

How to Study the Bible

Part One: Getting Started

Resources

- Living by the Book, Howard Hendricks
- How to Study Your Bible, Kay Arthur
- The Hermeneutical Spiral, Grant Osborne

Three ways to approach Bible study

- A particular book of the Bible
- A particular topic of interest
- Evaluate religious literature

Tips for effective Bible study

- Always begin with prayer; the goal is life change
- Memorize the order of the books of the Bible and their abbreviations
- Buy a good Bible (readable font, sturdy binding, durable paper, margins, references)
- Keep your study aids within easy reach (translations, concordance, Bible handbook)
- Develop a system for taking notes (computer, composition book, notebook or folder)

What Bible study involves

- Taking certain steps in a certain order to guarantee a certain result (LBTB, page 35)
- Personal study of the Bible that produces life change

The 3 Step Process of Inductive Bible Study

Step One: Observation (what do I see?)

- Background information (author, audience, date, location, main theme)
- Literary genre (exposition, narrative, poetry, wisdom, prophecy, apocalyptic)
- Literary structure (a general outline that shows the development of the book)
- Grammatical structure (subject, main verb, object, clauses, phrases)
- Important terms (nouns, verbs, modifiers, prepositions, conjunctions)

Step Two: Interpretation (what does it mean?)

- List your unanswered questions (who, what, when, where, why, how)
- Use your Bible study aids to find the answers (concordance, handbook, atlas, etc.)

Step Three: Application (how does it apply?)

- How does it apply to me?
- How does it apply to others?

Two Key Points

“The Bible was not written to satisfy your curiosity but to help you conform to Christ's image. Not to make you a smarter sinner but to make you like the Savior. Not to fill your head with a collection of biblical facts but to transform your life” (LBTB, page 19).

“The more time you spend in observation, the less time you will have to spend in interpretation, and the more accurate will be your result. The less time you spend in observation, the more time you will have to spend in interpretation, and the less accurate will be your result” (LBTB, page 224).

How to Study the Bible

Part Two: Tools for Better Bible Study

Building your library

- Basic: 2 translations, concordance, handbook, Bible dictionary, concise commentary
- Intermediate: additional translations, an expository dictionary or lexicon, atlas
- Advanced: Bible encyclopedia, multivolume commentary (20-30 volumes)

Translations

- Pro: Translations illustrate the range of possible meanings for a given passage
- Con: Every translation is an interpretation, theological assumptions are made
- Recommended: literal, theologically balanced translations (done by committee)
- Not Recommended: obsolete translations, paraphrases, sectarian versions

Study Bibles

- Pros: combines the best features of a concordance, handbook, commentary, atlas
- Cons: hard to carry; study aids must be brief, limited value

Exhaustive Concordance/Lexicon

- Lists every occurrence of an English word for a particular translation, topical studies
- Allows you to find the Hebrew, Greek word being translated, basic definition
- Strong's Concordance had errors, poor dictionaries; corrected in newer editions
- Computer programs are often faster, easier to use; search Hebrew & Greek terms

Bible Handbook

- Useful background information arranged by book, chapter, and passage
- Often includes timelines, outlines, tables, charts, maps and pictures

Bible Dictionary: concise articles in alphabetical order (mini-encyclopedia)

Commentaries

- Verse-by-verse explanation of the text; deeper than a typical handbook
- Allow you to compare your research with that of learned scholars
- Provide solutions to complex problems, avoid naïve mistakes
- All commentaries are theologically biased, confusing debates

Expository Dictionary/Lexicon: helps define Greek, Hebrew terms

Bible Atlas: colorful maps, photographs that illustrate biblical history, geography

Bible Encyclopedia: many lengthy articles arranged in alphabetical order

Multivolume Commentaries

- Pros: offer greater depth and breadth of material over shorter works
- Cons: much more expensive, generally intended for scholars, pastors
- Cons: theological bias, often incomplete, uneven in their treatment

Bible Software

- Pros: many translations, Bible study aids, and powerful search capabilities
- Many different options to consider and prices to match; upgradeable
- Cons: inconvenient if you're not computer-savvy (power, portability)

How to Study the Bible

The following is a list of recommended (**R**) or suggested Bible study resources.

