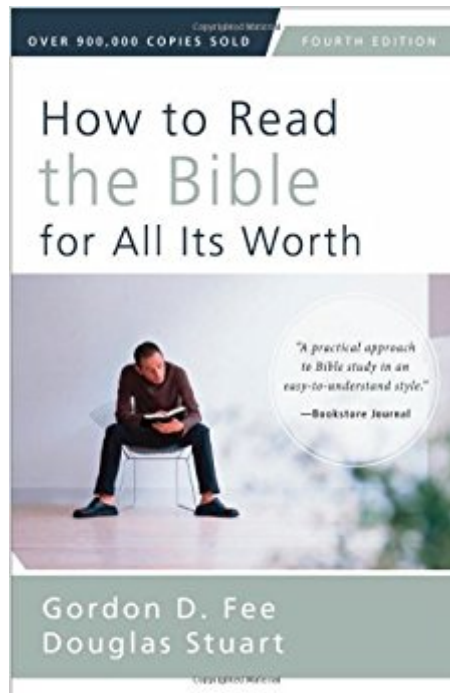




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How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth: Fourth Edition



Synopsis

Understanding the Bible isn't for the few, the gifted, the scholarly. The Bible is accessible. It's meant to be read and comprehended by everyone from armchair readers to seminary students. A few essential insights into the Bible can clear up a lot of misconceptions and help you grasp the meaning of Scripture and its application to your twenty-first-century life. More than three quarters of a million people have turned to *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* to inform their reading of the Bible. This fourth edition features revisions that keep pace with current scholarship, resources, and culture. Changes include:

- Updated language for better readability
- Scripture references now appear only in brackets at the end of a sentence or paragraph, helping you read the Bible as you would read any book—without the numbers
- A new author's preface
- Redesigned and updated diagrams
- Updated list of recommended commentaries and resources

Covering everything from translational concerns to different genres of biblical writing, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* is used all around the world. In clear, simple language, it helps you accurately understand the different parts of the Bible—their meaning for ancient audiences and their implications for you today—so you can uncover the inexhaustible worth that is in God's Word.

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Customer Reviews

Gordon D. Fee (PhD, University of Southern California) is Professor Emeritus of New Testament Studies at Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia. Douglas Stuart is Professor of Old Testament and Chair of the Division of Biblical Studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

He holds the B.A. and Ph.D. from Harvard University. Among his earlier writings are *Studies in Early Hebrew Meter*, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Primer for Students and Pastors*, and *Favorite Old Testament Passages*.

If teaching disciples to read the Bible for themselves is the most important task pastors, teachers, churches can perform then I believe most have failed. I grew up in a conservative Southern Baptist church context that taught the innerancy and importance of reading Scripture daily and studying it corporately, but never once had a lesson in exegesis, hermeneutics, biblical theology, etc. I was fairly well-versed in theologically-rich works by John Piper and Jonathan Edwards in college, as well as apologetics, but still didn't understand how NOT to read my Bible, and how NOT to use commentaries (among other things). One shouldn't have to go to seminary to learn these things if reading the Bible is essential to the Christian life. It really wasn't until I started listening to expositional preachers and noticing the difference of how they handled Scripture and explaining how NOT to handle Scripture that I began to "get it." Too often I see well-known teachers in errors of redefinition and decontextualization, which simply recreates itself as disciples make disciples. There's a reason why expositional preaching and biblical theology are at the forefront of the Nine Marks of a Healthy Church. The importance and practical application of proper exegesis and hermeneutics are what Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart teach in this book. I'm actually disturbed by who I haven't seen write reviews of this book on Goodreads and . Reading this book, and others like it which they recommend, is extremely important. This is basically a how-to guide made as simple as possible, providing some basic examples to get started in each genre of writing one encounters in Scripture. The authors have since written a companion book that I hope to read (*How to Read the Bible Book by Book*) but I'll read D.A. Carson's *Exegetical Fallacies*, R.C. Sproul's *Knowing Scripture*, and James Sire's *How to Read Slowly* first. Fee is a Pentecostal who has differentiated himself from others in his denomination. He's also a fantastic NT scholar, having written well-regarded commentaries on Paul's epistles to the Corinthians. Stuart is an Old Testament and ancient languages scholar at Gordon-Conwell. The first edition of this text was put out in the 1970s and the latest revision was published in 2006. Below include my own thoughts, summaries of topics, and some of my highlights and notes edited slightly. "Reading the Bible with an eye only to its meaning for us can lead to a great deal of nonsense as well as to every imaginable kind of error--because it lacks controls... we believe that God's Word for us today is first of all precisely what his Word was to them. Thus we have two tasks: First, our task is to find out what the text originally meant; this is called exegesis. Second, we must learn to hear that same

