

B I B L E I N A N H O U R

presents

12 *Obstacles*
to **Bible**
Reading

W A D E E . B U T L E R

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Foreword to the 12 Obstacles of Bible Reading

The Bible is the most read book in the history of mankind. No other book has been copied, commented upon, or caused so many human factions to occur than the 66 antique documents collected in the book called Bible. It has been abhorred by those who disbelieve its contents, loved by those who found comfort in its accounts, and even worshiped by those who have given it a divine essence. With so many people throughout the history of mankind interested in the Bible itself, and with so many preachers and teachers pouring over its words, many false teachings have arisen from the pages of the book called Bible. Battles have been fought, brother hating brother, lives have been lost over the very message that the Bible seeks to deliver.

Since the time that the Apostles of Jesus were martyred, 2000 years of history have passed. The Bible has been under much scrutiny, and possibly over criticized. The world having undergone so many different teachers, languages, cultures and philosophies, the relevant, applicable documents of the people of Israel found in the Bible have become difficult, stifling, “stone-scratches” of very old people. Instead of being the Divine Breath written down for the sake of posterity, it has become viewed as stale ink of under-evolved humans.

However, believers in God still exist who confess the 66 books to be the living Word of God given to the family of Abraham for the sake of everlasting life. Preachers still preach, the Scriptures are still read in Church services, and the big dusty book on the coffee table is still picked up from time to time. The Bible has not lost its identity, nor its integrity. God still speaks, as was spoken in the last chapter of the Revelation of St. John, “These words are trustworthy and true.”

Whoever sincerely wants to understand the Bible will run into certain barriers that trigger many frustrations that have accumulated over 2000 years of human history. From the funny names of the Old Testament

to the odd fiction like characters of the Book of Revelation to the endless number of English Bible translations, Wade Butler has systematically catalogued the great barriers encountered when reading the Bible. His writing style reflects one who has spent much time reading, studying and comparing not only different Bible versions, but different churches, teachers and teachings connected to the Bible. He leaves no impending stone unturned which lays on top of the simple understanding of the Bible, slowly pressing the life from it.

All people alike, whether they are highly educated or have just obtained their first Bible, will find the 12 Obstacles to the Bible to be a helpful viral antidote that filters clean the diseases clinging to the Bible that make it so difficult to understand. Wade Butler's rhetoric is simple and conversational, leaving the impression that he is sitting next to you in a comfortable chair with coffee in hand reflecting on the many hours put into the study of these antique texts.

I encourage you to give time to reading and remembering the 12 Obstacles connected with the Bible itself. With Wade Butler's aid, you will then be prepared to read the Bible with a breath of fresh air, no longer breathing the stale cloud of the Obstacles that surround the Bible. Old Testament names will not thwart your attention, the Revelation of St. John will not appear to be a cartoon script, nor will you be turned off from buying a Bible for your reading pleasure. "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15.4).

James A. Childs
Evansville, Indiana
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12 Obstacles to Reading the Bible

Wade E. Butler

The Two Great Mistakes Bible Readers Make

Before anyone reads the Bible or attempts to read and understand the books of the Bible, two truths must be understood and accepted if the books of the Bible are to make sense.

1. The Bible books were not written to everyone in the world.

2. The Bible books are not in chronological order.

Once these truths are accepted, the books of the Bible will make much more sense to a sincere reader who wants to know what the books are actually saying to the modern reader. Please impress these two truths into your mind before you turn another page.

Honest people want to read the Bible. They try--some of them. A few make it all the way through and gather many things of merit. Others fail to make it through. Others never get past the first page. Why is this?

Other books are read with little effort. Technical books take more effort, but interested individuals make it through and feel triumphant. But the Bible, God's word, seems to be an insurmountable task for even the most dedicated and desirous reader.

There are twelve obstacles blocking most people from reading the Bible. The obstacles are very high and daunting. They keep most people away from the Bible and at the mercy of anyone who says that they understand it. So many quirky preachers and teachers exist because people

have a difficult time overcoming these hurdles, but still want to know what the Bible says. Therefore, they are put in the position of having to believe the person who claims to understand the Bible. Most people realize they are in a position of ignorance, but are not sure what they can do about it.

If the obstacles attached to the Bible that keep people from reading are understood, then the obstacles may be minimized and the Bible made easily and readily available to the masses. People who really want to understand it are mystified that they cannot.

Many false teachers over the centuries have made good earnings on the backs of sincere people who cannot get over the impeding hurdles when it comes to understanding the Bible. Of course, hucksters and charlatans have nothing to gain by putting the Bible into the hands of the masses, for then they would no longer be needed to— as they put it— “unlock the secrets” of the Bible.

The Bible has no “secrets.” The Bible is God’s plain word to mankind through men in history. It is not esoteric or mysterious. But those who want to make money off of the ignorance of others try to keep it that way. Some of the phonies who claim to feel a bright light in their face or an urge in their bellies don’t know the Bible any better themselves.

It has been my observation that most of the preachers and teachers who claim to have the “secrets of Bible prophecy” and the like, never made it past high school. Most of those who are on TV have been ordained by fly-by-night outfits and have made a name for themselves among the ignorant. They believe that their ability to gather a crowd proves that they have something worthwhile to offer. This is simply not the case.

It is my desire to put the Bible in the hands of the people. Not by

selling them so-called “secret” information or “newly-discovered” documents, but by helping them understand the Bible by simply explaining why they find the Bible so difficult to understand when Tolstoy or Dickens are easily read and understood.

Once determined readers understand the obstacles to reading the Bible, steps can be taken to defeat discouragement and read the Bible for themselves.

I. Chronological Obstacle

I am convinced that this is the greatest hurdle of them all. The Bible is not one book. The Bible is a collection of 66 books under one cover. The books of the Bible have been collected at various times and various places, not arranged in chronological order. If you are attempting to read the Bible, understand this: the Bible is a collection of 66 different books that are not in chronological order.

This makes the very organization of the Bible a hurdle for most modern people. This is totally understandable. Most people who attempt to read the Bible have never been exposed to a book like it. It is not arranged like any other. It was collected according to literature type and not according to chronology.

II. Historical Obstacle

Anyone who opens the Bible and reads more than three chapters of the first book will realize that the events of the Bible did not occur yesterday. The Bible is very old and the cultures and societies mentioned in the Bible are very ancient. Some of the books of the Bible are nearly 5,000 years old. The youngest of the books is 2,000 years old. Because the events in the Bible happened so long ago, it is logical to assume that the people within the events will have happened long ago.

Let's face it. The first major city named in the Bible is Ur. Ur was a long time ago. Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome all existed a very long time ago. But here is the key: when the Bible was recorded, such ancient places and people were yesterday.

In order to avoid frustration with the Bible, the reader has to grant that yesterday for the people in the Bible was a long time ago. Since most people have no desire to learn ancient history, they give up on the Bible. They get confused and aggravated by historical situations about which they know nothing.

The sincere reader will have *two* choices:

- 1) Accept the names and places as having been there and not bothering with details, but paying close attention to the story line, *or*
- 2) Study some things about the ancient world and become familiar with at least the major players in the ancient world.

I suggest the latter. The main kingdoms of the ancient world within which the Bible take place are only six in number: Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman.

If the sincere reader of the Bible simply understands the rudimentary facts about these six kingdoms, they will be equipped to overcome the Historical Obstacle of Bible reading.

The task of understanding the basic facts about these ancient civilizations which interacted with the family of God is not an overwhelming one. You do not have to earn a degree in ancient history to get the sweep of these kingdoms. In fact, most colleges demand that their students take courses in World History and by doing so, students are introduced to these kingdoms. Maybe you did so, and maybe that might have been a long time ago. You might need to have an hour of refreshment to get you up to speed.

You will also need a short introduction to the odd customs of the ancient world. These customs, which those who lived in Bible times took for granted, are vexing to most modern people. One example of these confusing customs was the habit of marrying more than one wife. Another example is the belief in the ancient world that words once spoken took on a life of their own and made things happen even if the speaker himself changed his mind! These things are very difficult for a modern mind to understand, but if the reader knows about the ancient customs and refuses to cast the Bible into the 20th Century, these historical and customary problems evaporate.

