Introduction

In this section a foundation will be laid for the remainder of the study. It is the aim of this section to introduce the reader (or student) to the basic presuppositions that underlie the content of the entire series of lessons of which this is a part. The issue to be resolved is the nature of the book that is the subject of analysis. In other words, the following question must be answered: “What does the Bible have to say for itself?” The importance of this starting-point cannot be exaggerated; what one believes about the Bible will determine how he or she reads it.

This section will present various propositions that sum up the Bible’s witness concerning itself; each will be substantiated by Scripture verses or passages, as well as quotations from recognized Christian authors.

Doctrinal Propositions

“The Bible is a book of divine revelation.” By this is meant that God is responsible for the content of the Bible; he is its author. The message that is contained within the Bible originated in God. The spiritual truths it contains could never have been discovered by man; they can only be known because God has disclosed them to us.

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds” (Heb 1.1-2).

“Nevertheless he [God] left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14.17).
"Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue" (2 Sam 23.1-2).

"The vision of Obadiah. Thus saith the Lord GOD concerning Edom; we have heard a rumour from the LORD, and an ambassador is sent among the heathen, Arise ye, and let us rise up against her in battle" (Obad 1.1).

**Note:** The Old Testament includes the phrase, "Thus saith the Lord," or, "Thus saith the LORD" some 413 times.

"Certainly, we could never know God if He had not revealed Himself. But what do we mean by ‘revelation’? By revelation we mean that act of God whereby He discloses Himself or communicates truth to the mind; whereby He makes manifest to His creatures that which could not be known in any other way." Thiessen, Henry C. *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, c1949, p. 31.


"**The divine inspiration of the entire Bible guarantees its full authority.**"

There are two parts to this statement. First, there is an affirmation of the fact that the whole Bible is in a very real sense the breath of God. In other words, God has undertaken to put his revelation of truth into a permanent written form. Second, the statement correlates inspiration with authority. By this is meant that inspiration is God’s certification of the Bible’s accuracy and relevance.
"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim 3.16-17).

"We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet 1.19-21).

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Mt 5.17-18).

"The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times” (Ps 12.6).

"How, then, is inspiration to be defined? Inspiration is that mysterious process by which the guidance of God on the human prophets invests their writings with divine authority. It is the process by which Spirit-moved men (II Peter 1:20-21) produce Spirit-breathed writings (II Tim. 3:16).” Geisler, Norman L., and Nix, William E. A General Introduction to the Bible. Chicago: Moody Press, c1968, p. 46. (Emphasis theirs.)

"By the inspiration of the Scriptures is meant that they are of divine origin, the product of the creative energy of God. It was the ‘in-breathing of God’ into men by which they were qualified infallibly to utter His truth.” Fitzwater, P.B. Christian Theology: A Systematic Presentation, second edition. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, c1948, p. 36.

"God superintended the human authors of the Bible so that they composed and recorded without error His message to mankind in the

“What does inerrancy mean then? It simply means that the Bible is wholly true. Paul Feinberg has written, ‘Inerrancy means that when all facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything they teach, whether that teaching has to do with doctrine, history, science, geography, geology, or other disciplines or knowledge.’” Boice, James Montgomery. Does Inerrancy Matter? Oakland: International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, c1979, p. 13. (Emphasis his.)

“Still another deduction to be drawn from inspiration is the fact that the Bible is inerrant (errorless). Even though it may be technically correct that ‘the Bible itself, in advancing its own claim of inspiration, says nothing precisely about its inerrancy,’ it is as necessary and logical a deduction as is the ‘Trinity,’ about which nothing is ‘precisely’ stated in the Bible. Logically, if the words of Scripture are God’s and God cannot err, then it follows that there are no errors in the Scriptures.” Geisler, Norman L., and Nix, William E. A General Introduction to the Bible. Chicago: Moody Press, c1968, p. 53. The text in single quotes comes from the following source: Harrison, Everett F. “The Phenomena of Scripture.” Henry, Carl F. H., ed. Revelation and the Bible, p. 238.

“The canon of Scripture was affirmed by men as they recognized each book’s inspiration.” Each of the 66 books were authoritative at the time of their writing because God inspired them. However, it was necessary in the course of history for the people of God to acknowledge God’s inspired Word to be just that. A consensus concerning the Old Testament canon may have been reached in the lifetime of Ezra. The entire New Testament canon appears to have received full recognition around 400 A.D.

