

# An Introduction to Biblical Interpretation

By Dwight Gingrich – Originally created June, 2011

## Qualities of a Good Bible Student:

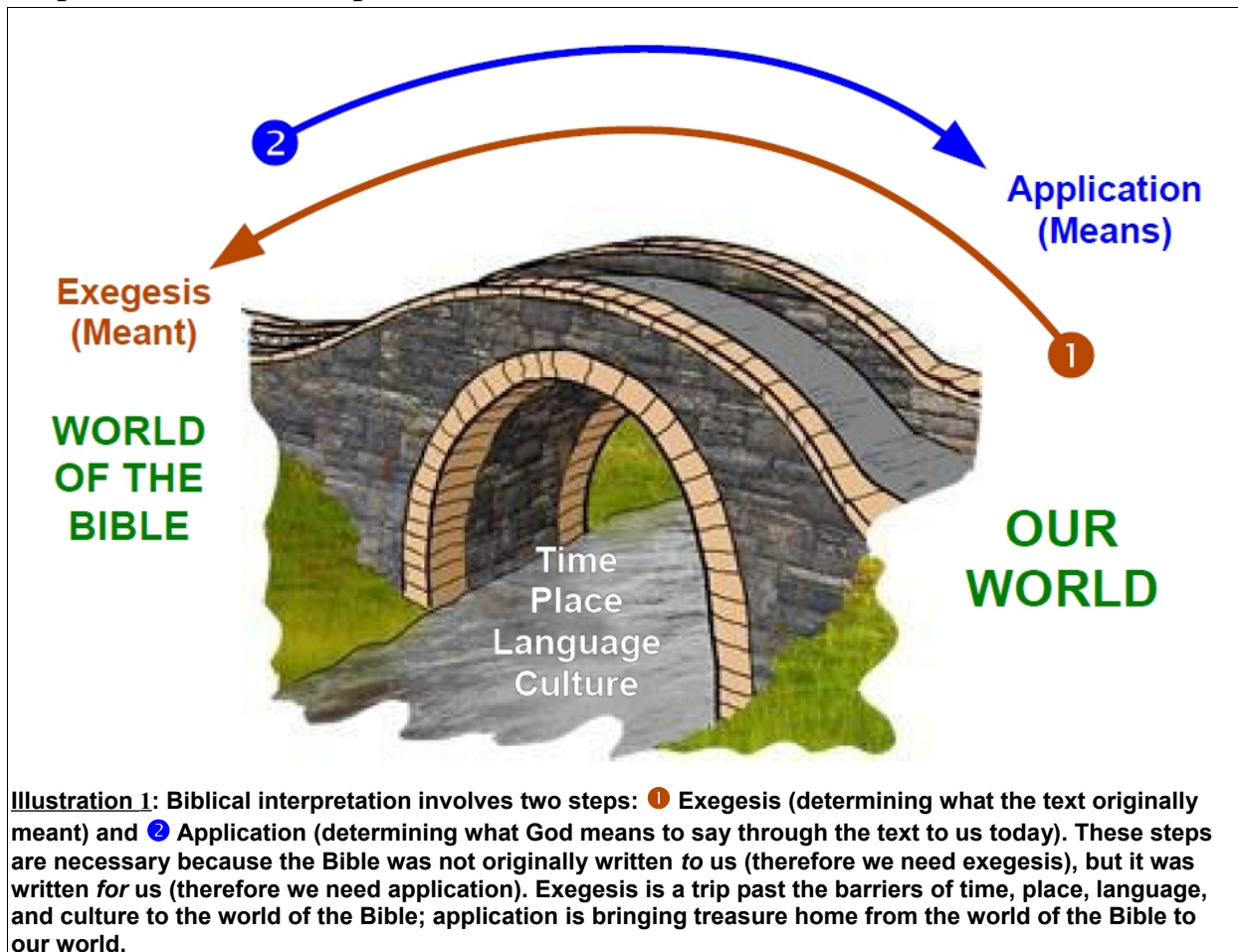
### 1. Spiritual Qualities:

- ⤴ Filled with the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:6-16)
- ⤴ Willing to obey (John 7:17; 8:31-32; Psalm 119:100)
- ⤴ Spiritually hungry (1 Peter 2:2)
- ⤴ Prayerful (Psalm 119:18; James 1:5)
- ⤴ Practiced as a spiritual listener; ready for “meat” (Hebrews 5:11-14)

### 2. Mental Skills and Attitudes:

- ⤴ A good reader: Howard Hendricks says our culture has lost the art of reading. In *Living by the Book* (pgs. 64-70) he suggests:
  1. Learn to read better and faster. (See *How to Read a Book* by Mortimer J. Adler, *How to Read Better and Faster* by Normal Lewis, etc.)
  2. Learn to read as for the first time. (Try a new translation.)
  3. Read the Bible as a love letter. (Eagerly; repeatedly; pondering every exact shade of meaning; because you love and want to know the Author.)
- ⤴ Observant: Renowned 19<sup>th</sup>-century naturalist Louis Agassiz would leave a dead fish in front of a new student for up to 2 weeks, with the instructions, “Observe this specimen, and write down everything you see” (Hendricks, pg. 48).
- ⤴ Ready to listen: Let the Bible do the talking. Don't bring an agenda or try to make it say something; just listen and let it direct the conversation!

## Steps of Biblical Interpretation:



**Illustration 1:** Biblical interpretation involves two steps: ① Exegesis (determining what the text originally meant) and ② Application (determining what God means to say through the text to us today). These steps are necessary because the Bible was not originally written to us (therefore we need exegesis), but it was written *for* us (therefore we need application). Exegesis is a trip past the barriers of time, place, language, and culture to the world of the Bible; application is bringing treasure home from the world of the Bible to our world.

# 1 Exegesis: What the text *meant*

I. **Key question:** “What was the inspired author's intended meaning for the original audience?”

II. **Definition:** Exegesis is drawing the meaning “out of” the text. (It is the opposite of eisegesis, which is reading your own meaning “into” the text.) Exegesis is listening to the Bible, thinking God's thoughts after Him. It requires hard work and humility, and a willingness to put aside questions like “What's in it for me?” or “What does the Bible say about X (whatever topic I'm interested in at the moment)?” In exegesis we take a trip back to another time, place, language, and culture, and imagine we are original audience (e.g. the Israelites in Jerusalem or the church in Rome), trying to understand what the author is writing to us.

III. **Why it is important:** Without exegesis we are basing our lives on our own ideas rather than on God's Word. By improper or hurried exegesis, cults misuse the Bible to support all sorts of heretical positions. But “a text cannot mean what it never meant” (Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All its Worth*, pg. 26). Since the Bible was not written *to* us (but for us), we must determine what it was intended to mean to its original audience, then base all our teaching and preaching on that.

Our tendency is to skip exegesis and go straight to application—focusing on heart-warming devotional thoughts, topical teaching inspired by our own individual and cultural pet topics, and preaching of the parts of the Bible that appear easiest to understand, such as the lists of commands. As a result, some of our devotional reflections, teaching, and preaching sound surprisingly similar to something you could perhaps hear in a Jewish synagogue or a Muslim mosque—full of encouraging thoughts, wise advice, and good morals, but lacking the uniquely life-giving essence of the gospel. Thus we use the Bible to reinforce what we already assume is true, rather than allowing the Spirit to use it as a sword to change our understandings, beliefs, and actions.