III. Linguistic Obstacle

Because the Bible is so old, it was written in very old languages. English was not one of them. English is a new kid on the block compared to the antiquity of the languages of the Bible. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, one of the oldest languages in the world. Hebrew is a Semitic language, born at the dawn of time in the fertile crescent when humankind was first aware of itself. Old language.

The Jews have used this language since before anyone can remember. Some of the Jewish teachers, called Rabbis, believe that Hebrew is the language of God spoken in the garden of Eden and taught to Adam and Eve. The Jews speak Hebrew to this day, but it is not the ancient version. They speak a modern version of a language with an unbelievable life span. Some tidbits of another language called Aramaic are tossed into the language soup in both the Old and the New Testaments. Aramaic was a form of Hebrew that acted as the everyday street language.

Since paper did not exist, the people wrote on clay tablets by pressing little styli into the wet mud and letting it dry. Once they realized that tablets break very easily (imagine how long a “tablet library” would last in the modern world), they invented scrolls made of parchment. Parchment is not paper. The craft lady at the craft store will try to tell you that thick, orange-looking paper is parchment. She is incorrect.

Parchment is actually a skin of an animal that is tanned in such thin layers that it can be rolled, stored, carried, kept and most importantly, written upon. Parchment degrees were carried by people even in the middle ages to prove the knowledge they claimed to possess. This is why a degree is still called a “sheep skin.” The original ones were just that! The tanned, parchment skins of sheep! The Old Testament was written on these parchments. When the parchments were rolled up, they were called scrolls.

They were usually sealed at the start of the roll so that only the person for whom the parchment was intended could open the scroll. (*FYI- this is mentioned in the Book of Revelation in the New Testament when Jesus, the Lamb, is able to open the scroll when no one else could do it. He was the recipient one.*)

To break the seal of a parchment not meant for you was worse than opening someone else's mail. It was a horrible breach of trust. The scrolls with the Old Testament on them were never sealed because the message upon them was for everyone in the Jewish family.

Degree holders of the Middle Ages could walk into another town, present their degree scroll unsealed. The first words on them were "To All Who Presents May Come." This meant that the credential, the scroll was for everyone. It is the same way with the Old Testament.

The New Testament is no easier than the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament. It was written in Greek--2,000-year-old Greek. Not the fancy classical kind either. It was written in common, ordinary, everyday, everyone-can-speak-it 2,000-year-old Greek. Similar to the everyday street character of Aramaic, the technical title for this specific form of New Testament Greek is called KOINE Greek. That just means the newspaper Greek of the day. While philosophers like Aristotle and Plato were chattering away in the fancy educated Greek, Jesus and the writers of the New Testament were speaking the down-and-dirty kind of language that the common person of the streets could handle.

With this in mind, two choices present themselves to earnest readers of the Bible:

1) Study the ancient tongues and learn to read Greek and Hebrew for themselves *or*

2) Realize that this has already been done by thousands of people who have spent a lot of time creating what are called translations.

I suggest selecting choice two. The work has already been done over and over again. Don't worry about it. Get a translation and read it. My suggestion? Try the *Living Bible*.

Theological and linguistic professionals will speak against the Living Bible. Strictly speaking, the Living Bible is not a translation. It is a paraphrase. A pastor, back in the 70's, got tired of wooden, difficult word-for-word translations of the Bible and decided to do something about it. Since he had the ability to read Greek and Hebrew, he knew that word-for-word translations did not bring the "sense" of the Bible to the people. So, while he commuted every day on the train, he would put the Bible in "other words" that communicated the sense of the Bible to the modern reader.

Let me explain what I mean by "other words." Let's say that two people who know English very well are talking. One of them says to the other, "I was on my way to work today and saw a near miss." Anyone who knows English understands that the speaker did not see some creature or some living thing called a "near miss." He saw two people, in cars, driving in traffic and almost having an accident. So close that all of the onlookers took a breath, the drivers of the cars were breathless, and probably pale, sorry about the things they just said in the moment of panicked relief. If someone translated "I was on my way to work and saw a near miss" word-for-word into Japanese, there is no telling what they would think that meant. These little potent phrases that people of a particular language use are called idioms. All languages have them. They are shortcuts in communication. They are loaded. They carry tons of other meanings.

Hebrew is full of them. Greek is full of them. A word-for-word Bible translates them just as they lie with no explanation. In comes the paraphrase. A paraphrase of the Bible takes the idioms into account and brings the meaning of one language across to another instead of just words from one to another. Of course, this means that the one making the paraphrase must understand and correctly communicate the idiomatic parts.

This requires skill and honesty. *The Living Bible* was paraphrased by an honest man with the knowledge to do it right. The Tyndale Publishing Press thought so. The paraphrased Hebrew and Greek called the *Living Bible* has sold millions of copies in English. Start there. I did. Leave the scaffold translations for more detailed work.

Start with the understandable stuff first, and then go into the world where one word may make a great difference. That leads me into the next obstacle which may be one of the highest hurdles that looms in the way of the sincere reader of the Bible.

IV. Ecclesiastical Obstacle

The church itself has been, and probably still is, the worst obstacle to people reading the Bible.

Although the church has, over the centuries, begged and pleaded with the people in the pew and beyond to read the Bible, they end up discouraging the very practice that they seem to encourage!

The multiplicity of churches in the world, all claiming to be Bible-based, but supporting separate mortgages, bearing different names, and hurling insults at each other cause the new reader of the Bible to think that the Bible must be totally difficult and unclear. If the Bible is clear and easy to understand, then why all the churches? Why all the factions? Why all the different ways to interpret the Bible?

The very existence of so many churches and denominations claiming to be “the” church and holding “the” interpretation lead the hapless, hopeful Bible reader to think that the correct interpretation can never be found. Or worse. It leads the new reader to think that the Bible CANNOT be interpreted in one way! They are taken down the slope of what I call “personal interpretation.” This is very dangerous and hurtful to understanding the Bible.

If the Bible can be seen and understood in so many different ways, the reader deduces that maybe the Bible means different things to different people! Like poetry, stylized literature, or likened to the on-looker of modern artwork, they begin to believe that the Bible doesn’t really mean anything in and of itself, but that it means what the reader thinks that it means for them!

When a Bible teacher of the orthodox faith tries to correct such a violent misunderstanding of the Bible, the reader looks confused and says, “Well, that is what it means to me.” “Why not?” the reader reasons. “Why can’t it mean that to me?” After all, they have the example of so many people claiming so many things that the Bible must certainly mean whatever sparks or pops into the mind of the reader.

Denominations are then groups of individuals who all personally interpret the Bible in the same personal way—not because the Bible means

anything in particular, but because of the fact that the readers all agree and so they gather into groups. Some people never pick up the Bible because they have determined that it is a fruitless effort. Even if they do read it, they feel they have no hope of understanding it for themselves. “If so many educated, sincere people can disagree on what it means, then surely I would never get anything out of it!” So, they decide that the Bible is too difficult, not because they have found it to be so, but because there exist so many voices all claiming to understand it.

I am convinced that most people are severely put off by the fact that so many churches claim so many different things and all of them claim to be based on the Bible. They imagine that the Bible must be a real tangle if no one, even those who believe the Bible, can seem to agree on what it has to say. I don't blame them. Surely the Bible is the only book in the world that has so many and varied interpretations pounding on its shore every day, hour and minute.

Our religious freedom in the United States makes matters worse in this regard. Our constitution protects the right of anyone to believe anything. Therefore, the church is forced to deal with unregulated preachers and teachers. Let me give you an analogy: what if the State did not regulate physicians? Quack doctors would abound and soon anyone with two hands would be claiming to be a doctor! How about the State regulation of lawyers? If not done, lots of people would get very bad legal advice and mayhem would ensue and people would get hurt.

What if the State didn't regulate dentists? Anyone with a pair of pliers could promise to give the patient painless relief causing untold misery, infection, and death.

But when it comes to religion, the whole thing is unregulated.