meaning in the variety of new or different contexts of our own day; we call this second task hermeneutics...the original meaning of the text--as much as it is in our power to discern it--is the objective point of control...And this brings us back to our insistence that proper 'hermeneutics' begins with solid 'exegesis.'"Scripture was written to be understood and interprets itself, but we have to pay attention and ask the right questions to get at the meanings. The authors walk through the different versions of literature found in Scripture and how to ask questions of the text. They disagree with each other on certain interpretations and hermeneutics, and are fairly plain about that. "Even the two authors of this book have some disagreements as to what certain texts 'plainly' mean. Yet all of us are reading the same Bible, and we all are trying to be obedient to what the text 'plainly' means. "There are two basic kinds of questions one should ask of every biblical passage: those that relate to context and those that relate to content. The questions of context are also of two kinds: historical and literary...The most important contextual question you will ever ask--and it must be asked over and over of every sentence and every paragraph --is, 'What's the point?'...A text cannot mean what it never meant. Or to put it in a positive way, the true meaning of the biblical text for us is what God originally intended it to mean when it was first spoken. This is the starting point. How we work it out from that point is what this book is basically all about."Most sections have a 10-20 point summary of the do's/do nots. They begin with a brief look at textual criticism and the difficulties of Bible translation. They endorse the NIV and (then new) HCSB while comparing various translations. They examine the translation difficulties related to various texts. (Fee is controversial in believing that 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 as we know them were not written by Paul but were a marginal comment written by a scribe that was later copied into manuscripts as though written by Paul. He argues that it clearly contradicts 11:2-16.) While many trumpet the ESV's gender-literal translations, they point out the problems with saying "man" or "son" when the author was referring to women as well, or "pupils," etc. In short, approaching a text from multiple translations and understanding why they differ is important. They discuss the importance of Bible dictionaries and external sources, particularly when looking at Old Testament history. They contain an appendix on what to look for in a good commentary and list a couple for each book, classified by the level of reading. Consulting a commentary should be "the last thing you do" in studying a text or a book. Some weaknesses and traits of the book that have probably kept it from wider scholarship and praise in recent years: 1. The authors are not Presbyterian or Southern Baptist. 2. They prefer the NIV as a translation and are somewhat critical of the ESV as an overreach into the unnecessarily literal. 3. The authors do not write about examining the themes that run through Scripture. They do mention analogies and caution the reader to avoid making analogies where Scripture does not. They demonstrate how

