
Together in Truth: How To Study the Bible

A Practical Guide for Home Bible Study Groups in The Church of God

1. Why Study the Bible This Way?

- **Foundation of Ministry:** Preaching and teaching depend on sound interpretation (2 Timothy 2:15).
 - **Guarding Truth:** Misinterpretation leads to error; proper study protects doctrine and practice.
 - **Transformation:** The Word is not just information—it is for correction, instruction, and equipping (2 Timothy 3:16–17).
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2. The Process of Interpretation

Biblical study involves several disciplines:

- **Hermeneutics** — the rules of interpretation.
 - **Exegesis** — applying those rules to a passage.
 - **Exposition** — comparing Scripture with Scripture to explain meaning clearly.
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3. Rules for Proper Interpretation

A. Grammatico-Historical Method (Literal)

- **Scripture interprets Scripture** (Isaiah 28:10; Acts 15:15).
- **One literal meaning** — words mean what they say unless context shows otherwise.
- **Scope of the book** — interpret verses in light of the book's purpose.
- **Context interprets text** — never lift verses out of their setting.
- **Historical setting matters** — know the time, culture, and audience.
- **Grammar counts** — pay attention to verb tenses, conjunctions, and sentence flow.
- **Author's intent** — respect what the writer meant, not what we wish it said.
- **Obvious meaning first** — God reveals, not obscures.

Example:

John 3:16 — Taken literally, God's love extends to the world, offering eternal life through belief in Christ. The grammar ("whosoever") shows inclusivity, not limitation.

B. Allegorical/Typological Method (Figurative)

- Used for **types, shadows, and prophecy**.
- Must agree with **New Testament revelation**.
- Principles repeat across generations (Ecclesiastes 3:15).
- Allegories must not contradict literal interpretation.

Example:

Galatians 4:22–31 — Paul interprets Abraham's two sons as allegories of law (Hagar) and grace (Sarah). This builds on the literal history but reveals a deeper spiritual truth.

C. Prophecy

- **Three dimensions:** historical, spiritual, and future.
- Always start with the **historical fulfillment**.
- Then consider spiritual and end-time applications.
- Interpretations must align with the historical fulfillment.

Example:

Amos 9:11–15 —

- Historically: fulfilled in the rebuilding of the temple.
 - Spiritually: fulfilled in the early church (Acts 15:16).
 - Future: fulfillment in the restoration of Israel and the last-days church.
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4. Guided Study: Applying the Rules

Let's walk through **Psalm 22:1** ("My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?").

Step 1: Context

- Written by David during suffering.
- A lament psalm expressing anguish.

Step 2: Grammatico-Historical

- Literal meaning: David feels abandoned by God.
- Historical setting: David faced persecution and despair.

Step 3: Scripture Interprets Scripture

- Compare with Matthew 27:46 — Jesus quotes this on the cross.

- The psalm foreshadows Christ's suffering.

Step 4: Allegorical/Typological

- David's cry becomes a prophetic type fulfilled in Jesus.
- The psalm moves from despair to victory, paralleling Christ's resurrection hope.

Step 5: Application

- For believers: God may feel distant in trials, but His plan is unfolding.
- For the church: Suffering often precedes glory; endurance leads to testimony.

5. Practical Steps for Home Bible Study

Weekly Flow

1. **Prayer & Reading** — Invite the Spirit's guidance.
2. **Observation** — What does the text say? (words, context, grammar).
3. **Interpretation** — What does it mean? (literal, historical, allegorical).
4. **Cross-References** — Where else does Scripture explain this?
5. **Application** — How do we live this truth today?
6. **Accountability** — Share one action step for the week.

6. Biblical Examples of Rules in Action

Rule	Example Passage	Application
Context interprets text	Philippians 4:13	Not about sports or success, but enduring hardship in Christ.
Scripture interprets Scripture	Hebrews 10:1 with Colossians 2:16–17	Old Testament sacrifices and Sabbaths are shadows fulfilled in Christ.
Allegory	Galatians 4:22–31	Abraham's sons illustrate law vs. grace.
Prophecy	Micah 5:2 → Matthew 2:5–6	Bethlehem prophecy fulfilled in Christ's birth.

