

STAGE THREE – OVERARCHING PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

Introduction

During the Bible study process, it is worthwhile for the Bible student to consider four overarching considerations.

The first is that the Bible is God’s inspired word to humankind. The contents of the Bible comprise God’s very words that He intends to be heard and acted upon by human beings.

The second is that God’s Word is understandable for a Christ-follower. Every Christ-follower has the Holy Spirit living inside of them, Which will help them better understand the message in God’s Word.

The third is that life change will occur when a Christ-follower takes action on what God says in His Word.

Finally, the Bible student may want to use a Bible Study Journal to record their journey through God’s Word and encounters with God.

The Bible is God’s Inspired Word to Humankind

One of the most memorable descriptions of divine inspiration of Scripture is in John Piper’s book *A Peculiar Glory*, (John Piper, *A Peculiar Glory*, (2016), Crossway, Wheaton, IL 60187) where on page 69, John Piper describes verbal inspiration of Scripture [italics in the original]:

When we confess our belief that “the infallible Word of God [is] *verbally inspired by God*,” the word “verbally” means that we believe God guided the biblical authors in their selection of the very *words* that they wrote to communicate his divine meaning. This is not identical with dictation, since the biblical authors are themselves selecting the words, under God’s guidance. Though there are rare times when God dictates the very words a prophet is to speak, typically the biblical authors write with their own styles and personalities, which are guided by God.

God’s Word is inspired. Three fundamental passages that teach this principle are:

2 Timothy 3:16–17 (NASB 2020 [emphasis added] - ¹⁶ **All Scripture is inspired by God** and beneficial for teaching, for rebuke, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man *or woman* of God may be fully capable, equipped for every good work.

2 Peter 1:19–21 (NASB 2020) [emphasis added] - ¹⁹ And *so* we have **the prophetic word** *made* more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in

a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. ²⁰ *But* know this first *of all*, that no prophecy of Scripture becomes *a matter of someone's* own interpretation, ²¹ **for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.**

2 Peter 3:15–16 (NASB 2020) [emphasis added] - ¹⁵ and regard the patience of our Lord *as* salvation; just as also **our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you,** ¹⁶ as also in all *his* letters, speaking in them of these things, in which there are some things that are hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Keeping divine inspiration in mind, there is no way that a thinking person can characterize the Bible as a “dead” book. It is alive and always ready to dispense truth. See Hebrews 4:12.

God's Word is Understandable for a Christ-follower

Each writer of Scripture had a message that he intended to convey to his intended audience. For example, 1 Corinthians 1:10–12 (NASB 2020) set out one purpose (i.e., address divisions in the church body) for Paul writing the letter:

¹⁰ Now I urge you, brothers *and sisters*, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. ¹¹ For I have been informed concerning you, my brothers *and sisters*, by Chloe's *people*, that there are quarrels among you. ¹² Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, “I am with Paul,” or “I *am* with Apollos,” or “I *am* with Cephas,” or “I *am* with Christ.”

A text like Psalm 119:130 (NASB 2020) establishes that the writer of Scripture intended for his original audience to understand the message:

¹³⁰ The unfolding of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple.

What that means for the 21st Century Bible student is the writer's message to his audience is understandable. The Bible student should remember that it may take time and effort to bridge the cultural gap and time gap between then and now. Bible study takes work not unlike the way the Bereans compared Paul's gospel message against Scripture per Acts 17:11 (NASB 2020):

¹¹ Now these people were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily *to see* whether these things were so.

Practicing solid Bible study relying on the guidance of the Holy Spirit and using appropriate Bible study tools allows the student to understand the writer's intended message of the passage. Ways to characterize the writer's intended message are "authorial intent" or author-oriented approach. Stein defines the author-oriented approach as:

At the beginning of the twentieth Century the general assumption was that the author was the determiner of the text's message. The text meant what the author of the text consciously willed to convey by the words he or she had written. Texts were understood as a form of communication, and in communication we seek to understand what the author of that communication seeks to convey.

Stein, Robert, The Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach to Hermeneutics, JETS, 44/3 (September 2001) at p. 451.

If a Christ-follower Takes Action, Life Change Will Happen

Adequately understood, the writer's intended message of the passage will influence the lives of God's people in any generation. For example, Psalm 119:9 (NASB 2020) teaches life change:

⁹ How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping *it* according to Your word.

2 Timothy 3:16–17 (NASB 2020) teaches that life change occurs through following God's Word:

¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and beneficial for teaching, for rebuke, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man *or woman* of God may be fully capable, equipped for every good work.

The Bible was not written to any specific person in the 21st Century. Yet, its timeless principles apply to 21st-century human beings, especially Christ-followers.

Knowing about the genuine opportunity for life change should cause every Christ-follower to have an excitement for the Bible like the Psalmist in Psalm 119:72 (NASB 2020):

⁷² The Law of Your mouth is better to me Than thousands of gold and silver *pieces*.

Like the prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 15:16 (NASB 2020):

¹⁶ Your words were found and I ate them, And Your words became a joy to me and the delight of my heart; For I have been called by Your name, LORD God of armies.

They ought to enter Bible study with an eagerness to learn consistent with Psalm 119:33–35 (NASB 2020), which reads:

³³ Teach me, the way of Your statutes, LORD, And I shall comply with it to the end. ³⁴ Give me understanding, so that I may comply with Your Law And keep it with all *my* heart. ³⁵ Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, For I delight in it.

The Bible student should strive to consistently engage the Bible so that they have a steady diet of spiritual food resulting in spiritual growth. 1 Peter 2:2 (NASB 2020) teaches that Bible engagement is necessary for spiritual growth:

² and like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,

Hebrews 5:11–14 (NASB 2020) teaches the same principle:

¹¹ Concerning him we have much to say, and *it is* difficult to explain, since you have become poor listeners. ¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the actual words of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³ For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is unacquainted with the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to distinguish between good and evil.

The Bible Study Journal

A notebook or other journal can function as the student's Bible Study Journal in which they record or memorialize their progress, insights, and other noteworthy takeaways from their study of God's Word. Students can easily personalize their Bible Study Journal to suit themselves or to fit a specific project.

An exemplary page for a Bible Study Journal is on the next page.

Bible Study Journal

Date: _____

Passage: _____

Observations about the Text (e.g., sentences, phrases, words and contexts):

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Takeaways:

Takeaway	How will I apply this takeaway?