“In the early church the word ‘canon’ was used to refer to the creeds. In
the middle of the fourth century it came to be used of the Bible; i.e., of
the list of accepted books that were acknowledged to make up the Bible."
"The word *canon* comes from the Greek *kanon*. It means, in the first
place, a reed or rod; then a measuring-rod; hence a rule or standard. In
the second place it means an authoritative decision of a Church council;
and in the third place, as applied to the Bible, it means those books
which have been measured, found satisfactory, and approved as inspired
of God." Thiessen, Henry C. Introductory Lectures in Systematic
"... the books were canonical the moment they were written. It was not
necessary to wait until various councils could examine the books to
determine if they were acceptable or not. Their canonicity was inherent
within them, since they came from God. People and councils only
recognized and acknowledged what is true because of the intrinsic
inspiration of the books as they were written." Ryrie, Charles C. Basic
"Canonicity is determined by God. A book is not inspired because men
made it canonical: it is canonical because God inspired it ... Canonicity is
determined or established authoritatively by God; it is merely discovered
by man." Geisler, Norman L., and Nix, William E. A General
(Emphasis theirs.)
"With regard to the Old Testament as we have it today, we may accept
the view of David Kimchi (1160-1232) and Elias Levita (1465-1549), two
Jewish scholars, who held that the final collection of the Old Testament
Canon was completed by Ezra and the members of the Great Synagogue,
in the fifth century before Christ." Thiessen, Henry C. Introductory
"It is generally agreed that this church council [the Council of Carthage,

"God fulfills his role in the communication process by means of illumination." God’s part in the communication of his message is made complete when he illuminates the minds of men to understand his truth. By this is meant that the Holy Spirit endows men with understanding of revealed truth. Unbelievers are illuminated concerning salvation, and believers concerning deepening degrees of all revealed truth.

"Illumination as distinguished from revelation and inspiration may be defined as the divine quickening of the human mind in virtue of which it is enabled to understand truth already revealed. By ‘truth already revealed’ is meant the truth of the Holy Scriptures.” Bancroft, E. H. Christian Theology: Systematic and Biblical. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, (year?), p. 24.

"... illumination does not deal with the transmission of the truth, but with the understanding of truth already revealed." Thiessen, Henry C. Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, c1949, p. 106.


"... the understanding has shared in the ruins of the fall, and is itself perverted; and as such it must be renewed by him who created it, otherwise it will for ever distort the light, however clearly it may shine from the page of Scripture.” Buchanan, James. The Office and Work of the Holy Spirit, p. 56.

“Then opened he [Jesus] their understanding, that they might
understand the scriptures” (Lk 24.45).

“Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (Ps 119.18).

“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you” (Jn 16.13-14).

“Man fulfills his role in the communication process by means of interpretation.” Man is responsible to make every necessary effort so as to discover the concepts the biblical writers had in mind when they wrote the Bible. In many instances, it is necessary to bridge many gaps in order to understand the author’s original intent.

“But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed” (Jas 1.25).

“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (Josh 1.8).

“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it” (Mt 7.24-27).
"All successful communication depends upon the ability of the hearer or reader to get substantially the same picture as that in the mind of the speaker or writer. At best there is some difference between what the sender is seeing and what the receiver sees." Brooks, D.P. *The Bible: How to Understand and Teach It.* Nashville: Broadman, c1969, p. 7.

"Biblical writers had pictures in their minds which they tried to convey through words, phrases, and sentences. They wrote to the men of their own time. These people shared the writer's history, culture, language, world view, and thought patterns. Therefore, the first readers got essentially the same pictures that were in the writer's mind. But alas, we are separated from those ancient writers by thousands of years in time, thousands of miles in geography, and by enormous changes in thought patterns and knowledge. Furthermore, we do not understand their language. We can only read the the English words which translators have chosen to represent the Hebrew and Greek words used by the writers." Brooks, D.P. *The Bible: How to Understand and Teach It.* Nashville: Broadman, c1969, p. 8.