Anyone can say anything! No school is required. No license is needed. Anyone can imagine anything and convince people to believe it! Sadly, most of these religious quacks have no conscience and are willing to say anything to keep the people coming back for more. The only reason they are able to do this is because they say that they are basing everything on the Bible!

So, the sad circle goes around and around. The Bible is not magic. It is not mysterious. The Bible says what it says. The madness is that people come to the Bible with such weird expectations that they either insist that it says things or denies that it says anything. And so the Bible is blamed, praised, and ridiculed by people who have never read it--because of the church!

V. Cultural Obstacle

This one is a great obstacle, possibly trickier than others. People come to the Bible expecting the Bible, its people, and cultures to have the same value systems of right and wrong as the contemporary reader. When the Bible does not have their value system, they either disregard the Bible or manipulate it so that it has their value system through contrivances of bizarre interpretation.

One great example was the practice of slavery in the United States. Since we lost hundreds of thousands of our own soldiers and billions of dollars in property during the Civil War, slavery is a touchy issue. We go to the Bible and find that almost all of the people in the Old Testament owned slaves, that God gave rules about the treatment of slaves rather than abolishing slavery and endorsed the institution by allowing the Hebrews to make slaves of the people they conquered. “Oh, that can’t be right,” an abolitionist might say. The cycle begins.

Another issue is abortion. Abortionists claim that a woman has a right to her own body. They teach that the right to have an abortion is a female right if she doesn’t want the child. This is not a new custom. In ancient times, physicians created potions and concoctions to force a pregnancy to terminate. In China, women face three options: they get an abortion; or they “expose” unwanted children in the streets until they are picked up for use of others; or they die. When abortionists go to the Bible and read that John leaped in the womb of his mother when Jesus came into the room in the womb of his mother Mary, they disregard it as a metaphor. On the other hand, the anti-abortionists insist that the Bible supports the idea that the child in the womb is alive and a viable human being. Yet, the laws of God recorded in Leviticus instruct that if two men fighting cause a woman to miscarry, the men must pay a fine!

Just recently I was talking to a young woman who is getting into the religion of Wicca. She wants to be a Neo-pagan. When I asked her why, she said, "I wanted to believe the Bible, but it is filled with contradictions!" I said, "How do you know? Did you read it?" She replied, "I read some of it. When I did, I found that in the place where the Bible says that homosexuality was wrong, it does not condemn slavery. If the book is going to be good, it needs to be all good. If not, then forget it!"

I didn't understand her. But I know that her feelings about homosexuality and slavery caused her to decide that the Bible was not "good" like she expected it to be. This a good illustration. For the Bible to be "good" everything in it would have had to agree with her cultural expectations. She rejected the Bible because it didn't live up to her idea of what a culture accepts and rejects. She is not the first or the last to do that.

Most people have no idea that the ancient world embraced different values and different customs. Customs and practices are not evil unless God specifically says they are evil. The problem with the cultural obstacle is that people want to insist that either God decry a custom when he didn't, or allow a custom when he decried it. Since God has chosen to make himself known through an old document, people in the modern world can twist the Bible to fit modern expectations until it looks like a mop run through a wringer.

Many customs are neither right nor wrong. They just are. Like people not speaking in an elevator, but staring at the numbers instead; like looking forward in a bus if two people are in a disagreement or like waiting a split second before honking at someone who has missed the fact that the light at the intersection is now green. These are our customs. We have millions of them. However, in the future, it might be thought the height of evil to do any of them! Some people call capitalism, the economic system

of the United States, a great evil. They call it slavery and the heart of the great evil Social Darwinism. They look for communism in the Bible and they claim to find it. They look for capitalism and the right to private property and they claim to find it on the stone tablets in the words, “You will not steal.”

The Bible allows for customs within a framework of God’s laws. God doesn’t care if you embrace communism. Neither does the Bible. But he does care if you murder others over it.

VI. Time Obstacle

Some people insist that they do not have the time to read the Bible. This is a ruse. People have all the time in the world to do what they want to do. The fact is, for all of the reasons surrounding this one in the list of the 12 Obstacles to the Bible, people do not want to read the Bible. The hurdles are too high; the effort too great. They would rather believe someone else; thus allowing their Bible to collect dust.

But some people do buy the “I don’t have time” ruse. And when they do, they make matters worse by aiding people in the error of reading the Bible in little pieces and hopping from here to there! “Better to read

some than none!” they say as they make reading lists that if followed, will allow them to read the Bible in three years! “What other book in the world has ever been treated like this?” The answer is none. No other book is treated like the Bible.

In order to make sure that people have time to read the Bible, good-intentioned people make endless plans and lists that will “help” the readers finally get “through” the Bible. So they spend five minutes in the Old Testament and then five in the New Testament. On and on. This method is wrong because it never affords the reader continuity.

Think about it. If the Bible is not arranged in chronological order and is difficult to understand, how on earth will it benefit the reader to jump around in the soup? It won’t. Those who think that this is the way to read the Bible think that reading the bits and pieces are better than reading none at all. I don’t think that is true. I think it would be better to leave the Bible alone than to read it in tiny pieces that never reveal what the Bible is all about.

You will never see the whole picture if you read it in “bits and pieces.” I believe that people do what they want to do. They go where they want to go. They watch what they want to watch and zap through what they do not. People have the money, generally, for the things they really want. When people, who can read a novel a week, express “no time” for the Bible, what they mean is, “I don’t want to read it.” On the other hand, the Bible is the only book in the world that requires a ritual to read! Most people who try to get others to read the Bible say that it is best to read the Bible in small increments. That is bad enough. But then they say that the new reader to the Bible needs to read the Bible during a “quiet time.”

Why does the Bible have to be read during meditation?

Why not on the bus? The subway? The train?

One time I heard someone say in a sermon that the best way to read the Bible was like this: take the Bible, open it wherever you feel led (*meaning flop it open in the name of God's leading*), read the passage (*notice, Bible reading has its own language: passages, not portions; verses, not sentences. Adds to the mystery that keep people from the Bible*) and then wait for God to speak.

Read the Bible, and then wait for God to speak. Just sit there, listening, quiet, with “spiritual ears turned on.” I tried that once and fell asleep in the process. God did not speak to me. And I never claim that he does. God spoke to others, they wrote it down, and I believe what they said God said. That is the nature of the Bible. People read it when they want to read it, believe they can read it with profit and when they think that, maybe, they might understand what all the fuss is about.

This whole situation is sad. People say that other people should read the Bible. They try to use guilt to get people to read it. Some churches have campaigns to get people to agree to “get into their Bibles.” You might think that the Bible is 300,000 pages long in hard-to-read cryptic letters requiring a magnifying glass and a code-breaker's book!

I have been there. I used to try to read the Bible for the Bible's sake. Like opening a portal into the realm of God. I guess that I thought the Bible was like a door into direct connection with God, so I would go someplace quiet, open the book and begin to read the secret messages about Canaanites and Hittites. I would tell my mind to ignore the messages that I had no idea what I was reading. I just knew that I should read it. I guess I, like millions of others, thought the Bible was more than words. I guess I thought that the Bible was simply a way to get to God and that

words were used by Him as an excuse to get to us. This is why people claim they do not have the time to read the Bible. They think that reading the Bible is an ordeal. A trauma that will take forever and need plenty of explaining, so they do not have the time for that. Sadly, while their frustration was swelling, they were passing up the time to simply read the Bible.

VII. Philosophical Obstacle

No one is able to approach the books of the Bible without some kind of philosophical presuppositions. We are people and people are socialized using philosophical certainties. Anyone who thinks that they are beyond having been influenced by presuppositions is exposing a philosophy in itself.

Those who say that they want to get rid of the “ideas of men” and just read the Bible for the Word of God are going the wrong direction. They are part of the myriad ignorant that think the books of the Bible fell out of heaven, or were dictated by the Holy Spirit making the writers stenographers. Those who say such things claim to be the most conservative when, in fact, they are the ones that are putting words into the mouths of those who wrote the books of the Bible. They, of course, would

deny this accusation and insist that they just want the words of God and not the ideas and notions of men. They have it in their minds that the words of God and the words of men are somehow juxtaposed. They have the philosophical notion that the words of God and the words of man cannot occupy the same space and are at war with each other.

