

The First Rule of Bible Study: *Read like an ancient Israelite*

- Good morning, church! Take a look around. You all look so smart.
- November is Global Bible Month.
- That's quite an ambitious thing to shoot for.
- That's why we're gonna do a whole series this month called, **Mastering Scripture in an Age of Distraction**.
- Cause, let's be honest.
- How many times have you read certain parts of the Bible — and you've read something about covenants, or sacrificial offerings, or endless chapters of "so-in-so beget so-in-so, who beget so-in-so" — and have thought: *"Ugg, I need a translator to help me understand this Bible."*
- I mean, we're a people who measure distance in kilometres and coffee in ounces.
- Our biggest concerns are whether to use the self-checkout line or wonder if our phones battery are gonna make it to lunch.
- And then we open up this holy, ancient book and read about an economic system based on goats, a justice system based on an eye for an eye, and a fashion sense that required tunics and head coverings.
- The cultural gap between the Bible and us, isn't just a gap; it's the Grand Canyon of gaps.
- It can feel like we're trying to watch a super-important, life-changing movie, but it's in a foreign language with subtitles that keep disappearing on us.
- We want to study our Bibles, we know it's good for us, we know it's God's Word — but sometimes, it feels about as relevant to our Monday morning commute as a clay tablet.
- Many Christians open their Bibles with sincere hearts, hoping for a word of comfort or guidance, yet close them feeling distant or confused.
- The gentle truth is that reading the Bible and studying the Bible are different disciplines.
- Truthfully, a "chapter-a-day" approach to the Bible is like walking past a cathedral: you see the open doors, maybe hear the music inside, but you never step inside to see the sun beam through its stained glass windows, or feel the vibration of the organ music reverberate off the stone pillars.
- I'll say it again, Bible reading is not Bible study.
- Reading your Bible is a quick, devotional skim — often just a "chapter-a-day" for familiarity and inspiration — while Bible study demands active excavation of the text's ancient linguistic, cultural, and supernatural layers.
- Without Bible Study, you'll remain vulnerable to proof-texting, spiritual shallowness, and an inability to apply the text to real world and supernatural problems — proving that quantity of pages turned, is no substitute for depth of understanding.
- The good news is that you don't need a Ph.D. in ancient Near Eastern languages to get to the heart of this book.
- You just need a little more time, a lot more context, a little humility, and the faith to believe that the God who created the physics behind your cellphone, also knows how to speak to people who use one.
- So, let's dive into this gloriously challenging, sometimes weird, but eternally true Word of God...

1. **Bible Basics**: What is the Bible and where did you get it from?

- I want to let you know a few things about this Bible of yours. And it is your Bible.
- Praise God that we get to own a Bible of our own.

