

What Does The Bible Say?

In our last study, we discovered that we need to use a Bible that is very accurate to the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek in which the Bible was written if we do not know the original languages. Some Bibles insert words and sentences that are not in the original writings of the prophets and the apostles. Consequently, the KJV, NKJV, NASB, ESV, and the new Legacy Standard Bible (LSB) Bibles were recommended for Bible study.

We also discovered that we should not be controlled by the verse and chapter divisions as we read the Bible. Chapter and verse divisions were added after the original books of the Bible were written to help us locate various statements or passages in the Bible. Sometimes the chapter and verse divisions leave the wrong impression that a new subject or event is beginning.

We also found that some Bibles tell us that certain words and verses perhaps should not be included in the Bible. If so, we should avoid establishing any doctrine based on these questionable passages alone. Unfortunately, some Bibles do not tell us that certain words and verses are in doubt. They just delete them. So, we encourage you to look for a Bible that has not deleted them. For example, check to determine if Matthew 17:21 is in your Bible. It does not appear in some Bibles. Another example would be Mark 16:9-20. These are two examples.

What Does The Bible Say? Those were the steps we need to take in preparation for this study. In this study we will provide an example of discovering “What does the Bible say?” We will begin with an exercise to discover what we must do to learn what the Bible says.

In the last study, we introduced the acronym SMA. The “S” symbolizes “What does it say?” The “M” represents “What does it mean?” The “A” stands for “How does it apply?”

Then we learned that we need to first read a Bible passage to discover what it says. When we read the verse or passage the first time, we should try to capture the big picture or the overview.

Observe and Observe! We are going to learn how to perform the second reading of a passage of Scripture. It is called observe and observe again. Observe every detail. This may seem elementary or ridiculous, but it is not. So, we will begin with a story that has been used in many seminaries

to teach people how to read the Bible. Please read every sentence of the story. The story is provided by Diana Rome Peebles. It is titled, *The Student, the Fish, and Agassiz*.

It was more than fifteen years ago that I entered the

laboratory of Professor Agassiz, and told him I had enrolled my name in the scientific school as a student of natural history. He asked me a few questions about my object in coming, my antecedents generally, the



mode in which I afterwards proposed to use the knowledge I might acquire, and finally, whether I wished to study any special branch. To the latter I replied that while I wished to be well grounded in all departments of zoology, I purposed to devote myself specially to insects.

“When do you wish to begin?” he asked.

“Now,” I replied.

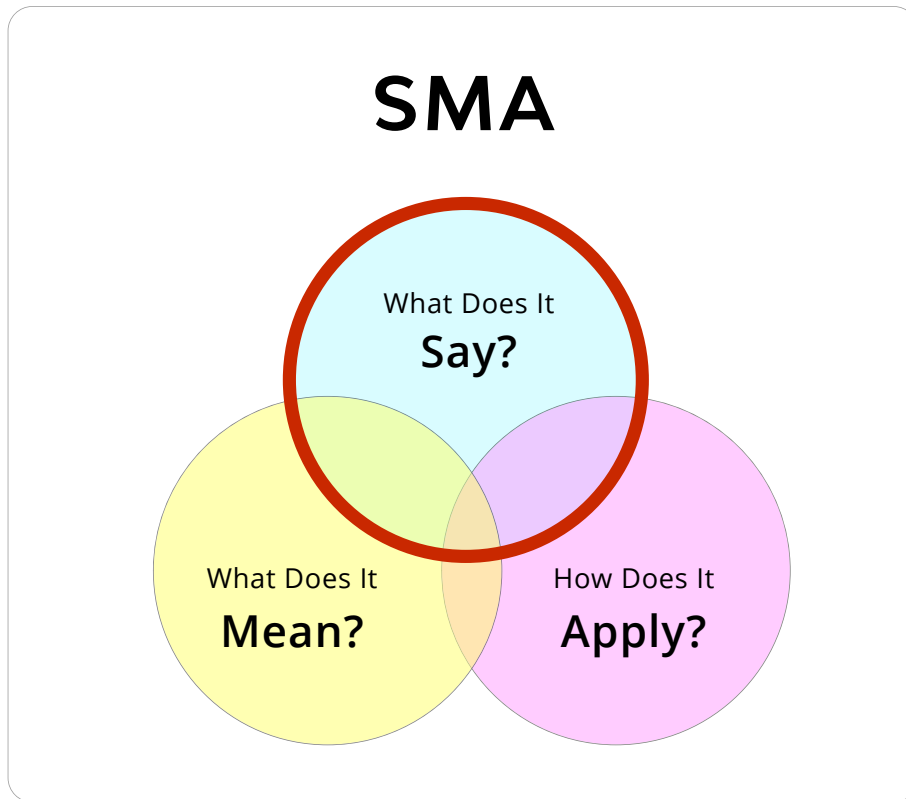
This seemed to please him, and with an energetic “Very well,” he reached from a shelf a huge jar of specimens in yellow alcohol.

