

# Understanding the Foundations

## Chapter 1

### Introduction to Methodology

#### Welcome

I want to welcome you to this study in the Name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is my prayer that this series will be one of the most encouraging and strengthening experiences of your life. I want this class to be highly interactive. Therefore, please feel free to ask any questions that are puzzling to you. Other people are probably wondering the same thing. We can discuss some questions on the spot while more complex issues can become the focus of future sessions.

We will be covering a lot of ground quickly and will be looking at many scriptures so I will email my notes to you after each class so you can review them in detail and share them with others. For those of you who use Facebook, I have also set up a group discussion area called “Understanding the Foundations” where we can wrestle with the week’s teaching or explore other questions.

Tonight’s lesson will be the longest of this series. Rather than simply diving in, I feel it is important to explain the methodology that we will use so you will be confident in where we are heading.

#### The Goal

In this class we will study the scriptures differently than you may have in the past. Often, we study sections of the scriptures in isolation. For example, we might study the sacrificial system of the Old Testament from the book of Leviticus or seek to understand what the End Times will be like from the prophetic writings of Daniel, Ezekiel and Revelation. However, in this class we will attempt to study what is written in the New Testament as it would have been studied in the first century. But how would that have been?

#### How do we know if something is true?

*<sup>10</sup> As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. <sup>11</sup> Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. <sup>12</sup> Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.* Acts 17:10-12 (NIV)

When Paul and Silas went to Berea, they, being Jews, went to the synagogue to share the Gospel with other Jews. The scripture says that the Bereans ***“received Paul’s message with great eagerness”*** but it also says that they ***“examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.”*** It is easy to miss a very important point here... what “Scriptures” did they use to test to see if what Paul was teaching was true? The New Testament had not been written by this time and, even if it had been, it would not have been available in the synagogue in Berea. The only scripture at that time was the Old Testament. This means that everything Paul taught had to agree with what is written in the Old Testament.

### ***The Old Testament is the Foundation of the New Testament***

Therefore, the principal that we will use in this class will be to understand the writings of the New Testament by studying their foundations in the Old Testament. People often think that the New Testament is completely different and separate from the Old Testament. However, in this study you will see how deeply the two are connected and that you really cannot understand one without understanding the other. This can be a difficult concept for those who have been taught (as I was) that the Old Testament is obsolete and therefore can be mostly ignored. However, consider what happened shortly after the resurrection when Jesus, apparently in disguise, comes alongside two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Though they had been with Jesus, listened to His teachings, and had even seen His crucifixion, they simply didn’t understand and, consequently, were in deep despair from what they saw as being His failure.

*<sup>25</sup>And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup>Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory?” <sup>27</sup>And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.*

When Jesus departed from them, they said to each other,

*<sup>32</sup>“Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road, while He opened to us the Scriptures?”* Luke 24:13-35 (ESV)

Jesus had explained His ministry, death and resurrection through the Old Testament writings. That would be important to us because most of us are not familiar with the Old Testament. However, these Jewish men had studied the Old Testament all their lives. When He ***“opened the Scriptures”*** to them, He didn’t simply unroll a scroll and read it. He literally ***“opened”*** them so they understood what they truly meant. Therefore, we see that not only can we not fully understand

the New Testament without understanding the Old Testament, but that the reverse is also true. Paul calls this “*a mystery kept secret for long ages.*” Romans 16:25-27

### *Can we really take the Scriptures Literally?*

Many churches teach that the scriptures contain “some good moral teachings” but they cannot be taken literally. Some say that the scriptures contain many errors or that most of the scriptures are simply no longer relevant to us in our modern world. This is nothing new. People have always twisted and abused the Scriptures. Consider Peter’s words:

*<sup>15</sup> And count the patience of our LORD as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, <sup>16</sup> as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. **There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.*** 2 Peter 3:15-16 (ESV)

Paul taught that the entire Bible – from Genesis to Revelation – is entirely true and relevant to our daily lives. Consider his words:

*<sup>14</sup> But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, <sup>15</sup> and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup> **All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.***

2 Timothy 3:14-17 (NIV)

This is the position that we will take in this study.

### *What is our Final Authority?*

We are all familiar with the clashes between Jesus and the religious leaders of His day. Many teach that these conflicts were because Jesus was introducing a new and better way of salvation. However, notice what the conflict was actually about.

