

# “Does the Bible Say That?”

## Introduction

### Objective

Our objective in this class is simple: *to help us read and interpret the Bible correctly through the scrutiny of passages that are commonly misunderstood and/or misapplied.*

### Method

1. We will explore **whether certain popular ideas, quotes and statements are actually found in the Bible** (e.g., “cleanliness is next to godliness”).
2. We will discuss New Testament and Old Testament passages that are **commonly misunderstood or misapplied** (e.g., Jeremiah 29:11, “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope” is often quoted out of context).
3. We will discuss New Testament passages that are **hard to accept** (e.g., Matthew 10:34-37, “I did not come to bring peace, but a sword...”).
4. We will discuss Old Testament passages that **seem to contradict God’s character** (e.g., Psalm 137:9, “Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!”).
5. We will discuss Old Testament stories that are **misused and abused** (Gideon putting out a “fleece of wool,” Judges 6:36-37).
6. We will discuss difficult passages that **students** would like to discuss.
7. In the process of examining these biblical texts, we will review and practice accepted rules of interpretation, so this will be, indirectly, a class on how to read your Bible.
8. We will always do our best to make application before closing the discussion of a particular text, narrative or statement.

### Resources

Besides a host of commentaries and word study volumes, the following books that specifically address Scripture abuses and misunderstandings are useful sources. As always, read with a filter tightly in place and with a keen eye on the text.

**Carson:** *Exegetical Fallacies*, Second Edition, D. A. Carson, Baker Book House, 1996

**Fee & Stuart:** *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 4th Edition, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, Zondervan, 2014

**HSB:** *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, Walter Kaiser, Peter H. Davids, F. F. Bruce, Manfred T. Brauch, Intervarsity Press, 1996

**Anderson:** *Misunderstood Texts of the New Testament*, Sir Robert Anderson, Kregel Publications, 1991

**Stein:** *Difficult Passages in the Epistles*, Robert H. Stein, Baker Book House, 1991

**Achtemeier:** *Preaching Hard Texts of the Old Testament*, E. Achtemeier, Hendrickson Publishers, 1998

**Bargerhuff:** *The Most Misused Stories in the Bible*, Eric Bargerhuff, Bethany House, 2017

**BCOT:** *The IVP Background Commentary: Old Testament*, Walton, Matthews, Chavalas, IVP, 2000

**BCNT:** *The IVP Background Commentary: New Testament*, Craig Keener, IVP, 1993

**Kaiser:** *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New*, Walter Kaiser, Moody Press, 1985

### Greek and Hebrew Word Study Helps

[Popular] **Vines:** *Vines Expository Dictionary of New Testament and Old Testament Words*

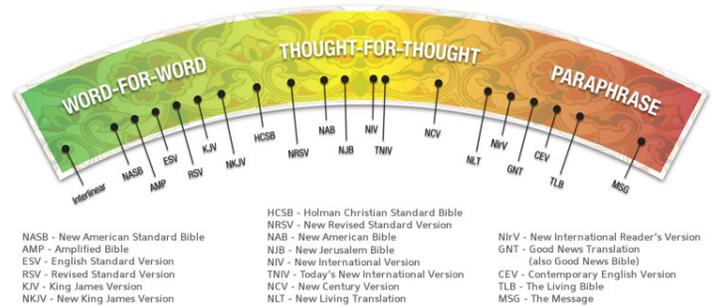
[Advanced] NT — **Bauer:** *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Walter Bauer; OT — **TWOT:** *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, R Laird Harris and Gleason L Archer Jr.

# Basic Bible Study Guidelines & Ground Rules

This is not a Bible study class, *per se*, but good Bible study habits will be required to understand the difficult texts and apply them correctly. Here are a few principles that we'll follow in our study in this class:

1. Did you know only 40 percent of Americans can name more than four of the Ten Commandments, and only half can cite any of the four authors of the Gospels? 12% believe Joan of Arc was Noah's wife (and how many know what an epistle is? A wife of an apostle?). So, first: **carve out some quiet time for serious Bible study.**
2. **Every reader is, at the same time, an interpreter.** This is true for everyone who reads anything (or, for that matter, listens to anything).
3. Your **choice of translation matters** (see below). For serious Bible study, use a translation on the left side of the chart. It's often helpful to consult several translations, especially those from middle-left to left.
4. Our **first task** is to discover the **original intent** of the words of the Bible. "A text can never mean what it could never could have meant to its author or the original audience (see Fee & Stuart). To get at the original meaning, we must "think exegetically." "Exegesis" is "the critical interpretation of a text or portion of a text, especially of the Bible." From *ek* ("out") + *hegeisthai* ("lead"). "Eisegesis" is to read *into* a text, which leads to all kinds of problems. Exegesis requires careful reading and may require expert help (see #5).
5. You do not have to be a Hebrew or Greek (or Aramaic) scholar to understand what the Bible is saying, but the use of **scholarly works** helps avoid misunderstandings and misapplications. There are many study aids available today that will help you understand the meaning of the text in its original language.
6. "The Bible has eternal relevance and speaks to all humankind, in every age and in every culture. However, **the Bible consists of God's word in human words** and so each document is conditioned by the language, time and culture in which it was originally written. Interpretation of the Bible is demanded by the 'tension' that exists between its eternal relevance and its historical particularity" (*Fee & Stuart*, p. 21).
7. Pay attention to the **nature of the communication** – the literary form (genre): law, poetry, psalm, proverb, narrative, prophecy, drama, biographical sketches, letters, sermons, etc.
8. In the letters, **think paragraphs!** Verse-by-verse studies can lead to misunderstanding when isolated from their contexts. And remember that the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke & John) exist in two time-frames: the time when the book was written (e.g., Matthew, c. 60 AD) and the time of the original words or action that is being recorded (mostly, 27-30 AD). The actions of Jesus, for example, were carried out under the law but the gospel was written to people who were no longer under the law. The book of Revelation is unique: it's primarily an "apocalyptic" (unveiling) writing or prophecy of things to come in the future. Much of the book is written in a kind of "code," using numerous figures of speech and symbols (several OT books use a similar approach, at least in some portion of the book).
9. In a study of any text, think **context, context, context** (immediate context [the text before and after] and literary, historical, cultural, book, and chapter context).
10. Beware of the **word study fallacy**. An argument from the origin of a word is often fallacious because meanings of words change, sometime long after the word came into play. The same is true of the use of compound Greek words. The meaning is not, necessarily, derived from the meaning of the two or more words that form the single Greek word. We can see this in English: when we describe a "pineapple" we do not refer to an apple growing on a pine tree (see Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*).
11. In application, we must **avoid the tendency to extend a text beyond its original borders** (see #4). For example, I Cor. 6:19-20 says to "glorify God in your body." Some have applied this to smoking or taking drugs (abusing your body). But the original context is about sexual immorality. If we extend this to smoking, we are no longer observing the context; and, where do we draw the line? Does it mean we shouldn't engage in dangerous activities (e.g., rock climbing) or eat red meat or too much salt? Now, we've gone beyond the text and into endless opinions (and "pooled ignorance").

## Type of Bible Translations



## "Paradox"

A common problem in Bible study is a failure to recognize the many paradoxical statements and concepts in Scripture. A paradox is "a statement or proposition that seems self-contradictory or absurd but in reality expresses the truth." We have to sort these out to arrive at truth but doing the work leaves us with a deeper understanding of the truth. You know, *"the truth is in the tension."*

Here are just a few paradoxical concepts we find in Scripture: one God in three; Christ as God and Christ as man; salvation is by grace, but faith without works is dead; judge not, but don't cast your pearls before swine.

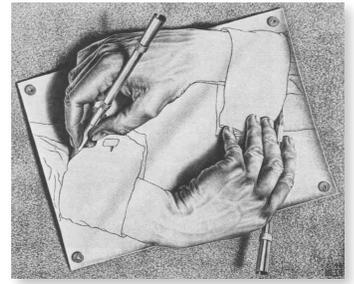
The prophets used paradox: "I have been found by those who did not seek me" (Isaiah 65:1, quoted by Paul in Romans

10:20). Many of Jesus' statements are paradoxical. For example he says in Matthew 10:39, "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses His life for My sake will find it." Paul said, "when I am weak, then I am strong" (II Cor. 12:10). The book of Proverbs is full of paradoxes (e.g., 26:4, "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself" and 26:5, "Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes").

Some biblical concepts seem to be paradoxes but are not. For example, the terms "predestination and free will" is not a paradox. "Predestination," in the New Testament, is never individual, but corporate. We'll cover that in more depth later in the quarter.

An example of a particularly sharp paradox is the many references to being saved by grace (or faith) while under the "law of Christ" (I Corinthians 9:21). There must be a balance in our understanding of law and grace. If I rely on the law of God, I will discount the place of God's grace and may only serve God out of fear of the consequences that the law requires. But if I only focus on grace, I may not fear the consequences of sin at all. For example, the Corinthians were saved by grace, but seemed to wink at sin (see I Corinthians 5).