"The second great need for a science of hermeneutics is to bridge the gap between our minds and the minds of the Biblical writers ... But when the interpreter is separated culturally, historically, and geographically from the writer he seeks to interpret, the task of interpretation is no longer facile. The greater the cultural, historical, and geographical divergences are, the more difficult is the task of interpretation. In reading the Bible we find ourselves with a volume that has great divergences from us." Ramm, Bernard. *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics*, third revised edition. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, c1970, p. 4. (Emphasis his.) Note: Dr. Ramm goes on to enumerate the gaps: language, culture, geography, and history.
Introduction

"Hermeneutics is the science and art of Biblical interpretation. It is a science because it is guided by rules within a system; and it is an art because the application of the rules is by skill, and not by mechanical imitation. As such it forms one of the most important members of the theological sciences." Ramm, Bernard. Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics, third revised edition. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, c1970, p. 1.


(emphasis his.)

"Since the word 'literal' has connotations which are either misunderstood or subjectively understood, labels like 'plain' or 'normal' serve more acceptably." Ryrie, Charles C. Basic Theology. Wheaton: Victor Books, c1986, p. 111.

Ryrie cites the following lines of reasoning for literal (or, as he terms it, normal) hermeneutics:

- The purpose of language: "... God gave man language for the purpose of being able to communicate with him ..., it follows that God would Himself use and expect man to use language in its normal sense." Ryrie, Charles C. Basic Theology. Wheaton: Victor Books, c1986, p. 113.

- The need for objectivity: "Switching the hermeneutical base from
literal to allegorical ... results in different, inconsistent, and often contradictory interpretations.” Ryrie, Charles C. *Basic Theology.* Wheaton: Victor Books, c1986, p. 113.

- The example of the Bible: “The prophecies of the first advent of Christ were all fulfilled literally. This obvious but extremely significant fact argues for the validity and use of literal hermeneutics in all of biblical interpretation.” Ryrie, Charles C. *Basic Theology.* Wheaton: Victor Books, c1986, p. 113.
Bible Introduction

Introduction
The following text was written by the author as a part of his analysis of the major themes of the book of Philippians. This is a case in which knowledge of introductory information has a substantial effect on one's understanding of the passage. The pertinent background is given by Tenney:

"The four Prison Epistles, Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon, were the products of this period from A.D. 56 or 57 to A.D. 60 or 61 ... Undoubtedly they were written during the period of imprisonment, for all of them make reference to Paul's bonds ... Probably the traditional view that they were written from Rome is correct, for the allusions to Caesar's household (Phil. 4:22) and to the praetorian guard (1:13) would apply better to Rome than to Caesarea."


Paul's message concerning joy is in itself impacting, barring the historical backdrop of the epistle. But, given the fact that Paul described his own joy while writing from a Roman prison is literally amazing. To understand the circumstances of the author, therefore, is in this instance of vital importance to the final interpretation of the passage.

The predominant theme of the epistle to the Philippians is joy. Forms of the words *joy*, *rejoice*, and *gladness* appear in 15 of the letter's 104 verses. In general, joy is described as the product of a healthy relationship between a church and a minister. The minister remembers the church with joy in his prayers (1.4); indeed, the subjects of his ministry are his "joy and crown" (4.1). He rejoices in the furtherance of the gospel (1.18), and his greatest aspiration is to enter Christ's presence knowing that his earthly efforts have been fruitful (2.16). To this end he is willing to lay down his life as an offering (2.17-18). In the remainder of his earthly course, he is joyous for the willing financial support provided by those to whom he has
The minister derives joy from his ministry. But he is not alone in his gladness. The minister's people rejoice when he is present with them (1.26; 2.28-29). And his willingness to sacrifice his life in the interest of their service, is also a source of joy to them (2.17-18).

The continual experience of joy is commanded in the epistle: "Rejoice in the Lord alway ..." (4.4; cf. 3.1). It is, therefore, viewed as the spiritual norm for the believer. As has been noted above, various realities motivate the minister and the church to joy. The epistle makes it clear, however, that joy can only be known in the context of one's relationship with the Lord: "... we ... rejoice in Christ Jesus..." (3.3; cf. 1.26; 3.1; 4.4, 10).

**Phlp 1.4** Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy,

**Phlp 1.18** What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.

**Phlp 1.25** And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith;

**Phlp 1.26** That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.

**Phlp 2.2** Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

**Phlp 2.16** Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.

**Phlp 2.17** Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.

**Phlp 2.18** For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me.

**Phlp 2.28** I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful.

**Phlp 2.29** Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation:

**Phlp 3.1** Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe.

**Phlp 3.3** For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the
Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.

Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.