IV. **How to do it:** Here are some elements of good biblical exegesis: A) Read the passage; B) Get the big picture—the literary form and historical context; C) Examine the literary context D) Outline the flow of thought of the passage, identifying its main idea or purpose; E) Study the details—key words and important themes; F) Compare your conclusions with the wider biblical context; G) Consult commentaries; and H) Read it again!

## A. Read the Passage

1. Read it again! And again—in several translations.
2. Read the entire book in which the passage is found. With most books we wouldn't think of dropping into the middle somewhere and trying to understand it. Why do we do that with the Bible?
3. Observe as you read. Barrage the text with questions! Ask the 5 W's: who, what, where, when, why? Collect data for interpretation.

## B. Get the Big Picture

### 1. Identify the Literary Form (Genre):

- a) Definition: Genre is the kind of literature used by the author. Modern genres include news article, owner's manual, novel, and textbook.
- b) Why it matters: When you identify the genre, you learn how the author intended his text to be used. If you use a novel as an owner's manual, you are in trouble! If you use the book of Daniel as a biology textbook, you will be confused. If you use the book of Joshua as a model for how Christians should treat their enemies...
- c) Literary genres in the Bible include:

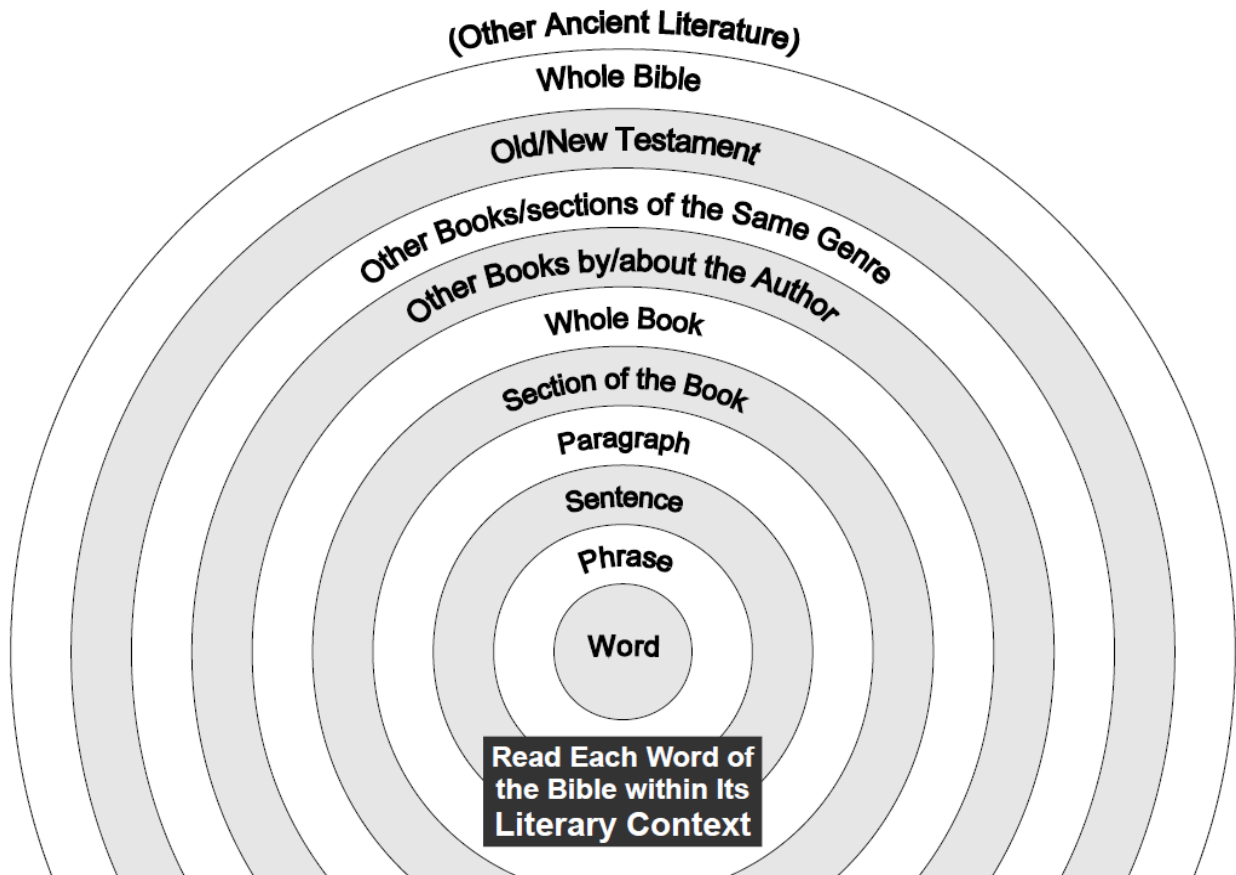
<b>Common Biblical Literary Genres</b>		
<b>Genre</b>	<b>Some Characteristics</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Law Code	Given to the nation of Israel; must be interpreted and applied in light of Christ's fulfillment of the Law.	Exodus 20-23; 25-40; Leviticus 1-27; Numbers 18-19; Deuteronomy 12-26.
Narrative	Stories and historical accounts; must be read as parts of God's "big story" of the entire Bible; examples must be compared with clear moral teachings.	Much of Genesis-Ezra; the gospels; Acts. (The gospels can be called a separate genre.)
Poetry	Intended to be spoken or sung; full of emotional imagery; must consider who is "speaking" when interpreting.	Psalms, Song of Solomon, much of Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the prophets.
Wisdom	Proverbs, riddles, admonitions, allegories, dialogues, and poems; must consider who is "speaking"; proverbs are not promises or commands.	Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, parts of Psalms.
Prophecy	Authoritative preaching and prediction; given with a specific audience, time, place, and purpose; must read alongside historical books.	Most of Isaiah-Malachi; Matthew 24 (and parallels).
Apocalyptic	Dramatic and highly symbolic; full of dreams, visions and revelations; must "stress the theological and note the predictive with humility" (Osborne).	Revelation, parts of Daniel, Zechariah and other prophets.
Parable	Brief story using illustrating a moral; an expanded proverb or riddle; must note historical and literary settings to determine intended meaning.	2 Samuel 12:1-6; a third of Jesus' teaching in the first 3 gospels!
Epistle	Letter to an individual, a church, or churches; full of reasoned arguments and personal exhortations; includes principles and commands for Christians.	Romans-Jude (written by Paul, James, Peter, John, and Jude; author uncertain—Hebrews).

## 2. Establish the Historical Context:

- a) Why it matters: History is His-Story. God sovereignly decided the places, times, and cultures in which He would reveal His written Word. We must study His Word within the context of His Story in order to understand the Bible.
- b) Two levels of historical context:
  - i . General: The geography, animals and plants, politics, economics, military situation, cultural practices, and religious customs of the time period. These will assist you with general understanding and interpreting difficult passages.
  - ii . Specific: The circumstances of the specific Bible book you are studying: its date, location, author, and audience. These will help you determine the historical purposes of the book and clarify problem passages.

