

## FOUR THOUGHTS ON APPLYING HISTORY TO BIBLE INTERPRETATION:

①



Sometimes knowing how the Bible was understood in the **past** changes how we apply it in the **present** (e.g., John 4.1-42)

②



Sometimes we **misunderstand** how the Bible was understood in the past so **misapply** it in the present (Mark 10.23-27)

③

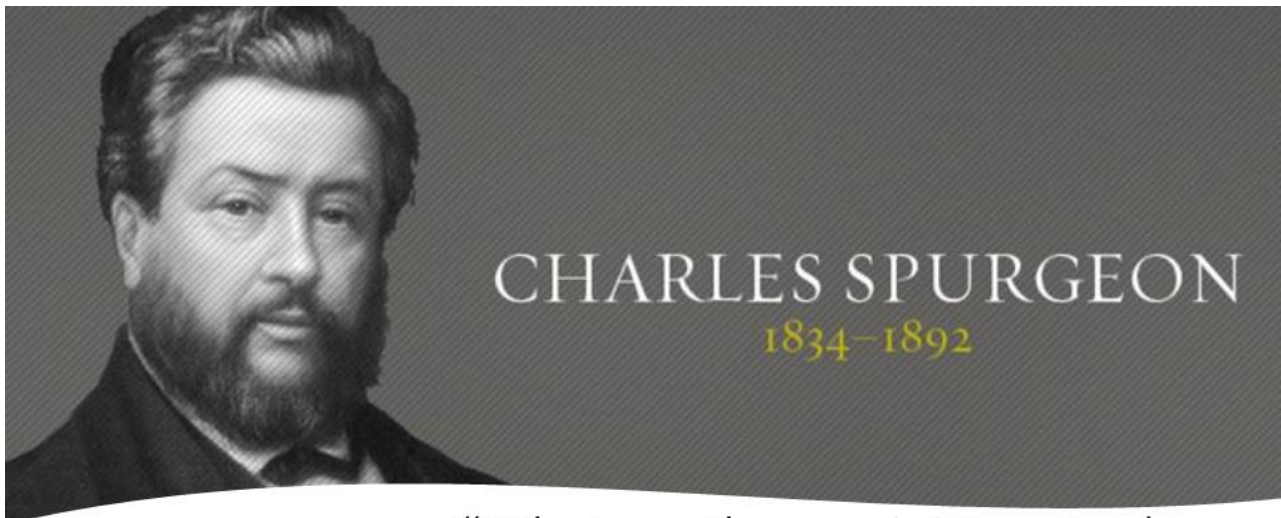


Sometimes the Bible's message in the past is meant to **stay** in the past (Psalm 137.9; Matthew 23.23; 2 Timothy 4.13)

④



Sometimes it isn't clear whether a Bible's message is meant to **stay** in the past or whether or how to apply it in the **present** (e.g., 1 Timothy 2.8-15; Matthew 5.39)



Charles Spurgeon,  
*Lectures to My Students*,  
Lecture XIII

“What are those ministers to do who have a slender apparatus? By a slender apparatus I mean that they have few books, and little or no means wherewith to purchase more. This is a state of things which ought not to exist in any case.”

# Interpreting a Biblical Passage

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## Bible Backgrounds

Because the books of the Bible were written a long time ago in cultures far, far away, much of what the Bible says only makes sense when we understand something of those times and cultures. For this, we need help.

### Tools: Secondary Sources

To access the **alien world** of the Bible, we have access to tools that represent **multiple lifetimes** of study:

- Bible atlases – give not only regional maps, but discussions of architecture, customs, politics, history
- Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias, and handbooks – give articles about the people, places, and customs of the biblical world;
- Commentaries – the **Introduction** section usually gives background information relevant to a particular biblical book;
- Old and New Testament Introductions/Surveys – give an overview of individual biblical books

## Two Levels of Bible Background Investigation

### Broad: The Biblical Book

To understand **many** books of the Bible, we may need to grasp **broadly** the historical and cultural world in which those books were composed. For this, we need to investigate:

- Who is the *author* and what is the author's relationship to the *recipients*?
  - Does the author assume a position of **authority** or **privilege** over the recipients?
  - Does the author have a **positive** relationship with the recipients?
- When was this book written and received?
  - Who is in **political power** at the time? (Is it written during a period of **freedom** or **captivity**? If captivity, who are the **captors**?)
- Where is the book composed/sent?
  - Is the message composed/received at "home" or from exile, prison, or some other location?
  - Is it from/to an *urban* or *rural* setting?
- What are the everyday customs, behaviours, and beliefs we might expect of people at this time and in this place?
- Why was this book written *in/to this place* and *at this time*?