Augustine over-analogized everything, much of what I marveled at in City of God (my review) was bad exegesis, and are probably eager for the reader not to turn common themes into unjustified analogies. But Wayne Grudem and others teach that finding themes is an important aspect of biblical theology.⁴ The book does not discuss inerrancy, even though the authors are inerrantists. Inerrancy is assumed, I suppose, and the authors do not deal with bible difficulties.⁵ Fee's views on 1 Corinthians (see above) and the role of women in the church put his hermeneutic outside most Reformed teachers. The authors deal with the problematic uses of the OT in the new. Christians believe that the New Testament authors were inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore able to write analogies between the Old Testament and the life of Jesus that we are unable to today. For example, Paul's interpretation of Jesus as the "rock" in Exodus 17: "To be sure, we modern readers are quite unlikely on our own to notice this analogy in the way that Paul described it. If Paul had never written these words, would we have made the identification of cloud and sea with baptism (v. 2) or the rock with Christ (v. 4)? In other words, would we, on our own, be able with any degree of certainty to determine the *sensus plenior* or secondary meaning? The answer is no. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write about this analogical connection between the Israelites in the desert and life in Christ without following the usual rules about context, intent, style, and wording..." Similarly with Matthew noting Jesus' "fulfillment" of various prophecies, such as being the "son called out of Egypt." Epistles: "one must always keep in mind that they were not primarily written to expound Christian theology. It is always theology applied to or directed toward a particular need." Were occasional from the reader's side and written for a specific or stated occasion. (Philemon, James, Romans, exceptions to epistles occasioned from reader's side). OT Narratives, their proper use: "In the biblical story God is the protagonist, Satan (or opposing people/powers) are the antagonists, and God's people are the agonists. The basic plot of the biblical story is that the creator God has created a people for his name in his own image who as his image bearers were to be his stewards over the earth that he created for their benefit. But an enemy entered the picture who persuaded the people to bear his image instead, and thus to become God's enemies. The plot resolution is the long story of 'redemption,' how God rescues his people from the enemy's clutches, restores them back into his image, and (finally) will restore them 'in a new heaven and new earth.'" "As you read the various narratives, be constantly on the lookout for how the inspired narrator discloses the point of view from which you are to understand the story." What OT narratives are: 1. Not allegories or stories filled with hidden meanings. (Augustine made this error in City of God... everything was allegory.) 2. Not intended to teach moral lessons 3. often illustrations of what is taught explicitly

elsewhere, like examples of what happens when people disobey the Ten Commandments. Errors in interpretation of biblical narratives:

- Allegorizing** - relegating the text to merely reflecting another meaning beyond the text.
- Decontextualization** - ignoring the full historical and literary contexts and the individual narrative.
- Selectivity** - picking & choosing specific words & phrases to concentrate on instead of listening to the whole.
- Moralizing** - looking for a moral in every story. Ignores that "narratives were written to show the progress of God's history of redemption."
- Personalizing** - applying parts of the text to you or your group in a way not applicable to everyone else.
- Misappropriation** - Gideon's fleece, people try similar because Gideon did it.
- False appropriation** - form of decontextualization. Suggestions or ideas that come from contemporary culture, foreign to the narrator's purpose.
- False combination** - Pulling here and there even though elements not directly connected in the passage.
- Redefinition** - Example: 2 Chron 7:14-15 "so they tend to ignore the fact that God's promise that he will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land was about the only earthly land God's people could ever claim as theirs, the Old Testament land of Israel. In the new covenant, God's people have no earthly country that is their land" despite the tendency of some American Christians to think otherwise about the world. The country all believers now most truly belong to is a heavenly one (Heb 11:16). Perhaps they offer ten principles of interpretation.

Acts: Holy Spirit is the leading role in the narrative. Church history was not Luke's goal per se. He wanted to explain how the Gospel got to Rome. Ignores Eastern churches, Jerusalem, Egypt, and more. Fee and Stuart give an exegetical sampling of Acts 6 and 8. "Not every sentence in every narrative or speech is necessarily trying to tell us something. But every sentence in every narrative or speech contributes to what God is trying to say as a whole through Acts." "Unless Scripture explicitly tells us we must do something, what is only narrated or described does not function in a normative (i.e. obligatory) way" unless it can be demonstrated on other grounds that the author intended it to function in this way.

Trying to look at Acts and the epistles for "how to do church" is problematic. Show how Baptism immersion is tricky (151-152). "We would probably do well to follow this lead and not confuse normalcy with normativeness in the sense that all Christians must do a given thing or else they are disobedient to God's Word."

