

## Praise for *Six Ways to Study the Bible*

“Trent Butler demonstrates that reverence for Scripture need not preclude asking probing questions about the texts’ origin, transmission, and meaning. In an engaging style, Butler welcomes readers into deeper dialogue with the Bible, uncovering the mysteries of study Bible notes and commentators’ jargon. By preceding the chapter on devotional study, ‘the queen of Bible study,’ with guides to textual, literary, historical, exegetical, and theological study, Butler shows how all of these enrich the meaning of the text. Students of the Bible who want to go beyond what other people tell them, but don’t know how to start, should grab Butler’s book and dig in.”

*Sandra Hack Polaski, author of A Feminist Introduction to Paul*

“*Six Ways to Study the Bible* is a comprehensive tool for any student of the Bible. Outlining six approaches for digging deeper into the text, it provides examples of how to do these and includes exercises the reader can use to practice. An excellent list of Bible study resources is also included. Teachers and students of the Bible in the local church will find this a useful addition to their toolbox of biblical study aids.”

*Karen Tye, author of Basics of Christian Education*

“A good resource for highly motivated laypeople, this book takes readers on an in-depth journey through six different ways of reading the Bible. It will repay its readers with helpful suggestions about these different approaches.”

*David M. Howard, Jr., Bethel Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota*

“Just as a master craftsman is one who is an expert in working with the tools of his craft, so an educated Bible reader is one who is trained in using the tools of biblical study. In *Six Ways to Study the Bible*, Trent Butler introduces readers to six of the most important tools they should have in their tool belts in order to study the Bible effectively. This slim volume, written by a veteran Bible scholar with the heart of a pastor, would make an excellent preparatory text for church Bible study groups and introductory level college classes.”

*Ralph K. Hawkins, Kentucky Christian University*

*To Dr. Paul Redditt,  
Friend for Life*

Six Ways  
to Study  
the BIBLE

TRENT C. BUTLER



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P R E S S

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# Introduction

The art of Bible study is learning to ask the right question at the right time.

What questions do you ask as you study the Bible?

Do you ask different questions when you are going to teach a lesson, when you are preparing to be part of a Bible study someone else is teaching, and when you are simply having a quiet devotional reading?

How are these Bible study preparations different?

I want to share with you what I think are the basic tools you should have as you study and the basic information you should be able to put your fingers on. Remember, education is not how much you know, but how quickly you can find what you need to know.

This book will introduce you to six different ways to do Bible study in different settings. You can add, subtract, or combine as you desire. Combining all six will bring you to a comprehensive understanding of the history behind the text, the actual text itself, the nature of the text, and the theological and practical meanings of the text. To do so, we will look at four texts from different time periods, in different styles, from different literary genres, and with different theological purposes. Except for the textual section, the texts used are Joshua 2, Psalm 137, Mark 8, and Philippians 2. In each type of study, you will see examples of how to do the type of study and will be given an exercise for doing the study on one of the passages for yourself.

## Textual Study

The most difficult phone calls I had while managing the Bible section at Holman Bible Publishers came from people using the *New International Version* and wanting to know why certain verses were not in their Bible, why even the verse numbers were not there. Textual study of the Bible shows you how to answer such questions.

The resources you have for this are in study Bibles. They come in the footnotes and center or side column references of the Bible and show you that many verses have different readings in different Bible manuscripts. Before you can do serious Bible study, you need to be able to interpret these footnotes and understand what they mean. If you really get serious at this study, you will go to a commentary such as the *Word Biblical Commentary*, the *Anchor Bible*, or the *New International Commentary*. Such resources give you a special section on textual notes.

## 2 *Six Ways to Study the Bible*

Take a quick glance at five passages using the *King James Version*, the *New American Standard Version*, and one modern version such as the *New International Version*, the *Holman Christian Standard*, the *New Revised Standard*, or the *Revised English Bible*. The passages are Joshua 21:35–38; Genesis 4:8; Judges 6:13–14; Mark 16:9; and 1 John 5:8. What differences do you discover in the translations of these verses? Can you explain why the translations differ or perhaps do not even include these verses? Our first chapter will seek to explain these differences and alert you as to how to discover and understand similar differences in other passages.

### **Literary Study**

An author may use different styles of writing for different audiences in ways that distinguish him or her from any other author. Thus vocabulary and letter style separate Paul's letters from the Letter to the Hebrews. Paul's style in Galatians differs from that which he uses in Philippians because he has different purposes and sees the two churches as needing different approaches.

The basic literary forms are prose and poetry. Poetry includes hymnody, victory songs, laments, prophetic sayings, wisdom poems, historical epics, etc. Prose includes historical narrative, short stories, battle reports, letters, apocalypse, boundary lists, architectural descriptions, instructions, laws, genealogies, etc. Thus we must learn how to distinguish one literary type from another and know what to expect from those styles and literary types.

### **Exegetical Study**

The heart of Bible study comes as we turn to a specific passage and study it word by word, verse by verse, chapter by chapter, and book by book. We must find how to segment a passage out so that we are as sure as possible that we are dealing with what the original writer considered a discrete section of writing. We will see how to find the structure of the passage in relationship to what precedes and follows. We will see how to find the way the passage itself is structured, what communication skills the writer utilizes in the passage, and the major point or points the writer seeks to transmit to the audience. This, in turn, will lead us to find the major theological teaching of the passage and the major response the writer wants the audience to make. Mark 8 will be the central focus for this chapter. Why did Jesus have to try twice before healing a blind man?