“Take this fish,” he said, “and look at it; we call it a *Hæmulon*; by and by I will ask what you have seen.”

With that he left me, but in a moment returned with explicit instructions as to the care of the object entrusted to me.

“No man is fit to be a naturalist,” said he, “who does not know how to take care of specimens.”

I was to keep the fish before me in a tin tray, and occasionally moisten the surface with alcohol from the jar, always taking care to replace the stopper tightly. Those



were not the days of ground glass stoppers, and elegantly shaped exhibition jars; all the old students will recall the huge, neckless glass bottles with their leaky, wax-besmeared corks, half-eaten by insects and begrimed with cellar dust. Entomology was a cleaner science than ichthyol-

ogy, but the example of the professor who had unhesitatingly plunged to the bottom of the jar to produce the fish was infectious; and though this alcohol had “a very ancient and fish-like smell,” I really dared not show any aversion within these sacred precincts, and treated the alcohol as though it were pure water. Still I was conscious of a passing feeling of disappointment, for gazing at a fish did not commend itself to an ardent entomologist. My friends at home, too, were annoyed, when they discovered that no amount of eau de cologne would drown the perfume which haunted me like a shadow.

In ten minutes I had seen all that could be seen in that fish, and started in search of the professor, who had, however, left the museum; and when I returned, after lingering over some of the odd animals stored in the upper apartment, my specimen was dry all over. I dashed the fluid over the fish as if to resuscitate it from a fainting-fit, and looked with anxiety for a return of a normal, sloppy appearance. This little excitement over, nothing was to be done but return to a steadfast

gaze at my mute companion. Half an hour passed, an hour, another hour; the fish began to look loathsome. I turned it over and around; looked it in the face -- ghastly; from behind, beneath, above, sideways, at a three-quarters view -- just as ghastly. I was in despair; at an early hour, I concluded that lunch was necessary; so with infinite relief, the fish was carefully replaced in the jar, and for an hour I was free.

On my return, I learned that Professor Agassiz had been at the museum, but had gone and would not return for several hours. My fellow students were too

busy to be disturbed by continued conversation. Slowly I drew forth that hideous fish, and with a feeling of desperation again looked at it. I might not use a magnifying glass; instruments of all

kinds were interdicted. My two hands, my two eyes, and the fish; it seemed a most limited field. I pushed my fingers down its throat to see how sharp its teeth were. I began to count the scales in the different rows until I was convinced that that was nonsense. At last a happy thought struck me -- I would draw the fish; and now with surprise I began to discover new features in the creature. Just then the professor returned.

“That is right,” said he, “a pencil is one of the best eyes. I am glad to notice, too, that you keep your specimen wet and your bottle corked.”

With these encouraging words he added --
“Well, what is it like?”

He listened attentively to my brief rehearsal of the structure of parts whose names were still unknown to me; the fringed gill-arches and movable operculum; the pores of the head, fleshly lips, and lidless eyes; the lateral line, the spinous fin, and forked tail; the compressed and arched body. When I had finished, he waited as if expecting more, and then, with an air of disappointment:



Haemulon
“Grunt Fish”

“You have not looked very carefully; why?” he continued, more earnestly, “you haven’t seen one of the most conspicuous features of the animal, which is as plainly before your eyes as the fish itself. Look again;

look again!” And he left me to my misery.