- You're probably not aware of this, but as recent as the 1500's (although that is 989 yrs ago), an English scholar by the name of William Tyndale, became the first person to translate the New Testament directly from the Greek into English and part of the Old Testament from the Hebrew into English.
 - But he was strangled and then burned at the stake for heresy, because the King of England and the Christian religious authorities of the day, prohibited the common person from reading the Bible in English.
 - The last words of William Tyndale were *"Lord! Open the King of England's eyes"*.
 - And within a year afterwards, an English Bible was placed in every parish church by the King's command.
 - But it was because of a man like William Tyndale that you and I, common people, get to own our very own Bibles.
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- That Bible you're holding is actually more of a library, than a book.
 - It's a collection of 66 books, and some letters — and it's divided into two big parts — Old Testament (39) and New Testament (27).
 - The books of this Bible have been authored by over 40 authors and editors, over a period of 1500 years.
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- The majority of the **Hebrew Old Testament** was written in Ancient Hebrew.
 - However, small, but significant, portions of the Old Testament were written in Aramaic.
 - These sections often deal with foreign correspondence or events related to the empires of the time.
 - The entire **New Testament** was written in Koine Greek.
 - **What is that?** Well, if you were a modern Greek speaker today, you could understand some Koine Greek, you'd get the gist of it, but it would be similar to an English speaker reading Shakespeare.
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- Now, these 66 books of the Bible were not written continuously either.
 - For example, between the Old and New Testaments, there is a 400 year period where no new Books of the Bible were written.
 - Except during that period, a period we called the **InterTestament Period**, or the 400 Years of Silence, the Hebrew Bible was translated into the Greek, in a translation called the Septuagint, or the LXX, and 16 additional books were included in this translation.
 - The reason for this translation was because Hellenistic Jews of that period wanted their Greek-speaking children to be able to read the Scriptures.
 - And just so you know, both the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint were the Bibles that Jesus and the disciples had access to.
 - And with the expansion of the Church into Greek-speaking Gentile lands, the Septuagint became the Bible of the early church, and was used extensively by the New Testament writers.
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- Another period you need to have in the back of your mind, because it's vitally important to understanding your Bible, is what is called ***the Second Temple Period***.
 - Jesus and the New Testament writers would also have been familiar with the religious texts that came out of this period — such as those found in the Dead Sea Scrolls and those found in the Apocrypha.
 - It was a critically important time that shaped the religious and cultural landscape of both Rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity.
 - The *Second Temple Period* is the name given to the era in Jewish history that spans approximately 600 years, between (516 BC – 70 AD) and it is marked by the existence of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, after Solomon's Temple.
 - The Second Temple, initially called **Zerubbabel's Temple**, was built by Jewish exiles returning to Jerusalem under authorization of the Persian King Cyrus the Great.
 - Later, that Temple was substantially rebuilt and expanded by the Roman Tetrarch, Herod the Great, and ended up being the Temple that Jesus and the disciples visited.

- When you read your Bible you also need to appreciate that it is non-linear, meaning the books aren't in chronological order.
- If you want to read it chronologically one year, there are reading plans available on the Bible App, as well as a chronological Bible that you can get.
- The Bible is the most-sold, most-circulated and most-stolen book on Earth.
- People steal Bibles from bookstores and hotels all the time.
- Also, the Bible has been translated into at least 3,756 languages, with complete translations available in over 750 languages.
- Now let's talk about translations...

2. Lost in Translation: Not all our translations are created equal.

- There are approximately 900 printed English translations and paraphrases since the 16th century, including complete Bibles, partial ones, and revisions.
- But again, not all translations are created equal.
- Look at the front of your Bible. It either tells you the translation on the cover or the spine or on the copyright page a couple pages in...
- Let's look at some of the major ones and how they differ...

CHART

BIBLE TRANSLATION GUIDE

WORD-FOR-WORD Formal Equivalence (study reading)				THOUGHT-FOR-THOUGHT Dynamic/Functional Equivalence (study to devotional reading)				PARAPHRASE Loose Equivalence (devotional reading)					
NET	NASB	ESV	CSB	NIV	GWT	RSV	KJV's	NLT	CEB	NirV	GNT	TLB	MSB

- This is especially true for study Bibles from your favourite pastors, like John MacArthur or David Jeremiah, or especially Scofield Study Bible.
- It's even true of the ESV Study Bible which leans to the Reformed tradition theologically.
- That's why I like the FaithLife Study Bible. It seems a little less biased.
- And that's what I want from my study Bible.
- I want the textual notes and the geography and historical notes, but I don't want anyone telling me what to believe theologically.
- **Now, let me say something about the KJV**
- I know some of you love your KJ Bible. And I'm glad you love it.
- I too appreciate the KJV's historical role in the development of the Bible, but I reject the "King James Only" (KJVO) position.
- Yes, there are Christians out there that asserts that the KJV is the only perfect, inspired, and authoritative English translation.
- Good enough for the Apostle Paul...
- This is bogus and scholarly untrue.
- Our denomination's view, as Rev. Magnus will probably explain next week, is that inspiration and infallibility applies ONLY to the original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek manuscripts, not to any translation, including the KJV.
- **And** there's a significant problem with the KJV from a manuscript perspective.
- When the KJV was translated in 1611, it was a great translation, based on the best manuscripts available at the time, the *Textus Receptus* (TR) — but it was a Greek text compiled from a few late manuscripts.
- But we have much better and earlier manuscripts today, that are closer to the original autographs, on which most modern translations like the NASB, ESV, and NIV are built.
- Also, the KJV is not easily intelligible to the average reader today, so it's not very helpful for modern Bible study and can actually lead to, first textual, and then theological errors.