### **Historical Studies**

Historical studies provoke more controversy than most any other. They have two points of focus: the time of the writer and the time of the

events described. Learning of the time of the writer helps us discover the important themes and situations the writer's audience faces and the author addresses. Such information may lead us to understand the nature of the author's writing style. Historical events may be incorporated into writing in many ways: poetry, biography, historical fiction, propaganda, entertaining narrative, royal annals, or interpretative historical narrative. Each of these writing styles or types can incorporate factual historical details. Each can relate these details in ways that support or oppose certain beliefs or programs. Whatever style, the writer incorporating historical detail has a purpose for using the detail other than simply narrating historical events. This chapter will show how to determine the writer's context and purpose and how the writer uses detail. It will also provide charts the reader can keep close at hand to find needed information about Israelite and Near Eastern history.

### **Theological Study**

No one passage provides all the teaching the Bible seeks to impart on any one subject. Indeed, each passage adds its important nuance to the total biblical teaching. The student of the Bible faces the enormous task of finding other passages in the Bible that deal with the same theme, then fitting them together into a coherent whole that lets us see a theological teaching in its complexity rather than in some simplicity we might impose upon it.

### **Devotional Study**

The "queen" of Bible study is devotional reading. This appears to be the simplest and easiest type of Bible study, but it can be the most careless and dangerous. We cannot deny that at times God speaks directly through the Word to particular needs of God's children. But we must not expect this to happen every time we read the Bible, and we must not let this be the only way we read the Bible. The previous five types of study should inform our devotional reading and help us know what kind of message to expect from a particular portion of Scripture. Of all passages, we will look at Psalm 137 with its gruesome images to determine some limits to place *on*, and some expectations to develop *in*, devotional reading.



## CHAPTER 1: Textual

Literary

Exegetical

Historical

Theological

Devotional



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# Finding the Text

## *Textual Study*

### **Purpose**

To learn how to use basic tools, information, and methods that will equip you to study God’s Word with a definite purpose in mind so as to lead to the enrichment of your life with God.

### **Introduction**

The art of Bible study is learning to ask the right question at the right time.

Bible study starts with the text, of course, but which text? Scattered through most of your Bible editions, particularly study Bibles, you find mysterious footnotes that give you important information when you learn how to decipher them. They will show you how different manuscripts (abbreviated “mss”) and different early translations of the Bible differ from one another. You need to know enough about these to understand what was happening as the early scribes copied and transmitted the text of the Bible. You also need to be able to come to some reasonable decision as to which text best approximates the earliest text of Scripture. Look at the evidence that follows so you can start to see what we mean when we ask you to “find the text.” As we introduce the text, we will also introduce you to some English translations that you may never have used before. You will want to keep a notebook handy as you go through this book, and whenever you study the Bible. Note the following abbreviations:

## 6 Six Ways to Study the Bible

MT=the *Masoretic Text*, or earliest Hebrew texts we have, coming from Massoretes, or early Jewish scholars, who copied and transmitted the Bible text

LXX=the earliest Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, done around 250 B.C.E.

TarOnq=*Targum Onqelos*=translation of Hebrew Bible into Aramaic

Vulg=Latin translation by Jerome

SamPent=*Samaritan Pentateuch*, text used by the Samaritan community near Shechem

MSS=manuscripts

The text of the Old Testament is based on two major Hebrew manuscripts from about 1000 C.E.: the Aleppo Manuscript and the Leningrad Manuscript, named for places they have been kept. The Old Testament text is checked for accurate transmission by use of the Septuagint, Dead Sea Scrolls, and other Hebrew manuscripts from after 1000 C.E.; and secondarily by Syriac and Latin Vulgate.

### Steps in the Decision

You most likely do not read Greek or Hebrew. To study the Bible with an eye to finding the original text, you must rely on study Bibles and commentaries. But those notes have already confused you. They use too many abbreviations and/or words that do not translate into the way you speak English. So we must expand our vocabulary just a bit to be able to study the evidence. In doing so, we will not try to get technical and exact. We will seek a simple definition that meets your Bible study needs.

#### *Old Testament Manuscripts*

*Septuagint*, abbreviated LXX, and referring to the earliest translation and collection of the Jewish Bible from the Hebrew and Aramaic languages into the Greek language. It contains the Apocrypha, or books about whose authority and inspiration the church has debated for many years (see *Apocrypha* below). The Septuagint quite frequently offers a reading of the Old Testament text that differs significantly from the Hebrew text.

*Masoretic Text*, abbreviated MT, represents the standard Hebrew text preserved by Hebrew scribes called Massoretes who carefully copied and supplied vowels for a Hebrew text that originally had only consonants.

*Leningrad Manuscript B19<sup>A</sup>* represents the most complete manuscript of the Hebrew Bible preserved. It dates to 1009 C.E. This text is printed in most modern Hebrew Bibles and is the starting point for textual study.