But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.
Bible Geography

The Relevance of Bible Geography

It has been already been affirmed (Tool 1: Bible Doctrine) that the Bible is to be viewed as God's self-disclosure to man. It is worthy of note that God's revelation is not simply a list of propositions to believe and standards to live by. God's Word is much more than this. The Bible is God's revelation in historical and geographical context: God has spoken in time and space. John Stott probes this concept:

"Why did he have to reveal himself in a rather remote historical and geographical context, so that we have to struggle to understand the context before we can grasp the revelation? ... A better answer would be that the living God is a personal God, who made us as persons in his own image and insists on treating the persons he has made as persons. So the whole process of revelation has been the self-disclosure of a Person to persons, to real persons like ourselves who actually lived in a certain place at a certain time. In saying this, I am not denying that God has revealed his truth in words. I am rather asserting that his revelation has been 'personal' and 'propositional' at one and the same time." Stott, John R. W. Understanding the Bible, revised edition. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984?, p. 24-25.

Because the different Bible books were given in various places, and because the Bible makes numerous references to geographical places, it follows that it is best interpreted in geographical context. By this is meant that the Bible is to be read with geography in mind. The biblical authors presumed (among other things) the original readers' knowledge of the places to which they referred in their writings. Keith Megilligan explains:
"... the Gospel writers, when presenting the life of Christ, assumed that their readers would know exactly what they had in mind when they mentioned various geographical points of interest. Further, they also assumed that the readers would understand that the message of Jesus rises up out of that geographical context. Unfortunately, many Bible readers skim over the geographical information provided in the Scriptures. They are only concerned with the *meat* of the passage. However, all the events of the Bible occurred in an historical context as well as a geographical context."


It is historical and geographical reality that bring the stories and characters of the Bible to life. We are able to see the relevance and application of biblical truth as we view it in time and space.

"Geography and history are vitally connected. The study of the one must be interwoven with the study of the other. Geography, apart from history, is abstract and uninteresting. History, apart from geography, is meaningless ... Geography gives history vividness and reality. In the light of Bible geography the men of the Bible stand out as real men who lived in our world, who thought out their truth, and wrought out their destiny as all nations must." Smith, William Walter. *The Student's Historical Geography of the Holy Land*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954, p. vii.

The task of the Bible student is, therefore, to acquire yet another tool: Bible geography. Only as he does this can he truly gain the meaning intended by the divine and human authors.

**Practical Example**

The following text was written by the author as part of his study of the "psalms of degrees." Accurate interpretation of the first part of Psalm 125 is dependent upon geographical insight, as will be shown.
Psalm 125: Bible study notes

A Song of degrees.

1 They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.

2 As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the LORD is round about his people from henceforth even for ever.

3 For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous; lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity.

4 Do good, O LORD, unto those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts.

5 As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the LORD shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity: but peace shall be upon Israel.

In the course of describing the land of Israel as the principal place where God chose to reveal himself, John R. W. Stott states: "Jerusalem is built on a mountain surrounded by mountains" (Stott 33). Jerusalem, indeed, is situated on a mountain (v. 1); around it are various valleys, and beyond these, other mountains (v. 2). The psalmist appeals to these two facts of Palestine’s geography (which would have been well-known to the original audience) in order to express two spiritual truths. Jerusalem’s position on a mountain was an indication of its stability. By comparison, those who put their trust in Jehovah are characterized by stability in their lives. Second, the location of mountains around Jerusalem, which provided a measure of security to the city, and had a notable effect on its defense strategy (Megilligan 27), are likened by the psalmist to the LORD’s protective activity on behalf of Israel.

The latter half of the psalm (vv. 3-5) continues the two themes already introduced: the stability of the believer, and the security of Israel. The psalmist asserts that "the rod [Strong’s 7626; most likely, a symbol of authority] of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous ..." (v. 3). That the LORD would shield the righteous from being dominated by the ungodly does not constitute an unconditional promise to Israel as a nation. Such a
protection would be conditioned on the nation’s collective righteousness. And in that spirit, the psalmist prays, “Do good, O LORD, unto those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts” (v 4); he could not rightfully request the blessings of God on those who would rebel against him. On the contrary, he understood that the deviant would be led forth to judgment (v 5). Loyal to his nation, his overriding desire was that peace be on Israel (v 5), but this could only be realized in the measure that his people were faithful to the LORD.