2 Thessalonians 2:7 KJV

"For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way."

- And because it is outdated English, it will probably end up on your shelf and not read by you.
- For these reasons, if you're in the market for a new Bible, even if you had a KJV before, I would NOT recommend you buy a KJV or NKJV of the Bible.
- Have it as a supplemental Bible, but you'll get much more benefit from a modern translation.
- And if you are in the KJ Only camp. Understand that scholarship is against you.

3. The First Rule of Bible Study: You are a stranger here.

- This is the most important rule you've never been taught.
- When you read your Bible you are entering a world that is not your own — politically, economically, socially, culturally, scientifically, religiously, even supernaturally.
- You are the stranger here.
- It's like the old saying goes, "You never understand someone until you walk a mile in their shoes.
- And you will never understand your Bible, until you start thinking like an ancient Israelite.
- Because that's who the Bible was written to...

Numbers 1:1 NIV

The LORD spoke to Moses in the tent of meeting in the Desert of Sinai on the first day of the second month of the second year after the Israelites came out of Egypt.

Ephesians 1:1 NIV

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, **to God's holy people in Ephesus**, the faithful in Christ Jesus.

- Understand: **That** Bible in your hands, from Genesis to Revelation, was generally **not** written **to** you, but it was written **for** you.
- That's not my saying, every Bible scholar will tell you that.
- **Look at these charts.**
- These are the books of the **Old Testament**...

Old Testament Books	Audience
Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy	The Israelites/Jewish people during their 40-years of wandering in the Sinai .
Joshua, Judges, Ruth	The generation of Israelites who first settled the land and the subsequent generations who struggled with obedience.
1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles	The Jewish people living in exile (Kings) and returned from exile (Chronicles)
Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther	The post-exilic Jewish community that returned to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple.
The Prophets (Isaiah–Malachi)	Addresses the people of Israel and Judah just prior to, during, and just after the Babylonian Exile (6th century BCE). Warning of impending judgment due to sin (pre-exilic). Comfort during the time of exile. And a call to repentance and hope for future restoration (post-exilic).

- Every single one of those books was written for a specific person or group of persons who lived in those times, not to you.
- These are the books of the **New Testament**...

New Testament Books	Audience
Matthew	Jewish Christians in Judea
Mark	Roman (Gentile) Christians in Judea and Asia Minor
Luke	Theophilus (a specific wealthy/high-ranking Greek individual) and Greeks/Gentiles generally
John	Christians among Asia Minor churches
Acts	Theophilus , but extends it to a broader audience of early Christians surrounding the Mediterranean .
Paul's Letters to Churches	Local Christian congregations (named specifically)
Paul's Pastoral & Personal Letters	Individual Church Leaders (Titus and Timothy)
General Epistles	Jewish Christians (named specific groups and churches)
Revelation	The Seven Churches in Asia Minor (Ephesus, Smyrna, etc.) and the wider Church facing persecution from Rome.

- Same thing. Every single one of those books was written for a specific person or group of persons who lived in those times, not **TO** you.
- So, while it wasn't written directly to you, you do get to benefit of their experience.
- In that way the Bible was written **FOR** you.

- The reason you need to appreciate this, is because, if you always read Scripture, as if it were written **to** you, you could misapply it.

Jeremiah 29:11 NIV

For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

- Sounds great!
- And we plaster it all over greeting cards and we preach it as a generic assurance that God will always delivers Christians from all difficulty, setbacks, or pain — ensuring us only a comfortable, "happy" future.
- Or worse, some Christians use it as a prosperity Gospel proof-text.
- Cause the word “prosper” is in there.
- But this verse was spoken specifically to the **Jewish exiles in Babylon** (NOT to you).
- God was promising **them**, an exiled nation, a definite future **restoration to their homeland** after 70 years of punishment.
- It is a national promise **for Israel**, for covenant faithfulness, not a general individual guarantee against personal misfortune for the believer today.
- **Now, can we benefit from that Scripture?** Absolutely!
- We can read how God was faithful to Israel, despite their unfaithfulness, to restore them back to their homeland — in 538BC.
- And we can be encouraged by that, and trust that God will always faithful to us, in our New Covenant with Him.

