

How to Understand the Bible
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A proper and accurate understanding of the Bible is so important that our very salvation hinges on it. Whether we walk in Truth will hinge on our grasp of the Truth. Paul told Timothy: “Take heed unto yourself, and unto the doctrine [proper teachings]; continue in them: for in doing this you shall save both yourself, and them that hear you,” 1Timothy 4:16.

For a variety of reasons some passages create difficulty. Doctrinal problems result if care isn’t taken to rightly divide the Word.

Some Bible students approach the Word in a piecemeal way, yanking verses or parts of verses out of context with damaging and even dangerous results. The story is told of a man who did this very thing while looking for an answer to a dilemma in his life.

Not knowing where or even how to look, he closed his eyes, flipped through his Bible’s pages, and happened to drop his finger down on Matthew 27:5: “Judas went and hanged himself.”

That wasn’t much help so he tried again, this time stopping on Luke 10:37, where Yahshua said, “Go and do likewise.”

He’d try one more time, his finger landing on John 13:27, “That thou doest, do quickly.”

Basic Principle

The Word is given for proper doctrine, correction, and instruction in righteous living, 2Timothy 3:16. Paul also told Timothy, “Study to show yourself approved unto Elohim, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth,” 2Timothy 2:15.

So how can we study Yahweh’s Word and know that we are properly understanding it? Five principles of Bible study will help guide us in getting the truth from each verse, while solving most problems presented by the more difficult passages.

Principle One: Take it at Face Value

The first principle of proper Bible understanding is to take the passage just as it reads. Look first for the literal meaning. A symbolic or deeper sense of the passage will often be evident, especially in combination with other related verses.

When Yahweh commands, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy,” Exodus 20:8, and then explains that we are to work six days and rest the seventh, He means to keep the Sabbath literally by resting from work. He does not mean to remember it by just thinking about the Sabbath or its significance while continuing to labor on the seventh day. The passage would be better rendered, “Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy,” which is how a few versions render

it. This shows that the command is not intended for just a spiritual application, as some teach, but for literal ceasing from labor, a fact made obvious by consulting other translations.

Principle Two: Read the Passage in Context

When faced with a difficult verse, read all the verses surrounding it. Read what comes immediately before and after the passage. Read the entire chapter, if necessary. Often this will reveal the true meaning.

As obvious as this principle is, even many “experts” fail to apply it and end up twisting a passage or missing its meaning entirely. An example of this is Romans 14:5, which has been used to support Sunday worship. “One man esteems one day above another: another esteems every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.”

By reading the entire chapter we can plainly see that Paul is addressing the practices of fasting and vegetarianism, and is not discussing the day of rest.

Principle three: Let Scripture Explain Itself

The biggest mistake of popular worship is a failure to harmonize the Scriptures, a violation that has led to a myriad of contradictory teachings. A verse will never disagree with any other passage in the Word.

In John 10:35 Yahshua said the Scriptures cannot be broken (“broken” is the Greek *luo*, meaning to loosen or dissolve). Paul in 2Timothy 3:16 tells us that ALL Scripture is inspired, meaning it is “Yahweh breathed.” And Yahweh never contradicts Himself, Hebrews 6:18.

We can’t say Paul did away with the law in Galatians 3:13 only to have him upholding it in Romans 7:1, 12.

In the same way we cannot read of the Savior’s plain instruction to the young man, “If you will enter into life, keep the Commandments,” Matthew 19:17, and then turn right around and say he abolished the law at His death, rendering His directive to the young man useless and pointless.

When a particular view of a passage does not seem to hold up in light of other Scriptures that say the opposite, then something is wrong with our understanding of the passage.

Principle Four: Know the Context

You often need to know the reason a passage was written in order to understand it properly; it may also be very helpful to know to whom the passage was written and why.

For example, 1Corinthians 16:2 has been grossly misinterpreted to support worship on the first day of the week. “Upon the first *day* of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as Yahweh has prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.” “Lay by him in store” does not refer to passing an offering plate at a church service on Sunday morning. Rather, Paul is

seeking help for a drought-induced famine situation in Jerusalem. He asks that the brethren in Corinth have their aid ready to give to the Jerusalem brethren on the first day of the week so that he can pick it up when he comes by. “Day” is not in the Greek but is an added word by translators.

No reference to a Sunday worship service is intended or implied. A careful reading of the first 4 verses reveals the truth of the circumstance and will dispel any erroneous conclusions drawn from this passage.

Some believe that Paul taught against observing Sabbaths and Feasts in Galatians 4:8-11: “Howbeit then, when you knew not Elohim, you did service unto them which by nature are no gods. But now, after that you have known Elohim, or rather are known of Elohim, how turn you again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain.”

If we understand that the Galatians were converts from a pagan place called Gaul (an area of old France from which they derived their name), then it is clear that he is telling them to stop going back to their old heathen ways. The “days, and months, and times, and years” he is speaking about is not the Sabbath and Feasts commanded at Sinai, but their old false worship, which is defined as “weak and beggarly,” being without substance and truth. Yahweh’s days are never referred to as weak and beggarly,

but part of His laws that are defined as “holy...and just, and good,” Romans 7:12.

Principle Five: Language and Grammar

Anyone who has studied a foreign language knows that nuances of meaning are often lost in the translation. By returning to the original languages as much as possible, one can come much closer to understanding the passage.

The common interpretation of Romans 10:4 is that Yahshua did away with the law. “For Messiah is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes.” The Greek word “end” is *telos* and means “goal.” Far from being the termination of the law, Yahshua is the very purpose for the law! The law aims at Him. The law transforms us to be like Yahshua when we adhere to it. He said in Matthew 12:50, “For whosoever shall do the will of my father Which is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother.”

Now we can employ principles three and five together. The same word *telos* is found in James 5:11, “...you have heard the patience of Job, and have seen the end [*telos*] of Yahweh, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.”

The same word *telos* is used in both passages. If *telos* means “end,” as in end of the law, then Yahweh has come to an end, too. In truth, *telos* means “goal” in both verses.

Another example of the importance of knowing the original meaning of words is in Matthew 25:46, which has been popularly interpreted to say that the wicked go to an ever-burning hell fire to roast in agony for eternity. “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.”

The word “punishment” is from the Greek *kolasis*, and signifies a “lopping off.” It derives from No. 2849 in ***Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance*** Greek dictionary and means to curtail. Properly interpreted, the verse tells us that the wicked will forever be “cut off,” their lives “curtailed.”

This agrees with 2Thessalonians 1:9, which reads that the wicked “shall be punished with an everlasting destruction from the presence of Yahweh and from the glory of his power.” Destruction” in this verse is the Greek *olethros* and means to destroy, not live forever sizzling in sulfurous flames for an eternity in a world of fiery brimstone.