- c) Tools for discovering historical context:
  - i . The Bible: Mine the book you are studying for specific historical data! Read the whole Bible to learn to think like an ancient Jew.
  - ii . Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias: these contain topical historical articles and also introductions to each book of the Bible.
  - iii . Commentaries: for book-specific historical information.
  - iv . Bible background commentaries: for more detailed historical study.
  - v . Biographical studies of Bible characters: Abraham, Moses, David, Paul, etc.
  - vi . Bible maps and atlases: You can fit ancient Israel into Iowa nearly 8 times!

### C. Examine the Immediate Literary Context



**Illustration 2:** Context is king! A careful reading of the context of a passage will resolve most important interpretive problems.

1. Read as much of the surrounding text as possible.
  - a) Begin with the confusing word or passage and work your way outward toward the rest of the Bible, going at least as far as the whole book.
  - b) See how the passage fits into the progress of thought of the whole book. You could:
    - i . Read, scan, or listen to the entire book, if you have time.
    - ii . Create a basic outline of the entire book, if you have even more time.
    - iii . Consult an outline of the book provided in a study Bible, Bible dictionary, or commentary, if you are short on time.

## D. Outline the Progress of Thought within the Passage

1. Analyze the structure of sentences, the basic units of thought:
  - a) Look for the **core idea** of each sentence—the main verb (word of action or being), the subject (who or what does the acting or being), and the object (answers the questions “who/what?” or “for/to whom/what?”).
  - b) Look for **supporting** words, phrases and clauses.
  - c) Be especially aware of **connectives**: and, but, for, therefore, because, so that, then, until, although, while, where, etc.
  - d) Example: The **core** of Romans 12:1 is “I urge you... to present your bodies a... sacrifice” (NASB). All the rest is **support** material that builds on this core idea, and a **connective** (“therefore”) that links the core idea to what came before.  
*(Detailed breakdown: I urge [subject + verb] you [answers “I urge who?”] to present your bodies... a sacrifice [answers “I urge you to what?”].)*
2. Analyze how sentences fit together to form paragraphs, and how paragraphs fit together to form larger sections. Common literary and logical structures include:
  - a) **cause and effect**: Romans 1:21-31 is tied together by cause (mankind rejects God) and a series of effects (God “gave them over” to sins).
  - b) **comparison or contrast**: Romans 8:1-17 is tied together by the theme of contrasting the flesh with the Spirit.
  - c) **repetition of concepts or words**: Romans 7 is tied together by the word “law”; Romans 8:18-30 by the words “groan” and “glory”; Romans 12:1-15:13 by words related to “thinking” or “mind.”
  - d) **parallel items**: Romans 16:1-16 is a series of greetings.
  - e) **imagery**: Romans 17-24 is a sustained metaphor about olive branches.
  - f) **chiasmus** (repetition in reverse order; can be on small scale or as large as a book):
    - A “To those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life;
    - B but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.
    - B' There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek,
    - A but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek” (Romans 2:7-10, ESV).
  - g) **idea/event followed by its explanation**: “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities” is explained in the following 7 verses (Romans 13:1, ESV).
  - h) **question and answer**: “What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! For...” (beginning of a paragraph in Romans 9:14-18, ESV).
  - i) **dialogue**: Paul carries on an imaginary dialogue with an opponent in Romans 3:1-8.
  - j) **climax**: The end of Romans 8 is a crescendo of excitement that is also a thematic climax, the end of a large section of the book.
  - k) **hinge/turning point**: “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have...” summarizes the previous chapters and points forward (Romans 5:1).
  - l) **change of location or characters**: In Matthew 24 Jesus has a series of three parallel dialogues, each with different opponents, starting at verses 15, 23, and 34.

3. Give each paragraph a title or a summary sentence.
4. Give each section a title or a summary sentence.
5. Give your passage a title that summarizes its main idea or purpose.

## E. Study the Details

### 1. Research key words.

a) Key words include: repeated words, difficult words, theological terms, and words translated differently in different translations.

#### b) **Steps for basic word studies:**

1. Compare multiple English translations.
2. Use word study tools (see below) to find possible definitions.
3. Choose which definition(s) fits best, based on:
  - ▲ The context of the word in your verse.
  - ▲ Other verses that use the same Greek or Hebrew word in a similar way.

#### c) Some word study tools:

- i . Exhaustive concordances, such as *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. 1) Look up the English word, 2) find the listing for the verse you are studying, 3) note the number of the Hebrew or Greek word beside your verse, and 4) look up that number in the dictionary in the back of the concordance.
- ii . Word study books, such as *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary*, *Vincent's Word Studies*, or, for a more up-to-date example, *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary*.
- iii . Bible software or online programs. I use [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com) as a general concordance and [www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org) for word study. Both sites have advantages over book tools. For example, 1) they both allow you to search by phrase as well as by word, and 2) Blue Letter Bible allows you to do a "reverse search," giving you a list of all the Bible verses in which a particular Hebrew or Greek word is used. This way you can compare for yourself the range of different ways in which one word can be used, and find other verses in which the word is used similarly to how it is used in the verse you are studying. This can be just as helpful as reading a dictionary definition. Another very helpful site is [www.netbible.org](http://www.netbible.org).
- iv . Commentaries: A expository commentary on the book you are studying will usually discuss the meanings of important words, and will do so in context.

#### d) Remember these facts about words and their meanings:

- i . Words generally have a range of possible meanings, not one all-encompassing meaning.
- ii . Words normally have only one meaning in any particular literary context, unless a pun is intended.
- iii . The meanings of words change over time, so:
  - ▲ Etymology (word origins and roots) is not a reliable guide to meaning. (E.g. "September" contains the prefix "sept/seven," but is no longer the seventh month.)
  - ▲ Modern words which come from an ancient word are not reliable clues to the meanings of that ancient word. (E.g. "dynamite" comes from the Greek word "dunamis/power," which is used in Romans 1:16 to describe the gospel, but the gospel is not destructively explosive like dynamite.)

- iv . **The meaning of a word is determined by** 1) the range of possible meanings for which that word is used by people at that time, and 2) the specific context, which usually narrows those possible meanings down to one.
- v . It is hard to do word studies well; don't build a whole interpretation on the meaning of one difficult Hebrew or Greek word. Certainly don't build an interpretation on the etymology or range of meanings of an English word in your translation!

2. Analyze important themes: Consider key theological themes or terms in your passage and compare with parallel passages, especially by the same author. (E.g. Galatians shares many themes with Romans 1-8—Law, Spirit, flesh, righteousness through faith, children of Abraham—and helps us understand Romans.)