- Another favourite is...

Psalms 46:10 NIV. "Be still, and know that I am God."

- This verse is made into get-well cards and bumperstickers, to prompt believers to engage in a personal quiet-time, or to face an anxious situation with calm.
- But we don't typically read the rest of the text, because Psalm 46:10 is an address to God's enemies (the warring nations that want to exalt themselves over Israel).
- "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."
- The command functions as a cease-fire ultimatum to the nations that were warring against Israel at that time.
- Will God ultimately be exalted among the nations? Absolutely!
- Can we be encouraged that one day God will reign absolute? Absolutely!
- That's the take-away **FOR** us.
- But that passage wasn't written **TO** us.
- And it certainly isn't a quiet-time verse.
- This is why you need to put yourself into the shoes of an ancient Israelite when you read.
- Cause the text of Scripture is informed and properly interpreted **only** if you appreciate the ancient Near Eastern and Second Temple Jewish cultures and worldviews that the ancient Israelites were absorbed in.
- The Bible was written **TO** people surrounded by pagan nations, to political exiles, and to bloodied warriors — who all spoke Hebrew, feared supernatural beings, and smelled like burnt offerings.
- You and I are not the Bible's first intended audience, but you can benefit from what it says to its original audience.

- What this means is, is that your biggest obstacle to understanding your Bible, is not your lack of faith or intelligence, but your cultural distance.
- We are all cultural and historical outsiders to the ancient world of the Bible, and we can't impose our modern worldview on it — not our culture, not our politics, not our science, not even our Christianity, on it.
- For instance, the Creation account is not scientific literature.
- **Genesis 1–10** is about cosmic geography and **an** Ancient Near Eastern polemical designed to defend Yahweh's sovereignty over Creation, and to refute the cosmological claims of Israel's pagan neighbours.
- Who all had their own Creation accounts and deities who did the creating.
- Now, most of you don't know anything about what I'm talking about, and that's because you haven't read Genesis 1-10 like an ancient Israelite, you've been reading it like a 21st Century Modern Christian.
- And all the Creation science groups don't help with that either. The Creation account is not about science.
- **So, let me say it again**, when it comes to understanding your Bible, you and I have to enter their world — or stay deaf to what Scripture actually says.
- We'll talk about more about context in a couple weeks.

4. A Lesson in Bible Study vs Bible Reading

Romans 15:1-4 NIV

1 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. 2 Each of us should please our neighbours for their good, to build them up. 3 For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." 4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

- There. That was Bible reading.
- The devotional observation is that the Scriptures gives us hope.
- But there's so much we've missed, by just reading it.
- First of all, who is writing this letter? **PAUL**.
- The Apostle to the Gentiles.
- The book of Romans is dated at the end of Paul's third missionary journey, he most likely wrote this letter from the Greek city of **Corinth** in the mid 50's AD
- Who's he writing to?
- If you have a study Bible, you'd learn in the introduction that he is writing his letter to the church in **Rome**.
- Now, the Roman church was probably a mix of Jewish and Gentile (non-Jews) believers in Jesus.
- And he's trying to communicate to them that the gospel includes everyone — and that "in Christ," they are united into God's holy family together — Jew and Gentile.
- Or you could just read it yourself in chapter 1...

Romans 1:1-7 NIV

1 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God— 2 the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures 3 regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, 4 and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. 5 Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the

Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake. 6 And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. 7 **To all in Rome** who are loved by God and called to be his holy people:

- When studying a passage of Scripture always read the first chapter.
- Now, look again — at ch.15:4:

Romans 15:4 NIV

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide, we might have hope.