*Vulgate* is the standard Latin translation of the Bible and, until Vatican II (1962–65), was the standard Bible read by the Catholic Church. The Vulgate was created because of a lack of uniformity in the earlier Latin translations. In 382 or 383 C.E. Pope Damasus commissioned Jerome to produce a standard Latin translation. At first he translated the Old Testament from the Greek Septuagint. Then about 390 he turned to the Hebrew text and translated it, completing the work—including the apocrypha—about 405. Early in his work, Jerome translated the gospels, but seems not to have finished the New Testament. Through the centuries various groups produced different Latin manuscripts and manuscript traditions. The Council of Trent declared the Latin Bible the official Bible of the Catholic Church. A final text of the Latin Vulgate was produced in 1598. This included much of Jerome’s Old Testament work, his gospels, and a sixteenth-century committee’s work based on a long history of Latin translations, some older than Jerome and referred to as the Old Latin translation.

The *Bomberg Bible*, named after its publisher, represented the First Rabbinic Bible and was published in Venice in 1516–17.

The *Targums* are the various translations of the Hebrew Bible into Aramaic. These include *Targum Onkelos* of the Pentateuch, which has close ties with the Jewish community in Babylon. It is the most literal of the Targums. It originated in Palestine in the first or early second centuries C.E.

The *Peshitta* or standard *Syriac* translation of the Old Testament first appears in quotations from texts written after 300 C.E. We do not know its origin. The Syriac translation includes several works not included in the Protestant Bible—Wisdom of Solomon, Epistle of Jeremiah, Epistle of Baruch, Baruch, Bel and the Dragon, Susanna, Judith, Ecclesiasticus, 2 Baruch, 4 Ezra, 1–4 Maccabees, and Josephus’ *Jewish Wars*. Some Psalters contain Psalm 151 (from LXX) and 152–55, now known from the Dead Sea Scrolls.

*Dead Sea Scrolls* are scrolls of biblical texts and of texts used by the community living in the Jewish community of Qumran. These texts represent the oldest Hebrew texts available to modern scholars. Yet they are very fragmented and contain only a small percentage of the biblical text. See the collection in *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* by Abegg, Flint, and Ulrich. In many ways these are the most valuable witnesses to the early Hebrew text.

*Samaritan Pentateuch* contains the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy as preserved by the Samaritan community

near Shechem. The date of the community's origin and of its biblical text is a matter of scholarly debate, but it may go back as early as the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 721 B.C.E. However, the oldest copy of their text goes only to about 1200 C.E. The text centers worship life on Shechem rather than Jerusalem or anywhere else.

### *The New Testament Manuscripts*

The New Testament text scholars use is not based on any one manuscript but is a scholarly creation done by examining the almost 5400 different manuscripts of at least part of the Greek New Testament that are available to us. This critical work has to be done because the different manuscripts contain about 300,000 variant readings, most of which can be quickly discarded as normal copying errors. Some of the more important texts include:

***Codex Claromontanus*** from about 350 C.E.—four gospels; ten letters of Paul (probably accidentally omitting Philippians and 1 and 2 Thessalonians); James; 1 and 2 Peter; 1, 2, 3 John; Jude; Barnabas; Revelation; Acts; Shepherd of Hermas; Acts of Paul; and Apocalypse of Peter.

***Cheltenham Canon North Africa*** about 350—four gospels; thirteen letters of Paul; Acts; Revelation; 1, 2, 3 John; 1, 2 Peter.

**Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, 367 C.E.**—first to list precisely the twenty-seven books of our New Testament.

Syrian churches had only the **Gospels, Acts, and letters of Paul** until after 400 C.E. Later added **1 Peter, James, 1 John**.

***Codex Sinaiticus*** about 325 had twenty-seven books plus Epistle of Barnabas and Shepherd of Hermas.

**Council of Laodicea in 363 C.E.** named twenty-six canonical books, omitting Revelation.

**Council of Hippo in 393 and Council of Carthage in 397** named twenty-seven books but separated Hebrews from Pauline list.

*Note:* No ecumenical council of the ancient church ever undertook to define the scope of the canon. Experience of the churches determined the canon. Finally, the church chose those documents considered to be apostolic, catholic (in universal use in the churches), orthodox, and in traditional use.

### *Footnotes in Your Bible*

Once you have learned this information or have it available for quick reference, you are ready to look at the textual footnotes in your Bible.

To do the best textual study you can do, I recommend you should have a copy of the *New King James Bible* (NKJV), the *New English Translation* (NET), and either the *New International Version* (NIV), the *Holman Christian Standard Bible* (HCSB), or the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV). If you want to study at an advanced stage, you may want to select a standard commentary that provides textual information. The most complete of these is the *Word Biblical Commentary* series, which supplies so much information you may be overwhelmed. You may want to try volumes from the *New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (NICOT) or the *New International Commentary on the New Testament* (NICNT) or the *New American Commentary* (NAC) or the *Old Testament Library* (OTL) or *New Testament Library* (NTL). The next step forward in textual study would include reference to the *New English Translation of the Septuagint* (NETS).