7. Tools for Study

- **Translations:** Use word-for-word translations (KJV, NKJV, ESV, NASB).
- **Cross-reference Bible** (Thompson Chain, Treasury of Scripture Knowledge).

- **Bible dictionary/encyclopedia** for historical background.
 - **Concordance** for word studies.
 - **Study notebooks** for recording insights and applications.
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8. Closing Charge

The Word of God is living and active (Hebrews 4:12). To rightly divide it:

- **Respect the literal meaning.**
- **Recognize the prophetic and allegorical.**
- **Always let Scripture interpret Scripture.**
- **Apply truth to life and ministry.**

As Jesus said in John 5:39: *“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.”*

The following is a **set of practice passages** that your *Together in Truth Home Bible Study Initiative* groups can use to **apply the rules of interpretation**. Each passage below is chosen to highlight a specific hermeneutical principle, with guiding questions to help participants walk through the process.

Practice Passages for Bible Study Training

1. Context Interprets Text

Passage: Philippians 4:13 — *“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”*

- **Observation:** Often quoted as a promise of success in any endeavor.
 - **Guided Study:**
 - Read verses 10–12. What is Paul actually talking about?
 - How does the context of contentment in hardship shape the meaning?
 - Application: How does this verse encourage us in trials rather than in personal ambition?
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2. Scripture Interprets Scripture

Passage: Hebrews 10:1 with Colossians 2:16–17

- **Observation:** Both speak of the law, sacrifices, and holy days as “shadows.”

- **Guided Study:**

- What does Hebrews say about the law's sacrifices?
 - How does Colossians explain the fulfillment of those shadows?
 - Application: How does this safeguard us from returning to ritualism?
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3. Literal Meaning First

Passage: Exodus 14:21–22 — The parting of the Red Sea.

- **Observation:** Some interpret this as symbolic only.
 - **Guided Study:**
 - How does the text present this event?
 - Why is it important to affirm the literal miracle?
 - Application: What does this teach us about God's power to deliver His people?
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4. Allegory/Typology

Passage: Galatians 4:22–31 — Hagar and Sarah.

- **Observation:** Paul uses Old Testament history as allegory.
 - **Guided Study:**
 - What is the literal story in Genesis?
 - How does Paul apply it to law vs. grace?
 - Application: How does this help us understand the freedom we have in Christ?
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5. Historical Setting

Passage: Jeremiah 29:11 — *“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you...”*

- **Observation:** Often applied directly to individuals today.
- **Guided Study:**
 - Who was Jeremiah writing to? (Exiles in Babylon).
 - What was God's promise in that historical moment?
 - Application: How can we apply the principle of God's faithfulness without ignoring the original audience?

6. Prophecy with Multiple Fulfillments

Passage: Amos 9:11–12 (compare Acts 15:15–17).

- **Observation:** A prophecy about the “tabernacle of David.”
 - **Guided Study:**
 - What was the historical fulfillment?
 - How did James apply it to the early church?
 - What future fulfillment is still anticipated?
 - Application: How does this shape our understanding of God's unfolding plan?
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7. Obvious vs. Obscure Meaning

Passage: John 10:9 — “*I am the door.*”

- **Observation:** Clearly metaphorical, not literal.
 - **Guided Study:**
 - What is the obvious meaning of Jesus calling Himself “the door”?
 - How does the context (vv. 7–10) explain it?
 - Application: How does this truth guide us in evangelism and assurance?
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8. The Testimony of Jesus in Prophecy

Passage: Isaiah 53:4–6 with Matthew 8:16–17.

- **Observation:** Isaiah's prophecy fulfilled in Christ.
 - **Guided Study:**
 - What did Isaiah predict about the Servant?
 - How does Matthew show its fulfillment in Jesus?
 - Application: How does this strengthen our confidence in Christ as Messiah?
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How to Use These in Home Groups

- Assign one passage per week.
- Have participants walk through the **rules of interpretation** step by step.
- Encourage them to write down:

1. **Observation** (What does it say?)
 2. **Interpretation** (What does it mean?)
 3. **Application** (How do we live it?)
- Rotate leadership so each member practices guiding the group.
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