Many biblical books do not disclose the circumstances surrounding their composition. As you study, your **secondary sources** will help you to determine the extent to which knowing a biblical book's background is accessible and useful to understanding a particular passage.

In any case, we still do well to remember that the Bible reflects an **alien world** with customs, behaviours, and beliefs that do not remotely resemble our own. Becoming **broadly** acquainted with honour/shame, purity, social structures, agrarian practices, political rule, *etc.*, can make us more sensitive to the Bible's message.

### Particular: The Passage

Beyond the biblical **book**, many of the Bible's individual **stories** relate settings with particular historical circumstances to investigate. But besides stories, *every* biblical passage simply **assumes** and **embeds** the customs, behaviours, and beliefs of the Bible's **alien world**.

Based on your observations, what **alien behaviours, beliefs, customs, economics, family life, peoples, places, politics, purity, rituals, status, etc.** does your passage simply **assume** and **embed** that you can investigate further?

# Resources for Effective Bible Reading, Preaching, and Teaching

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(\*Items in **bold with \*asterisk** specially recommended for a pastor's personal library.)

## Assessing Resources for Quality

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Not all resources are equal. When assessing resources, be aware of:

- The source's *actual expertise* (what are your source's credentials? What is your source *qualified* to tell you? Does the source have *legitimate expertise* in its area?);
- The source's intended **purpose** (is your source scholarly? devotional? homiletical?);
- The source's **currency** (how up-to-date is your source? Matthew Henry is long dead...let him rest in peace! Similarly, Vine's Dictionary and Strong's Concordance use long discarded definitions of Greek and Hebrew words. Using definitions from these sources is like a doctor using a 1<sup>st</sup> edition of Gray's Anatomy to practise medicine today!);
- The source's **theological or ideological bias**. This is often more difficult to discern, but it's important to be aware that *everyone* has biases, and sometimes even recognized scholars are pushing particular agendas.

## How to Read the Bible

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Bartholomew, Craig G. *Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Framework for Hearing God in Scripture*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016.

Blomberg, Craig L. *Can We Still Believe the Bible? An Evangelical Engagement with Contemporary Questions*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2014.

Blomberg, Craig L., with Jennifer Foutz Markley. *Handbook of New Testament Exegesis*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010.

**\*Carson, D.A. *Exegetical Fallacies*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996.**

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

**\*Fee, Gordon D. and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.**

Fee, Gordon D. *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2002.

Gorman, Michael J. *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers*. Revised and expanded ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010.

Green, Joel B. Ed. *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2010.

Green, Joel B. *Seized by Truth: Reading the Bible as Scripture*. Abingdon, 2010.

Kaiser, Jr., Walter C. *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011.

Kaiser, Walter C. and Moisés Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*. Revised and expanded ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.

Keener, Craig S. *Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in the Light of Pentecost*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016.

**\*McKnight, Scot. *The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible*. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016.**

Osborne, Grant R. *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Revised and expanded edition. Downers Grove: IVP, 2006.

Stuart, Douglas. *Old Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*. 4<sup>th</sup> rev. ed. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2009.

Thiselton, Anthony C. *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.

Thiselton, Anthony C. *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.

Vanhoozer, Kevin J. *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.

OT Introductions and Theologies

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Arnold, Bill T. and Bryan E. Beyer. *Encountering the Old Testament: A Christian Survey*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008.

Birch, Bruce C., Walter Brueggemann, Terence E. Fretheim, and David L. Petersen. *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Abingdon, 2005.

Broyles, Craig C., ed. *Interpreting the Old Testament. A Guide for Exegesis*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001.

Brueggemann, Walter. *Old Testament Theology: An Introduction*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008.

Childs, Brevard S. *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1986.

Childs, Brevard S. *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1979.

Collins, John J. *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007.

**\*Dillard, Raymond and Tremper Longman III. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006.**

Goldingay, John. *Old Testament Theology. Volume One. Israel's Gospel*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2003; *Volume Two. Israel's Faith*. InterVarsity Press, 2006; *Volume Three. Israel's Life*. Downers Grove, IVP, 2009.

Hill, Andrew E. and John H. Walton. *A Survey of the Old Testament* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.

Kitchen, Kenneth A. *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

Routledge, Robin. *Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008.

Sweeney, Marvin A. *Tanak: A Theological and Critical Introduction to the Jewish Bible*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011.

Vanhoozer, Kevin J., ed. *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Survey*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008.

**\*Waltke, Bruce K. *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007.**

Walton, John H. *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Old Testament*. 5 volumes. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.

