

## Academic research and the Internet since 2006-2008

In my previous blog post where I shared the history of the process of referee and peer review, I shared how the literature in ancient time was reserved to the elite—those who could read and write. There were no international orthographic and writing standards as we do today (even so today, modern linguists don't always agree, and it's not flawless and uniform). In addition, think of the fact that ancients had to manually write on, and read off, clay tablets, stone tablets, animal-skin parchments or scrolls, papyri, codex and codices. The European printing press around 1440-1450 CE really helped us move forward as the human race raced toward literary gluttony. The Renaissance and the Age of Reason were revolutionary in terms of Greco-Roman literature and art as well as intellectual criticism and reason, respectively. Science and philosophy advanced well into the modern era (mid-1900s) as well as modern technology into our current time.

### Staying up-to-date with the latest research

I've encountered some Christian pastors, elders and layman during the past several years that seem to have a hard time being up-to-date with the latest academic research with all of its arguments, viewpoints and resources in Biblical Studies (not to mention Food and Nutrition Science, or any other field of study in which we might have some interest). The problem is that some people insist that their viewpoint on a particular subject is the correct one, *but* at the same time they only display complete unfamiliarity with all the viewpoints and their nuances, and also make obvious blunders while doing so.

Before I move on, let me clarify at this point that I do realize that I was there at some point in the past. I was the one who did not really know—about a dozen years ago—and yet displayed a witty character thinking that I did in fact know. It appears that the less we know when we initiate some research into a subject, the more we think we know. It correspondingly appears that the more we learn about a subject in an objective way over several years, the more we realize that we know very little. We may realize, then, that some specialists out there actually know far more, and that we will probably never attain their level of knowledge and understanding.

Moving on, I want people to slowly and gently recognize where they actually stand, and how they can move forward without embarrassing themselves in front of, or in confrontation against, other individuals who are genuine academic researchers (students and scholars alike). My motive is not to appear as if I know everything (not

true!), or appear as if I know better than others (although it does apply at times!), or be filled with arrogance and pride (which is biblically sinful, yet socially and psychologically unhealthy). My motive is to educate others with what I have learned in the respective fields that I have studied, and with what we can all learn from objective academic resources as opposed to idiosyncratic points of view—and that are perhaps even already refuted or rebutted.

Some Christians in the ministry that are twice my age and that are supposed to be far more acquainted with Biblical Studies have displayed in the past antiquated knowledge and outdated, refuted interpretative viewpoints. It's as if they have never moved passed their studies over 20-40 years ago. It's as if they have remained stuck in the past. Some years ago, some of them have exhibited an unfair and angry attitude when I have disagreed with them over some Christian or textual matters. They had not even let me fully unpack an explanation. They simply jumped to conclusions. It's OK. I'm not writing this to blame and point fingers. But I'm here to share Biblical Studies. It would have been alright to become upset as long as they would have showed a good handle of the latest data and viewpoints already put forth in academia—but they did not. To my great disappointment, some have overreacted and uncritically accused me of various "heretical" viewpoints that do not represent who I am nor what I actually believe. But all my conflicts with them have been resolved through further discussions and clarifications. Read my homepage and my Introduction again. I mention "knowledge," "behavior," and "attitude." I do realize that I am not perfect. I do not proclaim to be flawless, but I do strive to be careful how I behave with others, and I try to encourage individuals to imitate other people out there that do in fact show a good attitude through disagreements (whether they are Christian or not).

### **Relying on older studies without considering newer ones**

I probably carried this blog post a bit too far. Let me come back to my main subject: academic research and the Internet since 2006-2008. Some Christian pastors, elders and layman rely on older studies from the 1950s-1990s, and early 2000s, and they do not seem to be aware of the current status of the viewpoints that they espouse. Of course, there are exceptions. Not everything that is old is wrong and not everything that is new is right. This issue about relying on older studies equally applies to Christians out there that get into personal studies of the Bible and independently search through the Internet to read some resources on the Bible to help them interpret it. This endeavor is acceptable and recommended for Christians. I'm not discouraging that. However, a lot of them fall into common trappings and commit exegetical mistakes or simply misunderstand by doing basic reading—and rarely

some others generate gross mistakes. We all make various mistakes. We all eventually do in personal studies or scholarship. Some younger Christians read the Bible a bit, but do not study much, or even at all (Bible reading is not study!). When we study texts, artifacts or philosophical views in an academic way, however, we ought to study them in light of the latest arguments, debates, findings and scholarly exchanges. Why? At times, it's a matter of reconsidering the interpretation of available data. At other times, recent discoveries in ancient languages, manuscripts, archaeology, and the like, can shift scholarly views and consensus on any given matter. Usually, such discoveries do not affect basic doctrinal teaching, and so overall do not affect the Church's teaching—and I have in view Protestant doctrinal teaching [and somewhat Catholic if it happens to overlap or be the same], but not Jehovah's Witnesses doctrines! Normally, such discoveries only affect peripheral details and technical articulations on some textual viewpoints. So, I'm not suggesting that only scholars can read and interpret the Bible. I'm only referring to textual observations that normally only affect peripheral details throughout the biblical texts. It could be related to languages and translation, book authorship, and the like. Keep in mind that my concern is Biblical Studies, not devotional reading for personal growth, evangelism or missionary work!

