

ISSUE #38
2019

HOW SHOULD WE READ THE BIBLE?

SOME FIRST STEPS TOWARDS
RESPONSIBLE BIBLICAL HERMENEUTIC



AN OLIVE PRESS
RESEARCH PAPER

BY
REV. ALEX JACOB

Welcome to the Olive Press Research Paper – an occasional paper featuring articles that cover a wide spectrum of issues which relate to the ministry of CMJ.

Articles are contributed by CMJ staff (past and present), also by Trustees, Representatives, CMJ Supporters or by interested parties.

Articles do not necessarily portray CMJ's standpoint on a particular issue but may be published on the premise that they allow a pertinent understanding to be added to any particular debate.



Telephone: 01623 883960

E-mail: office@cmj.org.uk

Eagle Lodge, Hexgreave Hall Business Park, Farnsfield, Notts NG22 8LS

HOW SHOULD WE READ THE BIBLE?

SOME FIRST STEPS TOWARDS RESPONSIBLE BIBLICAL HERMENEUTIC

INTRODUCTION

In this Olive Press Research Paper (OPRP) I want to try to explore and establish some helpful hermeneutical principles and values regarding how the Bible is to be read, interpreted and applied. In some ways this paper will build upon the OPRP - “*Did God Really Say?-Exploring the reliability of the Bible*” by Jacki Turnbull (Issue 25, 2015)¹. I want especially in this OPRP to encourage all of us (especially new Christians) to engage well with Bible study. In attempting to do this, I will draw upon insights gained during my current 14 years of advocacy work with CMJ and from previous ministry experience.

SETTING THE SCENE

As a believer in Jesus I understand that the Bible is the ultimate authority for what I believe and for how I try to live. This understanding is upheld in the Statements of Faith of the Christian Church. For example, the statement concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church states: “*The highest² authority for what we believe and do is God’s word in the Bible, alive for his people today through the help of the Spirit.*”

At this point for the sake of avoiding misunderstanding it must be stated that Christians do not worship the Bible and no one is saved by gaining Bible knowledge or undertaking Bible study. Christians do not place their trust in the Bible itself, but

in what or in whom the Bible is a witness to - namely the actions and character of God. For it is God alone who can save and it is God alone who is worthy of worship.

The inspiration and authority of the Bible flows from God; I think it is helpful to think of this in two ways: Firstly the inspiration of the Bible is due to God Himself. Scripture is not just “inspired” but it is given by God’s Spirit. In 2 Timothy 3:16 we are told that all Scripture is God-breathed. The Greek word here is *“theopneustos”* and it expresses an essential truth about the nature of revelation which is echoed in 2 Peter 1:20-21.

Secondly **it is helpful to link the authority of the Bible to the out-working of God’s sovereignty.** God is sovereign not just in His engagement with creation, but also in His revelation of Himself to people. Christianity is a revealed religion, in which God acts and speaks and we respond (Hebrews 1:1-4). God’s words and actions are not elusive or ambiguous: the word is living and active (Hebrews 4:12) and the living word of God became flesh in a specific person, at a specific time and in a specific place (John 1:14). The Bible is a component part of the redeeming work of God, as the Bible accurately makes known God’s ways and actions. In addition, the Bible teaches people how they should respond to God’s ways and actions.

In addition to these two faith-based convictions about the authority and importance of the Bible, I think it is important to “flag up” additional reasons, especially why the “skeptical enquirer” should read and take the Bible seriously. I often refer to the following eight points:

- The Bible contains many eye witness accounts. For example, the book of Acts contains a number of occasions where the author (Luke) is clearly with Paul and others during the missionary events and journeys which are recorded. Also the events recorded are often in “the public realm”; these are well-known and are clearly verifiable. For example, Acts 1:19 which tells of the death of Judas states: *“...everyone in Jerusalem heard about this”*. The Bible must not therefore be dismissed as “fairy tales” or as later writings with no valid historical sources.
- The Bible has an “inner authenticity”. For example, all four of the Gospel accounts (Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22 and John 18) tell of Peter’s denial of Jesus, and Acts 15 tells of the sharp row between Paul and Barnabas. These events are not “air-brushed out”, but despite the possible embarrassments which may

result from these details, they are an integral part of the text. The Bible must not therefore be dismissed as carefully controlled “propaganda”.

