. Our work as interpreters of God's Word (rightly dividing) is to discover what the Holy Spirit is saying, not what we want a passage of Scripture to say. That's the difference between inductive and deductive study techniques. Inductive study begins with specifics and moves to the larger perspective, while deductive study begins with the larger perspective and moves to specifics. If we start with a general premise and try to prove that premise through specifics we discover, that is deductive study. If we start with specifics and allow those specifics to add with other specifics until we see the larger perspective, the general premise will reveal itself from the specifics.

Another way of looking at the process is that inductive study is **bottom-up**, while deductive study is **top-down**. Deductive study moves from theory to hypothesis to observation to confirmation. Inductive study moves from observation to pattern to tentative hypothesis to conclusion and application. In inductive study we don't make an interpretation until we finish the process of observation. We also shared about not reading commentaries with other people's interpretations until we finish our own. It's important that we hear from the Holy Spirit first. He will always guide us into all Truth.

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.” John 16:12-15

We also looked at the importance of defining terms. Having the wrong understanding of a word or phrase can lead to the wrong interpretation of an entire passage of Scripture. That’s where good dictionaries and lexicons guide us to the true understanding of a word’s meaning. Understanding how the grammar of Hebrew and Greek affects definition within particular usage is also important to understand. Many good books about grammatical rules for the languages are available to study in English.

Step One of Interpretation

Ask questions. Interpretive questions come from your observations. If you are thorough in observing everything in a portion of Scripture, then lots of important questions will arise. The process of asking questions from your observations will sometimes send you back to the Word to observe again, which can lead to more discoveries.

Think of the Bible as **God's Letter of Love and Self-Revelation**. He makes it clear from the beginning to the end of the Bible that He loves people. He Created them, Redeems them, and Protects them for eternity. How would you read a letter from someone you loved deeply and wanted to know more intimately? Would you read it casually and quickly and toss it to the side? Of course not. You would pour over every word, not wanting to miss any deeper meaning that might be in it. You would read it again and again, thinking how wonderful it was that the one you loved so deeply would share their deepest emotions with you. You would probably have many questions to ask this special person in your life and would ask them in a response letter, looking forward to receiving their answers. It's the same with God's Word, except at a much higher and more important level.

Your questions for interpretation of passages of Scripture begin with what makes up a sentence (components of a passage – terms, forms, structure, atmosphere) and move to understanding the meaning of the passage. From a journalistic perspective, it's the old "who, what, where, how, and why" questions. Who' involved? What are they saying? Where did they say it? How did they say it? Why did they say it. Have you ever noticed that some reporters give you more and better information from covering the same story that many other reporters also covered? They all covered the same story, but usually one reporter's story stands out as being thorough and complete. We want to be that kind of reporter in our study of God's Word – thorough and accurate.

Can I Trust The Bible 10

Many New Testament historians believe Jesus Christ was born between 6 – 4 BC, based on information Matthew shared in his account of the Life and Ministry of our Lord (Matthew 2:1). Luke wrote that Jesus began His Ministry “at about thirty years of age” (Luke 3:23), which would have been somewhere between 24 – 26 AD if Jesus was exactly 30. The fact that Luke used the phrase “at about thirty” means it could have been a few years later. While there is still some debate about the length of time Jesus Ministered on earth, three to four years is generally used to express the time frame found in John’s Gospel. That would place the Lord’s Crucifixion and Resurrection somewhere between 27 and 30 AD.

The Author of the New Testament is the Holy Spirit. Jesus told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would teach them all things and bring to their remembrance all that Jesus had said to them (John 14:25-26). Jesus Breathed on the disciples after His Resurrection and they received the Holy Spirit (John 20:21). The Spirit fell on them a little more than a month later as they waited for Him in the upper room (Acts 2:1-4). The disciples immediately began to minister in the Power of God’s Spirit and the world is still hearing His Voice.

The Holy Spirit spent the first 15-20 years after Christ’s Resurrection and Ascension leading great numbers of people to Christ (Acts 2 – 6). The opposition to the Holy Spirit’s Message also grew and a great persecution dispersed Christ’s followers across the land (Acts 7 – 9).