The Gospels: "the major hermeneutical difficulty lies with understanding 'the kingdom of God,'" Authors shaped, and arranged his materials. Mark's gospel, for example, is especially interested in explaining the nature of Jesus' messiahship in light of Isaiah's second exodus motif.

pericopes. "Think horizontally" "To think horizontally means that when studying a pericope in any one gospel, it is usually helpful to be aware of the parallels in the other gospels. To be sure, this

point must not be overdrawn, since none of the evangelists intended his gospel to be read in parallel with the others. Nonetheless, the fact that God has provided four gospels in the canon means that they cannot be read totally in isolation from one another."why? 1. parallels give us an appreciation for the individual's distinctives. 2. help us be aware of different kinds of contexts. The purpose of studying the Gospels in parallel is not to fill out the story in one gospel with details from the others. Usually such a reading of the Gospels tends to harmonize all the details and thus blur the very distinctives in each gospel that the Holy Spirit inspired. The very best of these is edited by Kurt Aland, titled *Synopsis of the Four Gospels* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1975). "Think vertically" To think vertically means that when reading or studying a narrative or teaching in the Gospels, one should try to be aware of both historical contexts "that of Jesus and that of the evangelist. There were three principles at work in the composition of the Gospels: selectivity, arrangement, and adaptation. "One of the most noted of these, for example, is the cursing of the fig tree (Mark 11:12 " 14, 20 " 25; Matt 21:18 " 22). In Mark's gospel the story is told for its symbolic theological significance. Note that between the cursing and the withering, Jesus pronounces a similar judgment on Judaism by his cleansing of the temple. However, the story of the fig tree had great meaning for the early church also because of the lesson on faith that concludes it. In Matthew's gospel the lesson on faith is the sole interest of the story, so he relates the cursing and the withering together in order to emphasize this point. Remember, in each case this telling of the story is the work of the Holy Spirit, who inspired both evangelists. "Jesus' parables:- point of parables was to illicit an immediate RESPONSE. - identify the audience. Disciples? crowd? Pharisees? Scribe? Some parables have no context. The authors provide interesting interpretation in several places. "Let the dead bury their dead..." Jesus' refusal to settle dispute between brothers, etc. were admonishments that the kingdom of God is at hand, there are better things to concern oneself with. Old Testament Law: Six guidelines: 1. OT Law is a covenant. The covenant format had six parts to it: preamble, prologue, stipulations, witnesses, sanctions, and document clause. 2. OT is not our Testament "unless an Old Testament law is somehow restated or reinforced in the New Testament, it is no longer directly binding on God's people (cf. Rom 6:14 " 15). "3. Two kinds of old-covenant stipulations have clearly not been renewed in the new covenant . While a complete coverage of the categories of Old Testament law would take a book of its own, the portion of laws from the Pentateuch that no longer apply to Christians can be grouped conveniently into two categories: (1) the Israelite civil laws and (2) the Israelite ritual laws. 4. Part of the OT renewed in the new covenant. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind " 5. All of the OT is still

the word of God for us, even though it is not still God's command to us.⁶ Only that which is explicitly renewed from the Old Testament law can be considered part of the New Testament law of Christ (cf. Gal 6:2). There is an explanation of the apodictic laws and casuistic laws.¹² dos and don'ts:

1. Do see the Old Testament law as God's fully inspired word for you.
2. Don't see the Old Testament law as God's direct command to you....

OT Prophecy: The prophets are not inspired to make any points or announce any doctrines that are not already contained in the Pentateuchal covenant. Importance of understanding historical context. "God spoke through his prophets to people in a given time and place and under given circumstances. Therefore, a knowledge of the date, audience, and situation, when these are known, contributes substantially to your ability to comprehend an oracle." Stuart (I presume) walks the reader through Hosea 5:8-12.

Poetry and Psalms The authors give certain aspects of poetry to look out for. Psalms are poetry and need to be appreciated as such. A reader must be careful not to overexegete psalms by finding special meanings in specific words or phrases where the poet will have intended none.

wisdom literature (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes):

1. proverbs are not legal guarantees from God
2. Proverbs must be read as a collection
3. Proverbs are worded to be memorable, not theoretically accurate.
4. Some proverbs need to be "translated" to be appreciated.

