



- 1) 10 Questions to make sense of a verse.**
- 2) 8 Websites to assist in Bible study.**
- 3) The 7 Historical Stages of the Old Testament.**
- 4) Overview of the 39 Old Testament books.**
- 5) Overview of the 27 New Testament books**

## **1 10 Questions to make sense of a verse.**

**1. The question of our heart attitude.** Am I hungry and willing to hear what God would want to say to me through this verse? If we have the wrong attitude, we'll miss the meaning of the Bible. We're all in danger of putting our defences up as we come to God's Word. Replace pride with humility, dispassion with expectancy, self-reliance with prayerful dependence on the Spirit.

**2. The question of the author's intent.** What was the original author trying to say to his readers? After all, it cannot mean now what it did not mean then, and though there can be many applications of a verse, there is only one correct meaning - a meaning not meant to elude us, because it was originally written to mean something.

**3. The question of literature type.** What type of literature is the book in which this verse is found? Is it historical, narrative, law code, poetry, prophetic, parable, epistle or apocalyptic? In the same way you wouldn't read a love poem like you'd read a textbook, be careful to not interpret figurative parts of the Bible in an overly literal way.

**4. The question of thought flow.** What's its logical context? After all, the books of the Bible each have a structure, flow and sections; they are not just a mass of unrelated verses. What do the verses or chapters before and after say that might throw light on this verse? After all a 'text' taken out 'context' is a 'con'.

**5. The question of historical context.** Is there anything in the history and culture of that time that throws light on this verse? If an Old Testament verse, which of the Seven Historical Stages does this verse exist in? - see points 3 and 4 below to make sense of this.

**6. The question of other Scripture.** What does the rest of Scripture say about the topic of this verse? If this is a difficult verse to understand, what do clearer verses say on the subject? After all, Scripture is the best interpreter of Scripture. If there are several possible meanings, all those meanings that contradict other Scripture must be eliminated.

**7. The question of Christ.** What light does this verse throw on God and Christ? After all, Scripture is primarily about God and His Son Jesus Christ, the hero of the Bible. If this is an Old Testament verse in what ways (if any) does this verse point to Christ as its fulfilment?

**8. The question of other sources:** 1) **Credible commentaries:** How do studied theologians interpret this verse? (See the first 6 of the 8 websites listed in point 2). 2) **Other translations:** How other translations translate this verse often reveals nuances to the original text that one translation may miss - type the verse reference in the searchbar at [www.bible.cc/john/3-16.htm](http://www.bible.cc/john/3-16.htm). 3) **The original Greek/Hebrew:** For this, type the verse reference in the searchbar at [www.biblos.com/john/3-16.htm](http://www.biblos.com/john/3-16.htm).

**9. The question of application.** Is there a promise to believe, a truth to affirm, an insight to glean, a warning to heed, a command to obey, or an example to follow? (But be careful of the 100s of laws from Moses (Exodus through Deuteronomy) - they are not for Christians, who are under the much higher law of Christ. Also be cautious of examples - just because the Bible describes someone doing something does not mean it endorses it - eg polygamy).

**10. The question of the Spirit's nudging.** Having understood the meaning of the verse, how might the Holy Spirit be specifically leading me as an individual and us as a community to apply the meaning of this verse to my life/our lives?

## **2 8 Websites to assist in Bible study.**

**Create a Bible study bookmark folder on your computer browser and save these:**

1. [www.slices.org.uk/SlicesforEveryone.html](http://www.slices.org.uk/SlicesforEveryone.html) (the most valuable website of all)
2. [www.esvbible.org](http://www.esvbible.org) (access comes with the purchase of a must-get ESV Study Bible)
3. [www.preceptaustin.org](http://www.preceptaustin.org)
6. [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org)
5. [www.biblos.com](http://www.biblos.com)
6. [www.e-sword.net](http://www.e-sword.net) (to be downloaded - mainly for PCs)
7. [www.bible.cc/john/3-16.htm](http://www.bible.cc/john/3-16.htm) (to see multiple translations)
8. [www.biblos.com/john/3-16.htm](http://www.biblos.com/john/3-16.htm) (to see the original Greek or Hebrew)

