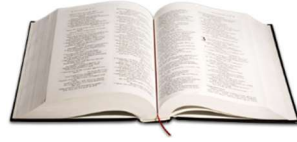


Foundation for Christian Education

Open Study Bible School



My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.
Hosea 4:6

Part-Time Course in Biblical Theology

Bible Study Methods

“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”
2 Timothy 2:2

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Biblical Theology Course

Subject: Bible Study Methods

Lecturer's Notes

Author: Arthur F Green

Course Introduction: Aims:

1. To explain the purpose of Bible study
2. To raise awareness of the importance of methods of interpretation
3. To teach a systematic approach to Bible study
4. To explain the sequence of sound Bible study

Teaching Topics: Lessons:

1. The Power and Purpose of God's Word
2. Methods of Interpretation
3. How to Study a Book
4. How to Study a Passage or a Verse
5. How to Study a Word
6. How to Study a Parable
7. How to Study Prophecy
8. Practical Application and Special Rules
9. Worked Example utilising Mark 16:9-20
10. Appendix A – "Nehushtan"

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Lesson 1. The Power and Purpose of God's Word

God's Word is the only method by which we can be equipped to be men and women of God, and God's Word is the only message which we have to deliver to people which can lead to salvation, change their lives, and enable them to grow to maturity as Christians.

"The difference between reading and studying is like the difference between drifting in a boat and rowing toward a destination."
Oscar Feucht

A. The Power of God's Word.

*"For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven,
And do not return there,
But water the earth,
And make it bring forth and bud,
That it may give seed to the sower
And bread to the eater,
So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;
It shall not return to Me void,
But it shall accomplish what I please,
And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it."*
Isaiah 55:10-11

God's word has the inherent power to accomplish the purposes of God.

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.
1 Thessalonians 2:13

The words of the Bible have life-changing power. The Bible is like no other book you will ever read — it is the only book with the real power to eternally change lives.

- **Converts the unbeliever**
Peter 1:22-25 — God's Word is the seed which produces new life.
2 Timothy 3:15 — Holy Scripture is able to show a person how to be saved.
Romans 1:16 — The gospel is the power of God for salvation to all who believe.
- **Combats Sin**
Psalm 119:9-11 — When we know and obey God's Word, we will be able to see sin in light of the truth and be warned about the consequences of sinning.
- **Causes Spiritual Growth**
1 Peter 2:2 — Just like drinking milk causes physical growth, God's Word causes spiritual growth when it is understood and obeyed.



John 6:63 — God's Word is our spiritual food — take it in and be nourished. Clearly reveals our true motives

Hebrews 4:12 — God's Word has the ability to reveal to us our inner, true motives which we sometimes don't realize.

- **Conforms us to Christ's Image**

James 1:22-25 — As we look into the Word of God, it is like a mirror which shows us What we are really like and what will change when we obey the Bible.

2 Corinthians. 3:18 — As we obey the Word of God consistently, we will become more Christ like in character, conduct and conversation.

Colossians 3:9-10 — As we become more Christ like we put off the fruit of the sinful nature.

B. The Purpose of God's Word.

The Bible is our resource book for life. God's Word:

- **Contains God's impartial, eternal standard of truth**

Psalm 119:89-91; Psalm 119:160 — The Bible is objective truth by which everything else must be measured. It reveals what is right and what is wrong.

- **Constitutes a guide for our lives**

Psalm 119:105 — The Bible provides both general direction for our lives and specific guidance as we live one day at a time.

- **Comforts, teaches and encourages us**

Romans 15:4 — What we learn from God's Word enables us to endure life's difficulties and not lose hope.

- **Cautions us about the mistakes of others**

1 Corinthians 10:11-12 — Examples from Scripture warn us of the consequences of sin and show us what to avoid.

- **Comprises a tool against temptation**

Matthew 4:4, 7 — Jesus used the truth of the Bible to oppose and resist Satan's temptations and so should we.

- **Communicates knowledge of God**

John 5:39; Luke 24:27, 44 — What we really know about God we learn from Scripture, for without it our understanding of God is inadequate and incomplete.

- **Causes us to be equipped as God's servants**

2 Timothy 3:16-17 — The Bible is our basic equipment and training tool.



C. Believer's Responsibility to Study.

Because of its power and purpose, God's Word must be the subject of our study. The believer's responsibility is to study, obey and teach God's Word (Ezra 7:10). Ezra was:

"A teacher well-versed in the Law of Moses" (Ezra 7:6).

"A man learned in matters concerning the commands and decrees of the Lord" (Ezra 7:11).

1. The believer's study of God's Word should be:

- **Diligent**
2 Timothy 2:15 — Work hard (like a labourer), correctly handle and accurately interpret the Word of truth
- **Daily**
Acts 17:11 — Eagerly (enthusiastically/excitedly) examine Scripture every day
- **Dependent on the Holy Spirit**
Psalm 119:124-125 — For wisdom, insight and understanding

2. The believer must himself obey God's Word.

- **Obedience**
Matthew 7:24-27 — It is a wise man who not only hears but obeys the Word

3. Assignment:

- For each verse listed below, write a one-sentence summary of the truth taught.

Jn. 7:17

Jn. 13:17

Jn. 14:15

Eze. 33:30-32

Dt. 29:29

Heb. 5:14

To know and not obey is not to know at all — God's Word was meant to be obeyed!

"Study the Bible to be wise; believe it to be secure; obey it to be holy." (Anon.)

As a believer, obeying God's Word will keep your character pure and your credibility powerful.



D. Role of Holy Spirit in Study.

The believer must work hard at study but must always rely on the power of the Holy Spirit. The role of the Holy Spirit in our study is to:

- **Teach us the truths of God** (John 14:26)
- **Guide us into truth** (John 16:13)
- **Enable us to discern error** (1 Jn. 2:20, 26, 27)

The Holy Spirit is not a substitute for our Bible study—He makes our Bible study effective.

- **He Illuminates our minds with insight to understand and accept truth** (1 Corinthians 2:12-14; 2 Timothy 2:7; Luke 24:45)
- **He Empowers us to obey** (Philippians 2:13; Ezekiel 36:27; Colossians 1:29)

E. Required Attitudes for Effective Bible Study

A good Bible student will maintain proper attitudes toward his study!

- Desire to know and understand God's Word (Psalm 119:97-100)
- Decide to have an open mind to discover what the text says (Psalm 119:169)
- Determine to obey what you learn (Psalm 119:33-35)
- Depend on God to teach you what to teach others (Psalm 51:12-13)

To be a good student of God's Word you must have a teachable spirit. The attitudes and pre-conceived ideas which we bring to our Bible study will greatly influence the results.



Lesson 2. Methods of Interpretation

There are three basic steps to understanding the Bible. They are very simple and even obvious, but it is surprising just how often they are neglected.

Step 1 Observation

What does the text say or **NOT** say? In the text, look for:

Words	Structure	Literary Form	Atmosphere
Nouns (Gender and Number)	Comparison	Narrative	Mood
Verbs (Tense)	Contrast	Discourse	Emotional Response
Prepositions	Illustrations	Poetry	
Conjunctions	Questions	Prophecy	
	Repetition		
	Cause and Effect		

Like a good detective, we want to know Who? What? When? Where? Why? And How?

Step 2 Interpretation

Interpret the passage—what does it mean? What is the significance of the passage?

Aspects of Interpretation
Literally
In Context
In View of History and Culture
In View of Literary Form
In View of Other Parts of Scripture
In View of Theological Consistency

Step 3 Application

What shall I do? How does God want to change me in light of this passage, and how should I teach others?

Application
Principle to apply?
Command to obey?
Attitude to change?
Truth to believe?
Example to follow?
Specific action to take?
Sin to renounce?



Summary of the three basic steps:

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| 1. Observation | What does it say?
Examine/search/inspect carefully. |
| 2. Interpretation | What does it mean?
Use established rules. |
| 3. Application | What shall I do?
Respond to and obey the truth. |

There are a variety of ways to study the Bible. Whilst each should have the three basic steps in common, different approaches provide a different understanding Scriptural truth. The two most common approaches are:

Spiritualized Interpretation

Those who take this approach argue that the Bible is a Spiritual Book and that we must look for spiritual meanings beyond the apparent words of Scripture. What they mean is that they can make the Bible say whatever they want it to say. With this approach everyone's opinion is equally valid. Even if no one else agrees, you have a right to your interpretation.

Literal Interpretation

This Approach seeks to understand the Scriptures in the normal meaning of the word. Someone who takes the Bible literally recognises that there are figures of speech in the Bible which are not to be taken literally, but have a literal meaning based on the context. This approach limits the variance of individual interpretations, and is more effective in keeping to the intended meaning of God's Word.