Historians estimate that time as being in the middle of the 4th decade of the 1st century AD. The Holy Spirit began Inspiring the Writing of the New Testament 15-20 years later. While there is some debate about who wrote first, Paul and James are the two most likely candidates. The Spirit of God had much to Say to the world (John 16:5-15) and spent almost 50 years Inspiring the Writing of the New Testament.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16-17

“For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. 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 1:16-21

The Holy Spirit took great care during the Inspiration of the New Testament, so it makes sense that He would also protect it through generations of Christians. The Letters of the Apostles that the Spirit inspired were carefully copied and distributed to other groups of believers across the world. The Holy Spirit chose the Koine Greek as the primary language of the New Testament and guided the process of copying to make sure the copies were accurate to the originals the Apostles wrote.

How successful was the Spirit? More than 5,350 Greek manuscripts from the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD are available for reading and comparing. That is a large mountain of evidence for writings of antiquity. There are only ten copies of Julius Caesar's Gallic Wars available to study, yet its accuracy is not seriously questioned. Some of the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament are within a few decades of the original Writings, but the earliest manuscript of the Gallic Wars is a thousand years removed from the original writing. Again, no serious questions about the Gallic Wars.

Rightly Dividing The Word Of Truth 10

The first course I studied in Bible college was **hermeneutics** (Methodical Bible Study). It was a mandatory course that lasted two semesters and had to be completed before students could proceed to other study areas – a wise decision by the college. It prepared students for everything else that would come during their education. I was a relatively young Christian, having recently come out of atheism, so I needed to understand the hard work that would be necessary to spend the rest of my life rightly dividing the Word of Truth. Methodical-inductive Bible study takes a tremendous amount of time and discipline, but the results are beyond explanation. It's so important that we know why we believe something and be able to explain that to someone else so they can understand it and apply the Truth of God's Word to their life.

The Second Step of Interpretation

The second step of interpretation is **finding answers and reasons for the questions we've asked**. You've chosen a portion of Scripture to study, preferably at the beginning of a Book of the Bible (e.g. Mark 1:1; Romans 1:1). You've carefully looked at everything in the verse(s) and written all of your observations. You've looked at all your observations and asked every question you can think of that needs to be answered.

Questions to Ask

Terms – the definition of each word ... the significance of the grammatical structure

Form – the literary form used by the writer (e.g. history, poetry, parable, psalm, proverb)

Tone – the atmospheric tone used by the writer (e.g. joyful, sad, serious, urgent)

Rationale – the why questions

Answering Questions

It's important to remember the **spiritual aspect** of Bible study –

“But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself

is rightly judged by no one. For 'who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?' But we have the mind of Christ." 1 Corinthians 2:10-16

We need to remember that the writing of the Bible was inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. He searches all things, including the **deep things of God**. Isn't that what we want to know from studying the Bible – the "deep things" of God? Paul taught and wrote those things the Holy Spirit taught him, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. The work of rightly dividing the Word of Truth is not a natural thing to do and it is something the natural man cannot do. Only spiritual can interpret spiritual.

When we study spiritually – attuned to the leading of the Holy Spirit – we will find that Truth is often **obvious**. God is not trying to trick or fool people. God Speaks openly and clearly. The correct interpretation of a passage of Scripture is usually the obvious interpretation. You might call it "spiritual common sense."

Because we are human beings and the people who the Holy Spirit inspired to write the Bible were human beings, we can understand the meaning of Scripture from a human as well as Divine perspective. Writers like Mark, Luke, Peter and Paul gave readers their human perspective of Truth even as they shared God's View. We learn so much through their human experiences. We understand what it's like to be human and filled with joy or overcome by grief. It is more difficult to understand what it's like to be God, so God sent His Only

Son Who became both human and Divine to die for our sins and help us bridge the gap in understanding the “deep things of God.” As John reminds us – “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14) Jesus Christ is the Word of God – “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” (John 1:1-4)

Can I Trust The Bible 11

The manuscript evidence for the New Testament is massive, especially when compared with other historical writings. Greek New Testament copies number in the thousands (5,686). Greek copies for other historical writings number anywhere from two copies to several hundred. The earliest copies for other historical copies are often 750 to 1,600 years from the original. The earliest Greek copies for the New Testament are less than 100 years from the original. The accuracy of the copies of most ancient writings is difficult to assess. Homer's Iliad has 643 Greek copies with the earliest believed to be about 500 years from the original. It's estimated that the accuracy of the Iliad copies is about 95%. The accuracy of the 5,686 copies of the Greek New Testament, with many being made within a hundred years of the original, has an accuracy estimated to be 99.5%. If you also count the more than 19,000 copies of the New Testament in Syriac, Latin, Coptic, and Aramaic, you see one the most remarkable textual evidence in the world of ancient literature.