## **F. Compare Your Conclusions with the Wider Biblical Literary Context**

1. This continues the process begun in point C) above (see Illustration 2), going beyond the book to the rest of the Bible.
2. Compare your passage with:
  - a) Other books written by the author (e.g. read Galatians alongside Romans).
  - b) Other books describing the life of the author (e.g. read Acts alongside Romans).
  - c) Other books/passages of the same genre (e.g. read Peter's letters alongside Romans).
  - d) The rest of the Old/New Testament (e.g. compare Romans with Jesus' teachings).
  - e) The rest of the Bible (e.g. compare Paul's and Moses's statements about the Law).
  - f) (To give wider historical context and greater clarity about literary forms and word usage, you may read beyond the Bible. E.g., read the 1<sup>st</sup>-century letter of Clement of Rome alongside Romans to meet a later leader of that church. *However, never let extra-biblical literature lead you to conclusions that contradict Scripture!*)

## **G. Consult Commentaries**

### 1. Why read commentaries?

- a) In the words of William Mounce: "The best exegesis is begun with you and your Bible. I cannot emphasize this enough. Read the passage over and over... Pray that the Holy Spirit will show you things you normally would miss. This is the best kind of Bible study, and certainly the most rewarding... However, you must not stop here. What if you are wrong?... This is where commentaries come in.... It is a dangerous thing to say that you understood the passage correctly and all the people who have studied the passage for years totally missed its meaning... Certainly there are commentaries from which I as a pastor want to protect my congregation... But don't think of a commentary as a book. Think of it as a chance to listen to a person who probably has substantially more formal training and experience than you have... When you read a commentary, it will provide checks and balances against your possible mistakes. If you read more than one commentary, they provide checks and balances against each other as well. I am not saying that the commentary is automatically right... But commentaries do more than provide checks and balances. They can answer questions that a reading of the text can never provide or ask questions that you may never think of asking" (*Greek for the Rest of Us: Mastering Bible Study Without Mastering Biblical Languages*, Zondervan, 2003, pgs. 237-48)
- b) To say "I would never read any commentary" is like saying "I would never listen to any preacher." God calls us to maturity, which occurs as we practice discerning good from evil (Hebrews 5:14). Read with care and prayer, and ask your spiritual leaders to help you discern truth.

### 2. Which commentaries?

- a) The options can be overwhelming at first! Ask a Bible scholar friend for advice about good authors or publishers.

- b) Unfortunately, there are few by conservative Mennonites, and even fewer that do detailed exegetical work. Check with Mennonite publishers—or write one! ☺
- c) Evangelical commentaries are sometimes described as devotional, pastoral, exegetical, or technical:
  - i . Technical commentaries are designed for those with knowledge of Hebrew and Greek and will bore most of us to tears.
  - ii . Devotional and pastoral commentaries are helpful for personal growth or for teaching outlines, illustrations, and applications.
  - iii . Exegetical (or semi-technical) commentaries usually focus on exegesis rather than application. They are usually best for serious attempts by non-experts to learn what the Bible *meant*.
- d) When choosing commentaries I consult, among other places:
  - i . [www.bestcommentaries.com](http://www.bestcommentaries.com) This site summarizes commentary ratings from many evangelical sources and leads you to individual reviews of a wide variety of commentaries. Good for learning what's available and popular.
  - ii . [www.lestourgeon.us/product/CommentaryBasicReferenceSet.pdf](http://www.lestourgeon.us/product/CommentaryBasicReferenceSet.pdf) This is a more limited list of semi-technical expository commentaries, compiled by a conservative evangelical. He also helpfully introduces the main commentary series produced by evangelical publishers. I own several from his list. None are perfect; all are very helpful! [Note: This site is now unavailable. See [www.dwightgingrich.com](http://www.dwightgingrich.com) for updated commentary advice.]
  - iii . [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) Reviews on this site often give a good sense of the theological slant of a commentary and also indicate which may be too technical or not detailed enough for my needs.

#### H. Read it again!

1. Read it again and again...
2. On your knees, asking for ability to understand and willingness to apply...
3. Then trust and obey...
4. Which will lead to ever-greater understanding and freedom, until you have more insight than all your teachers and understand more than the aged! (John 8:31-32; Psalm 119:97-104)

## ② Application: What the text *means*

I. **Key Question:** “What does God mean to say through this inspired text to us today?”

II. **Definition:** Application is 1) taking what the passage meant and, based on that, 2) seeing what it means today, then 3) believing and obeying. In application we take a trip home from the world of the Bible to our world. We take what the biblical text originally meant and bring it forward to our time, place, language, and culture. Under the Holy Spirit's guidance, we determine in what way the text is relevant to us today and then let it authoritatively rule our lives.

III. **Why it is important:** Without application we are not “doers of the word”, but “merely hearers who delude themselves” (James 1:22, NASB). No one is saved by mere knowledge; rather, increased knowledge means increased accountability, for “whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin” (James 4:17, ESV). *In fact, without obedient application, we will not have ability to properly understand God's Word (John 8:31-32).*

A Bible student who does exegesis without application is like a boyfriend who becomes an expert wedding planner but never proposes to his girlfriend; like a farmer who attends every



agricultural training conference around but never cares for his land; or like a pilot who, while in flight, repeatedly rehearses landing procedures with his crew, but never begins landing the plane. Exegesis without application is pointless and dangerous!

Our tendency is to avoid application to ourselves, but to apply Scripture instead to others. Sometimes we are so eager to apply to others that we do not do careful exegesis first, resulting in imbalanced or harsh application. Many of us know a lot of Bible facts, but do we understand how the parts of the Bible—such as Old Testament (OT) Law, the teachings of Jesus, and the letters to the New Testament (NT) churches—fit together into a message from God for us today? Over-eager or careless application can be as dangerous as none at all.

**IV. How to do it:** Here are some elements of good biblical application. *Please compare these principles with God's Word, asking the Holy Spirit to help you discern truth and error!*

#### **A. General Application Tips**

1. Pray and rely on the Holy Spirit: The Bible is not merely a textbook or a collection of rules written *to us* that we can understand and apply by human wisdom. Rather, it is an inspired collection of many forms of literature addressed to many different people, yet written *for us*—all designed to reveal God, lead us to salvation, and equip us for good works (2 Timothy 2:14-17). No set of principles will lead you infallibly to correct applications; only the Holy Spirit can do this, working in each specific believer and church in each specific circumstance.
2. Remember *all* Scripture has some profitable application: 3 Timothy 3:16-17
3. Ask 12 simple questions to get started:
  - a) Is there an example for me to follow?
  - b) Is there a command to obey?
  - c) Is there a sin to avoid?
  - d) Is there a theological error to avoid?
  - e) Is there a promise to claim?
  - f) Is there a condition to meet?
  - g) Is there a prayer to repeat?
  - h) Is there a sin to confess?
  - i) Is there a cause for praise or thanksgiving?
  - j) Is there a passage to memorize?
  - k) Is there a challenge to put into action?
  - l) Is there something to share with others?

(adapted and expanded from Howard Hendricks, *Living By the Book*, pgs. 304-307)

#### **B. Important Application Dos and Don'ts**

1. Do learn how to apply the Bible from the Bible itself:
  - a) *Observe how Jesus and NT authors applied the OT:* For example:
    - i . Jesus often affirmed or adapted OT teachings. E.g. Matthew 5:17-48; 12:1-8; 15:1-9; 18:16; 19:1-9, 16-22; 22:34-40.
    - ii . Paul often drew principles for action from OT theological truths or events: E.g. Romans 12:19; 14:10-13; 15:2-4; 1 Corinthians 6:15-18; 10:25-26; 11:7-10; 14:21-25; 2 Corinthians 9:8-11; Ephesians 5:31.
    - iii . Paul explicitly affirmed or adapted OT commands at least 12 times: Acts 23:5; Romans 12:20; 13:8-10; 1 Corinthians 5:13; 9:8-10; 2 Corinthians 6:14—7:1; 10:17; 13:1; Galatians 5:13-15; Ephesians 4:25-26; 6:1-3; 1 Timothy 5:17-18.
    - iv . Paul said OT records were written for our instruction and example: Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; compare Hebrews 6:12; 12:1.