A literalist recognises that the Bible uses types, symbols and analogies to convey Scriptural Truths. It should be noted that these are usually clearly identified and explained in the Scriptures, usually in the context in which they are found. It is good practice to remain with only those types, symbols and analogies that are clearly identified in the Bible. Do not invent your own.

Basic Rules of Literal Interpretation:

1. The Bible is the only authority for faith and practice
2. There is one and only one interpretation of a passage of Scripture, but many applications.
3. It is the context that determines the meaning of a passage, phrase, or word.
4. We use grammar to interpret the meaning of words and phrases.



5. We compare Scripture with Scripture. Use clear passages to shed light on difficult passages.
6. If the plain sense makes common sense, seek no other sense.
7. Understand that the culture of the time and place has a bearing on the meaning.
8. We interpret with an understanding of the historical setting of events.
9. Knowing the geography of an area can be helpful.

The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible. This is where the work of studying comes into play. “Rightly dividing the word of Truth,” is not always an easy task. You need to look for cross references and then double check that they are truly dealing with the same subject matter. You will need a good concordance, a good Bible dictionary, and a Bible encyclopaedia with maps and locations.

Other Bible Study Methods

Sometimes it is profitable to approach Bible study in ways that are not merely expositional and analytical. Determine what to study based on what you and your church feel are the needs of the congregation. Each of the following methods has a particular goal or purpose in view. Understand fully what you are trying to accomplish before you use one of these methods:

- Biographical (people)
- Topical (words or subjects)
- Theological (doctrinal)
- Devotional (personal nourishment)

These other Bible Study Methods are designed so they can be used where the student has no reference books except perhaps a Study Bible. Each of these methods will help strengthen students in the use of the features of the Study Bible and will allow additional practical work with the cross reference system, study notes, text notes, concordance, index to notes, and index to subjects (topical) and will promote effective use of the three steps:

Accurate	Correct	Right
Observation	Interpretation	Application

Proverbs 24:32 sums it up well:

“I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw.”

Bearing this in mind, let us look at how to study the various parts of the Bible: a book, passage or verse, word, parable, or prophecy.



Lesson 3. How to Study a Book

Read the entire Book at least ten times over a period of days. This will allow you to become familiar with the flow of thoughts in the book and see how the different sections interrelate. Good practice is to read it out loud to yourself.

Make an outline of the book based on the paragraph divisions. Note that the chapter and verse divisions, while helpful in finding a specific place in the scriptures, are not inspired. There are places where these divisions come in the middle of a thought and you will need to go into the next section to get the whole discussion. Some Bibles use the paragraph symbol (§) to indicate a change of thought.

Be looking for key transitional words such as: ‘therefore,’ ‘wherefore,’ ‘since,’ ‘for’ ‘now,’ ‘likewise,’ ‘forasmuch as,’ etc. While these will often introduce a new paragraph, they show that the understanding of that paragraph is based on what the previous paragraph has said. Also, there will be times when reading a portion of Scripture, that the meaning of what is being said is explained in the following paragraph.

Be looking for phrases and words that reoccur throughout the book and make a note of where they are found.

Make a list of references to each person of the Trinity. Give a brief statement of the truths that are indicated by these statements.

Get some background information about the book and the geographical location of its setting.

Make sure you list all Scriptural references that give you an answer to the following:

1. Find out who wrote the book.
2. When the book was written.
3. What were the circumstances of the author?
4. What were his future plans or prospects?
5. To whom was he writing?
6. What is the author’s relationship to the recipients?
7. How does the book address their present situation?

Identify and state the main theme(s) of the Book. There may be several depending on the size of the book. State how the themes are developed and supported by the details of the Book.

Identify the principles and precepts that are taught by the Book. Describe how you think these apply to Christians in the present day. Put the information in to a form that can be used to teach others what you have learned.



A Note on Chapters and Verses

The Bible was divided into chapters and verses to help us find Scriptures more quickly and easily. It is much easier to find "John chapter 3, verse 16" than it is to find "for God so loved the world..." In a few places, chapter breaks are poorly placed and as a result divide content that should flow together. Overall, though not part of the original inspired Scriptures, the chapter and verse divisions are very helpful.

The chapter divisions commonly used today were developed by Stephen Langton, an Archbishop of Canterbury. Langton put the modern chapter divisions into place in around A.D. 1227. This was not entirely original, because some manuscripts dating back to the fourth century had some form of chapter divisions. The Wycliffe English Bible of 1382 was the first Bible to use this chapter pattern. Since the Wycliffe Bible, nearly all Bible translations have followed Langton's chapter divisions.

The Hebrew Old Testament was divided into verses by a Jewish rabbi by the name of Nathan in A.D. 1448. Robert Estienne, who was also known as Stephanus, was the first to divide the New Testament into standard numbered verses; in 1551 he added verse divisions to his fourth edition of the Greek New Testament. Stephanus essentially used Nathan's verse divisions for the Old Testament.

Since that time, beginning with the Geneva Bible of 1557, the chapter and verse divisions employed by Stephanus, both Old and New Testaments, have been accepted into nearly all the Bible versions.



Lesson 4. How to Study a Passage or a Verse

Read the passage or verse at least ten times before doing any other research. Try to do this in one session, without stopping, or at the very least two or three times in a row. To study a verse you must understand it in the light of the passage in which it is found.

Identify the main thought(s) of the passage and write them down.

Make a list of verses that have got your attention.

1. Verses that have been an encouragement.
2. Verses that have brought new ideas to your mind.
3. Verses that have been a rebuke to you.

List the individuals or types of people that have been named and state the information that has been given about them.

- Identify any commands that are given.
- Identify any promises that are given.
- Identify any lessons that are given.

Be looking for phrases and words that reoccur throughout the passage and make a note of where they are found.

Define important words and words that are unfamiliar to you. If you use an English dictionary, make sure it gives both modern and archaic or old English meanings. Use the Bible study aids mentioned in the last session to determine possible meanings from the original languages. Remember that most words have several possible meanings and it is the context that determines the meaning of the word.

Check the preceding and following verses to see if they give any further insight to the overall understanding of the passage. Compare parallel similar passages for additional details and insights.

Make a list of any references to each person of the Trinity. Give a brief statement of the truths that are indicated by these references.

Solve any doctrinal problems you have by considering the context of the passage, the book as a whole and the clear teaching of scripture throughout the Bible.

Make an outline based on the information you have learned.

Put the information into a form that can be used to teach others what you have learned.



Lesson 5. How to Study a Word

Having chosen an English word, you need to find the Greek or Hebrew word from which it is translated:

1. Remember that a Greek or Hebrew word can be translated into many different English words
2. Also, other Greek or Hebrew words can be translated by the same English word.
3. Not all Greek and Hebrew words have been translated. Some have been transliterated, which means the spelling has brought over into English, giving us a new English word.

Make a list of all the different English words used to translate the Greek or Hebrew word.

1. List the verses that go with each English word.
2. Try to state a reason the translators used this word, looking at the context.

Based on your research thus far, try to state a simple definition of the Greek or Hebrew word. Remember a word can have more than one meaning, and that meaning is determined by the way it is used in its context.

Using each verse where the word occurs, make a list of what the Bible teaches about the word. Remember that more than one verse may teach the same concept.

List the major passages that deal with your word.

Based on your research, make an outline of the information you have gathered. Put the information in to a form that can be used to teach others what you have learned.



Lesson 6. How to Study a Parable

*Then He said, "To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what **parable** shall we picture it?"*
Mark 4:30

What is a parable? Where does the word come from and what is its meaning?

Strong's Greek # 3850 **παραβολή** (*parabolē*):

- 1. Parable**, an illustration that teaches (Matthew 13:3);
- 2. Archetype**, symbol, foreshadow (Hebrews 9:9);
- 3. Figuratively** (Mark 4:30; Hebrews 11:19);
- 4. Proverb** (Luke 4:23).

A parable seeks to make a comparison between something familiar to the hearer and the concept being taught. However, there were times that Jesus used parables to conceal truths from the general population, i.e. the Kingdom of Heaven parables in Matthew 13.

A Parable can be either fictitious or based on real people and events. Hebrews 9:9 calls the tabernacle a 'figure' (so KJV; 'symbolic' NKJV; 'illustration' NIV) which is translated from the Greek word **παραβολή** (*parabolē*). The same word is used in Heb 11:19 concerning the sacrifice of Isaac and is translated as 'figuratively.'

When studying a parable, find the main lesson being taught.

1. In Luke this usually clearly stated before or after the parable is given.
2. Look for what prompted the parable, and to whom it is directed

Look to see if the interpretation is given later in the passage, e.g.: Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13). Try to identify the meaning of the details of the parable. Be aware that the small details do not all have to be accounted for. Compare parallel and similar passages to gain insight in meaning of the parable. Use the clear teaching of scripture to guide you in understanding a parable. An interpretation that contradicts a clear biblical principle must be rejected.