I was piqued; I was mortified. Still more of that wretched fish? But now I set myself to the task with a will, and discovered one new thing after another, until I saw how just the professor’s criticism had been. The afternoon passed quickly, and when, towards its close, the professor inquired,

“Do you see it yet?”

“No,” I replied. “I am certain I do not, but I see how little I saw before.”

“That is next best,” said he earnestly, “but I won’t hear you now; put away your fish and go home; perhaps you will be ready with a better answer in the morning. I will examine you before you look at the fish.”

This was disconcerting; not only must I think of my fish all night, studying, without the object before me, what this unknown but most visible feature might be, but also, without reviewing my new discoveries, I must give an exact account of them the next day. I had a bad memory; so I walked home by Charles River in a distracted state, with my two perplexities.

The cordial greeting from the professor the next morning was reassuring; here was a man who seemed to be quite as anxious as I that I should see for myself what he saw.

“Do you perhaps mean,” I asked, “that the fish has symmetrical sides with paired organs?”

His thoroughly pleased, “Of course, of course!” repaid the wakeful hours of the previous night. After he had discoursed most happily and enthusiastically -- as he always did -- upon the importance of this point, I ventured to ask what I should do next.

“Oh, look at your fish!” he said, and left me again to my own devices. In a little more than an hour he returned and heard my new catalogue.

“That is good, that is good!” he repeated, “but that is not all; go on.” And so for three long days, he placed that fish before my eyes, forbidding me to look at anything else, or to use any artificial aid. “Look, look, look,” was his repeated injunction.

This was the best entomological lesson I ever had -- a lesson whose influence was extended to the details of every subsequent study; a legacy the professor has left to me, as he left it to many others, of inestimable value,

which we could not buy, with which we cannot part.

A year afterwards, some of us were amusing ourselves with chalking outlandish beasts upon the blackboard. We drew prancing star-fishes; frogs in mortal combat; hydro-headed worms; stately crawl-fishes, standing on their tails, bearing aloft umbrellas; and grotesque fishes, with gaping mouths and staring eyes. The professor came in shortly after, and was as much amused as any at our experiments. He looked at the fishes.

“Haemulons, every one of them,” he said; “Mr. ----- drew them.”

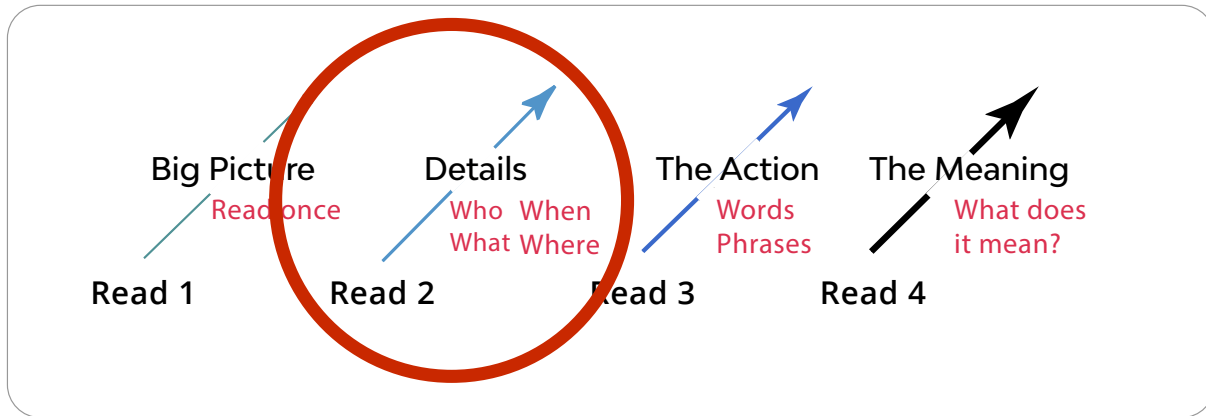
True; and to this day, if I attempt a fish, I can draw nothing but Haemulons.

