



---

**THE SALVATION ARMY** INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COUNCIL

---

---

## **TOOLS FOR INTERPRETING THE BIBLE**

### **► FIVE PRACTICAL STEPS**



## STEP 1: INTRODUCTION

Begin with prayer. Whether on your own, with a friend or a group, spend time asking God to help you better understand him through his word.

## STEP 2: CONTEXT

Read the passage in its entirety two or three times. Use your senses as you read – what are you hearing, seeing, smelling? Make notes of your findings.

Take a few moments to consider the passage through the following contexts:

- **Immediate** – what comes before and after this passage of Scripture? If possible, read through the entire book in a single setting to get the ‘big picture’.
- **Historical** – what was the cultural backdrop in which this was written? Consider any facts that can be verified.
- **Book background** – who wrote it? What was the occasion? Who is the audience? How is this setting different from your own?
- **Literary** – what kind of literary style is the passage/book you are studying written in?
  - Historic narrative** – writing history in a story-based form (Genesis, the first half of Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Jonah and possibly Acts)
  - The Law** – teaching and direction for life (second half of Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy)

**Wisdom** – statements from wise individuals that offer teaching about God and his rule of the world (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes)

**Prophetic** – calling humanity to be the people of God on behalf of the redemption of the world (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi)

**Apocalyptic** – expresses an author’s vision of the end times (Daniel, Revelation)

**Gospel** – primary source of information on the life of Jesus (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, possibly Acts)

**Letters** – written either to an individual or audience addressing particular moral issues with theological and/or doctrinal teaching (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2 and 3 John)

How does this change the way you view the passage? Is there anything you should be looking for in light of the literary genre? List any observations.



## STEP THREE: CROSS REFERENCE

- Check other passages of Scripture that deal with the same topic or issue. Scripture helps interpret Scripture.
- Compare interesting words or thoughts with other Scripture passages – do they provide further proof or explanation? Consider doing a word study.
- Commentaries, Bible dictionaries, atlases and the *The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine* are all helpful resources – see below if you wish to ‘dig deeper’.
- Consider other translations, not paraphrases.

## STEP FOUR: CONSIDER – IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

- Answer the following questions when considering how this passage applies to the Christian life:
  - > What example am I to follow?
  - > What sin am I to avoid?
  - > What promise am I to claim?
  - > What command should I obey?
  - > What action should I take?
  - > How do these relate to my relationships at home, work and in my community?
- Try to summarise what you believe to be the main point of the passage in one sentence.
- Does this passage link to a major theme in Scripture? If yes, which theme and how?

## STEP FIVE: CONCLUDE – RECOMMENDATIONS TO SELF

- Find someone to hold you to account for what you have learnt
- Write down your discoveries
- End with a prayer of gratitude

### DIGGING DEEPER – FURTHER RESOURCES

The Salvation Army International Theological Council website – [sar.my/itc](http://sar.my/itc)

*The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine*  
– [sar.my/hod](http://sar.my/hod)

An example of a word study – [sar.my/wordstudy](http://sar.my/wordstudy)