This particular philosophical presupposition is at the heart of the obstacle to reading the Bible. Western culture has been greatly influenced by the Greek philosophers from over millennia ago. Plato, the most influential of all, insisted that the divine, or the idea, and the natural, or the accidental, could not inhabit the same space at the same time. So, it is said that he taught that the finite could not bear the infinite.

In other words, God is not the creation and the creation is not God. Because those who still follow Plato no matter how much they read the books of the Bible never question this presupposition, then the very point of the books of the Bible is at issue.

The fact that God created the universe is not new to the pantheon of religious ideas in the world. The idea that people are creatures who can communicate with the gods is nothing new to humankind. The notion that the gods are looking for and expecting something from the creation is an old hat as well. Understanding that men desire to be like the gods and want to understand the universe by consulting the gods is the essence of any religion. Common to all of these notions is the thread that the creation is not the god and the god is not the creation and never do the two ever meet. Those who are looking for the “words of God” in the books of the Bible and trying to avoid the “ideas of men” have swallowed the philosophical notions of Plato and all of those who follow the disembodied notion of an idea as the greatest expression of reality.

When someone sits to read the books of the Bible, a strange world opens. A world in which God and the creation are separate, but allied on a personal level. The God does not dictate to the creation; the God comes to the creation and becomes part of the creation.

The fact that the books of the Bible teach that Jesus is God in flesh, God in a body, is blatant proof that God and the creation can co-exist in the same space. In fact, if God and man cannot co-exist, if the God cannot become a man and if the creation cannot bear the Creator, then the whole notion of Jesus makes no sense at all.

Most of the doctrinal and denominational problems in the world are all linked to this teaching of Plato. People think that they approach the books of the Bible with a blank slate. In fact, they do not.

The books of the Bible are not dependent on Plato, Aristotle or anyone else. The men who wrote the books of the Bible recorded in their own words with their own style what God had communicated to them and through them. They recorded what they saw, heard, and observed through many ways and means.

The books of the Bible are the words of men recording the revelation of God to them and through them and in front of their eyes. So, those who think that the words of men and the words of God are enemies need to do a little Bible reading.

I have heard men stand up and claim to be staunch defenders of the Bible and claim extreme ideas of inspiration and proceed to put down any ideas of men. But then, when they are confronted with the idea that God was born, God died, and Mary was the Mother of God, they run headlong into their own philosophical framework knocking themselves out. Little do

they know that they are judging the words of God with the notions of a dead pagan philosopher.

I realize that people get fed up with so many voices trying to tell them what the Bible says and doesn't say. They hear the cacophony of voices and think that they are all wrong: that the Bible is so simple that any difficulty is all man made. That is what the angel Moroni told Joseph Smith and he introduced the utterly useless Book of Mormon and endless arrays of heresies and sorrows. By telling the people that all the men were wrong, he was able to claim to be the only man who was ever right. He even claimed to see angels and translate ancient Egyptian.

Some people come to the books of the Bible and think that miracles cannot happen. And since they don't see them happen, they conclude that they never happened at all. This philosophical empiricism rules out many of the miracles recorded in the books of the Bible. Thus, they have shaped the Bible with their own philosophy because they have not seen miracles like those in the Bible.

The same is true for those who deny the existence of supernatural forces, beings and occurrences. They have not seen devils, demons and demon possessions; therefore, they come to the Bible already believing that these things cannot and do not exist. They interpret anything supernatural as the simpleminded Bible people trying to explain what their limited brains could understand. This elitism is remarkable. To believe that the people of the first century were so simpleminded that they were unable to discern the difference between someone who was mentally ill and someone who was filled with pure evil is uncannily superior of the one thinking this way.

Also, those who come to the Bible with this philosophical mind set have to figure out some way to explain Jesus. They claim that Jesus

believed that the people were demonized too. They reason, “maybe he was confused or maybe he just let the people think what they already thought so that they wouldn’t miss his ‘message.’” If this is true, then did Jesus pretend to believe in demons instead of saying, “This is no demon. There are no demons. This is illness of the mind,” and then proceed to cure the mental illness? It seems that those with this way of thinking want to believe that Jesus cured the one mentally ill person with a word and left the rest in ignorance.

The philosophical barrier is magnificently high. Unbelievably unscalable. I doubt that few people are ever able to get over the hump of the way that they have been taught to think all of their lives. Most people will never get into the world of the books of the Bible because they will never have the courage to emerge from their own set of beliefs.

For instance, if someone has swallowed the philosophy of evolutionism and Darwinism, then the Genesis account can never be taken at face value. Never. Even if one takes the account as the broad outlines of evolution, in an attempt to strike some middle ground, the fact still remains that the plants were created before the sun. No, if one is steeped in Darwinist philosophy, that person can never take the books of the Bible at face value. Why?

Because, according to them, modern man is so much more evolved than the poor ignorant people who wrote the books of the Bible. They, according to the Darwinists, were trying to describe the wind and rain and storms. They were so ignorant that they made up stories to make themselves feel better about the world around them. Why? So they could make out-of-control gods?

The Darwinist makes up stories to a bitter end. He gets rid of God

altogether and is comforted in being in control of his own world. In this way, the philosopher accuses the writers of the Bible books of the same error that he himself imbibes.

The philosophical barrier is one of the highest because the Bible books are so old. They have been through several shifts in world-view and philosophical transformations in the world around them. Fortunately, they are written down and have survived the tumult. But to get into the world of the Bible writers, it is vital that we accept their world as it is on the paper. When we try to impose our ideas onto them to make them fit our notions, we clash with the very people we think we want to follow.

So the conflict is this: Are they the words of men or of God? Which will it be? The world of the Bible writers, a 6,000-year-old span of a world, or what we think and believe? It is arrogant and foolish for us to claim that God is not out there in space or on the moon, when we are not capable of going out into space and confirming what the books of the Bible never claimed.

Some insist that no one can disassociate themselves from their cultural climate and experience nudely the culture and meaning of another.

To some extent I agree. I do not believe that it is necessary to completely get into the heads and minds of the writers of the Bible to understand the Bible. What must be done is that the modern reader must let the words on the page be the truth on the page. If the writer portrays angelic beings protecting prophets, and that those beings were observed, then the modern reader must let that be the truth.

To superimpose a non-belief in angels and imagine that the writers of the books of the Bible somehow made up myth and magic in order to

get a point across is to make the writers of the Bible intentional writers of fiction.

Some scholars have the idea that the writers of the Bible books were all scholars of Biblical literature. Thus, they cram the Biblical writers into the way that the contemporary scholar thinks that the writer would write if he/she was the writer. They see schemes and contrivances on the part of the author that most likely did not exist if the author was simply writing the facts as he observed them or heard them.

This philosophical barrier is no higher than when it comes to the prophets. Modern culture has no room for the oracular nature of the prophets. Modern science has no place for partial possession of God speaking through a human being. Therefore, the scholar concludes that the prophetic did not happen and that the prophets were visionaries and motivators for social change that, oddly enough, always seems to coincide with the values of the culture of the scholar.

Since modern prophets do not exist in the same way that they purport to have existed, it is imagined that they never existed. Maybe this is because they think that the writers of the Bible books were already imbued with the understanding that “the end justifies the means” that has swallowed whole the modern idea of ethics.

VIII. Educational Obstacle

The reader of the Bible books must be able to read. Insofar as people have differing abilities to read, there exist differing abilities to understand the literature at hand.

Here is an example. I am always amazed that it seems that the people who have the least education wind up with a Bible in 1611-style English. They can barely make it through the town newspaper, but they expect to be able to understand the Bible. This leads to mischief. They are told all their lives that anyone can understand the Bible. Therefore, they think that the books of the Bible are simple. Since they think that they are simple, they believe that how they read a portion must be the only way to understand the words on the page. Then, since they are intimidated by education anyway and shy about saying that they don't understand, they will resist any effort to correct their misunderstanding no matter how kindly the instruction is meant and delivered. "That is the way I see it" is their mantra.