- b) *Observe how NT authors applied Jesus' example and teachings:* E.g. Acts 20:35; Romans 15:3-8; Ephesians 4:32—5:2; Philippians 2:5; 1 Corinthians 11:23-27.
- c) *Observe how NT authors claimed authority for their example and teachings:* E.g. 1 Corinthians 4:16; 7:10 (compare 7:12, 25); 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 4:2; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-9; 1 Timothy 6:13-14; compare Hebrews 13:7.
- d) *Also observe:* how the OT interprets itself (e.g. all Psalm 78 in context of vs. 1-8); how prophetic passages are understood by NT authors; any other ways the Bible interprets and applies itself to the life of God's people.

2. Don't commit common application errors. Here are ten:

- a) *Don't apply every genre (kind of literature) the same way.* For example:
  - i . Historical narratives tell *what was done*, not necessarily *what should be done*.
  - ii . Proverbs are not promises or commands.
  - iii . Wisdom literature often includes speakers who portray ungodly perspectives.
  - iv . Parables often have one main point; details may be irrelevant for application.
- b) *Don't treat WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) as a sufficient guide.* Jesus is God; you are not. Perhaps you don't have authority to cleanse the temple? Or pray John 17:24?
- c) *Don't treat historical accounts or examples as commands;* let Scriptural commands and principles guide our imitation. For example, don't assume we must imitate the apostles in every detail. Must we have “all things common” (Acts 2:44)?
- d) *Don't quickly assume NT commands or examples are only relevant for 1<sup>st</sup>-century culture.* Might having “all things common” sometimes reduce greed and improve our witness?
- e) *Don't argue from silence alone.* The NT never mentions the use of songbooks, 4-part harmony, or musical instruments in church; but that doesn't make them wrong. The NT never mentions gambling; but that doesn't make it right.
- f) *Don't use commands given to one party in a relationship as teaching for the other party.* “Servants, be subject to your masters... [even] to the unjust” (1 Peter 2:18, ESV) was not written to justify masters abusing slaves; “masters... stop your threatening” (Ephesians 6:9, ESV) was not written to justify slaves overthrowing abusive masters.
- g) *Don't use one party's voluntary giving up of rights as justification for the other party's neglect of duty.* “The Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:14, ESV) is still a command despite Paul's choice to preach voluntarily.
- h) *Don't focus only on commands;* apply the whole gospel message.
  - i) *Don't confuse indicatives with imperatives (indicatives = statements of fact, such as promises or things God says he has done; imperatives = commands).* “The fruit of the Spirit is love...” (Galatians 5:22-23) is not a command, but a fact, a promise! The command is “Walk by the Spirit” (vs. 16a), and it comes with the promise “and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (vs. 16b), because the Spirit will bear His fruit through you (vs. 22-23). That's a fact, not a command!
  - j) *Don't teach commands without rooting them in indicatives.* The Bible never tells us *what to do* without saying *what God has already done, is doing, or will do*. Never teach what *should be* without telling the good news about *what already is*, thanks to God through Jesus! The OT Law was not given until *after* God had already redeemed His people and promised them the land of Canaan; Paul's

letters almost always begin with indicatives (e.g. Ephesians 1-3) and end with imperatives (e.g. Ephesians 4-6). Teach first things first!

### C. Specific Guidelines for Applying NT Teachings:

1. Consider that each teaching can be applied on two levels: 1) the level of the surface command, where we treat the teaching as universal, as if it had been written directly to us today, and **2) the level of the underlying principle**, where we realize the surface teaching is not for us to obey literally, but that it is rooted in a *principle* that God still expects us to obey today, in our own life contexts.

**How do we know on which level to apply a teaching?** This is difficult; Conservative Anabaptists tend to apply most teachings at the level of the surface command (sometimes forgetting underlying principles); liberal churches tend to apply most teachings only at the level of underlying principle (sometimes not even letting the principles control their behavior). But the answer is not as simple as applying all teachings on both levels: 1) Some teachings are clearly not meant to be literally obeyed by us today; 2) Other teachings are uncertain enough that when we insist people must obey at the level of the surface command, we can needlessly divide Christ's Church; 3) Some life situations are given no surface command in Scripture, so we must use existing teachings to discover principles that apply in our situations.

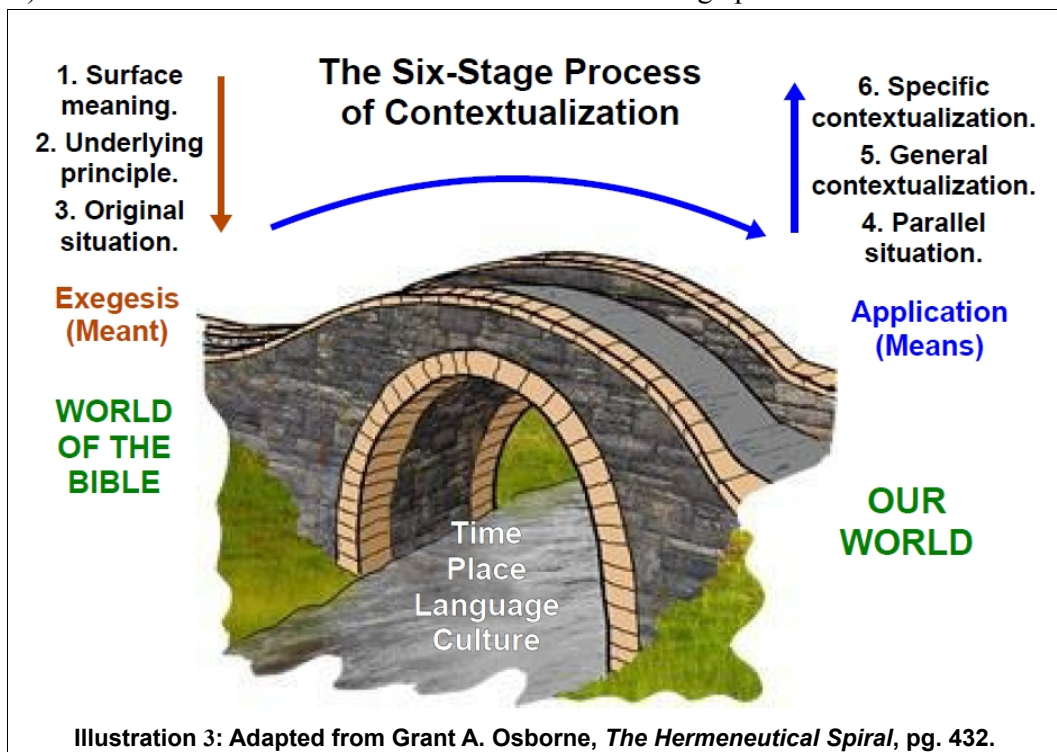
**Here are some indications others have found helpful:**