Translations

- | | |
|---|--------------------|
| R New American Standard Updated Edition (NASB95) | Lockman Foundation |
| R English Standard Version (ESV) | Crossway |
| New King James Version (NKJV) | Thomas Nelson |
| New International Version (NIV) | Zondervan |

Concordance/Lexicon

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| The Strongest NASB Exhaustive Concordance | Zondervan |
| The Strongest Strong's Exhaustive Concordance | Zondervan |
| The Crossway Comprehensive Concordance of the ESV | Crossway |
| The Strongest NIV Exhaustive Concordance | Zondervan |

Bible Handbooks

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| R The New Unger's Bible Handbook | Moody Press |
| R Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps & Charts | Thomas Nelson Publishers |
| Eerdmans' Handbook to the Bible | Eerdmans |

Bible Dictionary

- | | |
|--|----------------------------|
| R New Bible Dictionary, Third Edition | I. Howard Marshall, et al. |
| The New Unger's Bible Dictionary, Revised | Merrill F. Unger |

Concise Commentaries

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| The Bible Knowledge Commentary, 2 Vols. | John Walvoord, Roy Zuck |
| Expositor's Bible Commentary, 2 Vols. | K. Barker, J. Kohlenberger III |
| New Bible Commentary | G. J. Wenham |

Expository Dictionary

- | | |
|---|--------------------|
| R Expository Dictionary of Bible Words | Stephen D. Renn |
| Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary | William D. Mounce |
| Vines Expository Dictionary of OT, NT Words | W. E. Vine, et al. |

Bible Atlas

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| R Moody Atlas of Bible Lands | Barry Beitzel |
| Holman Bible Atlas | Thomas Brisco |
| The Carta Bible Atlas | Yohanan Aharoni |

Bible Encyclopedia

- | | |
|--|----------------------|
| R The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible | Merrill C. Tenney |
| The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, 4 Vols. | Geoffrey W. Bromiley |

Multivolume Commentaries

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| Tyndale OT, NT Commentaries | InterVarsity |
| Expositor's Bible Commentary, 13 Vols. | Zondervan |
| Word Biblical Commentary | Nelson |

Bible Software

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------|
| R Logos Bible Software | Logos |
| QuickVerse | Parson's |
| PC Study Bible | Biblesoft |

How to Study the Bible

Part Three: Observation

Observation Checklist

1. Read the background material related to the book
2. Read the whole book straight through to get an overview
3. Identify the author, audience, date, location, and main theme
4. Identify the genre (exposition, narrative, poetry, wisdom, prophecy, apocalyptic)
5. Read and summarize each paragraph; make a general outline of the book
6. Read each paragraph slowly and carefully; record any important facts
 - a) Look for things that are emphasized, repeated, related, alike, unlike, true to life
 - b) Notice the key terms, basic grammatical structure of each sentence

Step 1: Read the background material related to the book

- Can be found in a study Bible, Bible handbook, Bible dictionary
- Understand where this book fits in relation to the rest of the Bible
- Learn about any important historical or cultural information

Step 2: Read the whole book straight through to get an overview

- Read quickly (skim) to get the big picture, main theme
- Tips for reading faster and better
 1. Find a quiet place to study so you can concentrate
 2. Don't read out loud or move your lips as you read
 3. Push yourself slightly to read faster

Step 3: Identify the key facts (author, audience, date, location, and main theme)

- Sometimes this information is not given in the text; make an educated guess
- The goal is to understand the original context when the book was written

Step 4: Identify the genre (exposition, narrative, poetry, wisdom, prophecy, apocalyptic)

- Exposition: a carefully reasoned argument or explanation; well organized
- Narrative: a story that includes characters and a plot; biography, history
- Poetry: verses featuring parallelism, vivid images & symbols; psalms, songs
- Wisdom Literature: instruction for successful living; proverbs & parables
- Prophecy: authoritative declaration of God's will and plans; visions, dreams
- Apocalyptic: highly symbolic prophecy; vivid imagery, cosmic events

Step 5: Read and summarize each paragraph; make a general outline of the book

- Read the entire book again, paragraph-by-paragraph
- Construct a short sentence, phrase that summarizes each paragraph
- Try to read a Bible that does not provide chapter, section headings
- Make a sequential list and look for patterns, themes and organization