Use the study method for a passage.

Based on your research, make an outline of the information you have gathered. Put the information in to a form that can be used to teach others what you have learned.



Lesson 7. How to Study Prophecy

When it comes to prophecy, many people stop using the literal method of interpretation and adopt the Spiritualization method of interpretation. This reasoning seems to be based on the fact that prophecy often used figures and symbolic language, therefore they can make everything symbolic. This takes the authority away from the Word of God and makes the individual the authority. It should be noted that even sound men who would normally take the Bible literally have fallen into this trap when studying prophecy.

Use *the literal method of interpretation* when studying prophecy:

1. The Bible is the only authority for faith and practice
2. There is one and only one interpretation of a passage of Scripture.
3. It is the context that determines the meaning of a passage, phrase, or word.
4. We use grammar to interpret the meaning of words and phrases.
5. We compare Scripture with Scripture. Use clear passages to shed light on passages.
6. If the plain sense makes common sense, seek no other sense.

Determine if the passage is using literal, descriptive, figurative, or symbolic language. If figurative or symbolic language is being used:

1. See if the passage tells you what is being represented.
2. Compare other passages where the same or similar language is used.
3. Remember that there does co-exist a spirit world alongside our physical world. If no other explanation makes sense, see if this will offer a plausible explanation.

Remember that there are times when descriptive language is used in prophecy. This is neither figurative nor symbolic. There is no justification for making it representative of anything other than what it is — a description.

Use the study method for a passage.

Based on your research, make an outline of the information you have gathered. Put the information in to a form that can be used to teach others what you have learned.



Lesson 8. Practical Application and Special Rules

The three basic steps of Systematic Bible Study

Step 1. Observe the text. What does it say?

1. Introduction — Key questions to ask

What does it say? What do I see? Learn what to look for.

a) Three Key Thoughts

1. Concentrate your attention on the text.
2. Notice what is there and what is not. Examples:
Mt. 2:1-2 How many Magi (wise men) came?
Mt. 2:9-11 Where did the Magi visit Jesus?
Rev. 20:14-15 Where do unbelievers end up?
Rev. 21:1; 2 Pet. 3:10-13 Where is the eternal resting place for believers?
 - Read carefully
 - Read repeatedly
 - Read patiently
 - Read prayerfully
 - Read purposefully
 - Read inquisitively
3. Be accurate. Common mistakes to avoid in observation:
 - Failing to see all the details
 - Seeing what is not in the text
 - Not observing accurately
 - Reaching the wrong conclusion
 - Assuming you already know what it says

Exercise: Read 2 Peter 1:2-4. Make as many observations as you can.

Exercise: Read Genesis 6:19-20. How was Noah able to round up (gather) the animals to take on the ark?

Exercise: Read Job 1:22 and 2:10. What is the difference in how Job responded?

b) Asking the Right Questions

Effective Bible study requires asking the right questions. Ask yourself questions about the text:

WHO is talking or being talked about?

WHAT is the subject or topic being discussed; what comes before and after?



WHERE is the activity or discussion taking place?
WHEN is the activity or discussion taking place?
WHY is the activity or discussion taking place (purpose)?
HOW are the people involved responding?

Exercise: Read Luke 17:11-19 and answer as many of the above questions as you can:

Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?

c) What to Look For:

As you observe the text you are looking for

1. Words (Key Terms and Phrases)
2. Structure (Arrangement)
3. Atmosphere
4. Literary Form

1. Words (Key Terms and Phrases)

Look for important (key) words or phrases. Steps to follow:

- i) Determine the key words in the passage (Romans 8:9).
- ii) Decide whether the word is literal or figurative (John 10:6-9).
- iii) Note the grammatical form—is it a noun, verb, preposition, etc.?
Especially look for:
Verbs: “saw, killed, fled” (Ex. 2:11-15). Verbs carry the action of the story.
Nouns: subjects/objects: “word” (John 1:1, 14).
Prepositions: “by, with, from, to, through” (Philippians 4:13).
Conjunctions: “and, but, for, therefore” (Romans 12:1). Explain what “but” refers to in Matthew 5:21-22. Is it joining two ideas or indicating a contrast?
- iv) Note the Specifics:
Gender: male/female/neuter (John 14:16-17).
Number: singular or plural (Galatians 3:16).
Tense: past, present, future (Hebrews 1:1-2).
- v) Determine what the key word means in context:
For example, in Jude 3 What part of speech is “faith” and what does it mean?
Note: A preliminary definition can be made at the Observation Step to be confirmed or changed at the Interpretation Step.

Exercise: List Key Words or Phrases in Romans 6:1-12

Exercise: List Key Words or Phrases in Hebrews 11:1-8



2. Structure (Arrangement)

Look to see how the passage is constructed or arranged. Rules to follow:

i) Study by Paragraph

A paragraph contains one or more sentences dealing with the same idea, thought or subject. Example: Colossians 2:6-12. How many paragraphs are there and how many sentences in each paragraph?

Some paragraphs stand alone; others are related to what comes before and after and are part of a section or “Pericope”.

Caution: Sometimes verse and chapter divisions do not make the best place to start or stop studying. Example: Col. 3:25; 4:1

ii) See how the passage is composed or put together. Structure in a passage or between passages is like the framework on which a building is constructed. Often sections of Scripture are connected by or constructed around:

People (biographical):

Genesis 12-50	Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph
Acts 1-12	Peter
Acts 13-28	Paul

Places (geographical): Exodus

Events (historical): Joshua

Ideas (theological): Romans

Times (chronological): 1 and 2 Kings

Exercise: Luke 15:1-7, 8-10, 11-32. What key ideas are the 3 stories in Luke 15 built around?

Sometimes the text will use as its structure:

Contrasts: Galatians 5:19-25

Comparisons: Matthew 13:33

Illustrations: Matthew 7:1-5

Questions: Mark 11:27-33 Mark 12:13-17

Repetition: Romans 6:1-12 “to sin” Hebrews 11 “by faith”

Cause and Effect: Romans 1:18-32



Observing the structure will help us see the progression and development of ideas and themes and keep the passage in proper relationship to what comes before and after. Train your mind and eyes by practice to look for and see:

- Paragraphs
- Words and Phrases
- Structure

3. Atmosphere

Look to discern the atmosphere of the passage. Atmosphere is the underlying tone, mood, or spirit of a passage and the emotional response which it causes. Atmosphere has to do with the “feel” of a passage and sensory impressions. It is subjective and personal. Experience the passage. Examples:

Doubt	Mark 16:9-14
Joy	Ezra 3:10-13
Fear	Exodus 20:18-21
Majesty	Isaiah 6:1-5
Anger	Numbers 16:12-15
Thanksgiving	1 Timothy 1:12-17
Praise	Psalms 150
Awe	Luke 7:11-17
Sadness	Luke 8:49-52
Surprise	Matthew 19:7-10

Exercise: Read Revelation 9:13-21. What feelings/responses are generated in you?

Exercise: Read Romans 7:21-25. How does the mood of this passage change?

Put yourself into the passage so you can identify with the mind and emotions of the original readers.

Exercise: Read Psalm 8. What response does this Psalm call for?

Exercise: Read Lk. 24:1-35. How does this account affect you?

Sensing the atmosphere of a passage will enable you to identify more closely with the original writer and the original readers, and will promote a more appropriate response from you.



4. Literary Form

Look to determine the literary form. Not only is it important to (1) observe the Words, (2) discern the structure, and (3) feel the atmosphere, but we also need to (4) determine the general literary form of the passage we are studying. This can often be done at the start and is very helpful in interpretation. There are four main types of literature in the Bible:

A. Narrative:

A form of prose designed to convey history and truth in the form of facts, stories, parables, accounts, biographies, etc., from a theological perspective.