The fourth day a second fish of the same group was placed beside the first, and I was bidden to point out the resemblances and differences between the two; another and another followed, until the entire family lay before me, and a whole legion of jars covered the table and surrounding shelves; the odor had become a pleasant perfume; and even now, the sight of an old six-inch worm-eaten cork brings fragrant memories!

The whole group of Haemulons was thus brought into review; and whether engaged upon the dissection of the internal organs, preparation and examination of the bony framework, or the description of the various parts, Agassiz’s training in the method of observing facts in their orderly arrangement, was ever accompanied by the urgent exhortation not to be content with them.

“Facts are stupid things,” he would say, “until brought into connection with some general law.”

At the end of eight months, it was almost with reluctance that I left these friends and turned to insects; but what I gained by this outside experience has been of greater value than years of later investigation in my



favorite groups.¹

Now what did we learn from this story? What was the benefit of studying and studying the fish for hours and hours for days and days? The answer is obvious. Just as with the fish, the more we study a verse, a passage, or a chapter, the more we will learn about it. The principle is simple. If you want to learn a lot about the passage, you will read it and read it and keep looking at the details. You will get out of it exactly what you put into it. If you read it quickly, you will not get much. If you spend time looking at it again repetitively, you will get more out of it. It is a simple principle and that is what the article taught us.

There is another principle that we must remember. When the Holy Spirit wrote a verse, a passage, or a chapter, He gave us details that were important. All too often, we think the details are not important. We are often looking for the big picture and there is nothing wrong with the big picture. In fact, the first time we read a passage, we want the big picture. It helps us understand what is happening. When you go back and look at the details, you should ask, “Why did the Holy Spirit tell me this? Why did the Holy Spirit tell me about this person and that person? Why did the Holy Spirit tell me this person did that and this person did that? Why did the Holy Spirit give me all of these details?”

Now admittedly, some of the details are probably not all that significant. But other details can be very important. So, the message of the article is that what you put into your Bible

study is what you are going to get out of your Bible study. That is the significance of having read the article.

Reading Example — Read John 6:16-28. Next, we will read John 6:16 – 28. The passage says,

Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea, and after getting into a boat, they started to cross the sea to Capernaum. It had already become dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea began to be stirred up because a strong wind was blowing. Then, when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat; and they were frightened. But He said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” So they were willing to receive Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going. The next day the crowd that stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other small boat there, except one, and that Jesus had not entered with His disciples into the boat, but that His disciples had gone away alone. There came other small boats from Tiberias near to the place where they ate the bread after the Lord had given thanks. So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they themselves got into the small boats, and came to Capernaum seeking Jesus. When they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, “Rabbi, when did You get here?”

Jesus answered them and said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not

1. Illustration by Diana Rome Peebles, 1998
Courtesy of Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Division of Marine Fisheries.

work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal.” Therefore they said to Him, “What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?” John 6:16-28 (NASB)

This very important passage is about Jesus walking on the water. Some things happen to the disciples and there is the presence of a crowd. We are at the first step in Bible study, “What does it say?” Our temptation as soon as we read Scripture is to start applying it to ourselves. We enjoy doing that. But the first step in Bible study is to ask, “What does it say?” In order to discover what a passage says, we need to ask some questions. We want to start with the easy questions and then move to the more difficult questions. The easy questions are who, what, when, and where. The more difficult questions are why and how. Here is a list of all of the questions.

1. Who is mentioned in the passage?
2. What happened?
3. When did it happen?
4. Where did it happen?
5. Why did it happen?
6. How did it happen?
7. Who said what to whom?

Who Is Mentioned In The Passage? As you answer these questions, you will discover that Jesus, the disciples, and a crowd of people are mentioned in the passage. That answers the “who?” question.