- The Bible contains a vast range of powerful examples of prophecies being fulfilled with amazing accuracy, often many centuries later. ³ Surely this points to the inspired nature of the text?
- External archaeological evidence. There are numerous examples where the relatively new science of archaeology has confirmed the witness of the Bible.⁴
- The strength of the manuscript material available.⁵
- The example of Jesus towards the text. Jesus clearly affirmed the message of the Bible; time and time again He quoted from various texts in ways which show these texts were for Him and His followers, authentic, reliable and authoritative.
- The witness of cultural history. The Bible is the most read text in the world. Whatever one may or may not believe, surely a good understanding of the Bible is a key part of any astute broad educational process.
- Personal testimonies. Again and again across cultural divides and generations people have witnessed to the transforming power of the Bible’s message, both within their own lives and the lives of those around them.

As already stated, I uphold a high view of the inspiration and authority of the Bible. Yet, however secure our doctrines about the Bible might be, we will not be faithful in upholding these doctrines unless they are accompanied by clear principles of interpretation and application. Without such interpretive principles and applied wisdom, the Bible will not speak to us with helpful clarity or conviction.

I think this point is especially relevant within the area of Jewish mission, for over the years I have discussed with many Church leaders, who hold a similar “high view of Scripture” to myself but have very different views about the role of Israel within God’s purposes today, the importance of Jewish evangelism, the significance of the emerging Messianic Jewish Movement, etc. How can this be the case? Can the Bible be saying different things to different people? Or are the ways in which I and others interpret the Bible in some cases right and in others flawed? Clearly the way one

engages with this question demands humility, discernment and conviction. A great deal of my advocacy work with CMJ is working with Christian leaders (often who share my view of the Bible) who are indifferent to, or resolutely opposed to, the work of CMJ.⁶

What follows in this Olive Press Research Paper is my attempt to sharpen our interpretative skills. In some ways this flows from my advocacy work with CMJ, but I think many other contexts will bring about similar insights and convictions. In doing this I want to show that the interpretative task is a three way process, involving God, the Biblical text and the reader (or hearer). The reader receives and accepts the word in faith, yet through the use of prayer and all the skills and knowledge at the reader's disposal, the reader seeks to make that word intelligible and effective within his or her unique time, place and culture.

GETTING STARTED

As we begin to read and study the Bible it is good to affirm that God wants us to do this. God never intends the Bible to remain a closed book, or a book only open to a special learned few or chosen elite. Each person, regardless of background, culture or educational level, has the right and the privilege to read, study and apply the message of the Bible to their own lives.

Along with this is the assurance that the Bible is able to be understood. It does not belong to a branch of literature which is hidden in a mystical (or Gnostic) framework of esoteric interpretation. On the contrary, the Bible affirms that it is accessible (Psalm 19:7) and able to be widely taught and understood (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). Yet with this conviction there are three important caveats:

- 1) The Bible cannot be fully understood all at once. There is a process of study and a life-long journey of discovery.
- 2) The Bible cannot be fully understood without effort. We are called to study, reflect and discuss with diligence.
- 3) The Bible cannot be fully understood without the help of the Holy Spirit, who inspires our study, guides our thinking and enables us to hear and recognize the authentic voice (word) of God (John 10:4).

In getting people started in reading the Bible I therefore often speak about the six initial “stepping stones” which enables the life long journey of Bible study to begin.

Stone 1 This assurance that the Bible is indeed an “open book” and is able to be understood.

Stone 2 To encourage people to pray to God to help them as they open the Bible and begin to think about its message. A helpful prayer may well follow along these lines *“LORD help me to understand and apply your word today. Set me free from a false world-view or any rash insights, but renew my mind and enlarge my capacity to receive your truth through the gentle work of your Holy Spirit”*.

Stone 3 To encourage people, whenever possible, to set aside a specific time and place each day to read the Bible. There is a freedom in what one chooses, but also a discipline is introduced into our lives by doing so.

Stone 4 To commit to study and to find the right resources (Bible notes, commentaries, study groups, Bible courses etc.) to help them.