## **3 The 7 Historical Stages of the Old Testament.**

**The only way to understand the 39 books in the Old Testament is to find out which of the 7 stages of the history of the ancient Jewish people they were about.**

### **STAGE 1: Humanity is created but falls in sin (pre 2000BC).**

- Genesis 1-11 tells the story.
- Starts with the creation of the world and humanity and culture (1-2). Followed by the fall of the world and humanity and culture (3-11).
- Key people: Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah

### **STAGE 2: The Jewish people come into being (2000-1700BC).**

- Genesis 12-50 tells the story.
- The story focuses in on the fathers of the Jews, called 'the Patriarchs'. It tells how they came about, and how they landed in Egypt.
- God, through Abraham and his descendants, forms for Himself a family of people through which He will bless the whole world.
- Key people: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Esau, Joseph

### **STAGE 3: The exodus and the long journey to the Promised Land (1480-1400BC).**

- Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy tell the story.
- Through Moses, God powerfully delivers the Jews from slavery in Egypt and then gives them the Law and worship system, which would guide them as a people.
- Because of their disobedience, they spend 40 years in the desert before being allowed to enter the Promised Land.
- Key person: Moses

### **STAGE 4: Settlement in the Promised Land (1400-1050BC).**

- Joshua and Judges tell the story. The book of Ruth was written at this time.
- The Jews finally conquer the Promised Land although they have no king and are only a bunch of 12 loosely connected tribes at this stage.
- At first they are obedient, but begin to drift from God.
- Key people: Joshua, Deborah, Ruth, Gideon, Samson

### **STAGE 5: The Jews become a powerful political nation under a king (1050-930BC).**

- 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 Kings 1-11 and 1 Chronicles tell the story. At this point the poetic books (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs and most of Psalms, are written.
- Through Samuel, God anoints first Saul (who fails as king) and then David (who succeeds as king). Solomon succeeds his father David. The kingdom of Israel reaches its high point under him.
- Key people: Samuel, Saul, David, Solomon

**STAGE 6:** The Jewish kingdom divides in two (930BC) and ultimately both kingdoms are overthrown and taken into captivity, first the North (722BC), then the South (587BC).

- 1 Kings 12-22, 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles tell the story. Esther tells a story of how the Jews experience threat in exile during this time.
- This split of the nation of the Jews into two creates some confusion for Bible readers because we need to know whether the Northern or Southern kingdom is being spoken about. The Northern kingdom (consisting of 10 of the 12 tribes) is called Israel or Ephraim, with Samaria as the capital. The Southern one (two tribes) is called Judah, with Jerusalem as its capital.
- It spans 19 kings of Israel, and 20 kings of Judah. All 19 kings of Israel are corrupt, while 8 of the kings of Judah turn to God. During this time God sends prophets to both the North and the South. In the North the prophetic word is rejected. In the South, at times it is accepted. The prophecies are loaded with warnings of judgment. If they will not turn to God, they can expect to experience destruction at the hands of powerful tyrant nations. If they repent, God will spare them. Sadly, they don't meaningfully return to God.
- Many of the prophets who speak for God also write down their message at this time. Most of the 17 Prophetic Books in the Old Testament are these messages:

• Isaiah (740-700BC)	- Southern kingdom prophet
• Jeremiah (627-580BC)	- Southern kingdom prophet
• Lamentations (586BC)	- Jeremiah weeps for the destroyed Jerusalem
• Ezekiel (590-570BC)	- prophet in exile in foreign land
• Daniel (605-530BC)	- government official / prophet in exile in foreign land
• Hosea (745BC)	- Northern kingdom prophet
• Amos (760BC)	- Northern kingdom prophet
• Obadiah (500BC)	- prophet of doom to neighbouring people, Edom
• Jonah (770BC)	- prophet sent to save Ninevah, capital of Assyria
• Micah (740-690BC)	- contemporary of Isaiah in the Southern kingdom
• Nahum (590-570BC)	- prophet celebrating the fall of the Assyrians
• Habakkuk (630BC)	- Southern prophet of doom toward the cruel Babylonians
• Zephaniah (627BC)	- Southern kingdom prophet

- Sadly, the Northern kingdom, judged by God for its persistent rebellion, falls to the Assyrians in 722BC. It goes into exile and never recovers - lacking all faith-conviction, it is entirely assimilated into Assyria. The Southern kingdom, also judged by God for its persistent rebellion, falls to the Babylonians 130 years later (587BC). Jerusalem is destroyed. They go into exile (only the poor are left behind) but hold onto their distinctive faith in God - in the hope of returning.

**STAGE 7:** Some of the Southern kingdom exiles begin to return to rebuild Jerusalem (539-410BC).

- Ezra and Nehemiah tell the story.  
The prophecies of Haggai, Zechariah, Joel and Malachi are written at this time.
- Following the conquering of Babylon by Cyrus the Persian, many Jews from Babylon return to Jerusalem. Temple rebuilding in Jerusalem is completed and dedicated in 516 BC. There is then a 'silence' of Scripture - nothing is written for the 410 years before Christ comes.
- Key people: Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai

## 4 Overview of the 39 Old Testament books.

Of most importance, note the historical stage (based on point 3 above) for each book.

BIBLE BOOK	TYPE OF LITERATURE	MAIN THEME	KEY WORD	KEY VERSE	WHICH OF THE 7 HISTORICAL STAGES?
Genesis	Books of Moses/Beginnings	God chooses one nation to bless all nations	Beginnings	1:1	One (1-11), Two (12-50)
Exodus	Books of Moses / Law	Deliverance from Egypt	Redemption	6:6	Three
Leviticus	Books of Moses / Law	Approaching a Holy God	Holiness	20:7	Three
Numbers	Books of Moses / Law	Unbelief and disobedience	Wanderings	20:12	Three
Deuteronomy	Books of Moses / Law	Do not forget	Covenant	10:12	Three
Joshua	History	Entering the Promised Land	Conquest	11:23	Four
Judges	History	In the Promised Land without a king	Forget	21:25	Four
Ruth	History	Godliness illustrated	Kinsman	1:16	Four
1 Samuel	History	Israel's first kings	Redeemer	15:22	Five
2 Samuel	History	Israel's first kings	Rejection	7:13	Five
1 Kings	History	Israel divides into two northern and southern kingdoms	David	11:11	Five (1-11), Six (12-22)
2 Kings	History	The story of two kingdoms and their going into captivity	Division	17:23	Six
1 Chron-icles	History	The reign of David	Captives	17:13	Five
2 Chronicles	History	Solomon and the kings of Judah	Covenant	7:14	Five
Ezra	History	Returning to Jerusalem and rebuilding the temple	Temple	1:3	Seven
Nehemiah	History	Rebuilding the Jerusalem walls	Temple	6:15	Seven
Esther	History	Jews under threat while in exile	Rebuild	4:14	Seven
Job	Poetry / History	Suffering man, loving God	Providence	13:15	Five
Psalms	Poetry / Song	Hymn book of the Jews	Sovereign	145:21	Five, Six, Seven
Proverbs	Poetry/ Wisdom	To give moral instruction	Worship	1:7	Five
Ecclesiastes	Poetry/ Philosophy	Search for the meaning of life	Wisdom	12:13	Five
Song of songs	Poetry/Romance	A love song	Meaning-	8:7	Five
Isaiah	Prophecy	Salvation comes from God	lessness	40:1	Five
Jeremiah	Prophecy	God's patience and holiness	Love	31:33	Five (1-24), Six (25-52)
Lamentations	Prophecy	Mourning over Jerusalem's destruction	Salvation	3:22-23	Six
Ezekiel	Prophecy	Condemnation and consolation	Obey	36:26	Six
Daniel	Prophecy	Encouraging exiled Jews	Weep	2:20	Six
Hosea	Prophecy	God's love for Israel	Restoration	4:6	Six
Joel	Prophecy	God's judgment	God's plan	2:29	Seven
Amos	Prophecy	Social justice	Return	3:2	Six
Obadiah	Prophecy	Judgment on nation of Edom	Spirit	10	Six
Jonah	Prophecy	Salvation for non-Jews	Judgment	2:9	Six
Micah	Prophecy	Injustice exposed	Judgment	6:8	Six
Nahum	Prophecy	The fall of Ninevah	God's love	1:7	Six
Habakkuk	Prophecy	Sin in God's world	Mercy	2:4	Six
Zephaniah	Prophecy	The coming judgment	Judgment	1:14	Six
Haggai	Prophecy	Rebuilding the temple	Faith	2:4	Seven
Zechariah	Prophecy	Future blessings for Israel	Restoration	9:9	Seven
Malachi	Prophecy	An appeal to backsliders	The temple	3:7	Seven