Many church divisions can be traced to a misunderstanding of paradox. We have a tendency to overemphasize one side of the question at the expense of the other. We can only understand a biblical statement if we look at all the Bible has to say on the topic and then base our conclusions on a common sense application of those passages.



### More Paradoxes

- We see unseen things.
- We conquer by yielding.
- We find rest under a yoke.
- We reign by serving.
- We are made great by becoming small.
- We are exalted when we are humble.
- We become wise by being fools for Christ's sake.
- We are made free by becoming bondservants.
- We gain strength when we are weak.
- We triumph through defeat.
- We find victory by glorying in our infirmities.
- We live by dying.

### Can you think of some others?

# Does the Bible Say That?

## Lesson 1: Perplexing Parables

As you know, Jesus often used parables to teach about the kingdom, and most of the parables are easy to understand; *or are they??*

A parable (*parabole*) is simply a story, drawn from real life, that is used to illuminate a spiritual truth. For example, Jesus' first named parable is recorded in Matthew 13:44.

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Simple, right? *Yes and no.* The meaning is clear enough: the kingdom is a valuable "possession"; it's a treasure! The next parable bears this out: the kingdom is like a pearl of *great value*.

In both cases, the man sells "all that he has" to buy the land/pearl. Easy, right? Again, *yes and no.* It's easy to understand the point, but is it easy to apply? Who, really, "has" the kingdom of heaven. *Do I??*

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says of those who are poor in spirit, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." It says the same thing about those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

In the same book, we read the account of a rich young man who comes to Jesus and asks, "what must I do to have eternal life?" Jesus says, "sell all you have, give to the poor and follow me." (Mt. 19:16ff.).

Who *really* possesses this great treasure called the kingdom of heaven? It's one thing to read these parables and say, "I got it; it means the kingdom is really, really valuable." It's another thing, isn't it, to consider where that knowledge leads in your own life? Who will get the real message behind this "simple" parable? If you say, the "poor in spirit" then you must do some self-examination: am *I* poor in spirit? And what is Jesus demanding of me if I accept the premise that the kingdom is so great that I should sell everything to get it? Would he tell me to do what he told the RYR to do?

All of those questions arise from what many would consider to be two of the simplest parables Jesus told. And that doesn't even consider the ethical issues that are lying beneath the surface of these parables. For example, to whom does this field belong? Does the man in the parable have a right to conceal his discovery from the owner of the land on which he found this treasure?

Most likely, these details are incidental, but don't dismiss them too quickly. There may be an additional message there. True disciples, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, will read carefully to make sure they are not missing anything.

Read: Matthew 13:10-17 Mark 4:10-12, 34; Luke 8:9-10

### Questions

1. How do you think people reacted to these stories when they first heard them?
2. How would you describe the difference between the attitude of the crowd and the attitude of the disciples?
3. What is the *purpose* of parables, according to Jesus?

### Parable Types

Type	Description	Expression
Code	Allegorical. "Insiders" are able to understand the meaning of the terms describing the kingdom. They confirm what a reader already knows, clarify what he knows and certifies that he is a believer.	"Yes, I know that."
Vessel	Simile. The parable is a vessel or container for a theological or doctrinal truth. "The kingdom is like. . ." We must figure out in what way the kingdom is like the thing used to describe it (e.g., a "treasure," "mustard seed," "leaven," etc.).	"Aha, now I get it!"
Object	Metaphor. Produces a shock to the senses, presents the concept in a new way not seen before.	"Wow, I've never seen that before!"

## Questions

1. Who do you think is the main audience of this parable?
2. Identify the characters and items in the parable; who do they represent?
3. What is the main point of this parable?
4. How would categorize it: code, vessel, or object? (See Parable Types on page 4)
5. How do we apply the parable?

## The Parable of the Tares (Weeds, ESV)

**Matthew 13:24-30**

He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, <sup>25</sup> but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. <sup>26</sup> So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. <sup>27</sup> And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?’ <sup>28</sup> He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ So the servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ <sup>29</sup> But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. <sup>30</sup> Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, “Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.”’”

## Questions

1. Is this Parable referring to the world in general or the Church? Why or why not?
2. How do we remain a "Wheat" in the field?
3. How do I identify a "Tare"? (v.41)
4. How are we to deal with a "Tare"? What do I personally do when I know there is a "Tare" influencing my life?
5. What is my identity as a "Wheat"?
6. What does this tell us about the evil influences in our lives? Where do they come from?

## The Parable of the Tares (Weeds, ESV) Explained Matthew 13:36-43

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." <sup>37</sup> He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup> The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, <sup>39</sup> and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. <sup>40</sup> Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. <sup>41</sup> The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, <sup>42</sup> and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>43</sup> Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.