

Session Two

KEY PRINCIPLES FOR INTERPRETING THE STORY OF THE BIBLE

In our last session, we looked at the big picture of the Bible's story from a mobiology perspective: God qualifying a people as His chosen people to rule and reign with Him in His eternal age to come. Mobiology would title the Bible: The Story of God's Creation and the Preparation of His People.

In this session, we will identify key principles for interpreting the story of scripture that will guide us successfully through our study, much like the lights of a lighthouse would guide a ship safely to port.



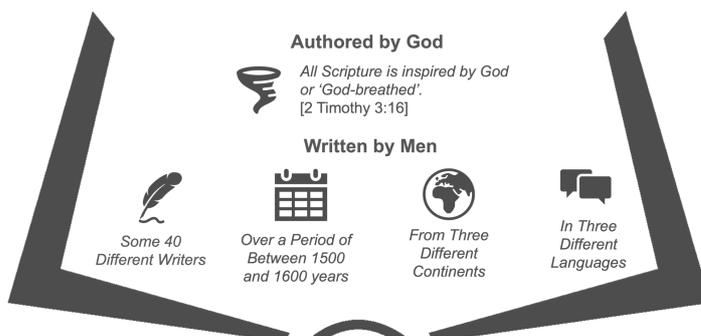
We will highlight eight key principles.

1. The Bible is of Divine and Human Origin

The Bible was authored by God and written by men. Just like Jesus, who was fully God and fully human, the Bible is also fully divine and fully human. "*All Scripture,*" Paul says, "*is inspired by God*" or "God-breathed" (2 Ti 3:16).

The Bible was written:

- by some 40 different writers who wrote it over a period of between 1500 and 1600 years.
- These writers wrote from three continents (Africa, Asia, and Europe) and in three different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek), with the last book, the Book of Revelation, written around 2000 years ago.



So, the Bible is God's word written by humans for a human audience.

2. The Bible's Story is Framed by Creation and New Creation

The Bible has similarities to most other books. It has an introduction, and a conclusion. Introductions and conclusions frame a book's story and provide the reader with the story's complete understanding, making sense of all the happenings throughout its many chapters. The Bible is the same.

Genesis chapters 1 and 2 are the introduction of the story, and Revelation 21 and 22 are the conclusion. Genesis chapter one begins with "*In the beginning, God created the **heavens and the earth.***" And Revelation 21:1 concludes with the writer, John, saying, "*I saw a **new heaven and a new earth.***"



It is important that we frame the story of the Bible correctly. If we don't, we will misunderstand God's story, as sadly so many Christians have done. We must frame God's story the way God, the author of scripture, has inspired his writers to frame it: by creation and new creation!

3. Scripture Interprets Scripture

There are many excellent Bible commentaries, and these should be referred to, but be sure to use as many as you can, as every commentary has its bias.

However, scripture itself is always the best tool for interpreting scripture. We should all have confidence that, with diligent and prayerful study, the Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth (Jn 16:13)¹.

Along with the use of multiple commentaries, we should use various Bible translations as, like commentaries, each translation unavoidably also has a bias.

4. The Old Testament interpreted in the Light of the New Testament

Theologians like to use the phrase "The New is in the Old concealed, and the Old is in the New revealed."

The Old Testament must not be interpreted beyond what is revealed in the New Testament. One testament never contradicts the other, and there is nothing in the Old Testament that the New Testament does not speak to or has not revealed its true meaning.

¹ Jn 16:13 *But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come.*

If we claim otherwise, self-proclaimed 'latter-day prophets' will always emerge, asserting they have further revelation beyond what the New Testament reveals. There will be deceivers arising in these last days, and many have already arisen; if our faith is firmly anchored in the books and pages of the Bible, especially the New Testament, we will not be deceived along with the deceivers!

5. Understanding the Historical Context of Scripture

The Bible was written **for** us, but it was not written **to** us.

We were not the original audience the writers were inspired to write to. Yes, God had us in mind these many years later, but to understand what scripture means to us in our time, it is very helpful to understand what it meant to them in their time.

Historical context is important in understanding the true meaning of scripture and how we are to apply it in our day.

6. The Bible is a Story

The Bible is primarily a story, not a book of doctrines. Doctrines support the story, but we must not reverse this order. If we do, we end up with different stories that serve the different doctrinal positions various denominations hold.

There is only one story; we could say that the Bible is a one-story book. Understanding the story is crucial. Once we have a proper grasp of the story, our doctrines can then be shaped by it, leading us to achieve the unity of faith that Paul was so eager for us all to attain (Ephesians 4:13)¹.

7. The Bible Consists of Various Genres of Writing

The Bible was written using both literal and symbolic language, and not everything was written in chronological order.

The context often determines how the story is to be understood. For example, much of the Book of Revelation follows the Jewish tradition of apocalyptic writings that use highly symbolic imagery. These types of writing are also found in other books such as Daniel chapters 7-12, Isaiah chapters 24-27, and portions in the books of Joel and Zechariah.

Additionally, not every writing is in chronological order; Jewish writing often provides an overview and then goes back to provide more detail, as is the case with the “details” of Genesis chapter 11, which occurs before the completion of the “overview” of Genesis chapter 10.

¹ Eph 4:13 *until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

8. The Sovereignty of God over His Story

We are to respect God's sovereignty. In our context, this means respecting God's sovereignty in fulfilling His creation plan as originally intended. When we connect God's sovereignty to who God is—His nature and character—we celebrate not only the fulfilment of His creation with a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells (2 Pe 3:13)¹ but fulfilment in the most glorious way imaginable.

In Isa 46:10-11 we find God saying that He will, “make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come.” He says, “My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.’ What I have said that I will bring about; what I have planned, that I will do.” God is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, and what He begins, He finishes. And in the most awesome and stunning way imaginable!

This is our God!

Conclusion

As we journey through the Bible's story, these eight important principles will help us understand what could otherwise be seen as a rather daunting and complex book.

Like lights shining from a lighthouse guiding ships safely to port, they will guide us safely to our destination of not only understanding this amazing ‘God Story’ but also our part in His Story and how He is **preparing us** to be a very special part of it and for all eternity!

¹ 2 Pe 3:13 *But in keeping with His promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.*