NT Introductions and Theologies

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Achtemeier, Paul J., Joel B. Green, and Marianne Meye Thompson. *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

Boring, M. Eugene. *An Introduction to the New Testament: History, Literature, Theology*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012.

Burge, Gary M., Lynn H. Cohick and Gene L. Green, *The New Testament in Antiquity: A Survey of the New Testament within Its Cultural Contexts*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.

Brown, Raymond E. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. NY: Doubleday, 1997.

Caird, G.B. and L.D. Hurst, *New Testament Theology*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Carson, D.A. and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.

Dunn, James D.G. *New Testament Theology: An Introduction*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2009.

Dunn, James D.G., ed. *New Testament Theology* monograph series. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991-2003.

Ehrman, Bart D. *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Green, Joel B. and Lee Martin McDonald, eds., *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013.

Gundry, Robert H. *A Survey of the New Testament*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.

Guthrie, Donald. *New Testament Introduction*. Revised ed. Downers Grove: IVP, 1990.

Johnson, Luke Timothy. *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*. Revised edition. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002.

Kee, Howard Clark. *The Beginnings of Christianity: An Introduction to the New Testament*. NY: T&T Clark, 2005.

Kümmel, Georg Werner. *Introduction to the New Testament*. Translated by Howard Clark Kee. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.

Ladd, George Eldon. *A Theology of the New Testament*. Revised edition. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993.

Matera, Frank J. *New Testament Theology: Exploring Diversity and Unity*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007.

Morris, Leon. *New Testament Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.

Perkins, Pheme. *Reading the New Testament: An Introduction*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Mahweh: Paulist Press, 2012.

**\*Powell, Mark Allan. *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey*. Second ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018.**

Witherington III, Ben. *The Indelible Image: The Theological and Ethical Thought World of the New Testament. Vol I: The Individual Witnesses*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009; *Vol. II: The Collective Witness*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010.

Witherington III, Ben. *Invitation to the New Testament: First Things*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2012.

**\*Wright, N.T. and Michael F. Bird. *The New Testament in Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019.**

Commentaries

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### Single Volume

Barton, J. and J. Muddiman, eds. *The Oxford Bible Commentary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Bruce, F.F., ed. *New International Bible Commentary*. Revised edition. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999.

Dunn, J.D.G. and J.W Rogerson, eds. *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

Kroeger, C.C. and M.J. Evans, eds. *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2002.

Mays, James L., ed. *HarperCollins Bible Commentary*. Revised edition San Francisco: HarperOne, 2000.

Wenham, G.J., J.A. Motyer, D.A. Carson and R.T. France, eds. *New Bible Commentary, 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Edition*. 4<sup>th</sup> revised edition. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006.

### Commentary Series

Although commentaries must be assessed on an individual basis, the editorial intentions of certain series make it possible to comment on them generally. This is not an exhaustive list.

- *Anchor Bible Commentaries*. Semi-technical; original languages transliterated; both academically rigorous and sensitive to intelligent non-specialists.
- *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Semi-technical recent Evangelical series; transliterated Greek.
- *Black's New Testament Commentaries*. Semi-technical; transliterated Greek; less rigorous than the Anchor Bible.
- *Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible*. A careful, Evangelical discussion of the meaning of the biblical text; primary purpose is to identify theological significance.
- *Hermeneia*. Technical; original languages. Don't be fooled by its small size – assumes much background knowledge of its readers. Always read the footnotes. Not evangelical.

- *International Critical Commentaries*. Technical; knowledge of original languages.
- *Interpretation*. Non-technical but scholarly; aimed at pastors and non-specialists, it deals usefully but generically with current critical issues; does not comment on every verse.
- **\*The IVP Commentary Series**. Non-technical, by Evangelical scholars. Published also as Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries and The Bible Speaks Today series. Somewhat dated; NT now accessible at [www.biblegateway.com/resources/ivp-nt/toc/](http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/ivp-nt/toc/).
- *The New American Commentary*. Semi-technical Evangelical series; original languages in footnotes.
- *New Century Bible*. Non-technical; written by critical scholars and aimed at lay readers.
- *New Covenant Commentary*. Non-technical by Evangelical authors; attendant to theology and contemporary application.
- *New International Commentary on the Old Testament/ New International Commentary on the New Testament*. Semi-technical; knowledge of original languages will help, but unnecessary. This series is updating its publications, so there are often two independent commentaries for a given biblical book.
- *New International Biblical Commentary*. Non-technical Evangelical series; reasonable overview of issues.
- *New International Greek Testament Commentaries*. Technical; assumes some knowledge of Greek.
- **\*New Interpreter's Bible. A Bible commentary in 12 volumes. Non-technical, by first-rate scholars.**
- **\*The NIV Application Commentary. Non-technical Evangelical series. Mixed quality.**
- *The Old Testament Library*. Semi-technical critical series; languages transliterated.
- *Sacra-Pagina*. Semi-technical; Roman Catholic series; critical but sensitive to the non-specialist.
- *Word Biblical Commentaries*. Technical; original languages; offers verse-by-verse exegesis and a separate explanation section.
- *Zondervan Critical Introductions to the New Testament*. Emerging Evangelical series focused on critical aspects of the NT that are often treated only minimally in full-length commentaries.