The level of education – ability to read and understand – affects in every way the understanding of the books of the Bible. This, again, is because the books of the Bible are so old. The reader must have a general

education and understanding of history, literature, the ancient customs and the background of the Bible writers before they can with assurance begin to read the books.

Since most people approach the books of the Bible with some idea of what they are *supposed* to say, they insist that they hear what the books are reported to have said. If someone with a broader ability to read attempts to widen out the understanding, he lights off the fuse of the bomb attached to the books of the Bible: the fuse of the talisman.

Most people, educated and not, have the idea that the Bible is a talisman. They think that the books themselves are somehow magical, containing the secrets of the ages in codes and titanic mysteries ending in apocalypse. Bibles adorn tables and shelves as priceless jewels because of this very notion. People insist that they believe the Bible books although they have never read them.

Why? Because they believe that the truth is somehow in the pages in a physical sense. They cannot understand the books so, therefore, they must have a mystical meaning that only the initiated can share. Unfortunately, the less educated Bible readers think that the education needed to become initiated into understanding the books of the Bible is a tool of the devil to root out the truth and mystery of the Bible itself.

People who are overeducated (those who have learned to read so well that they read into what they read) make similar errors with regard to the Bible but from the opposite extreme. They put words into the mouths of the writers and think that the Bible says more than it says.

Both extremes of over and under education only cause trouble and do not aid in the profitable understanding of the books of the Bible.

IX. The Literary Obstacle

The Bible contains many different types of literature. The Bible cannot be read the same way on every page. For instance, the book of 150 Psalms that are in the Bible are poems. They are songs that were used in the temple and by the people. They are verses to songs. Unfortunately, the music has been long-lost, but we have the verses.

No one would read a poem the same way that they would read history. Poetry has a certain license to exaggerate and color. In a poem, the

author expresses feelings of elation, joy, happiness, disappointment, fear, rage, and revenge. In a poem, the author is able to give voice to the raging feelings that he has inside him. Now, he might feel differently the next day and think better of the emotions that he was writing, but the poem is a snapshot of emotion and tension in the context of a human life. Those who do not understand that the Psalms are a different sort of literature might approach the Psalms expecting something other than what is really there.

In the modern era, would anyone read poetry to find out facts about science? No. Would anyone read poetry to get the facts about the Civil War? No. But, someone might read the poetry written by the soldiers at Gettysburg who were waiting for the orders to charge into what they knew would be their last moments on earth. Would those poems be filled with facts, figures, and incontrovertible premises? No.

But they would be filled with emotions, perceptions and dreams. They would be filled with fear, terror and regret. They would be filled with the voices of myriad men, young men, promising men, who would soon die on the grass and never live another day crying out to God and demanding an answer. The poems might be filled with repentance, forgiveness and cries for God to suddenly and without remorse destroy the enemy on the other side of the line. The poems, because of the type of literature they are, would give the men the right to speak in terms not usually used in regular language. That is the nature and one of the values of poetry and poetic language.

The Psalms are this way too. Sometimes the writer is in a good mood and things are going the way that he wants them to go. All seems right with heaven and earth and the seas abounding. The very next Psalm, which is not necessarily next chronologically, may be an example of the Psalmist in a very bad mood when things seem to be all out of place and

God no longer seems to care about the poor soul writing the song.

We have all felt that way. One of the values of the Psalms is that there is a song for every mood and emotion. There is a song for every time of a person's life. There is a release in song whether things are good, bad, desperate or happy. If we understand that God inspired the people who wrote these songs, we then see that God is not angry over our different moods. In fact, he understands them, has experienced them, and encourages us to express them, even when we hate our enemies or doubt the motives of God.

People who don't understand the value of the different types of literature will be completely confused by the Psalms. If they think that the Psalms are God speaking, they will come to the conclusion that God has mood swings, or they will force interpretations on the Psalms to make certain that God cannot be accused of being moody. The whole problem wouldn't exist if people would simply understand that different literature is used for different purposes in the Bible like it is today.

Here is another example. The New Testament is filled with letters. Now, let's think about that. If you do not understand that over half the New Testament is letters, you will never get the right idea of the letters or have the slightest idea of their sequence.

Let's think of letters for a minute. Letters are written by someone to someone. Letters are usually filled with personal references and private messages. Letters are usually inspired by some situation that needed a letter to address it. Letters are usually written from one person's point of view to an individual or group of people.

If letters are like that, then the letters in the Bible are like that too.

They are other people's mail which we now have in the Bible. This doesn't mean that the letters mean nothing to us. It means that the letters have to mean to us what they meant to the people who received them in the first place.

We cannot and should not imagine that the letters were written with us in mind while the original recipients understood nothing of what was on the paper. Many people believe this way or act like they do. They seem to think that the poor people who opened the letter just looked at each other and said, "Those lucky people in the next millennium. In the meantime, let's keep the manuscripts for them even though they are nonsense to us."

It takes work to understand a letter written to someone else. You have to know who wrote it, something about that person and what motivated the writing. You have to know who received it and why. You have to understand something of the implied references to governments, plans, laws and beliefs. You have to spend a lot of time to get into the head of the writer and the ones who received it.

If people know they are dealing with a letter and don't treat it like a letter, then they are too lazy to do what is needed to understand what the letter meant to the original people. If people do not know it is a letter, then it is a real obstacle to understanding the Bible and the various parts of it.

Most people think the Bible is one type of literature written to everyone. This is wrong. It is made up of various types of literature written to specific people for specific reasons.

The books of the Bible include these major types of literature: Gospel, History, Narrative, Parable, Poetry, Prophecy, Apocalyptic, Epistle and Wisdom.

Be aware that different literature was used by God to communicate his unveiling of himself. Remember that God chose the types of literature and that he did so for a reason.

X. Perceptual Obstacle

People have some very strange perceptions about the Bible. Since the Bible is very difficult to understand if you get hung up in the obstacles, much folklore and superstition has grown up around the Bible books. Some think that the books are magic and can perform cures just with the pages. Most people who own Bibles keep them in the house and wouldn't dream of throwing the Bible away for fear that bad luck would come upon the household.

Others think that the Bible is filled with rules and regulations that help people live better lives. They think the books of the Bible are the Ann Landers column from God filled with good advice about any situation that a human might experience. So, those who think this about the Bible usually carve it up according to the topics upon which God has spoken. Usually, they will make lists that are resident in the front of the Bibles. They think that if a person is in distress that they will turn to the part of the Bible that they say "speaks" to that particular issue. The Gideons put Bibles all over the world with this thought in mind, that people might need advice from God and so they make it available.

Other people think that the Bible is alive. They think that the pages have a life of their own. Since the words, according to them, are alive, they think that the Bible books can mean one thing at one time and another thing at another time. They believe that the Bible moves with the needs and the growing perceptions of the people who read the Bible. They speak of the Bible “jumping out at them” when they reread a passage that they have read many times. They seem to think that there is a mysterious quality about the Bible that makes the meaning live in different ways at different times. So, they think that the Bible books have a liquid quality about them, moving in waves and meeting needs here and there. Little do they realize that by believing this they have come to the conclusion that the Bible is concerned about them instead of them being concerned about understanding the books of the Bible on their own terms.

The fun doesn't stop there. Some believe that the Bible is like an oracle. Ask it a question and the Bible will answer you. They think that the Bible is like the Magic Eight Ball which, when tipped a certain way with a question applied, will render an answer to the inquirer. They approach the Bible like this: they ask a question, or pray a question, and then they flop the Bible open and read wherever their finger lands on the page. They think that what they read there is the answer to their question.

Other people think that the Bible is an excuse for the real message. They think that the Bible is like the cocoon for the real message that is safely tucked away in codes, secret passages and hidden meanings. They are convinced that the Bible does not mean what it says, but is like the “host” organism for the truer meaning. They find mathematical codes and the answers to how the Egyptians erected the pyramids. They even find evidence for extraterrestrial visitations and shocking appearances of otherworldly beings who have the best interest of mankind at heart. The problem is that the messages are always in direct contradiction to what the

books of the Bible say. This doesn't seem to be much of a concern for the reader who keeps probing the Bible for the "real" meaning.