Unless you think of these proverbs in terms of their true modern equivalents (i.e., carefully translate them into practices and institutions that exist today), their meaning may seem irrelevant or be lost to you altogether (cf. ch. 4).

Revelation Revelation must have meant something to the original hearers. Is written as a form of literature (apocalypse). "John clearly intends this apocalypse to be a prophetic word to the church. His book was not to be sealed for the future. It was a word from God for their present situation... What we must be careful not to do is to spend too much time speculating as to how any of our own contemporary events may be fitted into the pictures of Revelation." "The fall of Rome in chapter 18 seems to appear as the first chapter in the final wrap-up, and many of the pictures of temporal judgment are interlaced with words or ideas that also imply the final end as a part of the picture. There seems to be no way one can deny the reality of this. The question is, what do we do with it? "These are references given throughout the text that are not included in the Appendix: Textual criticism. This you may find in convenient form in the articles by Bruce Waltke (old Testament) and Gordon Fee (new Testament) in volume 1 of The Expositor's Bible Commentary (ed. Frank Gaebelin [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979], Everett Ferguson, Backgrounds of Early Christianity, 2d edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 373-546; Joachim Jeremias, Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus read Robert H. Stein's The Method and Message of Jesus' Teaching how to do hermeneutics in the Gospels: "highly

recommend" George E. Ladd's *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974). Joachim Jeremias - *Rediscovering the Parables* [New York: Scribner, 1966], p. 181): we recommend Bernhard Anderson with Steven Bishop, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, Ky.: or Tremper Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988). These are the very best introduction to Revelation. How it works as a book, its basic point of view, and its theological contribution to the Bible is by Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); for an easy read commentary intended for the lay reader, you may wish to look at Professor Fee's *Revelation in the New Covenant Commentary Series* (2011). The Appendix contains information on how to choose a commentary while offering suggestions for each book and some introductions to OT and NT. I give this book 4.5 stars out of 5. I highly recommend it.

Not an easy read, but lots of good information. I read this as a text book for a Bible class and learned a lot. However it was a little difficult to follow at times.

This is the book I have been looking for, for a long time. It takes the reader through each type of writing within the Bible (Epistles, Narratives, Acts, Gospels, Parables, Law, Prophets, Psalms, Wisdom, Revelation.) Each chapter explains why this type of writing was given, who it was given to, and how it can be understood. The writing is very easy to understand without a lot of theological academic jargon and yet has a great deal of scholarship behind it. Each chapter gives concrete guidelines for interpreting Scripture (something that each of us do instinctively, but perhaps without conscious thought or appropriate context.) Following these guidelines, each chapter provides an example of interpreting a passage of Scripture. This makes the book very practical and easy to understand and use. I wish more academic tomes would add in some practical helps. As with all books about the Bible, not everyone will agree with Fee and Stuart's interpretations, but the methodologies they describe are invaluable for any reader to use in understanding this ancient, wonderful, and mysterious text. Also extremely helpful is the discussion on different Bible translations and study materials (Bible dictionaries, commentaries, and handbooks.) If you are building a library to read and study Scripture for yourself, I would start with this great book on exegetical methods.

The content of the book is fantastic. I strongly suggest this book to any Christian looking to learn

how to study the Bible. The only reason it does not get 5 stars is because the style is a little dry. At times I felt as though I were reading a text book. This isn't necessarily a problem, but something to consider. I will refer back to this book often in preparing outlines for different books of the Bible. I plan to read "...book by book" eventually as well.

Awesome insight to the Bible. A must read for all those looking to get incredible value when reading in the Bible for "All Its Worth".

A friend recommended this book to me. So good. I've been looking for guidance on how to really read and study the Word and get something out of it. It's really helped me understand what it is I'm reading without the need for a study guide. A bible study is still always good, but being able to read the Bible and understand for yourself without someone steering you in a certain direction has a value all its own.

Every teacher and serious student of the Bible should read this several times and apply its principles.

The book opened up and built upon my understanding of the Scripture. I will be rereading this book in years to come.

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