#### Bible Dictionaries and Lexicons

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#### Topics

- *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. 6 vols. Doubleday, 1992.
- *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. IVP Academic, 2013.
- *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Development*. IVP Academic, 2000.
- *Dictionary of New Testament Background*. IVP Academic, 2000.
- *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books*. IVP Academic, 2006.

- *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*. IVP Academic, 2006.
- *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets*. IVP Academic, 2012.
- *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings*. IVP Academic, 2008.
- *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. IVP Academic, [1993] 2006.
- *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, rev. ed. HarperOne, 1996.
- *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Rev. ed. 4 vols. Zondervan, 1986.
- *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. InterVarsity Press, 1994.

### Words

The Bible is composed of words written in Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek. Since most of the following resources require some knowledge of the original languages, use an English concordance to find words in their original languages.

- *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 1972).
- *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. 3 vols (Eerdmans, 1990-93).
- *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (University of Chicago, 2000).
- *\*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Rev. ed. 4 vols (Zondervan, 1986) (\*Lists terms in English; Greek words can be looked up in the index).
- *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*. 4 vols (Zondervan, 2014).
- *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*. 5 vols. (Zondervan, 1997).
- *\*The NIV Exhaustive Bible Concordance*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Zondervan, 2015). (\*Lists terms in English. A better alternative to Strong's Concordance.)
- *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols (Eerdmans, 1964-76)/  
*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 15 vols (Eerdmans, 1975-2015).

### Digital and Online Sources

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Despite popular opinion, everything *is not* now available for free on the Internet. Mostly, the Internet gives free access to unaccountable opinion pieces or resources that are out of copyright (and often out of date). The most current and reliable resources are still protected by publisher's copyright and need to be purchased as books or online through paid access.

Below are some digital and online tools of some value:

#### Free Online Resources

- 1) Bible Gateway: <https://www.biblegateway.com/>
- 2) Bible Hub: <http://biblehub.com/>
- 3) BibleStudyTools.com: <http://www.biblestudytools.com/>
- 4) Biblical Studies UK: <http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/index.html>
- 5) Christian Classics Ethereal Library: <http://www.ccel.org/>



- 6) e-Sword: <http://www.e-sword.net/index.html>
- 7) Net Bible: <https://net.bible.org>
- 8) NT Gateway: <http://www.ntgateway.com/>
- 9) Oxford Biblical Studies Online: <http://www.oxfordbiblicalstudies.com/>
- 10) \*STEP Bible: <https://www.stepbible.org>**
- 11) Tyndale House (Cambridge, UK): <http://www.tyndale.cam.ac.uk/index.php?page=online-resources>
- 12) **\*Tyndale Seminary (Toronto) Reading Rooms:**  
<https://www.tyndale.ca/seminary/mtsmodular/reading-rooms>
  - a. Biblical Interpretation and Application: <https://www.tyndale.ca/seminary/mtsmodular/reading-rooms/interpretation>
  - b. NT: <http://www.tyndale.ca/seminary/mtsmodular/reading-rooms/newt>
    - Luke: <https://www.tyndale.ca/seminary/mtsmodular/reading-rooms/newt/luke>
    - Ephesians: <https://www.tyndale.ca/seminary/mtsmodular/reading-rooms/newt/ephesians>
    - Philippians: <https://www.tyndale.ca/seminary/mtsmodular/reading-rooms/newt/philippians>
  - c. OT: <http://www.tyndale.ca/seminary/mtsmodular/reading-rooms/oldt>
    - Genesis: <https://www.tyndale.ca/seminary/mtsmodular/reading-rooms/oldt/genesis>

#### Paid Software

- Accordance: <http://www.accordancebible.com/>
- BibleWorks: <http://www.bibleworks.com/> (Now out of business; may get older software)
- Logos: <http://www.logos.com/>

#### Mobile Apps for iOS and Android (Basic downloads are free; contain in-app purchases)

- Bible Gateway Bible App
- Glo Bible App
- Logos Bible App

Olive Tree Bible Study App