Bibliographical References:
Bible History

The Importance of Bible History

Just as God’s revelation was given in a spatial (i.e., geographic) context, so it was also given in history. John Stott expands on this concept:

“Christianity is essentially a historical religion. God’s revelation, which Christians cherish and seek to communicate, was not given in a vacuum but in an unfolding historical situation, through a nation called Israel and a person called Jesus Christ. It must never be divorced from its historical context; it can be understood only within it.” Stott, John R. W. Understanding the Bible, revised edition. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984?, p. 45.

Henry Morris corroborates:

“One of the great distinguishing features of the Christian faith is its incurable historicity! The crucial events that secured the eternal salvation of those who believe in Christ occurred not in some dreamland of another world, but rather in the realm of space called earth and in the realm of time called history.” Morris, Henry M. Many Infallible Proofs: Practical and Useful Evidences of Christianity. San Diego: Creation-Life Publishers, c1974, p i.

Morris goes on to explain that the Christian message is forfeited entirely if its historical nature is denied:

“In no uncertain terms, the New Testament emphasizes the historical aspect of its message ... As if to anticipate the day when men would talk about the resurrection of Christ while denying its historicity (and such are the subtle absurdities of modern neo-orthodoxy), Paul refused to leave the Gospel ‘hanging upon nothing.’ Instead, he locked Gospel events securely into their essential historical context: ‘Christ died for
our sins according to the Scriptures' and 'was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures' (I Cor. 15:3-4)." Morris, Henry M. Many Infallible Proofs: Practical and Useful Evidences of Christianity. San Diego: Creation-Life Publishers, c1974, p i.

That the revelation is wrapped up inseparably in a historical setting ensures its relevance to every human situation. The principles of Scripture were given to real people in the past, and they apply to people everywhere and at all times.

"Some folk who have no taste for either history or geography may ask rather impatiently why God did not give us instead a simple set of dogmas to believe and rules to obey. Why did he have to reveal himself in a rather remote historical and geographical context, so that we have to struggle to understand the context before we can grasp the revelation? ... A better answer would be that the living God is a personal God, who made us as persons in his own image and insists on treating the persons he has made as persons. So the whole process of revelation has been the self-disclosure of a Person to persons, to real persons like ourselves who actually lived in a certain place at a certain time." Stott, John R. W. Understanding the Bible, revised edition. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984?, p. 24-25.

The task of the Christian interpreter is discover the meaning of the Bible; he can only accomplish this as he understands the historical settings in which its parts were written, as well as the historical settings that are explicit or implicit in its content. John Stott sums it up thus:

"God's purpose to call out from the world a people for himself began to unfold on a particular part of the world's surface and during a particular period of the world's history. It is not possible to understand its meaning, therefore, without some knowledge of its historical and geographical setting." Stott, John R. W. Understanding the Bible, revised edition. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984?, p. 24.
Practical Example

The message of Joshua 1.8 is a well-known one: success is found in adherence to the laws of God, as given in his revelation to mankind. This much is clear from a cursory reading of the verse. There is more to this verse, however, and it is to be found in its historical context.

Joshua 1.1-9

1 Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying,

2 Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel.

3 Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses.

4 From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast.

5 There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

6 Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to givethem.

7 Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant comanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest.

8 This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.
9 Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.

The power of the promises extended by God to Joshua (and, by extension, to all believers) in this passage, can only be understood in the light of their historical context. As vv 1-2 tell, Moses had died just prior to the giving of the promises. Israel's respected leader had passed on. Now, the responsibility of leading well over a million Israelites had fallen on the shoulders of Joshua. It is very likely that he felt intimidated and overwhelmed. Against this backdrop of uncertainty, God promised success to Joshua if he would honor God's law. Paul Benware explains:

"God is never thwarted by the death of His servants. Although the death of Moses must have been a depressing event to Joshua and Israel, God immediately appeared to Joshua, bringing encouragement to him (1:5). Joshua was guaranteed of God's presence and blessing (1:1-9)." Benware, Paul N. *Survey of the Old Testament.* Chicago: Moody Press, c1988, p. 79.

So, the lesson to be learned is that, whatever challenging circumstance God may allow in the life of the believer, he will always enable him or her to have success at it. Few will ever face a responsibility as great as Joshua's, but all can rejoice in the grace of God to face the circumstances of life in a positive manner.
Bible Customs

The Importance of Bible Customs

An accurate interpretation of the Bible is, in many cases, dependent upon the reader's understanding of the customs that are implied—but not explained—in the text. G. Christian Weiss explains:

"The pages of Scripture are alive with illustrations from everyday life in the Middle East. To appreciate these allusions to daily life, one must have some understanding of the times and customs of the Middle East when the Bible was written." Weiss, G. Christian. Insights into Bible Times and Customs. Reading, England: Back To The Bible Broadcast, c1972, p. 3.

