

# Guiding Grammar

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In regards to getting an accurate understanding of Scripture, few things do better than careful analysis of the text one is reading. It is possible to tell much about a passage just by looking at the keywords, keeping things in context, and understanding the type of writing the author used.

One of the things to be aware of is the difference between a translation of the Scripture (which goes from one language to another) and an interpretation of Scripture (deciding what the author meant). The further we go from the original source, the more likely we are to have some error in what we are reading. Therefore, a literal word-for-word translation of the Scriptures will be more accurate than one that paraphrases. At the same time the literal translation will require more knowledge by the reader into the cultures and lifestyles found in Scripture to be properly understood. Assuming that one is not reading the original language of a passage, it is often helpful to look at multiple translations of Scripture to try and gain an understanding of what is meant by the original author.

For many people, understanding a passage comes mostly from picking out the keywords. This can be useful, but as is often the case, the easy route has its dangers. When looking through multiple versions of translation, we can quickly see that different translators use different keywords for the same passage. There is also the possibility that the author has added words not found in the original (often, but not always, these are marked such as being in italics). Such additions can entirely change the meaning of a passage since these often come with the theology of the translator. When working with keywords we must also be careful when using older translations since words in a language can change meaning over time.

Many clues to understanding a portion of Scripture can be found in the type of text that is used in the passage. Much of Scripture is written with a direct, literal, and factual meaning which is usually easy to comprehend. Other parts of Scripture are given in figurative or symbolic wording. Other accounts are given in the form of a parable to teach lessons on multiple levels, as figures of speech or idioms, and even as sarcasm. These require a closer look into what exactly is being stated or spoken about. We can also encounter commandments, poetry, and prophetic phrases. When specialized words are used instead of everyday language, this should be taken note.

One of the great challenges in reading Scripture, is to understand the flow of thought by the author. We should look at how a word is used in a sentence and how the sentence is used in a paragraph to see where the emphasis is placed. We should note where one thought ends and another starts. We must pay attention to which concepts are the main ideas and which are the supporting ideas. When needed, a sentence diagram can add a lot of clarity to a confusing passage. These are invaluable tools in keeping a passage of Scripture in context and understanding the themes the author was writing about. Keep in mind that the chapters and verses we see in the modern translations did not exist in the original writings. These were added later and often do not correspond to the flow of thought and needlessly break it up. One of the easiest ways to get a misunderstanding or a false doctrine is to take a passage out of its context.