What Happened? Answers to the “what happened?” question results in many details. It is the details that make this account fascinating. We are told that Jesus sent the disciples across the sea to Capernaum (v. 17). We are told it is dark (v. 17), and a strong wind occurred while they were rowing (v. 18-19). We are also told they had rowed about 3-4 miles, but we are not told why that is important. Verse 19 adds that Jesus came walking on the water toward the boat. When He came near, the disciples became fearful. Verse 20 says that Jesus told them to not be afraid. Then verse 21 says that after

Jesus climbed into the boat, immediately it arrived on the other side of the sea. This is an amazing miracle that we often miss. In fact, I had never noticed that miracle before. I have always been enraptured with the fact that Jesus came walking on the water. He got into the boat and the sea became calm. But in the past, I had missed the fact that as soon as He got into the boat, it was immediately on the other side of the sea! This is an amazing, miraculous detail that the Holy Spirit includes for us. Then a crowd came looking for Jesus and they wanted to know, “How did you get here?” These events are extraordinary!

When Did It Happen? Now, you don’t have to take these questions in the order that I am suggesting. You can scramble them any way you want, but I would suggest that you start with the easy questions.

The answer to the “when?” question is that the events occurred in the evening and in the dark. The major event occurred on the sea at the fourth watch of the night.

Where Did It Happen? There are multiple answers to the “where?” question. We are told these events occurred on a sea. We are not told the sea was the Sea of Galilee. It could have been the Dead Sea or the Mediterranean Sea. In verse 17, we are told the disciples were headed for Capernaum. That would suggest the Sea of Galilee because Capernaum was next to the Sea of Galilee in the north. We are told the disciples started out on the east side of the sea opposite Capernaum. We are also told they tried rowing across the sea. Eventually, they arrived on the other side of the sea.

Why Did It Happen? The “why?” question is not given to us. That is one of the hard questions. We are not given any “whys?” except for the fact that the crowd came looking for Jesus. Then Jesus said, “You were not looking for Me because of what I did, you came looking for me because you ate some bread.”

How Did It Happen? Nor is the answer to the “how?” question given to us. Usually, we cannot answer these questions because they are not given. They lead us to the meaning of the passage. I have a question, “Is this the same account as given in Matthew where we are told that Peter gets out of the water and walks on the water? Is the account in John the same as the accounts in Mark and Matthew? The answer is yes. It

is the same account. It is not recorded in Luke. This event followed the feeding of the 5,000. You can see that in John 6:1-15. The feeding of the five thousand is one of the few miracles that occurs in all four Gospels. This one occurs in only three gospels. Why did Luke leave it out? We are not told. The Holy Spirit moved Luke to leave it out for a reason. Matthew tells us that Peter walked on water. Why does Mark not record it? Why did John not record it? I do not have the answer. Each of the Gospel writers included what the Holy Spirit wanted them to include. So, Matthew gave us some details. Mark gave us some additional details and John gave us some additional details. If you were to compare all of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, you would find that each of the Gospels provides additional information that are very significant.

Who Said What To Whom? This passage gives us the answer to the “Who said so?” question. Jesus spoke these words,

It is I; do not be afraid. John 6:20 (NASB)