Stone 5 To begin to apply (James 1:22) the message of the Bible to their lives.

Stone 6 Then to begin to reflect (often with the help of others) on how this application of the Bible message has developed. Maybe we may need to modify or change the way we have previously understood and applied a Biblical instruction in the light of new understandings, more insights or changing contexts?

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

In attempting to engage well with Bible study there are numerous obstacles we may face. I am listing five of these. Clearly there are many more, but hopefully these five will be a helpful start.

Perhaps the most obvious is the lack of time due to busy lives. Each person’s situation will be unique with differing pressures. Therefore deliberately setting aside a set time (Stone 2) is helpful for many. Generally speaking those who are able to establish

regular Bible study habits will also have reasonable time-management skills. For those who struggle with this, perhaps it's helpful to try not to set your time goals too high - for example few of us will be able to read the entire Bible using a monthly cycle of readings, but maybe over a year or two this is more achievable. Similarly my own two Bible Study books⁷ set out a daily reading and reflection structure which should comfortably be contained within a 20 to 30 minute daily investment of time.

The second obstacle is the tendency to be too subjective in our reading and reflection. We can all fall into this and end up only reading certain parts of the Bible. We can filter out what we do not like and end up taking from the Bible only what we want to hear, what is comforting, convenient and self-affirming.

The third obstacle is the lens of denominationalism. All of us are part of a "Christian tribe"; we knowingly (or perhaps unknowingly) sign up to certain denominational, cultural or theological values. Some of these values may be a product of a particular time or context. Maybe this is a reaction (or overreaction) to a perceived error, or an area of obvious neglect within other Christian traditions. For example, I have recently listened both to some Anglican Christians who were convinced that the New Testament clearly promotes a threefold priestly order of ministry - deacon, priest and bishop, and to Christians from a New Frontiers Church, who spoke passionately for a universal five-fold ministry structure based on Ephesians 4. Both groups spoke with conviction and some Biblical insight, but I was not convinced by either, and I felt partly they were motivated in their convictions due to "denominational loyalty" and perhaps even a degree of "denominational control".

My own view (maybe this reflects a denominational lens as well?) is that there is not one overarching ministry structure taught in the New Testament. I have always believed that systems of Church government alongside forms of worship and associated liturgy belong to the category of things "hopefully helpful and appropriate but non-essential". Therefore, I don't believe any vital Christian Biblical principle is involved in conformity or non-conformity, in episcopacy, synodical or congregational forms of governance, in liturgical or non-liturgical worship, or in any other model or structure of Church leadership or community structure.

The fourth obstacle is what I would define as "super-spirituality". This condition prevents one from really studying the text. Often a random selected text is plucked out from a favourite section of the Bible (or a selection of Bible promises) and no

engagement is made with the wider context. Sometimes the Bible word for today is treated more like a daily horoscope than God's transformative word. Alongside this there is an attitude that bypasses serious study and reflection, and interpretation is based on the view that the "LORD will show me the true meaning of the text". However, the true meaning or meanings of the text are true, not because the LORD may have shown you this, but because the meaning you have received or discovered as true is the true meaning of the text (regardless of the fact that you have, or have not, received or discovered this).

Closely linked to Super-Spirituality is the lens of Sensationalism. Once again Bible study is not carefully invested in, but one is drawn to discovering "inner secrets from the texts", often with a strong interest in hidden spiritual meanings often linked to numerology or speculative eschatology. While there may be some useful insights arising from this at times, overall it is a poor way of making decisions and of reading the text. I remember one person telling me that they had an offer of going to spend some time volunteering in a ministry role in either Jerusalem or Glasgow. As they read the Bible (through the lens of sensationalism) they were excited by the many references to Jerusalem and felt that is where they should go. Maybe they were right, but I felt a bit sorry for Glasgow, as apart from an oblique reference to the *'Land of the North'*, I didn't think Glasgow would ever get much of a look-in!

Clearly we all have "blind-spots" and weaknesses, however, hopefully a faithful and long term study of the Bible should help us to discern these and to remove these, and certainly not to pamper to them.

I think before we move on to look at "helpful tools" for Bible study, the following four steps should be noted, as they are important contributions to helping us remove such obstacles and "blind-spots".