Before using any of these tools, read the introductory pages in the front to understand the terms being used in the notes, the abbreviations used in the notes, and the types of information available in different types of notes—cross references, textual notes, study notes, charts and graphs, inset notes, etc. Then look to see where the textual notes are situated in the various tools, and find if you have any notes concerning those texts.

### Begin the Textual Study

Now you are ready to begin textual study of the text. Follow these steps as you study.

#### A. English Translation Differences

Look at the translations you are using. Determine what differences appear in the texts. Note these differences in your notebook. Which of these differences appear to reflect simple translation choices rather than textual differences? Write these down in your notebook for further study at a later point.

1. NKJV
2. NET
3. NRSV
4. NIV
5. HCSB

#### B. Original Language Translation Differences

Look at the notes on the passage in the various tools you are using.

## 10 *Six Ways to Study the Bible*

What evidence is available for a different wording in the early translations of the text? Write in your notebook:

1. LXX
2. Vulg
3. Syriac (Peshitta)
4. Targums

### C. Making a Decision

1. Do all English translations agree? Note that NKJV is bound by its translation philosophy to maintain textual basis of original King James Version in the New Testament, so its translation may not represent the earliest text, but its extensive footnotes do give us information on which to make decisions.
2. Do the study tools show possible reasons for changes in the text?
  - a. Copying error caused by skipping from a word or ending of a word to another word that is the same or has a similar ending.
  - b. Copying error caused by copying material twice.
  - c. Translation error or change caused by change of culture so that translator did not understand geography or social custom, etc.
  - d. Translation change made to avoid “blasphemy” or seeming contradiction in text.
  - e. Translation insertion of familiar phrases.
  - f. Translation seeking to interpret or clarify the text.
  - g. Translation has simplified a difficult text.
  - h. Translation has improved literary style or syntax.
  - i. One text is more easily derived from the other (when two texts are very similar, but one of them elaborates or expands the information, it is reasonable to see the shorter texts as the source of the longer one).
3. Which reading do you see as preferable or more original?

A look at a couple of examples will illustrate how this type of study works.

## Example: Joshua 21:35–38

### The Evidence

#### *Jewish Publication Society*

*Joshua 21:35* Dimnah with its pastures, and Nahalal with its pastures—4 towns.

*Joshua 21:36* From the tribe of Gad, Ramoth in Gilead—the city of refuge for manslayers—with its pastures, Mahanaim with its pastures,

*Joshua 21:37* Heshbon with its pastures, and Jazer with its pastures—4 towns in all.

*Joshua 21:38* All the towns which went by lot to the Merarites, by their clans—the rest of the levitical clans—came to 12 towns.

#### *New King James Version*

*Joshua 21:35* Dimnah with its common-land, and Nahalal with its common-land: four cities;

*Joshua 21:36* and from the tribe of Reuben, Bezer with its common-land, Jahaz with its common-land,

*Joshua 21:37* Kedemoth with its common-land, and Mephaath with its common-land: four cities;

*Joshua 21:38* and from the tribe of Gad, Ramoth in Gilead with its common-land (a city of refuge for the slayer), Mahanaim with its common-land

#### *Holman Christian Standard Bible*

*Joshua 21:35* Dimnah with its pasturelands, and Nahalal with its pasturelands—four cities.

*Joshua 21:36* From the tribe of Reuben, | they gave |: Bezer with its pasturelands, Jahzaha with its pasturelands,

*Joshua 21:37* Kedemoth with its pasturelands, and Mephaath with its pasturelands—four cities.

*Joshua 21:38* From the tribe of Gad, | they gave |: Ramoth in Gilead, the city of refuge for the one who commits manslaughter, with its pasturelands, Mahanaim with its pasturelands,

### The Reasoning

#### *New English Translation Notes*

Joshua 21:36–37 are accidentally omitted from a number of significant Hebrew MSS. They are, however, found in some Hebrew MSS, the LXX [Greek translation] and Vulgate [Latin translation].

#### *New King James Version Notes*

Following Septuagint and Vulgate (compare 1 Chronicles 6:78–79); Masoretic Text, Bomberg, and Targum omit Joshua 21:36 and 37.

**Holman Christian Standard Bible Notes**

21:36–37 Some Heb mss omit these vv.

**Word Biblical Commentary Text Notes**

The major Hebrew tradition does not include vv 36–37, though some later Heb mss do witness them. Such omission, however, makes the arithmetic of v 41 in error. This is probably a case of early haplography [scribal omission of letters or words often caused by skipping from one word to its repetition later in the manuscript]. Reconstruction of the verses is done on the basis of LXX [Greek translation] and 1 Chronicles 6:63–64. The LXX appears to give the earliest reading.

A. English Translation differences:

A first glance shows no significant differences in these texts aside from spellings of geographical names. Yet the notes of the study tools will show us that no one of these translations produces the base Hebrew text represented by the Leningrad manuscript. This reminds us to look for textual notes even where the translations do not reflect differences.

B. Ancient Language Differences (where information is available)

MT—Does not have vv. 36–37

LXX—does have vv. 36–37

Vulg—does have vv. 36–37

Syriac (Peshitta)—Tools used do not mention

Targums—Do not have vv. 36–37.

Bomberg—Does not have vv. 36–37.