### **Academic research and the Internet**

The Internet has been available to the public since the late 1980s, early 1990s. But it was not until the mid-1990s and early 2000s that the Internet really became embraced by large populations through dial-up. I know some scholars started having their own websites during these time periods, but that's not what I want to refer to. Instead, I have in mind the fact that academic research exploded through the Internet when social media (Myspace, Facebook, YouTube) and blogs started to emerge between 2006-2008. This is really when it became easier for everyone around the earth to:

- Share information;
- Exchange viewpoints;
- Debate and publish it on YouTube;
- Publish academic papers and have them reviewed by scholars from different countries;
- Publish recorded academic conferences online.

## **Before the Internet, research was more laborious**

Let me clarify the point I want to get across to conclude the purpose of this blog post. If you want to get into some textual matters in Biblical Studies, you need to learn where you can access the top, best academic and scholarly resources on any matter through software and the Internet. You must familiarize yourself with them. You are responsible to do so if you want to teach, discuss or even debate them — because it's both possible today and it's easier than ever. I've done it and you can do it, too. In the past, before the Internet and before 2006-2008, one had to move around to get to the latest and best resources. One had to fly or drive from one place to another to attend a conference, or go to a library. One had to manually grab books and papers, and manually flip through pages. One had to manually count letters and words to get some statistics. One had to manually go through dictionaries and lexicons by flipping pages. All of this took even more considerable time 500 years ago, 1,000 years ago, 1,500 years ago, 2,000 ago, you get the picture. Today, we have Bible software both free (e.g. e-Sword) and paid (Logos.com or Accordancebible.com) that have been produced by knowledge contributors and/or expert scholars. There's even some free online Biblical Studies courses at [biblicaltraining.org](http://biblicaltraining.org). We no longer need to physically go to a library to pick up a book since we now have Amazon/Kindle, Logos, Galaxie, and the like. We have tablets, phones, desktops and laptops. Even Hebrew OT and Greek NT manuscripts are now accessible online for everyone to read and analyze. The amount of time it used to take a scholar to produce one book, one commentary, one article, one grammar was remarkable...but it only takes a fraction of the time today. The same applies for common Christians, although via the Internet. Do you get my point? The point is that scientific and scholarly understanding in the sciences and the humanities has greatly advanced during the past 12 years because of modern media! Therefore, you must update yourself with the latest arguments and data.

Some might point out that some elders are not used to software and the Internet. I understand. That's alright. But most scholars of their own age are up-to-date and have their own blogs, websites and other social media. Regardless, my blog is mostly aimed at younger adults who are not yet familiar with academic research, scholarship and science. It's for them to grow and learn...now is the time; we are in 2019!

I feel that I have a duty to share and demonstrate how accessible the latest and greatest Biblical Studies resources actually are. I will do so in another blog post.

## Outdated and refuted viewpoints in Biblical Studies

There are some older viewpoints in Biblical Studies that are no longer accepted in scholarship whatsoever. But some Christians find these older viewpoints online, read through them, and run with them *as if they were*: (1) newly discovered viewpoints, (2) reliable and up-to-date viewpoints, (3) or never-refuted viewpoints. This is the point I want to get across. It's OK if you do not know all of this information. It's OK if you make mistakes. We all make mistakes. I make mistakes. We all miss some things. We all make common errors. Scholars also make mistakes. That's why we have peer review and academic conferences. But I'm not here to show or teach you about scholarly mistakes. **This is not a blog for scholars; it's a blog for everyday Christians that are not familiar with research.** I'm here to share how to avoid mistakes that common Christians make. I have made all of the mistakes I have in mind. I went through them. We learn because we make mistakes. We become experts by making mistakes.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, everything I've said on this blog is aimed at research. It's not aimed at devotional, *personal* reading and study of the Bible. Devotional reading and personal study have their place in a Christian life. Missionary work and evangelism in the streets or in other countries have their place as well. Thus, everything I've said here is not aimed at these latter aspects of Christian ministry.

In the end, if you want to get into a difficult or controversial passage in the Bible, or into a controversial theological and philosophical issue (such as Suffering and Evil in the world), then you must become familiar with the latest and greatest scholarship (or science) about the matter. If not, then you must be more careful how you push forward your own understanding. **Everyone can have their own opinion, but not everyone can have their own data.** Data and viewpoints cannot be invented out of thin air. It requires tedious work, it requires knowledge of the field, it requires consideration of what has been said in the past by previous experts, it might even require that you go through peer review and academic conferences so that others who have proved mastery in any given field of study can judge or critique your own interpretation of the data and your own viewpoint. If you cannot or you do not want to do this then you must be more careful with what you say. Alternatively, you may simply study and compare the viewpoints that have already been proposed in academia and choose to espouse a particular viewpoint until—if ever—you become convinced of another viewpoint and shift views. I myself do so. I cannot invent data or come up with a new viewpoint that has never been put on the table out there in

scholarship or in science. All I can do is share what is out there and explain why I choose to adhere to one viewpoint or another, or how I get to interpret this or that while taking into account what is out there. You can learn to do the same like me. Some issues are more obvious than others. Other issues are less evident and require more guess work. Anyway, get out there and research...the right way.