Still others believe that they are the instrument for the correct interpretation of the Bible. They think that the Bible speaks in many ways with different meanings to different people. But they think that they are on the inside with God. They think that they have found the real meanings and that God selected them to make sense of the whole thing. They seem to share the idea that the Holy Spirit has filled them and speaks through them, sometimes in ecstatic utterances that need to be interpreted by those who hear them. They insist that they are the pipeline that connects mankind with God using the Bible as the transmitter. Most people who see the Bible this way think that the Bible speaks to them and communicates to them. They are known to dispute anyone who might understand the real nature of the Bible and they say, "This is what it means to me."

Perceptions. Hurdles to Bible understanding and barriers beyond belief for anyone who wants to know only what the Bible books say.

Some believe that the Bible is God. They do not believe that the Bible reveals God. They believe that the Bible actually is God. They obey it. They read it with great reverence as if the words about God are the God. This is idolatry in that they worship ink on pages. But they insist that the Bible is God's Word and they equate the two. To speak about the Bible in literary terms or in terms of natural production is labeled as "liberal" and "unbelieving." This is a powerful position for those who believe it for when they describe what the Bible says, they have spoken as if the God has spoken. They think in terms of God being paper in person and spirit in presence. They reverence the Bible as an item instead of the God that the Bible reveals.

Some come to the Bible with the notion that the people who wrote the Bible were inferior. They believe that the people who wrote the Bible were so ignorant of the science of this century that they made their stories up to explain the universe. For instance, they did not, according to these people, understand that mental illness existed. Since they did not understand mental illness, they decided to explain the behavior of the mentally ill as demonized. Since they did not understand storms and lightning, they reported the thunder as the voice of God.

These people picture those who wrote the Bible as uninformed, childish, scared myth-makers and liars. They picture the people who wrote the Bible as shamans who thought it was their job to make the people feel better by creating myth to explain the frightening. They think that whenever a miracle is reported some natural phenomenon occurred and the writers explained the scary occurrence away.

They imagine that the writers of the Bible understood nothing of reality, but explained the world with fantastic legends and unimaginable stories of achievement and glory. They believe that the writers of the Bible were little more than superstitious people who used the notion of God and supernaturalized everything that they did not understand.

Now, if you think like this and have this perception of the Bible, there is little hope that you will ever read the Bible for anything more than curiosity and anything meaningful that may have accidentally fallen from the pens of those who were making up lies to explain their puny universe.

Some think that half is real and the other half made up. That's right. They think that the writers of the Bible were more interested in making a point than they were in recording the truth. These people make the opposite mistake from those who think the writers of the Bible were

primitive. These people seem to think that the writers of the Bible were literary geniuses who crafted stories and reports with great thematic care so that their particular literary designs would be communicated. They speak in terms of the writer having hundreds of “devices” at his disposal and the desire to communicate his “emphasis” through the use of carefully crafted “arrangements” of the pieces of material.

Most of the people who see the Bible this way are scholars who project onto the Bible writers the kind of literary expectation that they would place upon someone writing a dissertation. This group of people who have the “genius writer” perception, seek the books of the Bible for literary devices and carefully explain to the last detail the genius of the writer who crafted and carefully placed all of the events of the Gospel or other book of the Bible.

This educated perception is as far off as the perception that insists that the writers of the Bible were uneducated myth-makers. This perception goes too far the other way! The writers of the Bible did not sit around in the forum and discuss the latest pressure point of theological thought. They wrote what they heard and what they saw. They were not interested in literary delicacies. They were not consumed with how they would be received by the theological elite. They simply wrote what they saw and heard and believed to be true. To say that they were all reaching for the approval of the seminaries of the future and trying to achieve the goal of capturing the attention of the latest mega-scholar who could unlock the way in which the “effort was shaped” is not how the Biblical writers wrote.

They think that some of the accounts of the Bible book writers actually happened and that half of what is written was an attempt to literarily frame the other half. They think that some of the writers were

smarter than the readers. They think that the writers accommodated the weak minds of the readers and let them believe lies about the nature of the universe. They think that the writers did the best they could to communicate the real truth about God without upsetting the world view of the reader. So, they think that the writers made things up to get the attention of the masses and then sought to deliver the real message.

Some go so far as to say that the writers knew they were making things up when they wrote, but that they thought the ignorant would not take them seriously if they didn't have the bells and whistles of the miracle stuff to get the attention of the masses who were stuck in the quagmire of primitive understanding.

So, when St. Paul mentions the relationship between slave and master, they believe that he hated slavery (modern notions shoved on the Bible) and that he accommodated it (smarter than all of the others) and that he decided to live with a situation he couldn't change (elitism) and do his best to raise the consciousness and morality of the people.

Now, is that what Paul meant to do? If so, then most of what he wrote cannot be taken seriously and the other half, the ribald moralizing that is left if you remove the miraculous, is so insipid and trite, that most people would pay no attention to Paul or the items that he addressed in his letters.

Some approach the Bible thinking that it is propaganda. They believe that the writers of the Bible books were trying to sell someone or something to the masses. They see the writers of the Old Testament as men who were trying to sell social justice, fairness, equality, concern for the poor, mercy, understanding among all people and peace among mankind in the name of God. They think that the writers wanted to sell social change

or sell their God to the other nations. They think that some of the writers were hawking the IAM of Israel and trying to sell him as the biggest and the greatest to all of the other nations and religions in the area. They think that some of the writers of the Old Testament wrote pure fiction in order to make the surrounding gods look inferior and the God of Abraham look like the one who was so powerful that he could knock out all of the other gods.

People in this modern age need to be very careful when looking for someone to teach the Bible to them because many professional religious people have these ideas buried deeply in their presumptive environment.

They think that when the Psalmist praises the God of Israel that he is giving the text of a promotional flyer for the domination of YAHWEH over all of the other gods in the area. They treat the Old Testament writers like spinmeisters who have God as one candidate among many in the area of that day. They think that the miracles are exaggerated to impress, that the stunts of Elijah and Elisha are made up to bring the sagging faith in YAHWEH back to the people of Israel so that they will return to the God of their fathers. They think that the God of the Old Testament is the political mascot of the writers and the nation, and they use him and his made-up antics as a very old and high form of “my daddy can beat your daddy up because he is bigger.”

It gets worse in the New Testament. The people who believe that the writers of the Bible are propagandists think that the writers of the New Testament saw that the battle in the competition for the “godding” of the area had been lost. They knew that maybe the whole game was wrong. So, because they knew that the god competition was infantile, they report a Jesus who talked about the important things in the world like kindness, goodness and the American Way. So, they see that Jesus was trying to cast away the nonsense of the god-selling and bring the human race into line

with the truth that we are alone, but that there is a higher power that loves everyone and that, if we are good to each other, he will love us all and slowly remove evil from us if we do not resist evil but educate it with goodness and kindness.

When that talk got Jesus killed, those who think that the Bible writers were propagandists “kick it up notch.” They make Jesus a GOD by selling the new hype about the resurrection of the One who is to be considered a god himself now. So, they say, “Jesus came preaching the Kingdom of God, but Paul came preaching Christ.” So, they think that except for a slim, flimsy sketch of what Jesus taught with regard to morals and human goodness, that the rest of the New Testament was written by those who had one thing in mind: selling Jesus as the new god who would conquer all of the other gods and put the god world at the feet of all those who believe in the new god.

If you sit down with the Bible with these ideas already in place, how can the Bible ever, ever, ever, get the fair hearing that even a dime-novel gets? This barrier is very high and difficult because the one who has the mistaken notions and preconceived ideas must change them in order for the Bible books to get a calm, even try at being heard for what the books are. The Bible books have gotten too much press and people have decided too much already to really approach the Bible books with the same courtesy that they might approach the newspaper. This one takes real work to overcome.

It seems that everyone has an opinion of what the Bible books are and who the people were who wrote them. The shocking truth is that all of these people believe that what they say is true simply because they think it or say it!