The oldest known Greek copy of the New Testament is the John Ryland MSS. It's a small fragment of John's Gospel (Chapter 18) believed to date from about 125 AD. That's about 30 years from John's original writing. The Chester Beatty Papyrus dates from about 200 AD and includes portions of the Books of Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, and Hebrews. That's less than 150 years from original to copy. The Bodmer Papyrus II dates from about 200 AD

and includes portions of John's Gospel – a little more than 100 years from original to copy.

Other ancient Greek copies contain almost all of the New Testament writings and date from the 4th century AD. They include Codex Sinaiticus, and Codex Vaticanus. Codex Alexandrinus and Codex Ephraemi are dated from the 5th century AD. Codex Bezae and Codex Washingtonensis also date from the 5th century AD, but contain fewer Books of the New Testament. Codex Claromontanus contains Paul's Epistles and dates from the 6th century AD.

Remember the Syriac, Coptic and Latin copies of the New Testament? The Syriac Peshitta dates from the 2nd or 3rd century AD. The Palestinian Syriac dates from the 5th century AD. The Coptic Sahidic version dates from the beginning of the 3rd century AD. The Bahairic version dates from the 4th century AD. Codex Vercellensis dates from the middle of the 4th century AD. Jerome's Latin Vulgate dates from the end of the 4th century AD. The African Old Latin version dates from the beginning of the 5th century AD. Codex Palatinus also dates from the 5th century AD.

Another important aspect of the trustworthiness of the New Testament is what early Church leaders wrote about it – and write about it they did. Early Christian writers quoted from the New Testament so much that most of it could be reconstructed from their writings without using the New Testament manuscripts. Clement of

Rome wrote at the end of the 1st century and beginning of the 2nd century AD and quoted from eight Books of the New Testament. Ignatius of Antioch wrote during the early part of the 2nd century AD and quoted from 15 Books of the New Testament. Polycarp of Smyrna was a disciple of the Apostle John and quoted from much of the New Testament. Researchers have found more than 30,000 New Testament quotes included in letters of the Church fathers from before the Council of Nicea in 325 AD. Adding the more than 5,000 quotes from Eusebius in the 4th century AD brings that total to more than 36,000 New Testament quotes. That is strong evidence that supports the authenticity of the New Testament we read today.

The textual evidence for the trustworthiness of the Bible is powerful, but is there anything else we can look to for physical support in our declaration that we hold the Word of God in our hands? Evidence from **archaeology** in our next study.

Rightly Dividing The Word Of Truth 11

In our last study we saw that some of the **subjective** methods of Bible study include **spiritual sense**, **common sense**, and **human experience**. This is where many Christians stop in their study of God's Word and one of the reasons we find so many different interpretations of the same verses within the Church. Subjective study methods are those that are based on or influenced by an individual's personal feelings and opinions. **Objective** Bible study methods, on the other hand, are not based on personal feelings or opinions in considering the facts before them. Rightly dividing the Word of Truth combines both subjective and objective study methods to be sure our feelings and opinions are based on the Truth. Objective study methods are honestly more time consuming and more difficult than subjective methods – but the results are definitely worth it.

We've looked at the importance of **defining terms**, so let me add a couple of thoughts about that aspect of interpreting Scripture. The Holy Spirit inspired the human authors of the Bible to use specific Hebrew and Greek words to communicate meaning. In order to understand that meaning, we need to understand the meaning of the individual words and their usage in Scripture. Words have a **root meaning** and it's helpful to understand the root meaning and how it was used and understood by ancient people. Good Bible dictionaries and lexicons are helpful in understanding the roots of words used in

the Bible.

I've often heard that English is a difficult second language for many people around the world to learn because the same word can mean different things depending on **usage**. For instance, the word cool. "It is a cool day." "He is such a cool guy." "What you did was not cool, dude." "Cool it, man! That's not cool." Someone who's mother tongue is a language other than English might find it strange that we use the word "cool" in so many different ways. In order for them to understand the meaning of the word cool, they have to learn about usage in the English language.