<b>On Which Level Should We Apply a NT Teaching?</b>	
<b>It is more likely it should be applied at the level of the <u>surface command</u> if...</b>	<b>It is more likely it should be applied at the level of the <u>underlying principle</u> if...</b>
It is already a simple principle. ("Love your neighbor as yourself" Matthew 22:39)	It is a highly-specific application of an underlying principle. ("Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age" 1 Timothy 5:9)
It is by nature a moral command. ("Men who practice homosexuality... and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine" 1 Timothy 1:10)	The biblical author specifies that it is only his opinion. (Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. I wish that all were as I myself am" 1 Corinthians 7:6-7)
It was a command of Jesus that the apostles obeyed literally. ("I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus... took bread" 1 Corinthians 11:23. Also baptism: Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38)	It is tied to unrepeatable circumstances. ("Let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one, for I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me " Luke 22:36-37)
It transcends the cultural biases of the 1 <sup>st</sup> century. ("No longer as a slave" Philemon 1:16)	It is tied to cultural situations not present in our context. ("It is good not to eat meat or drink wine" Rom 14:21)
It was taught and practiced by all the varied NT churches. ("This is my rule in all the churches" 1 Corinthians 7:17)	It was not obeyed universally at the level of surface command in its NT context. ("Paul... took [Timothy] and circumcised him" but "Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised" Acts 16:3; Galatians 2:3)
It is repeated elsewhere as a universal statement. ("One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor" and "Sell your	It is overturned by a later teaching. ("Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money" and "But now let the one who has a moneybag take it" Luke 9:3; 22:36)

<b>On Which Level Should We Apply a NT Teaching?</b>	
<b>It is more likely it should be applied at the level of the <u>surface command</u> if...</b>	<b>It is more likely it should be applied at the level of the <u>underlying principle</u> if...</b>
possessions, and give to the needy" Luke 18:22; 12:33)	
It is rooted in nature. ("Does not even nature itself teach you...?" 1 Corinthians 11:14)	It is clearly <i>directed to an original</i> audience. (No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments" 1 Timothy 5:23)
It is rooted in creation. ("Man was not created for the woman's sake" 1 Corinthians 11:8-9)	It is clearly <i>limited to a specified</i> audience. ("An overseer must be... able to teach" 1 Timothy 3:2; or regarding marriage "Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given" Matthew 19:11)
It is rooted in the Fall. ("Adam was not deceived, but the woman was..." 1 Timothy 2:14)	It is surrounded by other teaching that clearly does not apply directly to us. ("Concerning the collection for the saints... On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside... When I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem." 1 Corinthians 16:1-3)
<i>All scriptures are quoted from the ESV translation.</i>	

2. Learn to discern and apply underlying principles.

- a) Every specific NT teaching has underlying principles that must be contextualized (understood in their original contexts and reapplied specifically in our own contexts). This is true even when we believe we should also apply a teaching at the level of the surface command.
- b) The task of contextualization can be seen as a six-stage process:



c) An explanation of each stage:

**1. Surface Meaning:** What was the original intended message of the passage? (E.g. John 13:1-17 tells the story of Jesus washing his disciples' feet and commanding them to copy his example.)

**2. Underlying Principle:** What larger theological truth does this passage teach us? (John 13:1-17 teaches servant-hood and loving our brothers.)

**3. Original Situation:** What was the original situation in which the teaching was given? (In the situation in John 13:1-17, the cultural practice was that guests' feet should be washed, but the disciples were unwilling to do this; Judas was already planning to betray Jesus; and Jesus knew he had little time left to show love to his disciples.)

**4. Parallel Situation:** What similar situations face us today, to which this principle might apply? "If the biblical writer were exhorting my congregation/class on this subject, what aspects of church life would he address?" (Osborne, 441). (A modern parallel to John 13:1-17 might be that of immigrants coming as "guests" to America: many Christians are slow to meet their needs, and immigrants themselves sometimes seem to make our lives more difficult even if we try to help them.)

**5. General Contextualization:** How might this principle apply in this situation? (Applying the principles of John 13:1-17 to Christians and immigrants might mean we should make every effort to be good "hosts" for immigrants, especially working to welcome immigrant believers into our communities and churches.)

**6. Specific Contextualization:** How, specifically, can we apply this principle to our immediate situations? Do we face a situation that very nearly matches the situation in the passage, which calls for a very similar response? (We could perhaps "live out" John 13:1-17 by exchanging customary greeting kisses with Hispanic visitors; by making sure their traditional foods are available at our potluck meals; or by hiring them at a fair wage and being patient with their cultural expectations regarding work habits.)

d) More tips for discerning and applying principles:

i . Hendrickson gives 6 sets of questions "to help you develop and apply biblically sound principles":

1. What can you discover about the original context in which this passage was written and applied?

2. Given that original context, what does this text mean?

3. What fundamental, universal truths are presented in this passage?

4. Can you state that truth in a simple sentence or two, a statement that anyone could understand?

5. What issues in your culture and your situation does this truth address?

6. What are the implications of this principle when applied to your life and the world around you? What changes does it require? What values does it reinforce? What difference does it make? (*Living By the Book*, pgs. 322-323)

ii . Hendrickson gives three guidelines regarding principles:

1. Principles should correlate with the general teaching of Scripture.

2. Principles should speak to the needs, interests, questions, and problems of real life today.

3. Principles should indicate a course of action.

(*Living By the Book*, pgs. 317-320)

iii . McQuilkin gives four sources of biblical principles:

1. *Explicitly stated principles*. [E.g. “Love your neighbor as yourself.”]
2. *General principles derived from explicit declaration*. [E.g. A general principle of sexual purity is derived from many specific commands against adultery, lustful thoughts, etc. This principle can be applied regarding pornography, which is not explicitly condemned in Scripture.]
3. *General principles derived from historical passages*. ...Historical passages have three levels of authority when used as sources for deriving general principles to be used for contemporary application:
  - ♣ When Scripture itself evaluates an event and gives the reason for that evaluation, the historical event has the highest authority for being normative.
  - ♣ If Scripture evaluates a historic event as worthy of commendation or condemnation but does not make the reason clear, it is legitimate to use that event, along with clear teaching of Scripture, in deducing a principle. But the principle so derived does not have the same level of certainty.
  - ♣ On the lowest level of usefulness are those historic events on which Scripture does not render a judgment. Although those passages may be used to illustrate truth clearly taught elsewhere, they may not be used independently to establish normative Christian doctrine or behavior.
4. *General principles derived from passages that do not directly apply to contemporary life*. [E.g. God commanding warfare in the OT.]  
(From *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, pgs. 300-306).

#### **D. A Few More Application Principles**

##### 1. Four criteria for comparing data on a specific doctrine:

- a) The clear passage is to be preferred above the obscure.
- b) Greater weight is to be given to teaching often repeated.
- c) Direct, literal teaching should be given preference.
- d) Later revelation takes precedence over earlier revelation in building doctrine.  
(Robertson McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, pgs. 232-234.)

##### 2. A four-step process for applying any OT Mosaic law:

- a) Remind yourself that this law is not my law, that I am not legally bound by it, that it is one of the laws God issued to ancient Israel as part of his covenant with them.
- b) Determine the original meaning, significance and purpose of the law. *What was its point? Why did God issue it?*
- c) Determine the theological significance of the law. *...What does this law reflect about God's mind, his personality, his qualities, attitudes, priorities, values, concerns, likes and dislikes, his teaching methodologies, the kinds of attitudes and moral and ethical standards he wants to see in those who love him?*
- d) Determine the practical implications of the theological insights gained from this law for your own NT circumstances.  
(By David A. Dorsey; see below for source and expanded excerpt.)