Characteristics: [reveals truth indirectly]

- i) Appeals to the emotions and imagination by creating “mental pictures.”
- ii) Often discloses character development or deterioration (Joseph, Samson).
- iii) Often reveals evidence of the law of sowing and reaping (David).
- iv) Sometimes demonstrates how God relates to people and nations.
- v) Usually conveys a main point and/ or teaches principles for application.
- vi) Rarely includes direct commands to us. Some biblical examples:

Genesis
Exodus
Numbers
1 Samuel
Acts

Danger: Do not be concerned with all the details—some are significant; others are not (Luke 12:13-15)

B. Discourse:

A form of prose designed to present ideas, concepts, doctrine or facts in a logical, orderly fashion and often in the form of an argument, letter, lecture, sermon or speech. Characteristics: [reveals truth directly]

- i) Appeals to the mind and intellect (rational and orderly).
- ii) Almost always shows development and progression of thought.
- iii) Often includes exhortation and commands.
- iv) Usually leads to a conclusion or challenge for action (obedience). Some biblical examples:

Deuteronomy (parts of)
Leviticus (parts of)
Romans
Ephesians
Hebrews
Matthew 5-7



Danger: Seeing the individual parts of the writing, but missing the main point or theme. Romans 6:11-12

C. Poetry:

Involves primarily the expression of emotions, feelings and ideas as a means of conveying truth. Characteristics: [reveals truth in “word pictures”]

- i) Uses figurative, descriptive and symbolic language to create mental images.
- ii) Words are not usually meant to be taken literally but the meaning and truth communicated is clear.
- iii) Highly emotional — evokes feelings.
- iv) Uses parallelism for emphasis, contrast, reinforcement, etc.
- v) Biblical poetry does not have rhyme or meter and does not rhyme sounds.
- vi) Can be used to effectively teach truth using figures of speech, etc. Some biblical examples:

Job	Psalms	Proverbs	Ecclesiastes
Song of Solomon	Portions of the Prophets (e.g.: Isaiah)		

Danger: Trying to literally interpret symbolic or figurative language; or missing the truth taught (Psalm 89:26; 1 Corinthians 10:4).

D. Prophecy:

Involves the use of symbolic language to “reveal” or “uncover” that which was previously unknown. Characteristics: [reveals previously unknown truth]

- i) Uses highly symbolic and figurative language but still conveys real truth.
- ii) Usually includes predictive prophecy about the future.
- iii) Often has “visions” which require careful interpretation. Some biblical examples:

Isaiah	Jeremiah	Ezekiel
Daniel	Malachi	Revelation

Danger: Failure to recognize the symbolic and predictive nature of the material and follow the rules for interpreting prophecy (Revelation 6:3-6).

Identifying the literary form of a passage will greatly assist in reaching the correct interpretation.



Step 2. Interpret the text. What does the text mean?

1. Introduction — Key questions to ask.

Interpretation is the process and rules by which the meaning and message of the biblical text is determined and understood. Our goal is deciding on the truth within the passage when originally written.

If you miss God's meaning, then you no longer have God's Word (2 Peter 1:20-21).

Some key questions in Step 2:

- What does this mean? (Acts 8:30-31)
- What is the significance of this? (Romans 9:10-13)
- Why did God include this? (Romans 8:28)
- What is the purpose of this passage? (1 Corinthians 6:1-8)
- How did the original author intend the words to be understood? (1 Corinthians 12:13)
- How does this fit with the balance of Scripture? (John 6:44)

Warning: Do not attempt Step 2 (Interpretation) until you have completed Step 1 (Observation). Until you know what the text says you are not prepared to determine what it means or determine how it applies.

Remember: Each passage of scripture has only one meaning but may have several applications.

2. Important Matters to Remember

Effective interpretation demands we consider that the circumstances under which the Bible was written are different from ours.

- Historical (written thousands of years ago)
- Geographical (written in a different land)
- Cultural (with different customs)
- Political - Economic - Social
- Religious - Legal - Ethical
- Language (in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek)
- Writing (different authors and readers; particular purpose and occasion)

These different circumstances are hindrances, obstacles or gaps to our understanding of the original meaning of Scripture and must be overcome by careful study. The introductions, outlines and study notes in a good Study Bible will often provide this kind of information and background about the passage or book being studied.



The Bible was meant to be understood (Deuteronomy 29:29). Remember that the Bible was written by people to be understood by people using normal human language. The Bible contains divine, progressive revelation, but is totally unified (Hebrews 1:1-2; John 1:18)

The Old Testament is not complete without the New Testament and the New Testament can only be understood fully in light of the Old Testament (Luke 24:25-27).

Reason, study, and man's mind alone, will not reveal the truth of Scripture and enable us to accept it as truth. The truth of God's Word is spiritually discerned and accepted (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Effective understanding of Scripture depends on following the established rules of interpretation remembering that:

- The Bible is trustworthy, authoritative and inerrant.
- The Bible is a unity and one part will not contradict another.
- The Bible's revelation is divine, progressive and complete.

3. Special Rules of Interpretation

Certain types of biblical literature require special rules of interpretation:

Special Rule #1 – Parables

A parable is a "true to life" story taken from everyday life, which is constructed around one main thought or idea. A parable is an earthly story with a spiritual meaning. It:

- Teaches one key truth
- Makes one main point
- Illustrates or explains one truth
- Answers a question
- Corrects wrong teaching

Example: Matthew 20:1-16

All of the details of a parable are not usually of great significance — see how they relate to the main truth taught.

Hint: Observe the context carefully. Most parables address a specific issue, answer a particular question or correct some wrong teaching. Parables are most often found in the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke).

Exercise: Read the parable of the sower and the soils in Luke 8:4-15. What do the 4 soils represent? In one sentence state the main truth taught by this parable.



Special Rule #2 – Proverbs

Examine a proverb to determine what it teaches about how to live wisely. A proverb:

- Is a wise saying or comparison.
- Is a simple statement of truth.
- Contains God's wisdom about right living.
- **Teaches principles, not promises.** For example: In Proverbs 22:6 children who are trained up properly will always be aware of the right way, ***whether or not they follow it.***
- Is designed to teach the general principle that works in the greatest number of cases without stating any exceptions.
- Often uses comparisons or contrasts between a wise man and foolish man.
- Shows how a wise man acknowledges God and orders his life accordingly.
- Shows how a foolish man ignores God and lives his life as if God did not exist.
- Contains many figures of speech.
- Illustrates the law of sowing and reaping (cause and effect).

Example: The fear of the Lord is the beginning of ***knowledge***,
But fools despise ***wisdom*** and ***instruction***. Proverbs 1:7

This distinguishes between:

Knowledge = content [observation]

Instruction = leading to comprehension [interpretation]

Wisdom = skill in applying knowledge to life [application]

Proverbs are primarily contained in the wisdom literature of the Bible, e.g. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job.

Exercise: Read Proverbs. 14:16. How does it distinguish between a wise and a foolish man?

Note: Some Proverbs appear to be promises (e.g. Pr. 3:5-6). But even though the principle stated when followed completely may produce the same result as a promise, it is the nature of proverbial literature to set forth a principle, to which there may or may not be exceptions, instead of a guaranteed promise.

Special Rule #3 – Poetry

Examine the figurative language and parallel structure of Hebrew poetry to determine its meaning. Hebrew poetry:

- Does not rhyme sounds or words
- Does rhyme ideas, thoughts, concepts and images



- Contains many figures of speech and symbolic words
- Usually the second line will say something about the first line:
 - i) restate same truth Proverbs 9:9
 - ii) explain or emphasize the same truth Proverbs 24:1-2
 - iii) state cause and effect
 - (good) Proverbs 16:3
 - (bad) Proverbs 5:22
 - iv) make a contrast or comparison Proverbs 9:8

The normal parallel two-line (couplet) structure of Hebrew poetry is easily seen in Proverbs 9:8.

Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; line 1.

Rebuke a wise man and he will love you. line 2.

Notice that line 2 contrasts the response of different people to being rebuked.

Rule: Always try to determine how line 2 impacts line 1.

Hebrew poetry is contained primarily in Job, Psalms, Proverbs and Song of Solomon and parts of books of prophecy like Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc., and uses many figures of speech and symbols.

Exercise: Read Job 42:2. Identify lines 1 and 2. How does line 2 affect line 1?

Exercise: Read Isa. 40:18. Identify lines 1 and 2. How does line 2 affect line 1?

Special Rule #4 – Figures of Speech

Determine the figure of speech used and evaluate its impact on the idea or truth stated.

Definition: An unusual form or expression of a Word or phrase which creates a mental image or paints a word picture: e. g., the “pot is boiling” [it’s not the pot that’s boiling, but the water in it]. Figures of speech are always used to:

- i) Add force to truth conveyed
- ii) Add greater emphasis to it
- iii) Add depth of meaning to it
- iv) Intensify feeling
- v) Add colour
- vi) Attract attention
- vii) Illustrate and make abstract ideas clear

Figurative language is still literal in the sense that the idea conveyed is clear and true.

The truth stated by the figure of speech can be taken literally.