On the other hand, a lack of cultural insight is often the cause of inaccurate interpretation, as described by D. P Brooks: "Many things in the Bible will be misunderstood unless we know something of the culture of the people who appear in the biblical story." Brooks, D. P. The Bible: How to Understand and Teach It. Nashville: Broadman, c1969, p. 22. He goes on to say: "Some things in the Bible may seem shocking to those who fail to take into account the culture of the period in which the action unfolded." Ibid, p. 23. Fred Wight expresses the same broad concept:

"Many passages of Scripture that are hard for the Westerner to understand, are readily explained by a knowledge of the customs and manners of Bible lands. On the other hand, to ignore this subject is to deprive one's self of a thorough mastery of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments." Wight, Fred H. Manners and Customs of Bible Lands. Chicago: Moody Press, c1953, p. 7.

Students of the Bible whose native culture is non-Oriental must approach the Book cross-culturally; they must make mental effort to view cultural
references through eyes other than their own.

"It is easy for Occidentals [Westerners] to overlook the fact that the Scriptures had their origin in the East, and that each one of the writers was actually an Oriental. Since this is so, in a very real sense the Bible may be said to be an Oriental Book. But many are quite apt to read into the Scriptures Western manners and customs, instead of interpreting them from the Eastern point of view." Wight, Fred H. Manners and Customs of Bible Lands. Chicago: Moody Press, c1953, p. 7.

The tool of Bible customs, then, must be acquired by the serious Bible interpreter. Much of the biblical message is loaded with cultural content. Westerners are at a particular disadvantage, and must look through the lens of Oriental culture in order to bring biblical meaning into true focus.

**Practical Example**

The picture of humble service is fairly clear to the Western eye. However, a knowledge of Oriental culture sheds light on the story, making its message more radical. In the light of Jewish customs it can be affirmed that Jesus was voluntarily assuming the role of the least-esteemed servant. What a powerful example to his disciples--both then and now!

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John 13.1-2, 4-5, 12-17

1 Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.

2 And supper being ended, ...

4 ... [Jesus] riseth ..., and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself.

5 After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was
12 So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you?
13 Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.
14 If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.
15 For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.
16 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.
17 If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

"In the countries we call 'Bible lands,' the majority of the people wore only sandals, and their feet readily became soiled. Most roads were not hard-surfaced, and in the rainy season they became extremely muddy and unsanitary.

"Because the feet became dirty so easily, it was customary for a man entering a home to remove his sandals in the vestibule and wash his feet before proceeding into the house. The homes of men who were affluent enough to have several servants always had a particular servant at the door assigned to the task of washing the feet of all who entered, particularly guests." Weiss, G. Christian. *Insights into Bible Times and Customs*. Reading, England: Back To The Bible Broadcast, c1972, p. 87-88.

"At an early date this service was considered one of the lowest tasks of servants (1 S 25 41), probably because the youngest and least trained servants were charged with the task, or because of the idea of defilement connected with the foot. It was, for the same reason, if rendered voluntarily, a service which betokened [that is, signaled] complete devotion. Jesus taught the greatest lesson of humility by performing this humble service to His disciples (Jn 13 4-15)." Luering, H. L. E. "Foot." *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, Hendrickson Publishers edition. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994, c1956, s.v.
Bible Language

The Importance of Biblical Language

One of the largest gaps to be bridged in a successful interpretation of the Bible is that of language. "The most obvious divergence [between modern interpreters' minds and the minds of the biblical writers] is that of language. The Bible was written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. To formulate rules to bridge this gap is one of the most important tasks of Biblical hermeneutics." Ramm, Bernard. Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics, third revised edition. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, c1970, p. 5. (Emphasis his.)

The magnitude of the language barrier is made plain by familiarity with the principles of linguistics. Ramm explains:

"The basic problem at this point is that languages are structurally different …

"To translate from Greek to English is not the simple task of finding an English word for each Greek word. The translator has to tack back and forth between languages that are structurally different. He has the tricky job of trying to find equivalents in the English verb system of forms in the Greek verb system.

