

## Bible Study Tips

### GAPS TO BRIDGE

The books of the bible were written many centuries ago. For us to understand today what God was communicating the, there are several gaps that need to be bridged: the language gap, the cultural gap, the geographical gap, and the historical gap. Proper interpretation, therefore, takes time and disciplined effort.

1. **Language.** The Bible was originally written Greek Hebrew, and Aramaic. Often, understanding the meaning of a word or phrase in the original language can be the key to correctly interpreting a passage of Scripture.
2. **Culture.** The culture gap can be tricky. Some people try to use cultural differences to explain away the more difficult biblical commands. Realize that Scripture must first be viewed in the context of the culture in which it was written. Without an understanding of first-century Jewish culture, it is difficult to understand the gospels. Acts and the epistles must be read in light of the Greek and Roman cultures.
3. **Geography.** A third gap that needs to be closed is the geography gap. Biblical geography makes the bible come alive. A good bible atlas is an invaluable reference tool that can help you comprehend the geography of the Holy Land.
4. **History.** We must also bridge the history gap. Unlike the scriptures of most other world religions, the bible contains the records of actual historical persons and events. An understanding of Bible history will help us place the people and events in it in their proper historical perspective. A good bible dictionary or Bible encyclopedia is useful here, as are basic historical studies.

### PRINCIPLES TO UNDERSTAND

Four principles should guide us as we interpret the bible: literal, historical, grammatical, and synthesis.

1. **The Literal Principle.** Scripture should be understood in its literal, normal, and natural sense. While the bible does contain figures of speech and symbols, they were intended to convey literal truth. In general, however, the bible speaks in literal terms, and we must allow it to speak for itself.
2. **The Historical Principle.** This means that we interpret a passage in its historical context. We must ask what the text meant to the people to who it was first written. In this way we can develop a proper contextual understanding of the original intent of Scripture.

- 3. The Grammatical Principle.** This requires that we understand the basic grammatical structure of each sentence in the original language. To whom do the pronouns refer? What is the tense of the main verb? You will find that when you ask some simple questions like those, the meaning of the text immediately becomes clearer.
- 4. The Synthesis Principle.** This is what the Reformers call the *analogia scriptura*. It means that the Bible does not contradict itself. If we arrive at an interpretation of a passage that contradicts a truth taught elsewhere in the Scriptures, our interpretation cannot be correct. Scripture must be compared with Scripture to discover its full meaning.

**STEP 3 – Evaluating.** You have been reading and asking the question, “What does the Bible say?” Then you have interpreted, asking the question, “What does the bible mean?” Now it is time to consult others to insure that you have the proper interpretation. Remember, the bible will never contradict itself.

Read Bible introductions, commentaries, and background books which will enrich your thinking through that illumination which God has given to other men and to you through their books. In your evaluation, be a true seeker. Be one who accepts the truth of God’s Work even though it may cause you to change what you always have believed, or cause you to alter your life pattern.