Selected examples of common figures of speech in the Bible:



- i) Simile — a comparison using “like” or “as” e.g. “All men are like grass.” 1 Peter 1:24
- ii) Metaphor — a comparison where one thing represents another (uses some form of verb “to be,” i.e. is, are, were, etc.) e.g. “You are the salt of the earth.” (Matthew 5:13). Another example: “tongue also is a fire” (James 3:6).
- iii) Personification — giving human characteristics to objects, ideas, or animals, e.g., “The trees of the field will clap their hands.” (Isaiah 55:12).
- iv) Anthropomorphism — ascribing human characteristics to God, e.g., “The hand of our God was on us” (Ezra 8:31).
- v) Idiom — a peculiar way of saying something in a particular language, e.g., “breaking of bread” (Acts 2:42).
- vi) Euphemism — the substitution of an inoffensive or mild expression for an offensive one, e.g., “relieve himself” (1 Samuel 24:3).
- vii) Hyperbole — exaggeration for emphasis, e.g., “Whole world would not have room for the books” (John 21:25).
- viii) Irony — expressing something in a sarcastic way which conveys its opposite, e.g., “Shout louder, surely he is a god” (1 Kings 18:27).
- ix) Merism a substitution where two contrasting ideas (extremes or opposites) are used to express a whole, e.g., “You know when I sit and when I rise (i.e., all that I do)” (Psalm 139:2)

Exercise: Read the first 2 lines of Jeremiah 17:11. What figure of speech is used here? What mental image is created?

Special Rule #5 – Symbols

Definition: A symbol is a Word or phrase which stands for or represents something else. Its purpose is to illustrate or clarify, e.g., Jesus Christ as the “Lamb of God” (John 1:29).

Examine all symbols carefully to determine the purpose and meaning of the representation. But be careful, a symbol can refer to more than one person, event or action, e.g., both Satan (1 Peter 5:8) and Christ (Revelation 5:5) are referred to as a lion. Christ represents the good qualities of a lion (strength, kingly, etc.), while Satan its bad side — ferocious predator!

Examples:

Jesus Christ	Lamb, Lion, Rock, Branch, Root.
Holy Spirit	Water, Oil, Wind, Dove.
God’s Presence or Guidance	Cloud, Fire
Satan	Dragon, Serpent
Strength	Horn
Authority	Keys



Exercise: Read Mt. 3:12. What does “winnowing fork” symbolize?

Special Rule #6 – Typology (“Types”)

Types occur in the OT. Their Anti-Types, or fulfilment, occur in the NT. While some Bible teachers seek out and find many types in the OT, most of the analogies break down under close examination. There are, however, a few OT events or people which predict a “picture in advance” what will later become clear in the NT.

Examine types to make sure that there is direct correspondence between the OT example and its NT counterpart. Definition: a type is an OT pattern, example, prefiguring, or foreshadowing of a NT person or event.

Examples:

- Adam as an imperfect type of man prefiguring Christ as perfect man [first Adam/ last Adam] (Romans 5:14; 1 Corinthians 15:22; 1 Corinthians 15:44-49).
- The Passover in Exodus as a type of Christ as the Passover Lamb (Exodus 12:21-23; 1 Corinthians 5:7).
- Melchizedek as a type of Priest from the same order as Christ (Genesis 14:17-20; Hebrews 5: 5-10; Hebrews 7:1-17).
- The Bronze Serpent in the wilderness as a foreshadowing of the healing Christ would bring on the cross (Numbers 21:4-9; John. 3:14-15).

Safeguards:

- i) There must be significant correspondence or resemblance between the OT type and its NT anti-type.
- ii) The NT anti-type must be greater than and fulfill the true meaning of the OT type.
- iii) The NT should clearly identify the OT event or person as being “typical.”

Review:

1. What is the main danger of not following the special rule of interpretation for parables?
2. Why is it important to know that proverbs teach principles not promises?
3. Why is poetry often a very good means of communicating truth?
4. Do figures of speech make interpretation more or less difficult? Why?
5. How do symbols help us understand abstract things more clearly?
6. Why should we be careful in looking for “types”?



Special Rule #7 – Prophecy

Examine prophetic passages using the general rules of interpretation, but carefully considering special features of biblical prophecy. Why study prophecy?

- i) 25% of the Bible was prophecy when written.
- ii) Prophecy demonstrates the faithfulness, sovereignty and supernatural power of God (1 Kings 8:56).
- iii) Prophecy encourages believers to have hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).
- iv) Prophecy purifies and motivates believers to godly living (Titus 2:11-15).
- v) Prophecy reveals God's eternal plan and purpose (revelation) (Isaiah 46:10).

Special Features of Biblical Prophecy

a) Foreshortening

The OT prophet or NT writer could not see that many years might separate two events (the valleys between successive mountain peaks). The time of fulfilment of this prophecy hundreds of years in the future was unknown to the prophet: Isaiah 61:1-2 forward to Luke 4:17-21.

b) Near Application – Far Fulfilment

Isaiah 7:14 Matthew 1:22-23

This prophecy of Isaiah had application in his day but also looked forward to a future fulfilment in Jesus as Messiah.

c) Partial Fulfilment to Date (Progressive Fulfilment)

Joel 2:28-32 Acts 2:17-21

This O.T. prophecy was only partially fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was given. Part of the prophecy still awaits fulfilment in the future (See Revelation 6:12-14).

Interpretation Hints for Prophecy:

a) Compare all related and parallel passages (e.g., Daniel and Revelation)

Daniel 7:25 Revelation 13:5

b) Realize that there may be a long time (hundreds or thousands of years)

between the announcement of the prophecy and its fulfilment. Isaiah and Malachi both predicted the ministry of John the Baptist in NT times announcing the coming of Jesus Christ.



Isaiah 40:3

Malachai 3:1-3

Matthew 3:3

c) Distinguish between already fulfilled and yet to be fulfilled prophecy.

Examples:

Already fulfilled: Isaiah 44:28 and Ezra 6:3. Isaiah prophesied that Cyrus would allow the Jews to rebuild the temple. Two hundred years later we see that fulfilment in Ezra when the Jews are allowed to return to Jerusalem by Cyrus.

Yet to be fulfilled: Jeremiah 31:31-34. The New covenant as it relates to Israel.

d) Identify figures of speech and symbolic language.

Revelation 6:1-2 — The rider on a white horse is a symbol for the Antichrist. But note in Revelation 19:11 that Christ is also pictured on a White horse in His second coming.

e) Make certain the interpretation does not contradict other Scriptures.

Luke 17:34-37 — This cannot refer to the Rapture since the one taken goes to judgment (see 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Exercise: Read Isaiah 53:1-9. How do 1 Peter 2:21-25 and Matthew 8:14-17 apply this prophecy to Jesus Christ?

Review:

1. List at least two reasons why it is important to study prophecy.
2. What does the study of prophecy reveal about the character of God?

Special Rule #8 – Use of the Old Testament in the New

Examine the context of the OT and NT passages and determine how and for what purpose the OT is used in the NT. The use of the OT in the NT shows the unity of Scripture and that it will not contradict itself.

Importance:

- i) Over 300 separate quotations of OT in NT (10% of NT is OT quotes or references).
- ii) OT and NT have same divine Author.



- iii) NT writers knew the OT thoroughly and recognized the authority of the OT as God's Word (Hebrews 3:7; Galatians 3:8-9; 2 Timothy 3:15-17) as did Jesus (Luke 24:44; Matthew. 15:7).
- iv) Understanding of the OT is indispensable to understanding the NT. (Luke 24:26-27). To understand fully why Jesus came and who He really is, you must study the OT (Galatians 3:16-17). Unless you understand the promises made to Abraham in Genesis 12-17, you won't understand clearly what Paul says in Galatians.

How the NT uses the OT:

- i) With an introductory formula:
 - "It is written" (Matthew 4:6).
 - "To fulfill" (Matthew 1:22).
 - "The Scripture says," or "what does the Scripture say" (Romans 4:3).
- ii) By combining several OT passages:
 - 2 Corinthians 6:16-18 Matthew 22:34-40
- iii) By varying the wording of the OT passage:
 - Romans 15:12

Purpose of NT quoting the OT:

- i) To fulfill (realize) OT predictive prophecy
 - Mathew 1:22-23 fulfills completely Isaiah 7:14 — but fulfill does not always mean realize or accomplish. Acts 2 doesn't fulfill Joel 2 completely.
- ii) To confirm an OT principle or truth
 - Acts 15:4-18 Amos 9:11-12
- iii) To illustrate or apply an OT principle or truth
 - 1 Corinthians 1:19 Isaiah 29:14
- iv) To summarize an OT principle or truth
 - Galatians 5:14 Leviticus 19:18
 - Romans 1:17 Habakkuk 2:4
- v) To use OT wording for emphasis
 - Romans 10:8 Deuteronomy 30:14

Suggested Study Hints:

- i) Use the following to find the OT passage:
 - Text notes
 - Study notes
 - Cross reference system
 - Concordance (use a key word)



- ii) Examine the OT context.
- iii) Examine the NT context, but do not try to read a NT meaning back into the OT which was not intended for original OT readers.
- iv) Identify the differences in wording, etc., between the OT passage and the NT passage.
- v) Determine how and why the OT passage is being used (direct quote, illustration, summary, fulfilment, etc.)

Exercise: Read 1 Corinthians 6:16. How does this NT passage use the OT passage in Genesis 2:24?