The first step is observation. When any Bible passage is read we ask basic questions such as, "What type of writing is this?" "Who are the main characters?" "Where do these events take place?" These basic observational questions are often very simply answered, but nevertheless these observational questions need to be asked.

The second step is interpretation. We ask the question, "What does this reading mean?". Maybe there are a number of meanings in the text or perhaps only one

central message within the text? Regarding a suggested meaning there seem to me to be four answers we can give. Maybe we simply say “I don’t know”. To offer this answer is not necessarily a bad thing to do. Maybe it is honest and far better to be open about this than to jump to a wrong and rushed conclusion. The second answer is to say “This text possibly means this”. The third answer is to say “This text probably means this”. The fourth answer is to say “This text definitely means this”. I am always somewhat suspicious and alarmed of a preacher (or teacher or CEO of a mission agency!) for whom everything falls into the definite category. Equally I am suspicious and alarmed if nothing falls into this category!

Clearly something could be possible but not probable. If something is not probable it is very unlikely to be provable (definite), unless additional evidence comes to light. For example, have I ever been to the South Pole? I think people who know me would answer “no”, but they would admit it is possible. For they know that some people have been to the South Pole, and they also know that I have done some travelling over the years. What would move such people from saying this is possible to being probable? Maybe if I testified to going to the South Pole, maybe if pictures were found of me travelling as part of a polar expedition? All of these things would almost certainly change to some degree the answer given. However, some may suggest that testimonies can be false and pictures can be faked.

The third step is correlation. There is no short-cut here but we simply need to read the Bible widely and deeply. The step of correlation is simply saying how the text we are a reading relates to other texts which address similar issues. A good example of a text that needs some form of correlation is 1 Tim 2:12. This text is definitely saying that a women should not teach (lead/train) within a Church setting. Paul also correlates this back to a text from Genesis. However, probably the first question to ask is: is this a universal command for all times and for all Churches or is it a specific (contextual) command, namely the Churches linked directly to Timothy? Secondly, using the principle of correlation we know that other texts (some also written by Paul) seem to affirm the equal status of women in the Church and especially in some cases within Church leadership. Texts such as Galatians 3:28, Ephesians 2:14-22, Acts 18:26 and Romans 16:1 and 16:7 may well be helpful in this case. However, within this study some may argue that these texts refer to fundamental equality issues, but do not directly address formal Church leadership issues. Therefore, using correlation is helpful but will not always bring about a clear consensus on a particular issue. In such cases other study and reflection must take place, in the case of the role

of women in Church leadership I would want to explore as the next step how we understand the call to leadership and how this connects to receiving and exercising the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The fourth step is application. Again we ask questions of “What does this mean for me in my context?” and “What actions (if any) should I take in an obedient response to this message?”

HELPFUL TOOLS

As we try and enter into a faithful study of the Bible there are many other tools and principles which will help us. The following four principles of Bible interpretation have been tested over centuries and are widely valued.

The first principle is the principle of first use. This principle states that as a useful guide it is worth knowing that the first time a word (or idea) is used in the Bible will have a significant influence on how one understands subsequent occurrences. For example, Genesis 3 is foundational to our understanding of sin. Paul in Romans 5 refers back to the “*sin of Adam*” when teaching about the nature of sin. Equally an understanding of Genesis 3 is vital if one is going to understand Romans 16:20 or Revelation 12:1-7.

In the ministry of CMJ I have often taught (using this principle) that when Paul uses the word “Israel” (Romans 9:4) for the first time within the key teaching chapters of 9-11, Paul is using the word to refer to all Jewish people. Here, for Paul, all the Jewish people are Israelites. Here Paul is speaking from within his own people’s ethnic self-definition of themselves as God’s covenant people. Paul then uses the word “Israel” 11 times within Romans 9-11. I believe the use of the word in these 11 following cases should be understood as in Paul’s use in 9:4, unless Paul states otherwise, or there is some overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Therefore I think it is a poor interpretation to say as some commentators do, that the use of the term “Israel” in 9:4 refers to the Jewish people and in 11:26 the term “Israel” refers to the Church.