C. Making a decision

1. Do all English translations agree? *Yes*
2. Do the study tools show possible reasons for changes in the text?
  - a. Copying error caused by skipping from a word or ending of a word to another word that is same or has a similar ending.  
*Yes—four cities at end of v. 35 to four cities end of v. 37.*
  - b. Copying error caused by copying material twice. *No*
  - c. Translation error or change caused by change of culture so that translator did not understand geography or social custom, etc. *No*

- d. Translation change made to avoid “blasphemy” or seeming contradiction in text. *No*
- e. Translation insertion of familiar phrases. *No*
- f. Translation seeking to interpret or clarify the text. *No*
- g. Translation has simplified a difficult text. *No*
- h. Translation has improved literary style or syntax. *No*
- i. One text is more easily derived from the other. *Yes—MT derived from LXX in omitting part of LXX rather than LXX adding cities not known in MT.*

3. Which reading do you see as preferable or more original?

**Decision:** Include vv. 36–37 in the text and explain MT omission as copyist’s error moving from one “four cities” to another.

### **Example: Genesis 4:8**

#### **The Evidence**

##### ***Revised English Bible***

*Genesis 4:8* Cain said to his brother Abel, ‘Let us go out into the country.’  
Once there, Cain attacked and murdered his brother.

##### ***New American Standard, 1995***

*Genesis 4:8* Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

##### ***New International Version***

*Genesis 4:8* Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.”  
And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

##### ***God’s Word Translation***

*Genesis 4:8* Cain talked to his brother Abel. Later, when they were in the fields, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

#### **The Reasoning**

##### ***Word Biblical Commentary***

Sam Pent adds גלכה השתח “let us go into the field,” and this is supported by the ancient versions except TgOnq [Aramaic Targum Onqelos] and S [Syriac], which says “let us go down into the valley.” The clause may have been omitted in MT [basic Hebrew text] because

of homoioteleuton [scribal error omitting words by skipping from one word to another with a similar ending] with “in the field.” The difficulty of MT may have prompted the expansion found in the other texts.

### ***New English Translation Note***

The MT has simply “and Cain said to Abel his brother,” omitting Cain’s words to Abel. It is possible that the elliptical text is original. Perhaps the author uses the technique of aposiopesis, “a sudden silence” to create tension. In the midst of the story the narrator suddenly rushes ahead to what happened in the field. It is more likely that the ancient versions (Samaritan Pentateuch, LXX, Vulgate, and Syriac), which include Cain’s words, “Let’s go out to the field,” preserve the original reading here. After writing אָחִיו *achiyv* “his brother”), a scribe’s eye may have jumped to the end of the form בַּשָּׂדֶה (*basadeh*, “to the field”) and accidentally omitted the quotation. In older phases of the Hebrew script the sequence י (yod-vav) on אָחִיו is graphically similar to the final ה (*he*) on בַּשָּׂדֶה (“in the field”).

### ***Holman Christian Standard Bible Note***

Sam, LXX, Syr, Vg; MT omits *Let’s go out to the field*.

### **The Decision**

1. Look at the translations you are using. Determine what differences appear in the texts.

*Some translations have Cain’s words; others do not.*

Note these differences in your notebook.

Which of these differences appear to reflect simple translation choices rather than textual differences? *None*

Check these off in your notebook for further study at a later point.

2. Look at the notes on the passage in the various tools you are using. What evidence is available for a different wording in the early translations of the text? Write in your notebook:

#### **A. English Translation differences:**

NKJV—*No quotation*

Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

NET—*Quotation supplied from LXX; Use of “attacked” to translate literal “rose up.”*

Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

NRSV— *Quotation supplied from LXX;*

Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let us go out to the field.” And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him.

NIV— *Quotation supplied from LXX; Use of “attacked” to translate literal “rose up.”*

Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

HCSB— *Quotation supplied from LXX; Use of “attacked” to translate literal “rose up.”*

Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

B. Ancient Language Differences (where information is available)

Samaritan Pentateuch—Has quote

LXX—Has quote

Vulg—Has quote

Syriac (Peshitta)—Has quote

Targum—Has quote

C. Making a decision

1. Do all English translations agree? *No*
2. Do the study tools show possible reasons for changes in the text? *Yes*
  - a. Copying error caused by skipping from a word or ending of a word to another word that is the same or has a similar ending.  
*Skipped from field of quotation to field in next clause*
  - b. Copying error caused by copying material twice. *No*
  - c. Translation error or change caused by change of culture so that translator did not understand geography or social custom, etc. *No*
  - d. Translation change made to avoid “blasphemy” or seeming contradiction in text. *No*

- e. Translation insertion of familiar phrases. *No*
  - f. Translation seeking to interpret or clarify the text.  
*Possible; scribal tradition may have seen very early need to supply quotation to make text clear*
  - g. Translation has simplified a difficult text.  
*Possible explanation*
  - h. Translation has improved literary style or syntax. *No*
  - i. One text is more easily derived from the other.  
*Either text could be derived from other through addition or through copying error*
3. Which reading do you see as preferable or more original?

**Decision:** Difficult. MT without quote represents more difficult reading, which is often the best reading. MT could be seen as using literary tool to let reader supply quote in moment of silence or may have simply intended to say they were in conversation when the attack occurred. More likely, a simple copyist's error led to omission of quote quite early in text history. Read the quote in the text but with some reservation.