Review:

- 1. How reliable, trustworthy and useful did the NT writers consider the OT Scripture to be?
- 2. Why is it not possible to fully understand the NT without the OT?

Interpretive Dangers:

There are three (3) primary dangers which must be avoided at the interpretation stage:

- 1. An incomplete interpretation ~ Occurs when we fail to observe and interpret all of the text.
- 2. An exaggerated interpretation ~ Occurs when we read something into the text which is not there.
- 3. An inaccurate interpretation ~ Occurs when we reach the wrong meaning and conclusion because of lack of diligent study, failure to observe properly, failure to rely on the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit, etc.

A wrong interpretation leads to wrong application.

Exercise: List the four most important things you have personally learned about interpretation.



Step 3. Apply the Text. What shall I (Must I) Do?

You are wasting your time if you read and study Scripture but don't intend to obey it. Studying the Word of God is not the goal but only the means to the goal of becoming mature in Christ (James 1:22-25; Luke 6:46-49):

John 13:17 Respond to and obey the truth

Hebrews 5:14 By "constant use"; "trained"

Key Questions:

- What shall I do?
- How does this work?
- How can I put this into practice?

Results of not obeying God's Word

- You deceive yourself into believing that knowing is enough.
- You will not grow into spiritual maturity.
- You will not keep (retain) what you don't practice.
- You will contradict what you say by your actions.
- You cannot effectively teach/preach what you have not applied yourself.

Application (Obedience) must:

- Not be attempted before observation and interpretation
- Be a decision, not an emotion
- Take place over an appropriate period of time
- Be complete, not partial
- Rely on the power of the Spirit
- Include a plan to put it into action, which is:
 - ✓ Significant enough to commit to
 - ✓ Simple enough to be understood
 - ✓ Short enough to be followed
 - ✓ Specific enough to be measured
 - ✓ Spiritual enough to make a difference

Rules for Effective Application:

State the teaching of a passage in the form of a timeless principle or truth which is:

- relevant to your or your church's needs today
- consistent with God's Word
- general, but clear enough to be specifically followed

For example, the teaching of Lk. 9:23 might be stated as follows: "Each day I need to submit my will to God's will in every circumstance." Examine the teaching in view of how it can be applied:



Ask Yourself the Following Questions:

In this passage is there:

- A principle to apply
- A command to obey
- A sin to confess and forsake (repent of)
- A habit to start or stop
- An attitude to correct
- A truth to believe
- A promise to claim
- An example to follow
- An area to release to God
- A specific action to take
- A condition to meet
- A person to forgive
- A danger or error to avoid
- A change to make in my character, conduct or conversation

Put the application into practice, depending on the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit:

Romans 8:12-14

Philippians 4:9

Galatians 5:16-18, 22-25

Philippians 4:13

Goal of Application: Obedience.

The goal of Application is life change, bringing our attitudes, actions, beliefs and values into conformity to God's Word. We obey God's Word and teach others to obey so that we can become more like Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 John 3:2).

“Apply yourself to the whole text and the whole text to yourself.” J. A. Bengel

Exercise: Read 1 Peter 1:13-16 and 2 Corinthians 7:1.
Write out how you can put these verses into practice in your life.
How do you personally intend to obey these commands?
What specific steps must you take? (See also Psalm 139:23-24)

Summary:	Accurate	Correct	Right
	<i>Observation</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>	<i>Application</i>

Proverbs 24:32 sums it up well:

“I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw.”



Worked Example:

An Interpretation of Mark 16:9-20

**With special attention to verses 17-18 (Taking Up Serpents and Immunity to Poisons)
(Using the NKJV, unless otherwise stated.)**

Introduction

In order to put into practice everything we have learned, let us take a difficult passage of the Bible. These verses have caused so much controversy that many believe the last part of the original gospel of Mark should be discarded, that is Mark 16:9-20. Others think this is a later addition by a redactor (editor) with an agenda, although we don't know what that was or who it was. There is no evidence for this, only speculation. Those who argue for the shorter ending at verse 8 base their conclusions on internal evidence (difference of style and vocabulary between vv.9-20 and the rest of Mark), plus the omission of these verses from the Codex Sinaiticus and the Codex Vaticanus. Therefore, on this basis, the abrupt ending at verse 8 means the original ending has been lost. However, the authenticity of both the Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus has been questioned by forensic examination. It must be noted that virtually all other Greek manuscripts and many church fathers do contain this passage.

Step 1 – Observation

Let us look at the passage:

9 Now when *He* rose early on the first *day* of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons. 10 She went and told those who had been with Him, as they mourned and wept. 11 And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe. 12 After that, He appeared in another form to two of them as they walked and went into the country. 13 And they went and told *it* to the rest, *but* they did not believe them either. 14 Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen.

15 And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. 17 And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; 18 they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

19 So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. 20 And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with *them* and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen.

Mark 16:9-20



Context:

If we dismiss this passage, it would mean that Mark's Gospel is left hanging in mid-air, so to speak, without a proper ending. If, as some teach, it is the case that Mark's original ending has been lost, and this is a later separately added summary, then our Lord's words about preservation have apparently failed (Jesus is speaking):

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but **My words** will by no means pass away.”

Matthew 24:35 (my emphasis)

The contents of the Mark 16:9-20 are orthodox. Not only that, but the style and especially the vocabulary, closely parallel the first chapter of the book.¹ This illustrates the structure called Chiasm, in which the beginning and the end of a work are parallel, in the format abcd – dcba. In conclusion, if the end is a mirror of the beginning, then it is almost certainly written as part of the whole.

Despite some scholars saying the real ending must have been lost. I must emphasize that most of the disputed ending is very similar to the endings of Matthew, Luke, John, and the beginning of Acts, all of which are a form of the Great Commission (Matt 28:16-20; Luke 24:44-49; John 20:19-23; Acts 1:6-8). On this basis the ending should be retained. The only major difference is in verse 18, where it talks about picking up serpents and surviving poisonous drinks. Therefore, with the exception of verse 18, our disputed passage is quite normal and is in harmony with the endings of the other two synoptic gospels, the gospel of John, and the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles.

The immediate context is evangelism and the Great Commission.

Verses 17 & 18

Let us pick up the text at verse 17:

17 And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; **18 they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them;** they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

Mark 16:17-18 (My highlights)

So our exercise will consist of looking at these two verses and attempting to rightly divide their meaning, and understand why these verses were included in the first place. The first thing we will need to do is to decide the literary genre of the disputed passage in its entirety. It is neither poetry nor prophecy, but simple prose. Therefore, is it narrative or discourse?

¹ See further, George Salmon, *Historical Introduction to the Study of the Books of the New Testament*, pp. 144-151.



On examination (Step One – Observation) we can see that:

Verses 9-14 are narrative; and

Verses 15-18 are discourse, containing commands from Jesus Himself; and

Verses 19-20 revert to narrative.

Literal or Figurative?

Now, since we are concerned with verses 17-18 (discourse), the next question we must ask is, “Are these verses literal or figurative?” They give a list of supernatural signs from the Holy Spirit, to accompany those who believe and preach the Gospel as described in verse 20.

(Remember, Jesus issued these as commands.) The list is:

1. Casting out demons,
2. Speaking in new languages (not ecstatic gibberish),
3. Able to handle serpents,
4. Immunity from poisons,
5. Laying effective hands on the sick.

(I will not comment here about whether or not these signs or gifts exist today; or whether they were only for the Apostolic Age, before the Bible was complete, to authenticate the ministry of Jesus and the teachings of the Apostles. That is a different discussion for another day, but see Hebrews 2:3-4.)

Let us go back to our primary discussion. Are these literal signs or symbolic (figurative)? We know that demon possession is real and exorcisms do happen. We also know that the Holy Spirit sometimes grants a believer the ability to speak in a language they haven’t learned, to bless a native speaker of that language. Believers are also commanded to lay hands on the sick and pray for them — any healing comes from the Holy Spirit, lest individuals should boast. All of these things (items 1, 2, 5) are supernatural, pointing to God. Although individual human beings are active in these three areas, it is through the power of the supernatural, the Holy Spirit, by which they are accomplished. The question now can be asked, are items 3 and 4 also supernatural on the same basis, with believers handling literal serpents and drinking literal poisons, by the power of the Holy Spirit? How should we deal with these?

We must now interpret these two verses in light of their main context — evangelism and the Great Commission — **and that they are two of the five commands of Jesus.**



Step 2 – Interpretation

Properly interpreted, the verses included in the traditional text of this passage will not cause any erroneous doctrines to arise. However, no doctrine should be formulated based on verse 18 alone. Unfortunately, some have done just that.