## Conclusion of "The Law of Moses and the Christian: A Compromise"

by David A. Dorsey

Having suggested that the Mosaic law in its entirety be removed from the backs of Christians in one sense, I would propose that the corpus be placed back into their hands in another sense: the entire corpus—not just the "moral" laws but all 613—moral, ceremonial, civil. If on the one hand the evidence strongly suggests that the corpus is no longer legally binding upon Christians, there is equally strong evidence in the NT that all 613 laws are profoundly binding upon Christians in a revelatory and pedagogical sense.

That all the Mosaic laws are applicable to Christians in this latter sense is implied by Paul's well-known statement in 2 Tim 3:16: "All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." This assertion, referring as it does to the OT, presumably applies to all the OT Scriptures, including all the 613 laws, which suggests that each of the laws is inspired by God and that each is valuable for determining theological truths, for correcting misconceptions, for exposing and rectifying wrong behavior, and for training and equipping the Christian in practical, personal righteousness.

When Paul addresses himself specifically to the question of the value (and not the legal applicability) of the law, he expresses nothing but the highest regard for it. He considers the laws to be God's laws (Rom 7:22, 25; 8:7; 1 Cor 7:19). They are "good" (Rom 7:12–13, 16; 1 Tim 1:8), "holy and righteous" (Rom 7:12), and "spiritual" (7:14). He views the laws as embodying a standard of righteousness that we Christians are called upon to achieve by walking in the Spirit (8:4). He considers the laws valuable in the identification and conviction of sin in one's life (3:20; 7:7 ff.). He teaches, as did Jesus, that each individual law of the Mosaic corpus (and not just a certain category of laws) fleshes out the one overarching law: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (13:9; Gal 5:14). Paul holds the corpus in such high esteem that his inner being delights in it. Most significantly for the present inquiry, he maintains that the individual laws (speaking specifically of the law dealing with muzzling the ox; Deut 25:4) were given "for us" and are written "for us" (1 Cor 9:8–10). In no instance does he imply that only a particular category of laws possesses such high value.

Even without supporting statements from the NT it should be apparent to Christians that the Mosaic laws, though not legally binding, comprise a treasure of insights and information regarding the very mind and ways of God and therefore, a priori, will be binding upon Christians in precisely the same sense as are all other portions of the OT, such as God's messages to Israel in the prophetic books. If it is true that these stipulations are not our stipulations, it is equally true that they were issued by our God, who does not change. If the corpus was tailor-made for another people in another situation, it was tailor-made by the One we seek to know and serve.

It is here that the point of profound applicability for the Christian is found. A law reflects the mind, the personality, the priorities, the values, the likes and dislikes of the lawgiver. Each law issued by God to ancient Israel (like each declaration by God through the prophets) reflects God's mind and ways and is therefore a theological treasure. Moreover the theological insights we gain from a particular OT law will not only enhance our knowledge and understanding of God but will also have important practical implications for our own lives if we are patterning them after our heavenly Father and modifying our behavior and thinking in response to our knowledge of him and his ways (Paul argues along these very lines in 1 Cor 9:9–10). It is in this sense that every one of the 613 laws of Moses is binding upon the NT Christian.

I would suggest the following theocentric hermeneutical procedure for applying any of the OT laws, whether the law be deemed ceremonial, judicial, or moral:

1. *Remind yourself that this law is not my law, that I am not legally bound by it, that it is one of the laws God issued to ancient Israel as part of his covenant with them.* When I look at this law I am looking over the shoulder of the Israelite (just as I am, for example, when I consider one of God's messages through Jeremiah to the inhabitants of Jerusalem during the final days before the city's fall).

2. *Determine the original meaning, significance and purpose of the law.* What was its point? Why did God issue it? What apparently were his motives in giving it? (Allegorizing, spiritualizing and typologizing here are counterproductive, succeeding only in obscuring the original significance and purpose of the law.)

3. *Determine the theological significance of the law.* What does this law reveal about God and his ways? A law, as mentioned, reveals a great deal about the lawgiver. What does this law reflect about God's mind, his personality, his qualities, attitudes, priorities, values, concerns, likes and dislikes, his teaching methodologies, the kinds of attitudes and moral and ethical standards he wants to see in those who love him? In spite of the fact that these 613 laws were issued to another people who lived at another time under very different circumstances than ours (again, like the prophetic oracles of Jeremiah), they come from the God whom we too serve, and they represent a vast reservoir of knowledge about him and his ways.

4. *Determine the practical implications of the theological insights gained from this law for your own NT circumstances.* To take an example from the civil laws, Exod 22:25 states: "If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not be like a moneylender; charge him no interest." First, this law is not my law. It was part of Israel's covenant with God (Christian bankers can relax—for a moment). Second, as far as the point of the law is concerned, it forbids the charging of interest when lending to a poor person, presumably to assist the person who is in a financial crisis in such a way that his recovery will be possible and the repayment will not be overly burdensome. A second purpose is undoubtedly to encourage the individual Israelite to be openhanded and generous, to be sensitive to the needs of the poor, and to be ready and willing to help needy people in practical ways even when it will not result in one's own financial gain.

What theological insights come from this law? The Person who issued this law is obviously concerned about the physical and

emotional well-being of the poor. Moreover he apparently wants his people to have a similar sensitivity toward the poor, to be willing to help the needy sacrificially.

In light of what I, a NT Christian, learn about God and his ways from this particular law, many practical implications present themselves, including various specific ways in which I myself might help needy people that I know or know of. Interestingly a Christian banker, confronted by the request of a struggling young woman of an ethnic minority who has been turned down by several other banks, could, on the basis of what he learns of God and his ways from this very law, graciously grant her a needed loan—indeed, a loan with interest. In so doing he might very well be working out the practical implications of the theological insights rising from this law while at the same time treating the regulation as legally nonbinding.

Examples such as this could be multiplied. The approach proposed here completely avoids the logically unsolvable question of which laws were “fulfilled in Christ.” In a sense it bypasses the thorny debate over continuity/discontinuity altogether and enables the Christian to appropriate and apply to his or her own life the very heart and spirit of every one of the laws given by God at Sinai. It provides a way for the Christian to truly “fulfill” each law in a manner that would delight the OT prophets, so that in a real sense we can declare with Paul: “Do we then overthrow the law? By no means! On the contrary, we establish the law.” In the OT laws we find, after all, the marching orders for the Church.

- The Evangelical Theological Society, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society Volume 34* (The Evangelical Theological Society, 1991; 2002), 34:321-334. Accessed online at <http://www.ccctucsonmedia.com/pdf/Dorsey.pdf>, 6/3/2011.

## Recommended Books about Biblical Interpretation

*Here are three to get you started. I find these very helpful for learning exegesis, and also helpful for considering application (although I do not always agree with all their examples). [Note: Please see [www.dwightgingrich.com/other-resources](http://www.dwightgingrich.com/other-resources) or the attachment below for a more up-to-date list of recommendations.]*

**Basic:** *Living By the Book* (Howard G. Hendricks and William D. Hendricks, Moody Press, 1991).

Loaded with stories, examples, and a lifetime of wisdom about studying the Bible. Easy to understand, but something here for nearly all levels of students.