The second principle is the principle of good grammar. Good communication is based on two core principles. The true purpose of words is to convey meaning and language, and writing is a trustworthy medium for communicating words. Good grammar preserves the trustworthiness of written communication. You

must always understand a text grammatically before you can understand (and apply) it theologically. Therefore understanding grammatical rules and taking into consideration the way the text (be it in Hebrew, Greek or English) constructs a phrase, sentence or passages are important. For example, how many spiritual ministry gifts are referred to in Ephesians 4:11? Most of us in a simple reading of the English text would say five, yet an understanding of the syntax would suggest the answer is four as pastors (and) teachers are best understood as one shared ministry role/gift. Also, for example, an appreciation of the Greek in interpreting Ephesians 5:17 is helpful as it points to a continuous (present tense) process of being filled with the Holy Spirit rather than a single, once-and-for-all experience.

Along with this grammatical principle is a commitment to try and interpret the text by its literal plain (straight-forward) meaning unless it is clearly meant to be interpreted allegorically and symbolically. A good example of allegory is where both Jesus (Revelation 5:5) and Satan (1 Peter 5:8) are described as a lion.

In observing the grammar and syntax we also observe the wider context; a word may have a number of possible meanings, but it can only have one correct meaning in each context. See for example how the meaning of the word “faith” changes in Galatians 1:23, Romans 14:23 and 1 Timothy 5 11-12. The same is true for the word “blood” in Acts 17:24-26, Ephesians 1:7 and Hebrews 9:6-7.

The third principle is the principle of engaging with history. It is vital to interpret the Bible in harmony with the times of the author. Basic questions need to be answered as far as possible for each text - namely who is the author, when was it written, from where was it written, and (perhaps most significantly) why was it written?

In addition to these basis historical questions it is good to try and enter as far as is possible, the mind and context of the writer and the audience. We must try to “feel the pulse” and to “sense the emotion”. Here our imaginations fuse with our historical research and on-going study. Therefore, in reading and teaching about, for example, the parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25), it will be helpful to know as much as we can about the practice of Jewish weddings in the First Century. How did these weddings differ from our practice today? Also what do we know about the kind of lamps which were being used etc. Also we can reflect “emotionally” on the parable - for example, how do we feel when we have been foolish or excluded?

The fourth principle is the principle of Biblical Theology. The Bible narrative is part of a process of revelation. All Scripture is God's inspired written word and all Scripture is part of one "unit" of revelation (therefore I am uneasy when people speak about an Old Testament Theology and a separate New Testament Theology) yet there is often some progression of understanding. At one level the Old Testament sets the stage for understanding revealed fully in the New. For example, John 3:14-15 has meaning because of Numbers 21:8-9. A progressive revelation has and is taking place.

An understanding of progression is important, for God does not reveal everything straight away. The Torah for example concludes with a promise leading to the Messiah (Deuteronomy 18:15 and 34:10-12). Yet this does not mean we can ignore or pay less attention to the Old Testament. And at all costs we must avoid the heresy which states that the God of the Old Testament is different from the God of the New Testament. God does not change; God is always holy, always loving. Yet what can (and should) change is our understanding because what has been revealed over time has become clearer. This clarity is because God in "*...these last days has spoken to us by his son,*" (Hebrews 1:3).

Biblical Theology also helps us in interpreting and applying prophecies. Theology helps us to see when prophecies are conditional (upon our responses) or unconditional, when they are general or specific.

In Biblical Theology there is "one outworking of grace" which holds together and flows within the Biblical covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and the New Covenant sealed in the Messiah's blood.

Biblical Theology is also helpful in helping us to engage with, interpret and apply prophetic texts. We need to discern if these prophecies (promises) are general or specific. 1 John 1:9 is an example of a general (universal) promise while Isaiah 7:14 is specific. Also we need to know if these prophecies are conditional or non-conditional. Equally, many prophecies have been fulfilled while others have not yet been fulfilled. We may also consider the sense in which prophecies can be fulfilled in stages. Along with this we understand that prophecies such as Jeremiah 29:11 and Ezekiel 37:1-14 have a clear original context of fulfillment, yet many people (rightly in most cases in my view) apply this freely to their own lives, often (sadly in my view) without any awareness of the original context.