### **Example: Judges 16:13–14**

#### **The Evidence**

##### *New International Version*

*Judges 16:13* Delilah then said to Samson, "Until now, you have been making a fool of me and lying to me. Tell me how you can be tied." He replied, "If you weave the seven braids of my head into the fabric [on the loom] and tighten it with the pin, I'll become as weak as any other man." So while he was sleeping, Delilah took the seven braids of his head, wove them into the fabric

*Judges 16:14* and tightened it with the pin. Again she called to him, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" He awoke from his sleep and pulled up the pin and the loom, with the fabric.

##### *Jewish Publication Society*

*Judges 16:13* Then Delilah said to Samson, "You have been deceiving me all along; you have been lying to me! Tell me, how could you be tied up?" He answered her, "If you weave seven locks of my head into the web."

*Judges 16:14* And she pinned it with a peg and cried to him, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" Awaking from his sleep, he pulled out the peg, the loom, and the web.

*New King James Version*

*Judges 16:13* Delilah said to Samson, "Until now you have mocked me and told me lies. Tell me what you may be bound with." And he said to her, "If you weave the seven locks of my head into the web of the loom"—

*Judges 16:14* So she wove *it* tightly with the batten of the loom, and said to him, "The Philistines *are* upon you, Samson!" But he awoke from his sleep, and pulled out the batten and the web from the loom.

*Holman Christian Standard Bible*

*Judges 16:13* Then Delilah said to Samson, "You have mocked me all along and told me lies! Tell me how you can be tied up." He told her, "If you weave the seven braids on my head with the web of a loom—"

*Judges 16:14* She fastened the braids with a pin and called to him, "Samson, the Philistines are here!" He awoke from his sleep and pulled out the pin, with the loom and the web.

### The Reasoning

*New English Translation Note*

The MT of vv. 13b–14a reads simply, "He said to her, 'If you weave the seven braids of my head with the web.' And she fastened with the pin and said to him." The additional words in the translation, "and secure it with the pin, I will become weak and be like any other man." **16:14** So she made him go to sleep, wove the seven braids of his hair into the fabric on the loom," which without doubt represent the original text, are supplied from the ancient Greek version. (In both vv. 13b and 14a the Greek version has "to the wall" after "with the pin," but this is an interpretive addition that reflects a misunderstanding of ancient weaving equipment. The Hebrew textual tradition was accidentally shortened during the copying process.) A scribe's eye jumped from the first instance of "with the web" to the second, causing him to leave out inadvertently the intervening words.

*Word Biblical Commentary*

Words in brackets reconstructed from the LXX, "if you should knock with a pin (or peg) into the wall, I will be weak as one of the men." OL [Old Latin] reads, "If you take apart the seven locks of my head and

you lay the warp of a web and you lay bare my hairs in it as if the web is covered over, I will become weak.”

LXX<sup>A</sup> [a Greek manuscript of Judges] reads “and Delilah put him to sleep and began to weave the locks of hair of his head with the extension and nailed the pin into the wall.” The reference to nailing into the wall seems to be a Gk. interpretation from normal usage of the Gk. verbs. These clauses are apparently missing from the MT through homoioteleuton [skipping to similar ending]. LXX<sup>B</sup> [a second Greek manuscript] reads v 14a as “and in his sleeping Delilah took the seven chains of his head and wove in the warp and fastened the pin into the wall.” OL translates, “And Delilah made him sleep and she took apart the seven hairs of his head with fear, and she went out in the length of the room, and she fixed it in pins and she said to him, ‘Foreigners are upon you, Samson.’ And he rose up from his sleep, and he plucked out the pins with the loom and the ‘division’ [of his hair?] and his strength was not known.”

#### ***New International Version Note***

“‘If you weave the seven braids of my head into the fabric on the loom and tighten it with the pin, I’ll become as weak as any other man.’ So while he was sleeping, Delilah took the seven braids of his head, wove them into the fabric and”—Some Septuagint manuscripts; Hebrew “*I can if you weave the seven braids of my head into the fabric on the loom.*” So she...

### **Decision**

Here the reader is invited to go through the steps and make the decision.

#### **A. English Translation differences:**

NKJV

NET

NRSV

NIV

HCSB

#### **B. Ancient Language Differences (where information is available)**

LXX

Vulg

Syriac (Peshitta)

Targums

### C. Making a decision

1. Do all English translations agree? Note that NKJV is bound by its translation philosophy to maintain textual basis of original *King James Version* in the New Testament, so its translation may not represent the earliest text, but its extensive footnotes give us information on which to make decisions.
2. Do the study tools show possible reasons for changes in the text?
  - a. Copying error caused by skipping from a word or ending of a word to another word that is the same or has a similar ending.
  - b. Copying error caused by copying material twice.
  - c. Translation error or change caused by change of culture so that translator did not understand geography or social custom, etc.
  - d. Translation change made to avoid “blasphemy” or seeming contradiction in text.
  - e. Translation insertion of familiar phrases.
  - f. Translation seeking to interpret or clarify the text.
  - g. Translation has simplified a difficult text.
  - h. Translation has improved literary style or syntax.
  - i. One text is more easily derived from the other.
3. Which reading do you see as preferable or more original?