- What **past** is Paul talking about?
- Paul is talking about the **Old Testament** — the Torah (Gen, Ex, Lev, Num, Deut) and the Prophets, and the Psalms.
- Here's an interesting thought for us — when the Gentile Roman Christians read or heard these Scriptures from Paul, they were just as much "outsiders" as we are.
- They were reading about shepherds, tents, covenants, and altars, and wars that happened centuries and millenia before them.
- So, Paul gives them, and us, the key to reading this ancient text: **the entire Old Testament wasn't written to the Roman Christians (or us), but it was written FOR them and for us.**
- How?

Romans 15:4b NIV

...to teach us, so that through the endurance **taught** in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide, we might have hope."

- **So, to apply this properly, we must adopt an "ancient Israelite mindset" and then, with regard to the Book of Romans, and ancient Roman Gentile mindset as they are receiving this letter — and then we need to ask two crucial questions:**
- **What Did This Mean to Them?**
- Instead of jumping straight to, "How does this make **me** feel?" we must pause and ask, "What was the weight of this word or event for the person or people who first received it?"
- This is where we start thinking like an ancient Roman Gentile, who is trying to think like an ancient Israelite.
- What did the text mean to them?
- **Like when they read about the Law:**
- The Israelites didn't just see a moral code; they saw a covenant relationship that defined their entire national existence, giving them unique honour and status among the nations.
- But this created barriers between Jews and Gentiles. And that's what Paul saw in Gentile territories, as Gentiles converted to Christ.
- The application **FOR** us, is that the Law wasn't just about moral self-improvement; it was about understanding the holy standard that required, and why Christ's sacrifice and a New Covenant was so necessary.
- A new covenant that would break down those barriers that divided people.
- **When they read about the Exodus:**
- The Israelite didn't see an exciting action movie; they saw a definitive, redemptive act of God, that proved Yahweh's power over every pagan deity in Egypt. The Exodus defended Yahweh's sovereignty and His ability to deliver those who were loyal to Him.
- The application **FOR** us then, is that the Exodus is not just a lesson in miracles; it is the fundamental pattern of salvation — God conquers both human and supernatural powers that keep people in bondage and He is faithful to lead His people to freedom.

- And that message should inform how we view our own deliverance from sin.
- There's Passover and Exile messaging in the Communion meal too. That's no mistake.

• **How Does that Ancient Israelite Hope Fuel My Present Endurance?**

- Remember, Paul states the reason Scripture was preserved...

Romans 15:4b NIV

...to teach us, so that through the endurance **taught** in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide, we might have hope."

- The encouragement we receive isn't a fluffy feeling; it's based on the historical, tested endurance of the Israelite people and their God.
- The Israelites constantly faced the destruction of their land, the betrayal of their leaders, the threat of global superpowers, and the seduction of the gods of other nations — very real supernatural, divine beings in rebellion against Yahweh.
- Israel's hope was often delayed, sometimes for centuries, not because of the many forces against Israel, but because of their own unfaithfulness to Yahweh's covenants.
- The Old Testament is a history of Yahweh's endurance and faithfulness, as much as it is a history of salvation.
- This should, as Paul says, reinforce our hope, when we face setbacks, disappointment, suffering, persecution, supernatural opposition, or even when we are unfaithful to God — God is faithful.
- And that should give us hope!
- Our hope my friends, is rooted, NOT in a modern prosperity guarantee, but in the knowledge that God kept His promises to an ancient, often disobedient people — sustaining them through exile and trials, that sometimes led to their death.
- And because God was always faithful to them in those circumstances, we can know by what we read in the Scriptures, that He will be faithful to us in Christ.
- In this way, we who not Jews by birth, who have, as Paul says in Romans 11 — we who have been grafted in to the vine, that is Israel, are now included into this grand narrative of deliverance and salvation.
- Their story becomes our story.
- And that's why Paul says in...

Romans 15:1-2 NIV

1 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. 2 Each of us should please our neighbours for their good, to build them up.

- The takeaway, is that when we read Scripture with the ancient Israelite's struggles and covenants in mind, we move past surface-level application, and tap into the deep, resilient hope, that sustained the people of God for millennia.
- We are then equipped to bear with one another, to build one another up in the hope of God for all Ages.
- November is Global Bible Month!
- Join us each week as we learn how to Master our Scriptures in an Age of Distraction.