JEWISH CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

In bringing this brief paper to a close I want to focus on some insights into interpreting and applying the Bible which flow, in my view from an appreciation for, and a study of, the Jewish-Biblical roots of our faith. Again this is a huge and rich area, yet I will focus firstly on the Jewish context of Jesus, and then I will turn briefly to four other areas.

Jesus the Jew. Jesus and His message can only be fully understood when we are aware of the historical context, namely Second Temple Biblical Judaism. Jesus taught and demonstrated the reality of the Kingdom. His message was the Kingdom, and His prime method was to call people to discipleship. Both the message (Kingdom) and the method (Discipleship) are concepts uniquely “at home” in a Jewish context. In addition to this Jesus Himself was born into a Jewish family, was dedicated in the Temple, was circumcised and grew up with a great love for His family, the Scriptures, the Biblical festivals etc, He was often referred to as “Rabbi” and his dress and customs reflected a Jewish cultural commitment. A brief tour through Luke’s Gospel (see for example, 1:16, 1:54, 1:68, 2:25, 2:32, 4:16, 8:44, 13:31-35, 24:27) will show us the rich “Jewish contours” of His life and ministry. An appreciation for this Jewish context will be invaluable in helping understand and apply key aspects of the Bible.

Let’s now turn to the four other areas- **firstly, an understanding of Remez.** Remez derives its name from the Hebrew word for “secret” or “hidden”. In this way of interpretation a text is explored for its “secret” meaning - a meaning which is not apparent from a straight-forward reading. This type of interpretative study is highly prized within many rabbinical schools, and while we should be cautious of it, we should not be closed to it. An example of Remez is found in Matthew 2:15, where Matthew quotes from Hosea 11:1 and sees this text being fulfilled in the fact that the infant Jesus was taken to Egypt to avoid Herod’s persecution and then later Jesus was called out from Egypt. For Matthew this is the hidden or secret meaning of the Hosea text, while the plain meaning would see the text as referring to the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt many centuries earlier, led firstly by Moses and then by Joshua.

Secondly, an understanding of Kal V’khomeh. Kal V’Khomeh is an interpretative method made popular by Rabbi Hillel in the First Century. This method takes a well-established point and then emphasizes it in order to point to a connected greater

truth. It is a method used by Jesus in His teaching (Matthew 12:11-12 and Luke 11:11-13), and we see traces of it in Paul's writings as well (Romans 5:8-9 and 11:24).

Thirdly, insights from travelling in Israel. The opportunity of travelling and studying in Israel and investing time in visiting key Biblical sites is for many Christians enriching and transforming in regard to Biblical understanding - so much so that some regard the Land of Israel as a "fifth gospel", bringing to the earnest seeker new and deeper insights.

In visiting Israel and associated holy sites we are reminded that the Bible narrative is not based upon philosophical ideas or human wisdom, but upon real events, in real places and with real people. A site becomes holy, not simply by what may have happened at that place, but by the worship and prayer offered there over the generations, both by local believers and by visiting pilgrims. Yet while we rightly remember and revere key sites, we know that as Christians we worship a person and not a place, but place (and time) becomes sanctified by the working of the Holy Spirit. This is, in part, the meaning of the incarnation, in which we celebrate the mystery of the eternal God becoming rooted in time and the omnipresent Spirit being defined (and confined) by space.

The immense value of visiting Israel and studying at the holy sites is why CMJ has invested in promoting a travel ministry⁸. Again and again those travelling in Israel speak of gaining new and deeper Biblical insights. To get a glimpse into such insights and the wider value of visiting and studying in Israel, please see my OPRP - "*A Pilgrim's Progress - A devotional teaching resource for pilgrims to Israel*" (Issue 12, 2012).⁹

Fourthly, insights from the Passover meal (and other Biblical festivals). Our Bible understanding is also enriched by sharing in a Passover meal. This is why CMJ has invested in promoting Passover meals and other linked events.

Sharing in a Passover meal firstly makes clear the connection between the Passover and the Last Supper (Mark 14:12). This places the redemptive work of Jesus within the wider context of the redemptive acts of the Exodus story, including especially the sacrifice of the Passover lamb (Exodus 12, John 1:29 and 1 Corinthians 5:6-9). It also 'opens up' the link between the Temple, other pilgrim festivals (Tabernacles and Pentecost) and the public ministry of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels.