## Example: Mark 16:8

### The Evidence

See text with brackets, parentheses, and/or footnotes in your translations.

### The Reasoning

#### *New English Translation*

The gospel of Mark ends at this point [v. 8] in some witnesses, including two of the most respected [Greek] MSS. The following

shorter ending is found in some MSS: “They reported briefly to those around Peter all that they had been commanded. After these things Jesus himself sent out through them, from the east to the west, the holy and imperishable preaching of eternal salvation. Amen.” This shorter ending is usually included with the longer ending [at least one witness], however, ends at this point. Most MSS include the longer ending (vv. 9–20) immediately after v. 8 [but MSS evidence also shows a different shorter ending between vv. 14 and 15]. Jerome and Eusebius knew of almost no Greek MSS that had this ending. Several MSS have marginal comments noting that earlier Greek MSS lacked the verses, while others mark the text with asterisks or obeli (symbols that scribes used to indicate that the portion of text being copied was spurious). Internal evidence strongly suggests the secondary nature of both the short and the long endings. Their vocabulary and style are decidedly non-Markan. All of this evidence strongly suggests that as time went on scribes added the longer ending, either for the richness of its material or because of the abruptness of the ending at v. 8. (Indeed, the strange variety of dissimilar endings attests to the probability that early copyists had a copy of Mark that ended at v. 8, and they filled out the text with what seemed to be an appropriate conclusion. All of the witnesses for alternative endings to vv. 9–20 thus indirectly confirm the Gospel as ending at v. 8.) Because of such problems regarding the authenticity of these alternative endings, 16:8 is usually regarded as the last verse of the gospel of Mark. There are three possible explanations for Mark ending at 16:8: (1) The author intentionally ended the Gospel here in an open-ended fashion; (2) the Gospel was never finished; or (3) the last leaf of the ms was lost prior to copying. The first explanation is the most likely due to several factors, including (a) the probability that the Gospel was originally written on a scroll rather than a codex (only on a codex would the last leaf get lost prior to copying); (b) the unlikelihood of the ms not being completed; and (c) the literary power of ending the Gospel so abruptly that the readers are now drawn into the story itself. E. Best aptly states, “It is in keeping with other parts of his Gospel that Mark should not give an explicit account of a conclusion where this is already well known to his readers” (*Mark*, 73). The readers must now ask themselves, “What will I do with Jesus? If I do not accept him in his suffering, I will not see him in his glory.”

Double brackets have been placed around this passage to indicate that most likely it was not part of the original text of the gospel of Mark. In spite of this, the passage has an important role in the history of the transmission of the text, so it has been included in the translation.

### ***Word Biblical Commentary***

Although scholars are almost evenly divided over the question of whether v 8 was the original conclusion of the gospel of Mark, almost all regard both the so-called Long Ending (i.e., vv 9–20) and the Short Ending as textually spurious. Most think the longer passage is a late secondary conflation of traditions found in Matthew, Luke, John, and Acts, enriched with a few legendary details... [I]t is much more probable that the ending is not original, even if it does preserve some details that may have been part of the original ending.

Parts of Mark's long ending appear to be based on various elements found in the other Gospels and Acts. Some of the most obvious elements are as follows:

- v. 11: Lack of belief (cf. Luke 24:11)
- v. 12: Two on the road (cf. Luke 24:13–35)
- v. 14: Reproach for unbelief (cf. John 20:19, 26)
- v. 15: Great Commission (cf. Matthew 28:19)
- v. 16: Salvation/Judgment (cf. John 3:18, 36)
- v. 17: Speaking in tongues (cf. Acts 2:4; 10:46)
- v. 18: Serpents and poison (cf. Acts 28:3–5)
- v. 18: Laying hands on the sick (cf. Acts 9:17; 28:8)
- v. 19: Ascension (cf. Luke 24:51; Acts 1:2, 9)
- v. 20: General summary of Acts

The material appears to be abbreviated and/or summarized from these sources.

### ***New King James Version Notes***

Verses 9–20 are bracketed in NU-Text as not original. They are lacking in Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, although nearly all other manuscripts of Mark contain them.

### **The Decision**

Scholarship is virtually unanimous in seeing 16:9–20 as a later addition to the text by scribes who were not satisfied with the ending at verse 8. Textual evidence highly favors verse 8 as the original ending unless early manuscripts lost that ending. If that is the case, then we do

not have the original ending of Mark but still have a sufficient word to show us the power of the resurrection of Jesus.

### **Example: 1 John 5:8**

#### **The Evidence**

##### *New King James Version*

1 John 5:7 For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.

1 John 5:8 And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.

##### *New English Translation (NET)*

1 John 5:7 For there are three that testify,

1 John 5:8 the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three are in agreement.

##### *New American Standard Bible 1995*

1 John 5:7 For there are three that testify:

1 John 5:8 the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.

##### *Revised English Bible*

1 John 5:7 [-8] In fact there are three witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood, and these three are in agreement.

#### **The Reasoning**

##### *New King James Version Notes*

NU-Text and M-Text omit the words from *in heaven* (1 John 5:7) through *on earth* (verse 8). Only four or five very late manuscripts contain these words in Greek.