*<sup>6</sup> He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. <sup>7</sup> They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.' <sup>8</sup> **You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.**" <sup>9</sup> And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!"* Mark 7:6-9 (NIV)

In clash after clash, the conflict was because men had replaced the commandments of God with their own traditions. Is this important? Consider the words of Jesus:

*<sup>20</sup> For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.* Matthew 5:20 (ESV)

It is good to listen to the wisdom of others. Sermons, Bible commentaries and denominational creeds can be very helpful. However, we must test every idea, opinion and doctrine against the full Word of God. Anything that contradicts it must be rejected. Therefore, in this study, we will take the position that nothing, except the scriptures themselves, carries any authority.

### *Perfection or Perish?*

So... am I saying that there is only one truth and that we can't be saved unless we understand and obey everything perfectly? Well, despite the foolish idea that has become popular in recent years that we can all have our own "personal truth" common sense tells us that there can only be one truth. **However**, if our salvation is dependent on knowing the entire truth and following it perfectly I will be the first to hang my head in despair.

***Salvation is, has always been, and will always be entirely by the grace of God.***

One of the greatest men of God that I have ever known was my grandfather. He wasn't great because he had tremendous wealth, Biblical knowledge, or success in ministry. He was a poor man who only had a third-grade education and therefore was denied even ordination as a deacon. His "greatness" was because he strove with all his heart to understand the scriptures, to apply them to his life and to share them with others. He was the personification of Jesus' answer to this question:

*<sup>36</sup> "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" <sup>37</sup> Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." <sup>38</sup> This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup> And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' <sup>40</sup> All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."* Matthew 22:36-40

### *Will we all Agree?*

As we examine the scriptures, I am certain that we will not all reach the same conclusions and that is OK. There are many men that I deeply respect who do not understand scripture exactly as I do. Indeed, my own understanding of scripture continually matures as I study it. Paul said,

*<sup>12</sup> Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.*

1 Corinthians 13:12 (NIV)

There are also some things that cannot be conclusively proven from the scriptures. We may have strong opinions about them and they may be very important to us. However, such matters must not be points of division.

There are also times that things become very clear to us from scripture, but we will still struggle with or even resist them for one reason or another. Change is hard, and it can be very costly. Others may help and encourage us in such situations, but it is ultimately a personal struggle between us and the Holy Spirit. I have been in this position. Even though I wanted to please the LORD in every area of my life, I still struggled for over a year before I finally made a necessary change. During that struggle, it was the kind and gentle encouragement of one person that the Holy Spirit used to help draw me to where He was leading me.

### *What is the Reward of this Study?*

Through this study you will see a new depth in the scriptures. You will see that most of the so-called “errors” and “contradictions” in the Bible that skeptics love to point to are simply verses taken out of context. Likewise, many of the “hard to understand” verses in the New Testament will become clear when we examine their foundations in the Old Testament.

The Bible may very well become an entirely new book to you as you begin to see it as a single, continuous story of God’s plan of redemption for mankind. You will also gain a clearer view of God which will dispel misrepresentations such as the “angry and condemning ‘God of the Old Testament’” being so different than the loving and accepting “God of the New Testament.”

As a result, you will come away with an unshakable confidence in the scriptures that will both strengthen your personal walk with God and help you to share the Gospel with others.

## Warnings?

During this study, you will hear many new terms. For example, I will sometimes use the Hebrew names Yeshua and Yahweh in place of their English counterparts, Jesus and The LORD. I will frequently use the term “Torah” to refer to the first five books of the Bible that were written by Moses. “Torah” is the Hebrew word for “instructions” which I feel is more expressive of God’s heart than the word “Law.” Also, in the New Testament, the term “The Law” can mean either the commandments of God or the “Talmud” which is the traditions of the ancient Jewish teachers (some good – some bad). For some people, learning new terms is fun but for others it can be frustrating. Since our goal is greater understanding and not confusion, if a term is unfamiliar – *PLEASE* – ask for an explanation.

You will also be exposed to many ideas that you may never have considered before. Depending on your background, you may find this to be exciting or very threatening. Sadly, it seems that people can “prove” anything by picking a handful of verses from the Bible. Therefore, our standard in this class will be to test everything against the *entirety* of scripture.

Such study is a lot of work but, in a world of half-truths and deceptions there is a lot at stake. Most of the people around us will never even read, let alone study scripture. The only scripture they know comes from the twisted and perverted view they get from the media and from observing the lives of those who call themselves Christians. Therefore, we all must strive to understand the scriptures correctly, to live lives that honor God and draw people to a saving knowledge of Him.

Please notice also that when I am quoting long passages of scripture, I will sometimes leave out sections to clarify the meaning of the passage. I hate to do this because this is how people who intentionally distort and twist scriptures “clarify” them for you. I pray that I never change the meaning of a passage that way. Nevertheless, after each class I will email my notes to you and I encourage you to review the complete scriptures in context.