

How to Interpret the Bible Correctly: The Bridge of Old Testament History

March 10, 5PM: Old Testament History.

One of the amazing elements of Holy Land travel is that you are seeing the entire spectrum of Old Testament events all at once. Many sites have witnessed everything from Abraham through Christ and up to the present. So, for most believers this is bewildering. Through a few very easy memory devices we can grasp the flow and key events of the Old Testament events and how the 39 Books fit into that flow of history and tie together with the Land itself. This is like a Jet Tour of the Old Testament in a time machine. This class will change how you look at your Bible.

As a student of God's Word for over 40 years, there is one simple question that fills my heart and mind as I read the Bible, "What does this passage mean?"

Bible teachers are called to explain the Bible, to help people understand what the Bible means, and how it fits together into one powerful message from God to us.

The only way to apply God's Word correctly is to understand first what God has said, what He meant, and then what response He desires from us. That is why we have started a monthly study of the elements of Biblical Interpretation.

Someone long ago told me that my job as a Bible Expositor was to build a bridge that transported people from where live in the present, back to what God said and did in the historic context of His Word: and then to bring them back into their daily lives understanding what God expected from them.

To build that bridge we must realize that there is a gap between us and them.

1. **A Gap of History** (“they lived in a very different time”);
2. **A Gap of Geography** (“they lived in a very different place”);
3. **A Gap of Culture** (“they lived in a very different way”);
4. **A Gap of Language** (“they spoke in a very different way”).

So the first elements of Biblical Interpretation are bridges that help us create understanding about the history, geography, culture, and language that surrounds the world of the Bible.

The Bible was set in Real History that is Archaeologically Verifiable

The historicity of many of the world’s religious books is at times questionable; but God's Word has been continuously verified by each new archaeological find. We can place most of the Biblical characters into a timeline that opens the doors to understanding historic events in light of God's Word.

The Bible Portrays Literal Geographic Places

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. Of course, nothing helps like seeing the land first-hand on a tour.

The Bible is Reflective of Specific Cultures

The cultural setting of the Bible helps us to understand what God's Word says; but it does not give us a way to soften or remove the truths communicated by God. The Old Testament is sometimes set in the agricultural and nomadic culture of the promised lands. Other times in ancient civilizations that surrounded Israel. Just as the Gospels reflect first century Jewish culture, so Acts & the Epistles reflect the Graeco-Roman world. There are incredible background books that open those cultures to us.

The Bible is Communicated by Picturesque Languages

God's Word was breathed out and written down in mostly Hebrew and Greek. Many times the more clearly you understand the meaning of the original words, the more clear the passage becomes. With modern computer Bible study programs, the study of centuries of language scholars is readily available to sift through.

We have covered over the last two months how the history and archaeology of the Bible give us great insights. Tonight we begin our look at Bible Geography.

Principles to Understand Four principles should guide us as we interpret the Bible: literal, historical, grammatical, and synthesis.

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.

The Historical Principle This means that we interpret Scripture in its historical context. We must ask what the text meant to the people to whom it was first written. In this way we can develop a proper contextual understanding of the original intent of Scripture.

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'll find that when you ask some simple questions like those, the meaning of the text immediately becomes clearer.

The Synthesis Principle This is what the Reformers called the *analogia scriptura*. It means that the Bible doesn't 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.

Apply the Bible

We are on the third of the elements of Bible Interpretation tonight. To properly interpret God's Word we need to follow what Bible teachers calls the

Jesus insight will become more evident when the participants walk on His foot steps in Galilee, on the Jordan River and in Jerusalem

In Galilee pilgrims are invited to walk a segment of the short cut road between Nazareth and the north side of the Sea of Galilee near Magdala, the town of Mary of Magdala, or walk on the Way of the Sea between Capernaum and "Mensa Christi" (Peter's Primacy)

In Jerusalem pilgrims are invited to walk the Kidron Valley or the steps next to the house of the High Priest or the steps, south to the Temple, leading to the temple Mount...where He walked with the disciples, or stand on the Mount of Olives

St. Jerome called this Holy Land "the fifth Gospel" where, for those who come with faith, the stones would speak to them about Him

December 2, 5PM: Biblical Archaeology. This class will explain the site lingo like "Tel", layers, eras, historic periods, and the wide number of Biblical sites that are in the Land of the Book. We will define the terms that you will hear so often like: Byzantine, Mamluk, Iron Age, ostraca, and so on. All of these will be tied to Biblical Periods and passages.

January 13, 5PM: Biblical History. This class will weave together the history of the Land of the Book from the time that Japheth and Shem arrived after the Flood, through Abraham's arrival, the time of the Patriarchs, the Egyptian Bondage, Exodus, Conquest of the Land, the Period of the Judges, the Monarchy, the Divided Kingdom, the Assyrian Captivity of Israel, the Babylonian Captivity of Judah, the Return of the Exiles, the 400 Silent Years, the Birth of Christ, the Early Church, the Destruction of Jerusalem, the Diaspora, and all the way to the Re-Gathering and Re-birth of the Modern Nation of Israel. This is a must see and do class to fit all the myriads of pieces of Biblical History together in your minds.

February 10: Biblical Geography. Everything happened somewhere is the catch phrase of history. The places where events in the Bible took place provide what the Ancient Church Fathers called the Fifth Gospel:

the Land. See the regions, understand the geography, and get a handle on how much of Biblical History was shaped by the geography. This is a fun time to learn all the depths of Biblical insights that can come from the map and the lay of the Land of the Book.

- March 10, 5PM: Old Testament History. One of the amazing elements of Holy Land travel is that you are seeing the entire spectrum of Old Testament events all at once. Many sites have witnessed everything from Abraham through Christ and up to the present. So, for most believers this is bewildering. Through a few very easy memory devices we can grasp the flow and key events of the Old Testament events and how the 39 Books fit into that flow of history and tie together with the Land itself. This is like a Jet Tour of the Old Testament in a time machine. This class will change how you look at your Bible.
- April 7, 5PM: New Testament History. Our faith is so tied to the events of the NT. God picked a spot for the Drama of Redemption, and that history is so tied to the Land and the Book. Again, the history of the New Testament is written in a flow that ties each of the 27 pieces together. The books are in themselves a map that traces the history so dear to us. Come and see how our New Testaments are 27 books but one amazing event: Christ!
- May 5, 5PM: Jerusalem, City of God. Our final class is about the heart of the Drama of Redemption. The City of Abraham's offering Isaac, the city of Christ's Death, Burial, and Resurrection, and the city of the Birth of the Church. Come and see the place God picked to be the center of the Redemptive Universe. Jerusalem is the most Biblical Spot on Earth.