##### *New American Standard Notes*

“the Spirit and the...”—A few late mss add...*in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one. And there are three that testify on earth, the Spirit*

##### *Word Biblical Commentary*

Between vv 7 and 8, after, “those bearing witness”), six Gr MSS introduce a gloss which the AV [Authorized version=King James] translates as, “in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. (8) And there are three that bear witness in earth.”

The earliest of these Gr witnesses, all of which depend on an earlier Latin tradition, can be dated to the twelfth century. The OL is the only ancient version to include the words, and then with variations between the MSS; but, although the evidence is not entirely clear, the passage seems to be unknown in these texts before the eighth century. It does not appear in Jerome's definitive edition of the Vg [Vulgate] (*circa* AD 404), even if some other MSS of the Vg contain the addition. The earliest extrabiblical writer to show knowledge of the section is the Spanish heretic Priscillian (who died *circa* AD 385), when quoting from this part of John in his Latin "Book of Apology" (*Liber Apologeticus*). None of the Greek Fathers quotes the words. Despite this slight MSS attestation the inclusion remained in the Vg and also survived in the AV. In most modern translations the words have disappeared from the text altogether.

The section, which in any case interrupts the thought of the passage, is clearly an interpolation. Presumably it represents an attempt on the part of those who, in the third and fourth centuries, were preoccupied with understanding the doctrine of the Trinity, to explain this text in a trinitarian manner. What may have begun life as a marginal gloss in a Latin MSS then became incorporated in the text, and was eventually translated back into Gr in some Gr MSS. For similar additions to the Latin text of 1 John see 2:17 and 5:20.

### The Decision

1. Look at the translations you are using. Determine what differences appear in the texts. Note these differences in your notebook.

NKJV has a second part to v. 7 and a first part to v. 8 that do not appear in other translations.

Which of these differences appear to reflect simple translation choices rather than textual differences? *None*

2. Look at the notes on the verse in the various tools you are using. What evidence is available for a different wording in the early translations of the text. Write in your notebook:

*7b and 8a appear only in late Latin and Greek mms; NKJV translation philosophy forces choice to use the late texts*

A. English Translation differences:

NKJV—Adds 7b and 8a

NET—Does not have 7b and 8a

NRSV—Does not have 7b and 8a

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NIV—*Does not have 7b and 8a*

HCSB—*Does not have 7b and 8a*

### B. Ancient Language Differences (where information is available)

*Earliest texts do not have these verses*

### C. Making a decision

#### 1. Do all English translations agree?

*No*, because NKJV is bound by its translation philosophy to use text of original KJV so its translation may not represent the earliest text, but its footnotes show that only a few mss have the reading they follow.

#### 2. Do the study tools show possible reasons for changes in the text?

- a. Copying error caused by skipping from a word or ending of a word to another word that is the same or has a similar ending. *No*
- b. Copying error caused by copying material twice. *No*
- c. Translation error or change caused by change of culture so that translator did not understand geography or social custom, etc. *No*
- d. Translation change made to avoid “blasphemy” or seeming contradiction in text. *No*
- e. Translation insertion of familiar phrases. *Yes*
- f. Translation seeking to interpret or clarify the text.  
*Yes by inserting doctrine of Trinity into text*
- g. Translation has simplified a difficult text. *No*
- h. Translation has improved literary style or syntax. *No*
- i. One text is more easily derived from the other.

*7b and 8a reflect theological interpretation in light of Trinitarian debate in early church and have been awkwardly added to Greek text*

#### 3. Which reading do you see as preferable or more original?

*Addition in NKJV has very little textual support and is obviously later theological addition*

**Decision:** Read text without 7b and 8a.

### **Next Steps**

Now you have watched someone else work to determine the text to interpret, so it is your time to try. Work on the texts above and make sure you agree with the answers given. If not, why not? If you want to take this a step further, compare 2 Kings 20 and Isaiah 38 or work through 1 Samuel 11:6–10 or John 7:53 to 8:11 or Matthew 6:13.

As you study these critical textual matters, remember the amazing reality of the preservation of these ancient texts through time, the hard work copyists did to keep the texts alive for generation after generation, and the amazing agreement of most textual witnesses to the greater part of the biblical text. Textual study is necessary for any kind of true depth Bible study, but such textual study should drive you to greater appreciation for the text we have, not to any type of doubt or fear concerning the authority of the text for your life under God.

### **Reflection Arising from Textual Study**

Textual study is more than a detective opportunity to find answers to textual questions. Textual study calls on you for theological reflection as to what you have learned about the nature of holy Scripture by employing the method of study. Write answers to the following questions in your notebook.

1. How do you explain how textual differences arose? How do you explain how so much of the text does not come under question?

2. How do you incorporate the textual evidence you have studied into a personal understanding of the authority and inspiration of the Bible as God's Word?

3. What conclusions do you draw from the fact that God trusted human scribes to copy and preserve the Holy Scriptures?

As you study the Bible, you will want to use various translations. The descriptions in Appendix 4 should help you see the translation philosophies behind each translation. This will help you choose a translation to use in various situations such as devotional study, introductory reading of the Bible, or serious Bible word study.