XI. Difficulty Obstacle

After reading all of these barriers, you might be tempted to think that the Bible is way too much work to understand and, in the end, is not really worth all the trouble. You might think that there is too much in the way—that the effort will take a lifetime and you have other things that you would like to do with your life other than chase the meaning of the Bible down.

Don't get discouraged. If you follow what I will tell you now, you will be able to overcome this barrier and you will be on your way not only

to understanding the Bible, but also on your way to making the Bible a set of books about which you will be able to converse admirably and without fear.

I want you to understand the Bible. I searched most of my life to help you understand the Bible and go on with the rest of yours. It shouldn't take a lifetime of dedication to understand a set of 66 books that are not that long all put together. Night after night in Bible college and seminary, I studied 66 books because I wanted to know, like you do, what they are all about. I couldn't quit. I wouldn't quit. I refused to let people tell me what the Bible said. I wouldn't let a book beat me.

Oh, it's not that I didn't ask for help. It's not that I didn't look for a teacher, but they all had a "just a little more, c'mon" catch to them. They acted like they knew what the Bible was about, but then when I paid the money and followed them, they would tell me the little bit that they knew and make it seem like my fault that I didn't know more. I am now convinced that they would pretend that they knew what the Bible was all about and then act like the fault was mine if I didn't understand it like they pretended to. The fact is, as I now know, they didn't understand the Bible either and couldn't help me. They were scam artists. They took advantage of me and most of the people that I knew who were sincere young people. They took our money, blamed us for not knowing more than we did and convinced us that if we didn't know more than we did, God would be angry at us.

They told us that we had to go to church and that we had to act in certain ways (which they dictated) in order to make us worthy to understand the Bible. They made us think that if we didn't live their rules and their ways that we would not be a good antenna and would not be able to pick up the signals of God which would let us know what the Bible said.

If we asked a question that the teachers did not know, we were told that we were not ready for that answer yet and were left in the mysterious dark to fend for ourselves. So, the question of what the Bible meant was elevated to godlike proportions and we were the reason we didn't understand it.

But since I believed them and was trying to play by their rules, I played their game and came away with a degree in Bible and was not able to say what the 66 books were about.

I don't want you to go through the same thing. I want you and all the people who want to understand the Bible to understand it once and for all. Then, once you see the big picture, you can do as detailed a study as you want to.

This is how most people approach the Bible: They tell you all of the details first and never tell you the big picture.

What if medicine was taught that way? What if the medical schools taught all of the details about cells and organs and systems and never, ever let the student see the human body? That would be unbelievable and unquestionably would fail in the most miserable way. But that is the way the Bible is taught and we all wonder why few people understand it.

The ironic thing is I don't think that many people know what the whole picture really is! If so, why don't they tell what it is? If they *know* the way the Bible fits together, why don't they share it? Is it a big secret? Why do sincere people have to seek for years and scrap together the little bit about the Bible that they can gather?

Why do people have to go to church for years just to piece together

moralistic details that never amount to the big picture? The fact is that they do not know how it all fits together! They either think they do, or they refuse to admit that they don't.

I have found the way to show you the whole picture and let you decide how many of the details you want to know. The following list are the Twelve Pieces of the Puzzle that will let you know more about the Bible than most people ever will in their whole lives no matter how hard they try.

Because the people they are trusting to tell them the truth and explain to them the Bible don't know either!!

So, using my ability to synthesize information and boil it down to just the things that you need to know to see the big picture, I have created **Bible in an Hour®**.

Don't spend needless years trying to find out what these 66 books are saying. I already did that. I put in the time already and do not want to play the blackmail game of keeping the information from you or pretending I know when I don't know. I want to share my discoveries with you.

Bible in an Hour® is enough for most people and they are glad to stop there and let it be enough. Other people want to go deeper and make the Bible a hobby and a guide.

Some people think that when I call the Bible a hobby that I am being sacrilegious. No one can or should spend all of their time studying the Bible. The world needs people filling vital functions so that all people can be benefitted, served and the greatest experiential fun can be had while on this playground God made for humankind.

But some people like to make the Bible a hobby and learn as much about the Bible as they can. They are interested and curious about this set of books like other people are interested in other literature and other hobbies. For the people who want to be hobbyists, the other eleven Pieces will not only open the details and motivations behind the Bible books, but will help them integrate into the groups that gather around the books of the Bible. These are usually called churches, but I don't like to use that language, because the term "church" is laden with baggage that the churches have piled upon themselves while they misrepresented the books of the Bible.

XII. Application Obstacle

What does all of this mean to me?

If the Bible is 5,000 years old and is the record of other people and the way that God interacted with other people in many ways and through many cultures, what does it mean to the average person today? If most of the New Testament was written by the Apostle Paul as other people's mail, then what does it mean to the person who is reading it now?

This is a very good question and a fantastic barrier for the thoughtful person.

Here are some of the wrong conclusions that others have come to in trying to understand how the Bible applies to people today:

(Read these and then I will tell you the right way.)

1. Some say that the Bible wasn't written to the people it seems to have been written to, but was written in a mysterious way by God to all of the people of the world in all times because the words on the page are alive and change when time passes.

2. Some say that the Bible was written to the people it seems to be written to and also was written to all people of all times because the Bible is mysteriously alive on the page. These people say that God lifts the words off the page at different times and applies the words like a bandage or medicine might be applied.

3. Some say that the Bible only applies to us as we watch the lessons that God taught the people about whom the Bible is written. They say that the Bible means something to the modern reader in that modern

people are able to watch the actions of God and the reactions of the people and learn valuable lessons and morals from all of the activities. The people who look at the Bible this way think that everything happened to all the 5,000 years of people to teach modern people the lessons needed to please God. Of course, it never seems to cross their minds that literally millions of people died and experienced lives of misery just so the modern person will be able to discern the lessons needed to enjoy life.

4. Some say that the Bible is not written to the people it seemed to have been written to or the modern reader. They say that the Bible is written for the ones who are able to discern its secret passages and hideaway truths. They teach that for a person to understand the Bible they have to be initiated into the ways of the secrets of the Bible. They especially abuse the prophets.

5. Some say that the Bible was written to prepare the modern people for the end of the world. Those who believe this are always digging around in the Bible for signs and pointers to the end of the age and the destruction of everything. They panic about social events and watch the news like hawks thinking that God has written in the Bible the text for the end of the world. I have never been able to understand what the goal is with this way of thinking. Is the goal of all of the frenzy to be able to say, "I was right! Look, here is the end of the age right on time?!"

6. Some say that the Bible wasn't written as a factual document at all, but represents the struggle of a people to maintain their community. In essence, those who think this do not believe a word of the Bible. They see the accounts of the Bible as quaint efforts of a nation called Israel to carve out for itself a niche in the world that surrounded them. They believe that the accounts in the Old Testament reveal not God, but a people emerging from obscurity, blooming into maturity and then falling into disunity with

all of the attendant emotions that follow a people who go through such upheavals.

They believe that the Bible books were written to justify political actions and attach the demand to God. They believe that the laws and rules which the Bible writers say came from God were actually cooked up by the priests so that they could maintain control over the people and get them to become superstitious in order to preserve the priestly class and maintain the money coming into the temple.

7. Some believe that the Bible was written by hundreds of people with different goals and dreams and recollections and that none of it is historical, but represents the contributions of a hysterically superstitious people who lied to get into the Bible to make a statement about social ills or wandering in the valley of questioning God. They believe that the way the Bible applies now to people is that those who read it should identify with the true motivations of the people who wrote the Bible books and seek to right the wrongs that they faced in their writings. It doesn't matter to these people if the Bible really happened or not. The question is irrelevant to them. All they understand is that people need to do the "right thing" as the people in the Bible taught it.

I got an e-mail from a lady who falls into this category. She told me that she had been talking to her priest friend about the Bible. Evidently, she was told to read it for herself. This is what she said:

"I have about given up on getting the truth from man or text on the subject. The only ones I can trust are God, Jesus and what I feel to be the truth deep down in my soul."