Hebrew and Greek are more exact languages than English in many ways. For instance, the word **love**. Hebrew and Greek each have several words that are translated by the English word "love". The love may be that of a parent for a child, child for a parent, husband for a wife, person for a pet, brother for a brother, friend for a friend, God for people, people for God. Knowing which Hebrew or Greek word the human author of Scripture used in a verse helps us understand the true meaning and purpose.

Integrating and Summarizing Answers

Once you've answered your questions, you need to **integrate** the answers to arrive at the main message of the Scripture you're studying. That main message is the meaning the Holy Spirit purposed when He inspired the writing of what you are reading. If you've done a good job of rightly dividing the Word of Truth, you're ready to

prepare your interpretation for the next step. Even as you've written your observations, questions, and answers, I suggest you write a **summary** statement about what you conclude from integrating your answers. A good way to do that is present it as a **research paper** you might give to a professor for a grade. Include a title and simple outline. You might also include a premise and conclusion to the outline. Remember, this is just for you – for now. The purpose of integrating and summarizing your hard work of rightly dividing the Word of Truth is to see what you discovered and prepare you for the next step. Other ways to integrate and summarize your interpretation are **paraphrase** and **essay**. Those might even fit your thought process better than a research paper. Your essay could include the process you followed to get to the interpretation.

Be careful when integrating and summarizing answers not to fall into common traps that some interpreters fall into. Every denominational group has a different way of interpreting some portions of the Bible. Remember, Jesus prayed to His Father for unity among His disciples. The Holy Spirit speaks what He hears from Christ. God's Message to His children is not many messages – **it's one message** – if it's "rightly divided". That means some of the different denominational interpretations are **not** correct. We want our interpretation to be right, so we work hard to rightly divide the Word of Truth.

Can I Trust The Bible 12

God knows what He's doing. I know that is most likely obvious to you, but let me give you a personal glimpse of how God revealed that to me more than 40 years ago.

I was a scoffer. I did not believe in God and wanted the world to know it. Since I had a daily radio talk show in a major market, I had a way of letting a part of the world know what I thought about people who believed in God. I thought they were stupid. God was about to show me how smart His people can be.

I saw an advertisement in a local newspaper about Dr. Henry Morris coming to town to speak about searching for Noah's Ark. I invited Dr. Morris on my show for a two-hour interview. My plan was to blow Dr. Morris' theory out of the water. God's Plan was to get my attention. He did. Dr. Morris was a brilliant scientist and showed me there were many things about science I did not know.

The next step in God's Plan was for me to see a newspaper ad for a Christian Drive-In Ministry. I thought it would be fun to find out how a Christian was using a drive-in theatre to preach the Gospel. I invited Evangelist Terry Lytle to be on my program and found him to be a kind and engaging person who knew what it meant to live by faith in God. We continued to talk after the show and I often stopped by his office to ask him questions. That's where I met Dr. Ed Hindson. Ed worked with Terry and helped answer my many questions about God and the Bible. Dr. Hindson's book about the Philistines and the Old

Testament had been published just a few months before we met, so he introduced me to Biblical Archaeology. He showed me how archaeologists had uncovered so many ancient places and people that were witnesses to the truthfulness of the Bible.

Archaeology – The Study of Ancient Things

Archaeology is the systematic study of past human life and culture through the process of uncovering and examining material evidence found in graves, tombs, buildings, pottery, and tools. The built-in dictionary on my computer defines archaeology this way: “the study of human history and prehistory through the excavation of sites and the analysis of artifacts and other physical remains.” Biblical archaeology is the study of human history of the biblical lands “through the excavation of sites and the analysis of artifacts and other physical remains.”

The writing of the Bible covers more than 1,500 years, but the history contained in the Bible goes back to the beginning of time. What began with one man and one woman in a large garden grew into many millions of people living around the world. Hundreds of generations lived and died. That process of life and death left hundreds of millions of artifacts and bones that archaeologists have been uncovering.