There are many rural churches in the southeastern USA who practice literal snake handling as a religious rite, mostly from the Holiness Movement, Pentecostals and Charismatics. Snake handling as a religious ritual began in 1909 in Tennessee. So for at least 1900 years, no-one in the church at large thought this was a literal command or literal activity, ***binding on all believers***. Snake handling, then, is a very recent phenomenon. Snakes, typically rattlers, are passed among the congregants for handling. Church elders sometimes patrol the church to ensure the snakes do not go beyond certain boundaries. Most participants are not bitten, but some have died from snake bites.

The ***Church of God with Signs*** believes that snakes are incarnations of demons, so if a church member truly has the Holy Spirit within them, they should be able to handle venomous snakes— as well as drink poison and suffer no harm. By this logic, the people who died did not have the Holy Spirit. You might say they were filtered out from the (self-designated) true believers, based on taking one verse out of its context and applied literally.

They are following the steps Observation — Interpretation — Application, but have not properly observed and interpreted the verses, leading to a wrong application.

They also refer to Paul's experience in the Book of Acts:

3 But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand. 4 So when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live." 5 But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. 6 However, they were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.

Acts 28:3-6

These verses are not a discourse with commands or doctrinal implications. It is a simple narrative of the events of Paul's shipwreck on Malta. When he placed some sticks on the fire, a viper came out, bit his hand, and he shook it off. If you know about the fangs of snakes, they curve inwards, and once it has a firm grip it will not be shaken off until it has injected all its venom. Clearly in escaping from the flames it fastened on to the first thing available, Paul's hand, but it cannot have been a firm grip, because Paul immediately shook it off, probably in less than 2 or 3 seconds—and so, very little poison, if any, was injected. There



are no evangelical implications, or any mention of the Holy Spirit, despite the fact the natives wanted to worship him as a god. It is just a narrative of Paul's eventful journey to Rome.

These people in southeastern USA are taking Mark 16:18 literally, some at the cost of their lives, thorough bad observation and faulty interpretation. **This cannot be interpreted as a literal command from Jesus.** There is also the spiritual or demonic side to this practice, which smacks of false teaching and gnosticism. In the 2nd century the Gnostic Ophites reportedly handled snakes during their services,² and also worshipped the serpent.³ Gnosticism is ever present, even today, teaching more than the simple Gospel, drawing people away from Christ to worship something else. (In Greek, the word for serpent is ὄφις, pronounced ophis, hence the name of the sect.) So let us examine the word "serpent" to see if we can shed any light on this problem; so this now becomes a word study.

Word Study:

In general, throughout the biblical texts, the serpent is used as a symbol of deception, sin, lies, and false teaching. We first come across this in Genesis:

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"

Genesis 3:1

Here the angelic deceiver is introduced, represented by a serpent, symbolising the evil of listening to his lies and **subsequently acting upon them, or applying them**, as Adam did. If we skip to the very end of the Bible, we read:

1 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. 2 He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; 3 and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.

Revelation 20:1-3

As part of the final stages of history, as prophesied in the Bible, the serpent of old, from the garden of Eden in Genesis, is taken up and restrained to the end of the Millennium, then he will be released for a little season, just before we progress to the eternal state. So the serpent is considered evil from beginning to end of biblical history. This is significant for our word study. Serpents are symbols of evil and sin.

² Joseph Campbell & M. J. Abadie (1981). *The Mythic Image*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p. 296.

³ Tuomas Rasimus (2007). "The Serpent in Gnostic and Related Texts". In Painchaud, Louis; Poirier, Paul-Hubert (eds.). *L'Évangile selon Thomas et les textes de Nag Hammadi: Colloque International*. Presses Université Laval, p. 804.



We meet serpents again in Numbers:

6 So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.

7 Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. 8 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery *serpent*, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.” 9 So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived. Numbers 21:6-9

The plague of ‘fiery’ serpents was sent by God as a result of rebellion and disobedience of the people. They had been influenced by false ideas about their condition, clearly as a result of lack of faith in God’s providence (verse 5 preceding). Here the narrative stops and we get no more explanation of this event until we get to the New Testament, in John’s Gospel:

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. John 3:14-17

As we know, the bronze serpent that Moses made was forged in fire (a fiery serpent). We also know that fire is a biblical symbol of judgment—hence the original plague of fiery serpents sent by God. So the bronze serpent hung on a pole was a symbol of sin judged. Anyone who looked on it would be saved. Jesus became sin judged hung on a pole, and anyone who looked upon Him and accepted what that represented, was saved. John’s Gospel then continues with the famous verse of John 3:16.

Sadly, the bronze serpent of Moses became an object of idolatry, worshipped by the people, until King Hezekiah was forced to deal with it:

He [Hezekiah] removed the high places and broke the *sacred* pillars, cut down the wooden image and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan. 2 Kings 18:4

See Appendix A for a fuller explanation of the term “Nehushtan.” So the Israelites fell into the same trap as the Ophites, worshipping the bronze serpent for its alleged powers; but of course inanimate objects have no power, as God has pointed out many times; nor do literal serpents have any miraculous powers as the modern Ophites of the southeastern United States have discovered, some of them at the cost of their lives.



Let us also consider the poison they are supposed to drink:

18 Beware, lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the LORD our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. Beware, lest there be among you a root ⁴ bearing poisonous and bitter fruit, 19 one who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.'

Deuteronomy 29:18-19

And,

Their wine *is* the poison of serpents,
And the cruel venom of cobras.

Deuteronomy 32:33

These verses in Deuteronomy, to the children of Israel in the wilderness, is a warning against self-justification, which is false teaching, and hence, if applied to the heart, leads away from God. Drinking the poison chalice of false teaching damages the soul, spiritual life, and our relationship with Almighty God. Then we see in Jeremiah:

"For behold, I will send serpents among you,
Vipers which cannot be charmed,
And they shall bite you," says the LORD.

Jeremiah 8:17

"Vipers that cannot be charmed," is an interesting phrase, going against the well-known practice of literal snake-charming. This implies they are not literal serpents, causing physical death, but symbolic ones that cannot be turned away. By implication their bite is deadly to spiritual life. This is another warning from the Lord to avoid the poisonous venom of false teaching, which undermines the pure and simple faith in God and His Word.

Therefore, by deduction, we can see that the serpent is a symbol of sin, lies, and deception, and its poison damages spiritual life.

Handling Serpents

There is one last thing we must examine and interpret, and that is the verbs used concerning the serpents and the poison. Let us look at the text again:

17 And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; 18 they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

Mark 16:17-18 (My highlights)

⁴ Hebrews 12:14-15



The above is the NKJV translation, but other translations read:

“They shall take up serpents...”	KJV (AV) / NKJV / ASV
“...they will pick up serpents with their hands,”	ESV / NIV ⁵
“...they will pick up snakes.”	LEB
“...they will pick up serpents,”	NASU / AMP

These are a representative sample. Let us examine the Greek Received Text of verse 18, with the Greek and its pronunciation, the parsing of the words, and the Strongs reference numbers:

they will	take	up	serpents;	and	if they	drink	anything	deadly,	it
→ →	ἀροῦσι ₁₂	←	ὄφεις ₁	κἄν ₃	← →	πίωσιν ₆	τις	θανάσιμόν ₄	→
	arousi		opheis	kan		piōsin	ti	thanasimon	
	VFAI3P		NAPM	CLN CAC		VAAS3P	RX-ASN	JASN	
	142		3789	2579		4095	5100	2286	
will	by	no means	hurt	them					
	οὐ ₇ μὴ ₈	← ←	βλάψει ₁₀	αὐτοῦς ₉					
	ou mē		blapsei	autous					
	BN TN BN TN		VFAI3S	RP3APM					
	3756 3361		984	846					

The verb translated “take up” is the Greek word: ἀροῦσι (arousi): Verb, Future, Active, Indicative, Third Person Plural. It carries the following meanings, depending on context. James Swanson, in his *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), gives a fuller explanation:

149 αἶρω (*airō*): vb. DBLHebr 5951; Str 142; TDNT 1.185—**1.** LN 15.203 **carry, take up, take away** (Mk 6:29; Mk 16:18 v.r.); **2.** LN 20.43 **destroy** (Jn 11:48); **3.** LN 20.65 **execute** (Lk 23:18); **4.** LN 57.218 **withdraw**, money (Lk 19:21); **5.** LN 90.96 αἶρω ἀπό (*airō apo*), **cause to no longer experience**, formally, **remove from** (Mt 21:43); **6.** LN 24.83 αἶρω τὸν σταυρόν (*airō ton stauron*), **suffer unto death**, formally, **lift up the cross** (Mk 8:34); **7.** LN 30.36 αἶρω τὴν ψυχὴν τινος (*airō tēn psychēn tinos*), **keep in suspense**, formally, **lift up the soul of someone** (Jn 10:24+).