8. Some believe that the Bible was written as a pamphlet to sell the

God of the Jews because if people would believe and follow the God of the Jews, the Jews would rise as a nation with the most prestigious god of all. So, they do not believe any of the accounts, but think that they are overblown exaggerations of what really happened so that the Jews in their environment could point and say the cosmic version of “My Daddy is Better than Your Daddy.”

In this sense, the Bible makes no sense to the modern reader and does not apply except to fulfill the need to curiously study an ancient people with quaint customs and outmoded beliefs. Those who believe this way are usually the highly educated who believe that there is no RIGHT or only GOD if there is a GOD, so they reject even the claims of the God of the Bible to be unique. They do not see the writings of God, they see the boasts and claims of authors who had a vested interest in keeping the worship of the God of Israel going for political, social and economic reasons.

This reasoning applies, in their minds, to the New Testament as well. Since they do not believe that any of the Bible records actually happened in the way that they have been transmitted, they do not believe many things about Jesus that are claimed in the New Testament. They believe that Jesus was a Jewish teacher and reformer who was rejected as too radical. They believe that Jesus was bringing universal and radical moral ideas to the Jews that are common to all of the “great” religions that teach peace, harmony and the unity of mankind.

They think that when Jesus’ message was rejected by the people of the time who wanted to maintain the old ways and concepts about God that quaintly bolstered their own cultic priesthood and national identity that they executed him for HIS beliefs which they saw as a threat to the welfare of the Jewish nation and way of life.

So, when the Jesus message failed, they believe that the Apostles, who had so much invested in Jesus and his ways, decided to make Jesus something he wasn't and never had been. They began, according to the reasoning of these people, to promote Jesus as God when Jesus never claimed to be God. They insist that the Apostles made up the resurrection account and pretended that Jesus rose from the dead so that they could continue to force the moral change and harmony principles that Jesus already had in place.

Again, since these people in the Bible were not modern and were superstitious and had some weird idea of literature, the fact that they made up lies about what happened and reported false claims of miracles and achievements to buttress their lies about Jesus, didn't seem to bother them at all. They believe that the fact is that the whole New Testament is essentially a lie in order to foster the "better way" of peace, humanity, equity and fairness through truth, freedom and justice. This makes the Apostles people who endorsed and believed that the end justifies the means.

9. Some people believe that the books of the Bible are a stage for self-discovery. When they study the Bible, they are not concerned about what the Bible books say, they are concerned about what the books of the Bible say to "them." When they read the Bible, they say that the Bible speaks to them. Since the Bible is totally subjective in its interpretation if it is no more than the springboard for self-discovery, then the Bible really doesn't say anything at all. In fact, the Bible is, essentially, a discussion starter for those who want some spiritual starter kit.

People who believe this way think that the Bible means what people say it means and not what it might have meant. What it meant is irrelevant because what it meant to others is not what it means to present company.

They believe that the Bible should be filled with application notes and leading questions to aid the reader in self-discovery. This makes applying the Bible wholly and totally centered around the reader and not at all around the writer.

This seems to make perfect sense to them. Since this allows the reader to not concern themselves with the nitpicky details of history and context, the Bible seems easy to understand. Leaders of this sort of Bible study will say after the passage for the evening has been read, “What does this mean to you?” and all will go around the table and share what the passage means to them.

10. Still others believe that the Bible cannot say anything to anyone because the Bible doesn't mean anything at all. True. Some people think that the Bible is just a collection of frauds and odds and ends of Mid-Eastern Semitic nonsense that was never meant to be taken seriously. They believe that the books of the Bible have no roots in history--maybe some roots in fantasy, but no roots in reality. They don't even pretend to give Jesus lip-service.

They don't think that he existed at all. They think that the Bible has only a pretext to reality and therefore is a total waste of the time and resources of all concerned. They believe that the books of the Bible have served the religious elite, that they have been assembled to rob the poor and give to the religious elite. Those who believe this would like to burn the books of the Bible along with all religious literature. They tend to be those who are scientifically minded and have come to the conclusion that since so many voices claim to know the Bible and they differ, that no one is able to know the Bible.

But I insist that the Bible can easily be understood if a simple thing

is believed: the books of the Bible were not written to everyone.

That is the first step to understanding this collection of books. Once you understand them using this *Passive Principle*, then you can decide whether you believe what they say or not. But before you will ever be able to believe them, you must come to understand them first.

There are some people who think that the truth is in the Bible, but they think that they will never be able to understand it. So, they think that they believe it when they don't understand it. This makes no sense. No one can trust and rely upon something to be true that they don't understand. This "taking someone else's word for it" is very destructive. But many sincere people fall into this because they think that it is futile to believe that they will ever get anywhere. So, they just believe the ones who say they understand it.

These are the people who mindlessly believe their religious leaders.

Step #1: Remember that the books were not written to everyone at all times and in all places.

I received an e-mail from a woman who was confused because she thought that the Bible was written for all people at all times. She must have thought that since she wrote:

"It would really be interesting to see the Bible if it were written in today's society where women are considered equals not subordinates and you divorce people instead of stoning them to death. Somehow I don't think today's man would go for their biological children being considered their wife's dead husband's children. I also don't think women today would stand for being forced to marry their deceased husband's brother or even his father. That thought really kind of sickens me."

She seemed to be unconsolated by the notion that the Bible had to mean the same thing to everyone all the time or it means nothing to anyone anytime. This muddled thinking is nearly added. But when it comes to the books of the Bible, reason seems to be inapplicable.

So, the first thing to tell yourself is that the Bible was not written to everyone.

Rule #2: Realize that the Bible was written to someone by somebody.

Now, if you believe that the Bible was written to someone by somebody, it follows that the Bible was not written to you. That means that if the Bible is going to mean anything to you, it will mean that you understand the meaning to you passively as you look over the shoulders of those to whom the Bible books were written.

You will have to ask questions like “Who wrote this part?” And then apply the rest of the journalistic questions of Who, What, When, Where and Why.

Once you answer all those questions, then you will see that the Bible made sense to the one who wrote it and the one who received it. Now, that sense will be your sense also, if you keep rule number three.

Rule # 3: The Bible is taken at commonsense face value.

No tricks. No show time. No bamboozles and cryptic notes and codes. Just something from someone to someone about something.

Those who want to make the Bible completely a mystery will try to insist that I am being simplistic and leading sincere readers wrongly.

Most of the people who think this way and say these things want the Bible to be difficult. They want the Bible to remain a mystery, for then they have material to untangle for people. There are a lot of people in the world that depend on the Bible remaining a mystery for their livelihood. If, all of a sudden, the people could understand the Bible for themselves, the ones who have been pretending to understand the Bible will be revealed as frauds. Those who make a good living unlocking the so-called secrets of the Bible will suddenly have no audience at all. What would they do then? They would have to go and make an honest living not fooling the people who have looked to them for guidance. Wouldn't that be a shame?

Let me give you an example of how the *Passive Principle* works out in understanding the Bible. The Old Testament plainly tells the people of God that they need to worship God by slaying lambs on a specific altar at a specific time in a specific place in a specific way. Now, are we all to believe that we are to slay lambs in order to follow the commandments of God?

The answer is, "No, of course not." My question is "Why not?"

If the Bible is written to the whole of mankind and is filled with what God wants us to do and is crammed with steps and ways to follow him and have better and better lives, we ought to start with this one. We ought to sacrifice lambs immediately.

No one would ever do this. Why not?

Because on this issue, they know that their own rules of Bible interpretation do not apply. They know that those laws and rules were written for a specific people and time. But they will not be so sensible at other times with the Scripture.

The fact is that at that time, in that place, for the reasons the Bible books make clearer later, the lambs were to be slaughtered. The fact that they followed the demands of God and looked to the One that the lambs foreshadowed is the important thing.

This is how it will apply to you!

With regard to worship, God still locates himself for the people. Only now, he does not accept the blood of the lambs, he gives it. Therefore, the way that these passages apply to you is that you have the chance to receive the blood of God at his altar.

Using the Passive Principle, the whole set of books of the Bible will make sense to you. They will mean something to you. And that is what Bible reading is all about.