Many people call Cyriacus of Ancona, from the 15th century AD, the “father” of archaeology, and Sir William Matthew Flinders Petrie the “father” of modern archaeology. The “father” of Biblical archaeology is thought to be William Albright. Other well-known Biblical archaeologists from the 19th and 20th centuries AD include Sir William Ramsay, Sir Fredrick Kenyon and his daughter Dame Kathleen Kenyon, G. Ernest Wright, Frederick Jones Bliss, Robert Alexander Stewart Macalister, Frank Moore Cross, M.A. Meyer, Nelson Glueck, and Yigael Yadin.

Each of these archaeologists discovered hard evidence that supports the historical accuracy of the Bible. In the next part of our study, we will look at several of the most important of those discoveries and what they mean to the trustworthiness of the Bible.

Rightly Dividing The Word Of Truth 12

Congratulations! You've done a great job interpreting Scripture. You are well on your way to "rightly dividing the Word of Truth." So, what's next?

Evaluate the value of your interpretation, **Apply** it to your life, and **Correlate** it properly with other portions of the Word of Truth.

Evaluation

To evaluate is to determine the worth of something. We know that the Bible has inestimable value in part and as a whole, but how do we determine the value of our interpretation of God's Word? We know that "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work," but is all Scripture addressed to us today?

God told Abraham to circumcise every male child as a sign of the covenant between them. Any male child who was not circumcised would be cut off from his people because he broke the covenant with God. (Genesis 17:9-14) How do we reconcile that direct and clear command with the Apostle Paul's declaration to Gentile believers that if they became circumcised "Christ will profit you nothing." (Galatians 5:2) Paul added that every man who became circumcised was a

“debtor to keep the whole law” and had become estranged from Christ – “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.” (Galatians 5:6) Even though you can correctly interpret each portion of Scripture (Genesis 17 and Galatians 5) correctly, you won’t understand its worth to your life until you evaluate it for application. Which will it be? Circumcision or uncircumcision?

Look at the Scriptures you’ve interpreted and ask yourself this important question – “does this have any value for people today?” If you don’t find value in what you’ve interpreted, then you need to ask why to make sure there are no holes in your interpretation. If what you’ve interpreted truly has no value for today, then you don’t need to proceed to the application phase of Bible study. However, 40 years of studying God’s Word have taught me that every part of the Bible has value for my life. As Paul wrote, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” All Scripture – not just some of it – all of it.

Since the Bible does have great value for our lives today, I need to seek God’s help to understand its worth to my life and people in my life. Even though circumcision is not something Christians should do today for spiritual purposes, there is great value in circumcision from the time of Abraham to the time of Christ. Knowing that value and the deep spiritual purpose behind it will help us understand God at new depths and increase our appreciation for His wonderful plan for Israel.

Application

The process of application is to take the proper evaluation of correctly interpreted portions of God's Word and apply them to our life. It is never enough to just "know" the Truth. We must "do" the Truth. As Jesus asked the crowds of people that followed Him – "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46) Application is the process of obedience to God. That obedience must follow proper context and right division of the Word of Truth, but it must follow! Bible study without application is a great waste of the breath God has given us. The Church has wasted much breath through the centuries.

Application is the great purpose of Bible study. God inspired the Writing of the Bible so that people would live according to His Truth. As Jesus told Satan – "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'" (Luke 4:4)

Correlation

Correlating Scripture is what we are able to do well after finishing the process of observing, interpreting, evaluating, and applying God's Truth to our lives. Correlation is the process of establishing relationships and connections between and among various portions of Scripture. We learn how to do it properly by seeing how Jesus, Paul, Peter, John and other apostolic writers made correlations from Old Testament passages. It is from the process of correlating Scriptures that "topical" studies form. It is from correlation that we are

able to develop character and theological studies. Knowing that we understand how to “rightly divide the Word of Truth” so that we are using every passage properly during correlation gives us great comfort in knowing we are handling the Truth as God would have us do – “a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15)

Rightly dividing the Word of Truth is not easy. It takes time, effort, prayer, and a spiritual ear to hear what the Spirit says about why He inspired what we read in the Bible. That’s why Paul told Timothy he would be “a worker.” Rightly dividing the Word of Truth takes work, and yields a great harvest of Truth that will change your life and the lives of all who listen to you. Our prayers are with you as you study God’s Word methodically and inductively!

Copyright © 1990-2016 GraceLife Ministries

“Scripture taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.”