As the meal progresses many new insights can be gained. Let me share just three from recent feedback I have received from those attending Passover meals for the first time. Firstly, a number of participants remarked how the eating of the aphikomen reminded them of the bread Jesus broke and gave to His disciples (Matthew 26:26). I also pointed out to them that, in many rabbinical contexts, the aphikomen is seen as representing the coming Messiah. Secondly, two participants noted how the reading (or singing) of the Hallel Psalms helped them to appreciate the Last Supper within the on-going praise of God offered by the people of Israel. Thirdly, a Church leader was very moved by the progression of drinking from the four cups which shed light, for him, upon his own “discipleship journey” of preparation, sanctification, redemption and promised completion.

CONCLUSION

Reading the Bible for all its worth is a key part of Christian discipleship. Sadly there are many signs today of a Church which is lacking in Biblical wisdom, and some Christians appear largely “Biblically illiterate”. This reality seriously undermines all aspects of our spirituality, theology, discipleship, worship and evangelism. Hopefully this paper will help us overcome some of the obstacles to life-long Bible study and will point us to some helpful tools and new insights which will equip us for the vital task of authentic Christian study, living and teaching.

ENDNOTES

1. All previous copies of OPRP's can be downloaded for free from the CMJ UK website. Click on the resources page (www.cmj.org.uk/resources/oprp).
2. I think the term "highest", while carefully chosen in this statement, can possibly be misleading. Hence I prefer the term "ultimate", for the Bible is not just our "highest" authority: it is in a class of its own authority.
3. For some examples of this see my book "Prepare the Way!" and the chapter on the prophets (full details in bibliography).
4. The following two books provide much helpful information on the archeological evidence for the reliability of the Bible - "The Signature of God" by Grant Jeffrey and "What mean these stones?" by Millar Burrows (full details in bibliography).
5. For a helpful review of this see "The New Testament Texts are they reliable?" by F.F. Bruce (full details in bibliography).
6. My book "The Case for Enlargement Theology" (full details in bibliography) is my major attempt to engage with the interpretative issues of what the Bible teaches about Israel, Jewish mission etc. I tried to establish a clear hermeneutical framework for doing this based on a careful study of Romans 9-11. It is for others to judge if they find my approaches and conclusions compelling.
7. "100 Days with Luke" and "100 Days with Acts" (full details in bibliography).
8. This ministry is known as Shoresh, which is the Hebrew word for root. By visiting both the CMJ UK and CMJ Israel websites you can find out more about Shoresh and see future tour options.
9. This can be downloaded for free from the CMJ UK website. Click on the resources page (www.cmj.org.uk/perch/resources/olive-press-12-a-pilgrims-progress.pdf).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Burrows, Millar, *What mean these stones?* (The American School of Oriental Research) 1941.

Bruce, F F, *The New Testament texts are they reliable?* (Eerdmans) 1943.

Hilborn, David, *Supreme Authority: The Word of God and the URC* (A Basis Publication) 1999.

Jacob, Alex, *The Case for Enlargement Theology* (Glory to Glory) 2010.

Jacob, Alex, Prepare *the Way!* (Glory to Glory) 2014.

Jacob, Alex, *100 Days with Luke* (Christian Publications International) 2018.

Jacob, Alex, *100 Days with Acts* (Christian Publications International) 2019.

Jeffrey, Grant, *The Signature of God* (Waterbrook) 2010.

Nowland, Philip, *Rightly Divide the Word of Truth* (PTM Publications) Third Edition, 2001.

Oeming, Manfred, *Contemporary Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Ashgate) 2006.

Pawson, David, *Unlocking the Bible* (Harper-Collins) 2003.

Stern, David H, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Jewish New Testament Publications) 1998.

Tate, Randolph W, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach* (Hendrickson) Third Edition, 2008.

Warfield, B B, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing) 1948.

© Rev. Alex Jacob, 2019

The right of Rodney Curtis to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright Design and Patents Act 1988. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reprinted or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Editorial team: Rev. Alex Jacob

Concept and design: Phil Bowell Design

Printed through: A-Tec, Broxbourne, England