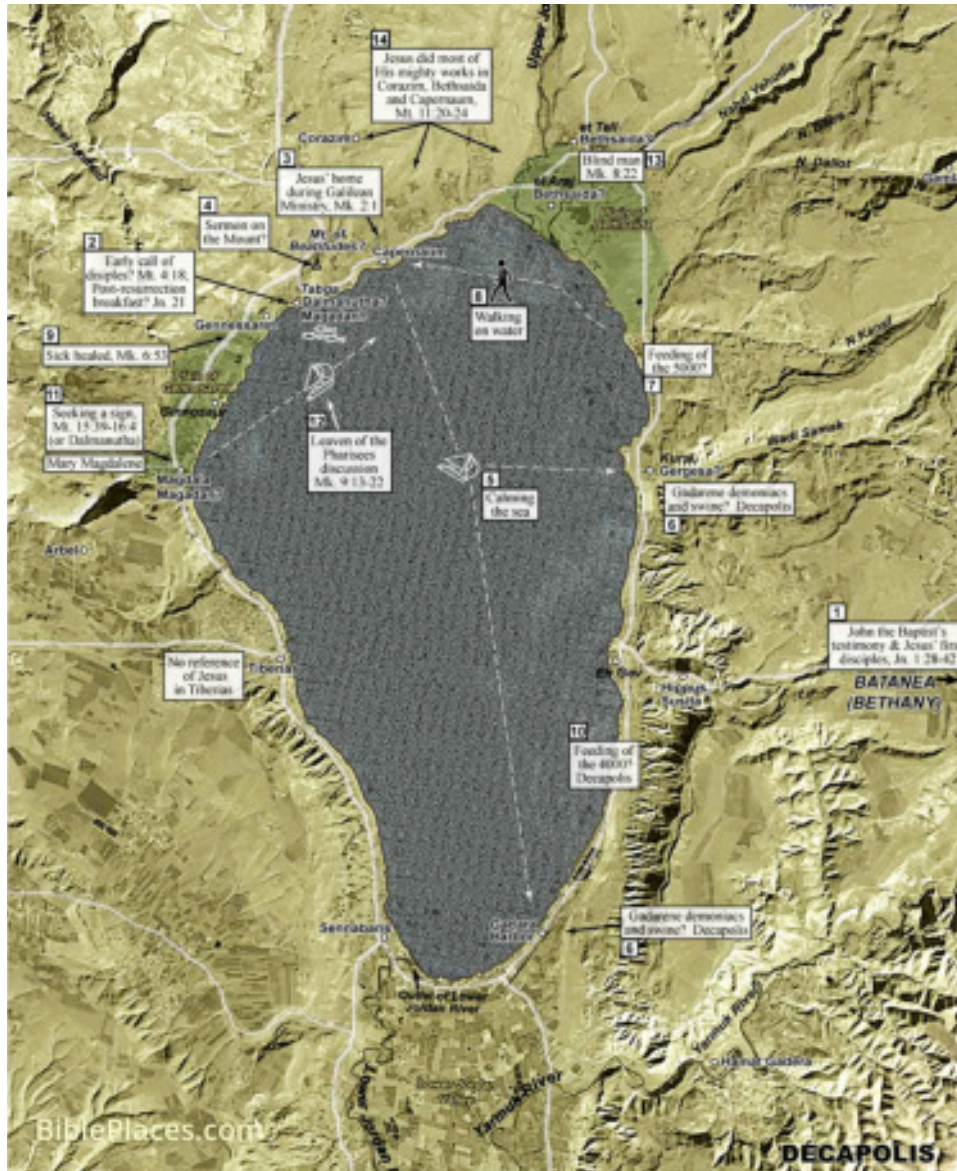
Who is in the crowd in verses 22-28? Verse 23 says that the crowd had come from Tiberias, which was near where they ate the bread. This immediately reveals we are missing some information. In order to obtain more information, we need to read the context. That is, what came before and after this event. If we read John 6:1-15, we learn the crowd had just

come from the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand . That agrees with verse 26.

Other Gospels Sometime Provide More Information. Sometimes the other gospels will provide us with more information. That is true for this account. Therefore, the reader is now encouraged to read Matthew 14:22-26 and Mark 6:45-54.

The gospel of Matthew helps us learn some new information. Matthew 14:22-23 tells us that Jesus

ordered the disciples into the boat before He went up on the mountain. We are also told that Jesus was alone on the mountain, while the disciples were on the sea. Verse 24 adds that the boat was being battered by the wind and waves. Verse 25 tells us it was the fourth watch of the night when He came walking to the disciples. Verse 26 gives us another answer to



“Who said so?” That is, the disciples said,

It is a ghost. Matthew 14:26 (NASB)

All three Gospels tell us that the disciples were afraid.

Verses 28-31 tells us that Peter wanted to walk on the water and Jesus enabled him to walk on the water.

