

TRINITY COLLEGE OF THE BIBLE AND SEMINARY

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GRASPING GOD'S WORD

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Introduction

The Bible is the only diverse book which is consistent as a whole. No other books known to mankind harmonize and tell one single unfolding story like the Bible. The Bible is self-contained and its continuity is second to no other literature. The Bible's uniqueness has not come to us without a cost. No other book has been scrutinized, knifed, sifted, and chopped as much as the Bible. As the Bible's persecutor's die and lay in a wooden box called a casket, the book lives on and might I add as it lives on, it carries with it favor and blessing wherever it goes. If this book had not been the book of God, men would have destroyed it long ago. Yet even under these secular progressive modern times and attack upon religious freedom and the Word of God, we can rejoice because the anvil still stands and it is still loved, read and proven as objective truth from God to man.

The objective of this paper will be to explain the main points, the supporting points, and the outline of the original work, '*Grasping God's Word*' by J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays. I will not seek to give a critical analysis or evaluation of the work, but to state the nature and purpose of the author's work. The paragraphs will be summaries of the various sections and then I will seek to close with a concluding paragraph.

Part 1: How to Read the Book- Basic Tools

After the author gives a brief survey of all the English translations, he narrows it down to reading and sticking with the closest translation to the original Hebrew and Greek and that conclusion would be the *King James Version*, *New King James Version*, *New American*

Standard Version, and the *English Standard Version*. The author makes the case that the Bible is unique through its survival. After giving a brief description on how Scripture was written on perishable materials, it had to be copied and recopied for hundreds of years before the invention of the printing press. However, as the author makes the explicit point that the Scriptures have never diminished in style or correctness, he also notes that they have never faced extinction. Compared with other ancient writings, the Bible has more manuscript evidence to support it than ten pieces of classical literature combined. Within the various sections of part one, the author gives six steps for the student of the Bible interpreting Scripture. These steps are a series of questions the reader must ask himself as he approaches the text.

The student must look for detailed observations within the text. The author makes it abundantly clear that inductive study of the text, repetition of words, contrasts, comparisons, lists, and cause and effect, pronouns, and verbs will all be imperative to parse when studying the text. The overall thrust of what the author is teaching is the proper science or method of interpreting Scripture which is to interpret each sentence in light of each verse and each verse in light of each paragraph each paragraph in light of each chapter and each chapter in light of each book of the Bible. In this section the main point is for the student to observe the text with intensity asking oneself, “What does the text say?”. In order to do this one must not jump around the entire Bible but camp out with the expository unit.

Part Two: Contexts- Now and Then

As the author is describing how to study in context, he explains this in two elements. *First*, historical context: in which he defines as culture, customs, languages, beliefs, and history

of the author and his audience. The study of the historical context describes how a portion of the Bible fits into this world. As the author describes the historical-cultural context, the reader must understand that the main point the author is making is historical context and this will allow Bible students to gain access through background, study of the language, history, customs, and philosophy of the author and his audience. *Second*, literary context: This type of context uses words, sentences, paragraphs, or chapters that surround and relate to the text. As the author explains, if necessary, the literary context allows you to study the words of the text even if information about the author and audience is limited. After one has studied these two forms of context, the author encourages the student to move directly into establishing the immediate and then the remote context.

Part Three: Meaning and Application

In the third section of the book the author focuses on the meaning of the text. When one reads this section, it is obvious that the author establishes for the reader how to discover the main point, idea, command, appeal, or rebuke, which the author was making to the original recipients of his writing. Some important truths that were gleaned from this section were as follows: *First*, the meaning can never change, because it has been locked into history. *Second*, the meaning can apply to us only after we have determined what the meaning was for the original recipients. *Third*, the meaning can usually be found near the beginning of the expository unit or near the end.

Upon studying the chapters of this section, it is also important and instructive to note that the author explains the subject matter of the text. The subject matter is the feature of a text or an

entire expository unit that either lead us to the discovery of the meaning, define the meaning, or reinforce the meaning. In searching out the meaning of the text we will also find logical breaks as well. A logical break is when the author addresses a new subject, or theme. Sometimes the new theme or subject can be married to the previous subject, but it is clear that the author is addressing a new thought, theme, or subject. Once the meaning is established, then we can bring in the remote context and apply it to our lives here and now.

Part Four: The Interpretive Journey-New Testament

When reading and studying the New Testament letters. The author encourages that readers thoroughly study the historical context first. It is only then that the interpretive journey can begin properly. He exhorts his readers to ask the question while reading, “What did the text mean to the Biblical audience?” Studying Bible maps and theological principles in the text is part of running the race and being a faithful student of Holy Scripture. It is important to understand that the letters are meant to be read from beginning to end, the same way you would read a personal letter today. Within the framework of reading the gospels, the author informs his readers to be aware and consider the special literary forms within the gospels: exaggeration, metaphor, simile, and parables. The Acts of the apostles is really the first book of the New Testament era.

The author describes Acts as the only record we have in inspired history concerning the beginning of the church. In interpreting the book of Acts, one must understand that nothing outside of Acts speaks to the history of the Lord’s church regarding its beginning in its inspired record. In order for someone to interpret Acts properly there must be a proper understanding that

it is the first book in the Bible to bridge between the Old and New covenants between God and man. Acts is the only record book that calls man by name and says how they came into a saving relationship with Christ. It entails: *first*, the history of the Jerusalem church (1:1-8:4). *Second*, the spread of the gospel in the surrounding areas (8:5-12:25). *Third*, the setting apart of Paul and his preaching up to the last visit in Jerusalem. *Fourth*, the arrest in Jerusalem to Paul's Roman imprisonment (21:17-28:31).

Part Five: The Interpretive Journey- Old Testament

As the author describes how to interpret the Old Testament, he first explains the literary features of narrative. He describes four important elements of narrative (1) plot, (2) setting, (3) characters, and (4) the viewpoint of the narrator. In studying the Old Testament, the Law needs to be viewed in light of the Mosaic covenant. The author is sure to proclaim that the Mosaic covenant is no longer a functional covenant. The student of Old Testament scripture must understand that Hebrews 8-9 makes it very clear that Jesus came as the mediator of a new covenant that replaced the old covenant.

In studying the Old Testament, poetry structure must be interpreted with diligence and care. The author encourages readers to train your eye to read line by line rather than sentence by sentence. Along with the Hebrew poetry, one will need to understand figurative imagery as well. This is not seeing poetry as a massive essay, but rather a painted picture. The author describes this as the colors of the painting are figures of speech and wordplay. Recognizing these elements

of structure within the Old Testament will assist the reader in appreciating and interpreting the dynamic messages the Old Testament poets provide for us.

Conclusion

The word of God is the tool the Holy Spirit uses for our growth and sanctification (John 17:17). As we live in the days of mysticism, and liberalism that deny the authority of Holy Scripture '*Grasping God's Word*' puts us where we need to be in light of sound hermeneutics. We need a strong exegesis to find our way to heaven. If there is one great need for the Lord's Church today it is the need of understanding the things which help us to gain knowledge of the Word of God. It must be stated that a general and thorough education is needed, but if the Holy Spirit is not behind it there will be major difficulty with regards to receiving and knowing the truth (1 Cor. 2:14). As we study the Word of God, we come to a develop a greater appreciation for the God of the Word. We understand that Biblical hermeneutics keeps us faithful to the intended meaning of Scripture and away from allegorizing and symbolizing Bible verses and passages that should be understood literally. Christians need the true meaning and application of scripture (Hebrews 4:12), and proper study will help the Christian keep his sword sharp!