"Nor is it easy to find words in English that closely match the word in the Hebrew or Greek text. Each word is a little pool of meanings." Ramm, Bernard. Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics, third revised edition. Grand Rapids; Baker Book House, c1970, p. 5.

Translation is a complex procedure. There are a variety of approaches to it. In the end, "all are agreed that the meaning of the original must be preserved in the translation." Beekman, John, and Callow, John. Translating the Word of
God. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, c1974, p. 33. The nature and extent of the problem understood, a question must be confronted: to what degree must the common interpreter seek to learn about the original languages of the Bible. To this a variety of responses could be given. Ramm comments:

"This [liberal arts education] should be followed by a standard theological education which should include studies in Hebrew, Greek, and theology. To be a competent Biblical interpreter a knowledge of the original languages is indispensable." Ramm, Bernard. Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics, third revised edition. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, c1970, p. 15.

Virkler takes a more lenient position:

"Several kinds of lexical tools are available which enable the modern student of Scripture to ascertain the various possible meanings of ancient words. While a knowledge of Hebrew and Greek certainly enhances one's ability to do word studies, an increasing number of these lexical tools are being keyed numerically to Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, making it possible for the person who has no knowledge of Hebrew or Greek ... to do word studies in these languages." Virkler, Henry A. Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, c1981, p. 101.

There is no easy answer to the matter that has been posed here. It is certain that a minimal linguistic knowledge is essential. Training in the original languages, while not always feasible, is desirable. A working conclusion is that each interpreter ought to seek out as much information as he or she can reasonably assimilate. This should at least include a functional knowledge of Greek and Hebrew reference helps that can be used by those who have no formal linguistic training.
Practical Example

Following is an illustration of the difference that a knowledge of biblical Greek can make in Bible study. The text is 1 Timothy 4.6. It is not that the KJV misrepresents what the Greek says here. Rather, it does not fully portray the depth of the original message.

1 Timothy 4.6

If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained.

The book of 1 Timothy was penned by Paul so that Timothy would know how to conduct himself in the local church (see 1 Tim 3.16). Verse 6 of chapter 4 follows Paul's warnings concerning those who would depart from biblical correctness in favor of false teachings. Timothy's responsibility was to remind the believers of the truths that would keep them from being deceived by the false teachings. This much is clear from the English reading.

What is not clear in the KJV translation (but is in the original Greek) is the relationship between Timothy's spiritual life and his ability to minister in the face of false teaching. An observant Greek reading reveals two important facts. First, there was a sense in which Timothy's faith was static (unchanging). He had made, once and for all, some determinations about what he believed, and had pledged allegiance to the truth. Secondly, there was a sense in which his faith was dynamic. It was his duty to be continually nourished with the words of the faith. He was to keep before him the truths of Christianity; he was to grow in them perpetually.

These two facets of Timothy's preparation for ministry are readily evident in the Greek grammar underlying 1 Tim 4.6. The static (or confirmed) aspect of his faith is derived from a perfect tense verb, which denotes past action that has present effects: "... whereunto thou hast attained." The dynamic (or growing) aspect stems from a present tense participle, indicating continuous action: "... nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine ..." Thus, it can be concluded that a minister is to have settled his beliefs in the past, but he is to
minister from a heart that is ever growing in faith. This can only be deduced from the Greek grammar. The following translation, reflecting these concepts, is suggested:

As you suggest these things to the brothers you will be a good servant of Jesus Christ, [you] continually being nourished with the words of [the] faith and of good teaching, which you have examined thoroughly [or, confirmed yourself to].
Bible Study

The Importance of Bible Study Methodology

The task of studying the entire Bible can seem overwhelming. The Bible is lengthy, and its concepts profound. It can be discouraging to think of studying a book for an entire lifetime, yet without exhausting its content. Jensen describes this frustration, and poses a worthy solution.

"The problems of Bible study ... will always exist, as long as there is a Bible being studied. But they need not appear as an impassable mountain. For the Christian who has committed his life to Christ unreservedly, who opens his heart daily to the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit and sincerely wants to study the Bible, the clue to the conquering of the mountain is probably to be found in a practical and fruitful method of study." Jensen, Irving L. *Independent Bible Study: Using the Analytical Chart and the Inductive Method*, Moody paperback edition. Chicago: Moody Press, c1963, p. 20. (Emphasis his.)