Verse 32 says that the wind stopped when Jesus stepped into the boat. Then verse 33 says the disciples worshiped Him.

The answer to the question, “What was the disciples’ destiny?” provides more information. In verse 17, we are told that after getting into a boat, the disciples started to cross the sea to Capernaum. But Matthew 14:34 says they crossed over to Gennesaret. Mark 6:53 says,

When they had crossed over, they came to a land at Gennesaret and moored to the shore. Mark 6:53 (NASB)

That would suggest that they originally intended to go to Capernaum but did not get there. They ended up going to Gennesaret. This little detail may not seem too important.

But the question, “What was their path across the sea?” prepares us for another question. The fact that John 6:17 says the disciples were going to Capernaum and then two Gospels say they actually went to Gennesaret helps us to understand *the path that they took across the sea*. All of this is important because the Holy Spirit is giving us a number of little details for a reason.

A map from a book titled, *Satellite Bible Maps* provides more help. You can buy it at Bibleplaces.com. The author has guessed that the feeding of the 5,000 occurred on the east side of the Sea of Galilee just below the Plain of Bethsaida. In reality, we do not know the precise location. Since John tells us that the disciples had planned to arrive at the city of Capernaum but actually arrived at Gennesaret, this helps us understand that most likely the disciples crossed in the middle of the sea.

Another information question is, “What are the dimensions of the Sea of Galilee?” To answer the question, I used a

Bible dictionary. I should add quickly that not all Bible dictionaries provide the same information. A number of Bible dictionaries do not even provide the dimensions of the Sea of Galilee. I finally found one that stated the dimensions were 14.4 miles in length and 8.6 miles wide. Since John tells us that they were 3-4 miles into the sea, and they are near the widest part of the sea, then we know they were roughly in the middle of the lake. Research reveals that Olympic rowers could have crossed the sea in about two hours. We do not know if the disciples had the same skills of an Olympic rowing team; but as experienced fishermen, they were not amateurs. Therefore, maybe it would have taken them three hours to cross the sea.

Our next question is, “What time of the night did Jesus walk on the water?” The Holman Bible Dictionary says a watch is,

A division of time in which soldiers or others were on duty to guard something. They are listed as “evening,” “midnight,” “cockcrowning,” and “morning” (Mark 13:35 NAS).²

Other information tells us that the first watch was from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. The second watch was 9 p.m. to midnight. The third watch was from midnight to 3 a.m., and the fourth watch was from 3 a.m. to 6 a.m.

The most important new information is found in verse 52 when we are told that the disciples had hardened hearts.

Questions That Go Beyond “What Does It Say?” So far, we have tried to just ask questions that reveal the facts. We have avoided these two questions:

1. Why did the disciples do that?
2. Why did Jesus do what He did?

We have avoided them because they border on trying to understand the meaning of the passage. In order to answer these questions, we would have to assume facts that are not explicitly given to us. We are never told why the disciples were afraid or why they had hard hearts.

We are also not told why Jesus did not initially get into

2. Trent Butler. Holman Bible Dictionary. 1991, p. 1399.

the boat with the disciples, why He waited to walk out on the water, or why He allowed Peter to walk on the water. To answer such questions goes beyond “What does it say?” It borders on the meaning!

Conclusion. We have discovered what the passage says. Now let us conclude by discovering what is the meaning. We will be discussing “What does it mean?” But now let us discuss the meaning before we end.

We have learned that Jesus came walking to the disciples on the water. It is the fourth watch. The disciples have been rowing for about nine hours. It should have taken them only two or three hours to cross the Sea of Galilee. They had been working really hard to cross for a long time. That tells us the storm was bad. Maybe they were in panic at this point.