## 5 Overview of the 27 New Testament books.

BIBLE BOOK	TYPE OF LITERATURE	MAIN THEME	KEY WORD	KEY VERSE
Matthew	Jesus' birth, ministry, death and resurrection	Words and deeds of Jesus	King	28:18
Mark	Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection	Jesus' mission	Servant	10:45
Luke	Jesus' birth, ministry, death and resurrection	Jesus in detail	Son of Man	19:10
John	Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection	Believe in Jesus	Son of God	3:16
Acts	The story of the spread of the early church	The power of the Spirit and gospel	Mission	1:8
Romans	Paul's letter to a church	God's gift of righteousness	Salvation	1:17
1 Corinthians	Paul's letter to a church	Freedom from compromise	Transformation	1:30
2 Corinthians	Paul's letter to a church	Jesus' death on a cross	Reconciliation	5:21
Galatians	Paul's letter to a church	Freedom from legalism	Liberty	5:1
Ephesians	Paul's letter to a church	Living in unity	Grace	2:8
Philippians	Paul's letter to a church	To live is Christ	Joy	4:4
Colossians	Paul's letter to a church	Christ is supreme	Christ	2:9
1 Thessalonians	Paul's letter to a church	Jesus will return	Imitate	4:16
2 Thessalonians	Paul's letter to a church	Expecting Jesus' return	Day of the Lord	2:2
1 Timothy	Paul's letter to a person	Advice for Christian leaders	Instruction	4:13
2 Timothy	Paul's letter to a person	More advice for Christian leaders	Endure	2:3
Titus	Paul's letter to a person	Advice to a Christian leader	Teach	2:10
Philemon	Paul's letter to a person	Personal reconciliation	Forgiveness	17
Hebrews	Letter to a church	The superiority of Christ	Better	4:14
James	James' letter to a church	Life-changing faith	Active faith	1:22
1 Peter	Peter's letter to a church	Enemies from without – persecution	Endure	4:12
2 Peter	Peter's letter to a church	Enemies from within – false teachers	Be alert	3:8,17
1 John	John's letter to a church	Authentic spirituality	Fellowship	4:8
2 John	John's letter to a church	Beware of false teachers	Watch out	10
3 John	John's letter to a person	Fellowship with Christians	Faithful	8
Jude	Jude's letter to a church	Beware of false teaching	Contend	20
Revelation	John's 7 prophetic letters to churches, and visions from God	Things that will take place	The Throne	3:20

Source: 'The Bible made easy' (Paternoster Publishing)

**Be sure to keep this handout in your Bible for future use.**