So it can be concluded that the translation of “take up,” although correct in one sense, is insufficient to express the full meaning and semantic domain of the word, viz.: take away; destroy; execute; withdraw; cause to no longer experience; remove from.

⁵ “with their hands” is not in the Greek texts, neither the Received Text (TR) nor the Minority/Alexandrian text (NA27).



Additionally, there is the extended usage of: suffer unto death; lift up the cross; lift up the soul of someone.

If we apply this logic to our previous interpretation that the word “serpents” represents false teachings, then we could provide a better translation/interpretation of, say, “remove false teachings,” or, “deal with false teachings,” or, better yet, “handle false teachings.” This would give the interpretation that the believer could handle false teachings, and remain faithful to the true teaching of the Word of God.

Aaron’s Rod

As part of our word study, let us look at the story of Aaron’s rod:

8 Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 9 "When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, 'Show a miracle for yourselves,' then you shall say to Aaron, 'Take your rod and cast it before Pharaoh, and let it become a serpent.'" 10 So Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh, and they did so, just as the Lord commanded. And Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a serpent. 11 But Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers; so the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. 12 For every man threw down his rod, and they became serpents. But Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods. 13 And Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the Lord had said.

Exodus 7:8-13

Significantly, Aaron’s serpent swallowed up the serpents of the false gods of Egypt. Aaron’s rod became a serpent at God’s command. God did this to show Pharaoh that His Word (represented by God’s serpent) was greater than all the false words or teachings of the Egyptian gods (represented by their serpents). But Pharaoh would not listen, despite the demonstration in terms he could understand, and he hardened his heart.

Despite having a clear demonstration, in terms clear to Pharaoh, that his gods were false, Pharaoh wouldn’t listen. He was so caught up in the false worldview of his culture that **he could not hear the lesson God was teaching**. So (in verse 14) God moved on to a much harsher lesson—the ten plagues of Egypt, each plague targeted at the individual gods of Egypt.

In terms of our word study of αἶρω (*airō*), God’s Word took away; destroyed; executed; withdrew; caused to no longer experience all the falsehoods of the gods of Egypt.

Drinking Poison

The verb translated “drink” is the Greek word: πῖωσιν (*piōsin*) Verb, Aorist, Active, Subjunctive, Third Person Plural. It carries the following meanings, depending on context: again referring to James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains*:



Greek (New Testament) (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), we get a fuller explanation:

4403 πίνω (*pinō*): vb.; ≡ DBLHebr 9272; Str 4095; TDNT 6.135—**1.** LN 23.34 **drink** (Jn 4:7, 10; Mk 16:18 v.r.); **2.** LN 14.35 **soak up, absorb** (Heb 6:7+); **3.** LN 24.81 **experience, suffer severely** (Mt 20:22, 23; Mk 10:38, 39; Jn 18:11+).

So it can be concluded that the translation of “drink,” although correct in the literal sense, is insufficient to express the full meaning and semantic domain of the word, viz.: soak up; absorb; experience; or suffer severely.

If we apply this to the poison mentioned in verse 18, we can now conclude that it is the poison of false teaching.

Conclusions:

1. We can interpret the verse to mean that the believer would be able to handle false teachings, and therefore not be affected by the spiritual poison of any false teachings they may encounter in the context of their evangelistic efforts.
2. Therefore the reason they were included in the first place, is so that the believer has another weapon in his armory: the ability to discern false teachings, and prevent their poison from damaging his own faith and that of other.



Step 3 - Application

Looking at the list of commands in verses 17-18, we can now reassess their context and their application to ourselves. Here is the list again:

1. Casting out demons,
2. Speaking in new languages (not ecstatic gibberish),
3. Able to handle serpents,
4. Immunity from poisons,
5. Laying effective hands on the sick.

Previously we discussed that items 1, 2, and 5 were the work of the Holy Spirit, acting through human agents. We can now add items 3 and 4 to the work of the Holy Spirit, who will give us the ability to resist false teaching and maintain our adherence to the true Word. Through His ministry of **Illumination of the Scriptures** to our hearts and minds, He will teach us all things and enable us to prevent the poison of false doctrine from infecting others.

Our application is that by handling false doctrine by teaching correct doctrine, we prevent its poison from having any harmful effect on the believer or the subject of our evangelism. The whole context of these verses is the great commission and the evangelization of the world. This context gives added strength to our interpretation and application of these verses.

Wise as Serpents and Innocent as Doves

Jesus said:

Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise ⁶ as serpents and innocent ⁷ as doves. Matthew 10:15

This does not imply the serpents are wise and that we should imitate them. The serpent is cunning. What Jesus is saying is, beware of the cunning of the serpent that you may resist his wiles and maintain your innocence. The only way we can do this is through complete and thorough knowledge of Scripture, that we may answer deception, as Jesus did in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11).

As believers are agents through whom the Holy spirit works, so those who do not serve the Lord Jesus Christ are used as agents of the evil one. Paul writes in his conclusion to his letter to the Romans:

17 Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. 18 For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering

⁶ Genesis 3:1

⁷ Romans 16:19 (Gk.); Philippians 2:15; [1 Corinthians 14:20]



speech deceive the hearts of the simple. 19 For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil. 20 And the God of peace will crush Satan [**that serpent of old**] under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

Romans 16:17-20 (My interpolation)

So then, what should (must) we believers do? The Word of God has the answer:

2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. 5 But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

2 Timothy 4:2-5

15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; 16 having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. 17 For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

1 Peter 3:15-17

Even if we suffer for the Truth, we must maintain a good conscience and, having done all, stand up for the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

2 Timothy 2:2

Remember always that Bible Study is meant to be passed on!

Ends.



Appendix A

“Nehushtan” in Israelite Religion

Various theories have been put forth on the origin and nature of the serpent cult in Israelite religion based on the many Near Eastern conceptions of the serpent’s abilities and attributes. The biblical authors sought to explain the origin of Nehushtan by linking the serpent cult of the eighth century BC with the tradition of the Mosaic serpent fashioned in the wilderness. Although it is not mentioned in the text, the biblical authors imply that the serpent was preserved from the time of Moses and eventually taken to Jerusalem, where it became an object of reverence to the point of idolatry for the Israelites. While this view is possible, it is problematic for two reasons:

1. No account is provided of the serpent’s transition from the wilderness to an object of veneration in urban Israel, unlike other sacred objects associated with Moses—such as Aaron’s staff, the jar of manna, and the two tablets of the law (Exod 16:33–34; Num 17:10–11; 1 Kgs 8:9; Heb 9:4)
2. It seems unlikely that Hezekiah would have destroyed the bronze serpent had he known it to be the same serpent fashioned by Moses.

An alternative explanation is that the veneration of the bronze snake was an Israelite adaptation of a Canaanite religious practice established in the second millennium BC. The archaeological evidence suggests that ancient Syria-Palestine’s veneration of the snake became prevalent in the mid- to late Bronze Age, when the Canaanites inhabited the southern Levant. By this point, the snake—with many mythical associations—had long been a revered creature in Egyptian and Mesopotamian art and literature. Therefore, it is likely these conceptions of the snake would influence Canaanite—and subsequently Israelite—thought.

Scholars have put various theories forth in an attempt to explain Nehushtan in light of its probable Canaanite background. Karen Randolph Joines (*Serpent Symbolism*, 61–84, 90–93; “Bronze Serpent”) argues that the bronze serpent in Canaanite culture was probably associated with a fertility cult. Joines is therefore the chief proponent of the view that Hezekiah’s Nehushtan was a Canaanite fertility deity taken over by the Israelites to represent Yahweh’s powers of fruitfulness and rejuvenation. The biblical text, however, does not seem to indicate that Nehushtan had anything to do with fertility specifically. Rowley suggests that Nehushtan was originally a Jebusite deity taken over by the Israelites when David conquered Jerusalem in the 10th century BC (2 Sam 5:6–9; Rowley, “Zadok”), though this is unclear.

Although the Israelites’ reverence of the serpent likely had its roots in Canaanite religion, it seems that the Israelite perception of the snake cult was informed by early traditions of association with Egypt and the Midianites, preserved in the exodus and wilderness wanderings accounts. The biblical text suggests that the bronze serpent was a symbol to drive away evil, as it was a dangerous animal that at the same time represented a deity (much like the uraeus in Egyptian iconography). Thus, it is argued that the bronze serpent probably came



to represent a lower deity of healing or perhaps also life and rejuvenation. According to this view, it either was perceived as acting on behalf of the God of Israel or embodying Yahweh's ability to heal, restore, and protect. Scholars holding this view argue there was no place for such an entity in the conservative Yahwism of Hezekiah, which explains Hezekiah's move to destroy Nehushtan, a mere "thing of bronze."⁸

⁸ Justin L. Kelley, "[Nehushtan](#)," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).



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