**Intermediate:** *Understanding and Applying the Bible* (Robertson McQuilkin, Moody Press, 1992).

The author works unusually hard to base his principles of interpretation and application on a high view of Scripture. My brother (a deacon) liked this book and taught from it in his congregation.

**Advanced:** *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Grant R. Osborne, IVP Academic, 2006). The author writes: “The big problem with Bible study today is that we think it should be easier than other things we do... Why do we think the Bible is the only subject we should not have to study?!” (pg. 25). This book is not easy, but is loaded with insights to help you think more deeply about the Bible. Worth re-reading!

## Bibliography

*In creating this guide, I used the above books, plus these sources:*

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<http://www.biblicaltraining.org/study-bible/george-guthrie>, 2010-2011. Web. Accessed October, 2014.

Mounce, D. William. *Greek for the Rest of Us: Mastering Bible Study without Mastering Biblical Languages*. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2003.

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# An Updated List of Resources

(October, 2014)

^ = Books I've read all the way through (though perhaps not the latest version).

~ = Books I've read in extensively (though perhaps not the latest version).

## Introductory books:

^ Fee, Gordon D., and Douglas K. Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth*. 4th ed. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2014. 304 pages.

This book is probably the one on this list that is most widely used throughout all evangelicalism. I know they've even used it at Faith Builders. Strengths: focus on genre; focus on application and not just exegesis; plenty of examples using Bible passages. Weaknesses: Authors present some conclusions—such as their preference for dynamic translations and their support of women in leadership roles—in a manner that seems to downplay or ignore evidence to the contrary; also, the narrow focus of the book on genre means other topics are left out.

^ Guthrie, George. *Read the Bible for Life: Your Guide to Understanding and Living God's Word*. Nashville, Tenn.: B&H Books, 2011. 352 pages.

This exceptionally good book reads as a series of journalist interviews. The people interviewed are mostly Bible scholars, but also include a musician (Michael Card) and Guthrie's wife (Pat). The middle of the book provides solid guidance for reading OT and NT genres. But the ends of the book reveal its unique strengths, with chapters such as “Reading the Bible for Transformation,” “Reading the Bible in Times of Sorrow,” “Reading the Bible with the Family,” and “Reading the Bible with the Church.” Suitable for beginners, and nourishing for everyone. **Perhaps the best first book on the topic (or see Plummer).**

~ Hendricks, Howard G., and William Hendricks. *Living by the Book: The Art and Science of Reading the Bible*. Rev. and updated. ed. Chicago: Moody Press, 2007. 400 pages.

Its exceptional strength is teaching you to closely examine the details of the text in front of you. Less technical and more devotional than most books on this list, but still calls for rigorous study.

^ McQuilkin, J. Robertson. *Understanding and Applying the Bible*. Rev. and exp. ed. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009. 384 pages.

This is the first book on biblical interpretation that I read, and it is still good. This book takes the authority of Scripture very seriously. Most books on biblical interpretation are weak on questions of application. This book tries to remedy that by including a couple final chapters on the topic. These chapters are a very helpful starting point, but benefit from being compared with other authors, such as Osborne.

^ Plummer, Robert L.. *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2010. 352 pages.

Covers a lot of important topics quickly. Generally very accessible, except for some final chapters on current interpretive trends. Points to lots of other good resources, including online resources. Borrows a lot from Stein's book and lectures, since Stein was Plummer's mentor. Somewhat less technical than Stein, but longer and covers more topics. Sometimes raises interpretive options without resolving them. Weak on determining Scripture's implications for us today. **A very good first book (or see Guthrie), but not a good only book.**

## Intermediate books:

~ Duvall, J. Scott, and J. Daniel Hays. *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012. 512 pages.

I think this is my favorite on this list for the average student who has a high school or brief college education. **If one expects to read only one book on the topic, this may be the best.** It's a textbook, with helpful assignments for each chapter. Very readable and quite wide-ranging, borrowing from sources as diverse as Hendricks and Osborne.

~ Stein, Robert H. *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2011. 228 pages.

I've listened to lots of lectures by Stein and trust his generally sane judgment and clear communication. His work is used by other authors such as Fee/Stuart and Plummer. This book is narrower in focus than some others on this list, but addresses its chosen topics with greater depth. He's especially strong on literary genres, as well as on developing a precise vocabulary about the tasks of biblical interpretation, helping you think clearly about such matters as inspiration, application, significance, meaning, etc.

## Advanced books (but still not as technical as you can get!):

^ Osborne, Grant R. *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Rev. and expanded, 2nd ed. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2006. 624 pages.

This is a standard seminary text. I read this once and didn't understand it all—especially the parts on Hebrew and Greek grammar and such. But it's definitely worth the sweat it requires, helping you think through how to move from what the text meant in its original historical context to what it means today. He also includes some very dense appendices in defense of the belief that texts can actually meaningfully convey a message from author to reader—important stuff in our postmodern context.

Köstenberger, Andreas J., and Richard Duane Patterson. *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2011. 891 pages.

Similar to Osborne; likely to join his book as a standard text. Perhaps not quite as dense? Perhaps spending less time on the results of exegetical study—biblical, systematic, and homiletical theology? Focuses on history, literature (canon, genre, and language), and theology, with most space by far devoted to literature. Includes one chapter on application and a useful appendix called "Building a Biblical Studies Library." I haven't read this much yet, but it comes with some very high recommendations and looks hopeful. Köstenberger is an expert on the NT writings of John, and also has very helpful writings on marriage and family.

## Books on special topics:

~ Beale, G. K. *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2012. 173 pages.

Quite technical, but the best brief introduction to this important topic. See also the massive and very useful volume edited by Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Also superb is the technical *Jesus and the Old Testament*, by R. T. France.

^ Bray, Gerald. *Biblical Interpretation Past and Present*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996. 608 pages.

A reference work surveying the history of how the Bible has been interpreted. Provides brief

bios of major interpreters and discusses major interpretive approaches, providing examples. Very interesting and helpful, but includes no mention of Anabaptists, and only a brief dismissal of Arminian theology as being heretical!

~ Mounce, D. William. *Greek for the Rest of Us: Mastering Bible Study without Mastering Biblical Languages*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2003. 289 pages.

This is an introduction to the very basics of Greek, showing how a brief acquaintance with that language can improve Bible study skills. Also includes some very accessible and sane chapters about the basics of interpretation and the use of translations and commentaries.

### **Audio resources:**

I've listened to a lot from [biblicaltraining.org](http://biblicaltraining.org). They have some lectures that are helpful for this topic. Look for courses by Robert Stein (best for this topic; he has some thoughts about the role of the Holy Spirit that are different from what you might hear elsewhere, but worth considering); Mark Strauss (less technical, not a great fan of "literal" translations); and George Guthrie (pretty basic but solid). Bill Mounce is also good and always engaging.

Also, [the Gospel Coalition website](http://the Gospel Coalition website) has dozens of lectures by D. A. Carson, including many superb ones on biblical interpretation and preaching. Like most of the above (but more fervently than some), he is Calvinist. But he's one of the best evangelical exegetical scholars—and fun to listen to.