Also, we are told that Jesus was on a mountain. Mark 6:47 gives us very important information. It says,

When it was evening, the boat was in the middle of the sea, and He was alone on the land. Mark 6:47 (NASB)

This confirms that the disciples are in the middle of the sea. Verse 48 adds,

Seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, at about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them. Mark 6:48 (NASB)

The picture is incredible. Jesus was on the mountain. The disciples had been rowing for about nine hours. They were supposed to be in Capernaum, but they had been blown south. They were about 3-4 miles away. It was dark. The time was probably between 3 a.m. to 4 a.m. There was a storm on the sea when Jesus saw them. Amazing! Jesus saw them when they were 3-4 miles away in the dark in a storm! That was incredible.

Now we will jump for a second. Do not miss this. This reveals something about Jesus. What does that tell us about Jesus? He is God. He was on the mountain and was able to see the disciples 3-4 miles away struggling at the oars.

When Jesus came, the disciples were frightened. Why?

Mark has said in verses 51-52.

Then He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were utterly astonished, for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened. Mark 6:51-52 (NASB)

We are told they had not learned anything from the miracle of the loaves. Do you see the importance of context? The feeding of the 5,000 came before this event on the sea. They did not understand the message of the feeding of the 5,000. We are told by the Holy Spirit that their hearts were hardened. The first time I realized what Mark was saying, I thought, “Wait a minute. The disciples have been with Jesus for a long time at this point, about two years. What do you mean, their hearts are hardened?” Mark 8:17 is a great cross-reference. Mark 8:17 says,

And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart?” Mark 8:17 (NASB)

The point is that they did not understand the message of the feeding of the 5,000. They did not understand what that miracle revealed about Jesus.

What is the application for us? Is it possible that we can miss the message of Scripture too? Why is it possible that we might miss the message too? One reason is sin! Sin can block us from understanding the message. In John 14:21, Jesus said if we keep His commandments, He will reveal Himself to us! We have discovered in 1 Corinthians 3:1 that Paul wanted to teach the Corinthians but could not because they were in sin. Paul said because they were in sin, he could not give them solid meat. He had to give them milk. The message was that they could not understand the more difficult concepts of Scripture. He had to give them the simple things. The disciples also missed the meaning of what Jesus had done.

Now what does that mean about the disciples? Did they have sin in their heart? I will just give you my opinion. I am speculating. It is important to understand that I am specu-

lating. Scripture does not tell us. We know that the disciples had a tremendous problem with pride. Numerous times Jesus rebuked them for wanting to be first in the kingdom. They wanted to be first among one another. That occurred early in the ministry. In the upper room, Jesus washed their feet as a rebuke to them and to teach them an important lesson. Now that is just my view. I do not know if I am right. But it is important to know that the disciples were rebuked for having a hardened heart.

We know Jesus ordered them to cross the sea. Why did He do that? Why do you think Jesus sent them across the sea? I believe Jesus sent them across the sea because He wanted to teach them a lesson about Himself.

I have another question. Why did Jesus wait nine hours before He went to them? Because He had a very important lesson for them. He wanted to wait until it was very dark. He wanted to wait until they learned that they could not rescue themselves. Maybe He wanted to wait until the storm was at its worst or at its peak. Jesus had a very important lesson for them and so He waited. He could have gone to them earlier and saved them from all the pain, grief, and anguish. But He did not do that. James 2 tells us that God allows trials in our lives. Hebrews 4:16 actually tells us that we can pray and God will grant us peace and mercy in the time of need. If you look at the Greek text, the Greek phrase at the end implies that He comes at the opportune time. He comes at the right time - not when we want Him to come. Jesus waited about nine hours before He came because He had a message for them. The message was He is God! That was the message and they missed it at the feeding of the 5,000. Who else can create food? They missed it! They had a hardened heart. I wonder, what did they think He was doing? How did they think He did that? Somehow, they missed it. There was a more important message than that Jesus could walk on the water. The message was that Jesus who is the Christ is God! He was and is God! That was the message of the passage. Now there can be other applications the Holy Spirit has for individuals, but I believe that the core message of the passage is that Jesus is God.

So, at the conclusion of the message, we have jumped to meaning and application. How did we get there? We laid out the details of what the passage said. Then we started putting

the pieces together, moved to the meaning of the passage, and then to the application.