Jensen’s contention, and that of this author as well, is that effective Bible study is necessarily methodical. Many methods have been proposed over the course of centuries, and certainly most have considerable value. It is the purpose of this unit to familiarize the reader (or student) with the method that has enabled the author to conduct increasingly meaningful Bible study for several years. It might be asked, “What is the best method for me?” The answer? “Whichever one you develop and use faithfully.”
A Method of Bible Study

Step 1: Observation

"The act of watching carefully--especially with attention to details or behavior--for the purpose of arriving at a judgment"

Objectives:
• To draw meaning from the text rather than inserting meaning into it
• To be open to the message of the text
• To approach the text with an intent to discover something
• To be an objective observer, avoiding excessive reliance on others' opinions concerning the text

"Exegesis is the application of the principles of hermeneutics to arrive at a correct understanding of the text. The prefix ex ('out of,' or 'from') refers to the idea that the interpreter is attempting to derive his understanding from the text, rather than reading his meaning into the text (eisegesis)." Virkler, Henry A. Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, c1981, p. 18. (Emphasis his.)

"In observing a passage of Scripture, the student is urged to lay the passage before him in temporary isolation, and to approach it impartially and fearlessly. He should scrutinize it with what John Ruskin calls 'the innocence of the eye'--as if he had never seen it before ... What he desires above all else, in a true scientific approach, is to see things as they really are." Jensen, Irving L. Independent Bible Study: Using the Analytical Chart and the Inductive Method,

Step 2: **Analysis**

"Separation of a whole into its component parts; an examination of a complex, its elements, and their relations"

**Objectives:**
- To break down the text into its natural component parts
- To study each component part's relationship to the whole
- To give attention to detail
- To emphasize diversity, divergence, dissimilarity of elements in the text
- To categorize the concepts in the text
- To seek a more thorough understanding of any unfamiliar people, places, objects, customs, words, or concepts mentioned in the text

“When the student is face to face with the minute parts of Scripture, including even the punctuation, and when he wrestles to know its intent in its context, he is engaging in the study process known as analysis.” Jensen, Irving L. *Independent Bible Study: Using the Analytical Chart and the Inductive Method*, Moody paperback edition. Chicago: Moody Press, c1963, p. 46.

“Analysis involves structure, for structure, as described in the previous chapter, involves two things: parts, and the relations of parts to each other and to the whole.” Jensen; Irving L. *Independent Bible Study: Using the Analytical Chart and the Inductive Method*, Moody paperback edition. Chicago: Moody Press, c1963, p. 47.
Step 3: Synthesis

"The composition or combination of parts or elements so as to form a whole; the combining of often diverse conceptions into a coherent whole"

Objectives:
- To unify all the minute details of the text
- To answer the question, "What is the bottom-line message of this text?"
- To sum up the meaning of the text, focusing on the big picture rather than the details
- To emphasize unity, convergence, similarity of elements in the text

Step 4: Application

"The act of establishing relevance or valid connection"

Objectives:
- To understand the practical implications of the message for the original recipients
- To note any cultural realities that affect the implications of the message
- To discern the practical implications of the message for a person in your culture

"Application is the end or goal of Bible study. This application involves the Bible student himself as the one acted upon. Not what he does to the Bible but what it does to him should be the student's main concern." Jensen, Irving L. Independent Bible Study: Using the Analytical Chart and the Inductive Method, Moody paperback edition. Chicago: Moody Press, c1963, p. 75. (Emphasis his.)
"When our Lord and his apostles gave exhortations and teachings they spoke in terms of the prevailing culture. Otherwise they could not have communicated effectually with their audience. Paul's statements about women (e.g., I Tim. 2:9) must be reinterpreted for our culture. The same applies for Paul's statements about cutting the hair and wearing the veil." Ramm, Bernard. Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics, third revised edition. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, c1970, p. 189.

**Step 5: Expression**

"The act or process of representing in a medium"

**Objectives:**

- To translate the message (and its personal implications) into a form of expression for which you have an appreciation: e.g., art, conversation, essay, graphics, lesson, poetry, sermon, song, speech, etc.

- To translate the message into the conduct of your daily life

"The application is usually conceived of as terminating in the life of the student himself. Actually, there is a further terminus, involving the student's communication to others." Jensen, Irving L. Independent Bible Study: Using the Analytical Chart and the Inductive Method, Moody paperback edition. Chicago: Moody Press, c1963, p. 75. (Emphasis his.)