

## HOW TO INTERPRET THE BIBLE

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Taken consistently, the steps below can be a great help in correctly interpreting the Bible:

1. **BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT.** The Holy Spirit MUST lead our study of the Bible. All successful interpretation only comes through submission to the will of God, through prayer, and through having a humble, teachable spirit. No, you definitely do not have to be “perfect” to understand scripture. But those who are in known rebellion against God should not expect to arrive at a correct understanding of the Bible.
2. **READ WIDELY THROUGHOUT THE BIBLE, ESPECIALLY IN THE EASY-TO-UNDERSTAND PARTS.** There are few things more dangerous than someone with strong convictions based on only a small portion of the Bible. So read the Bible—and read it a lot! The Bible generally interprets itself, and reading widely in areas you understand well will help you understand better the parts that are difficult.
3. **DEFINE KEY WORDS AND LEARN HOW THEY’RE USED.** Find the key words in the part of the Bible you’re studying. What does each word mean? And how does the Bible use them? You may want to use a Bible dictionary to make sure you have correct definitions, whereas a good Bible concordance can help you see how specific words are used throughout scripture.
  - Stick with the plain meaning of the Bible’s words, unless there is good reason to choose a different meaning (such as with many of the symbols in the books of Daniel and Revelation). This may require looking at the Hebrew or Greek in order to make sure that the plain meaning is the right one.
  - DO NOT BE INTIMIDATED BY LOOKING AT THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGES! Websites like Biblehub.com are FREE and easy to use. If you want to see the Greek or Hebrew of a Bible text on BibleHub, simply look it up, then click on the letters “INT” in the middle-top of the page. This stands for “Inter-linear,” meaning that you will then be able to see the original languages immediately above the lines of English words on your screen.
  - **Tip:** Use Multiple Translations of the Bible. If you don’t have access to the original languages, reading multiple versions of the Bible in your own language can definitely help you see the range of meanings and uses for a particular word.
4. **STUDY THE WRITTEN (LITERARY) CONTEXT.** This is incredibly important! The meaning of a passage of scripture CANNOT be understood properly without first understanding the passage’s context. Every word you read must be understood in the light of the words that come before and after it. Many passages will not be understood at all, or understood incorrectly, without paying attention to the context. So when studying, be sure to read the surrounding verses, the surrounding chapters, and similar passages found elsewhere in the Bible (whether by the same or a different biblical author).
5. **STUDY THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT.** When trying to understand the Bible, it can help to have some awareness of the life and society of the times in which

scripture was written. The Bible does give spiritual principle that are timeless and are not tied down to a particular culture! But many times, we cannot properly appreciate those spiritual principles without some knowledge of the Bible's historical and cultural background. There are numerous sources online that can help with this. The SDA Bible Commentary/Dictionary/Encyclopedia series and the Sabbath School Quarterly guides provide excellent insight on the culture and times of the Bible.

6. **THINK CAREFULLY/USE COMMON SENSE.** There's no way around it: Solid Bible interpretation means we need to use solid reasoning. So when we make conclusions from our Bible study, we need to ask the question: Given all that I've learned about this text so far, does the interpretation I've arrived at make sense? While the Holy Spirit is the Final Interpreter of God's Word, God still requires us to use our brains to the best of our ability.
7. **MAKE SURE YOUR INTERPRETATION FITS THE UNITY OF THE BIBLE.** The Bible was written by more than 40 authors from widely differing backgrounds over a period of about 1,500 years. But in spite of this incredible diversity, the Bible, inspired by God, presents a unified message. Any interpretation we make of a Bible passage must therefore be consistent with the rest of scripture.
8. **CHECK OUT ELLEN WHITE'S WRITINGS.** Many people never read Ellen White's writings—and they miss a great deal as a result. Ellen White was a deep student of scripture. Combined with her prophetic gift, her writings have helped millions understand Bible truth better. Studying her writings should NEVER be a substitute for studying the Bible. However, her writings can nonetheless be a powerful tool for rightly understanding God's will for His church in these last days. We have been given a great gift in Ellen White's ministry. Let us use it for God's glory!
9. **LIVE WHAT YOU LEARN.** This is the point of Bible study! The Bible is not given merely to learn facts; it is given that we might be *changed*. Take what you learn and put it to use! Fruit in the life of the believer is proof that the Bible is having the effect in our lives God desires—and, it always opens the door to new Bible truths in the future.
10. **SHARE WHAT YOU LEARN WITH OTHERS.** Whatever we know more about God than others, we are that much indebted to them, to help them learn what we have had the privilege of learning. Not all will want to hear what we have to say. But for those who are willing, we must share with them! And in sharing, we will learn more ourselves. The Bible says that iron sharpens iron, and sharing with both unbelievers and believers will help us to see truth more clearly (and may help correct errors we've accidentally made).

"A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: to understand a proverb, and the interpretation." [Prov. 1:5,6]