How to Study the Bible

Step 6: Read each paragraph again slowly, carefully; record any important facts

- Notice that each reading is more careful and detailed than the last
- Examining an entire forest, an individual tree, then the cells in a leaf
- There is important information at each level that affects the interpretation
- Reading repeatedly helps uncover additional details, insights

Step 6a: Look for things that are emphasized, repeated, related, alike, unlike, true to life

- Emphasized: amount of space, stated purpose, order of the material (Gen 1)
- Repeated: terms, phrases, characters, incidents, circumstances (Job 1:15-19)
- Related: a connection or interaction, cause and effect, question and answer (Rom 6:1)
- Alike: similes (using *as* or *like*), metaphors (a comparison without *as* or *like*)
- Unlike: contrast emphasized by using *but* or *however* (disjunctive)
- True to life: biblical stories that are similar to personal experiences

Step 6b: Notice the key terms, basic grammatical structure of each sentence

- Most sentences will be straightforward, diagram the more difficult ones
- Notice the subject, main verb and predicate within each sentence
- Verbs have tense (past, present, future) and voice (active, passive)
- A direct object receives the action of the verb, an indirect object does not
- Clauses (dependent and independent) contain a subject and a verb
- A phrase is a group of words that does not contain a subject and a predicate
- Prepositional phrases use terms like: in, at, on, by, with, for, to & from
- Conjunctions join sentences, clauses together: and, but, therefore, because
- There are modifiers (adjectives, adverbs), participles, gerunds, pronouns, etc.

Basic Outline of 1 John

Our Fellowship with God and Christ (1:1-4)

The Basis for Our Fellowship (1:5-2:2)

The Test of True Fellowship (2:3-11)

The Standing of True Believers (2:12-14)

Beware of Worldliness and Deception (2:15-23)

Abide in Truth and Righteousness (2:24-3:9)

Fulfilling the Call to Love (3:10-23)

Recognizing the Spirit of Truth (3:24-4:6)

Abide in God through Love (4:7-19)

The Test of True Love (4:20-5:5)

The Testimony of God (5:6-13)

Our Confidence in Prayer (5:14-17)

Summary and Conclusion (5:18-21)

How to Study the Bible

Part Four: Interpretation

Interpretation Checklist

1. List your unanswered questions (who, what, when, where, why, how)
2. Check other translations if the passage is obscure or difficult to understand
3. Look up unfamiliar terms in a Bible dictionary, lexicon, or encyclopedia
4. Check related passages using the cross references, a concordance or software
5. Consult a Bible handbook, atlas or commentary for more information

Step 1: List your unanswered questions (who, what, when, where, why, how)

- Identify the key information that you still need to understand the passage
- Do this in a systematic fashion by asking the six basic questions
- Identify the study aids that might help you answer these questions

Step 2: Check other translations if the passage is obscure, difficult to understand

- Different translations help to illustrate the range of possible meanings
- Words can have different meanings which creates ambiguity in translation
- Translators try to pick the most likely meaning, best English expression
- Some translations strive for word-for-word accuracy, lose the thought
- Other translations strive for thought-for-thought accuracy, lose precision

Step 3: Look up any unknown terms in a Bible dictionary, lexicon, encyclopedia, etc.

- Systematically check all your Bible study tools to investigate a word, topic
- Many study aids have a useful topical index, Scripture index in the back

Step 4: Check related passages using the cross references, a concordance or software

- The Bible is usually the best source of information about the Bible
- Bibles often provide cross references to related passages; answers already provided
- A concordance or computerized search engine can also help locate related passages

Step 5: Consult a Bible handbook, atlas, or commentary for additional information

- Handbooks are arranged by book, chapter, verse; historical, cultural information
- An atlas is organized by location and time; geographical, historical information
- Commentaries are arranged by book, chapter, verse; grammatical, theological information

Useful Websites:

Bible Study Tools	http://www.biblestudytools.com/
International Standard Bible Encyclopedia	http://www.internationalstandardbible.com/
McClintock & Strong Biblical Cyclopedia	http://www.biblicalcyclopedia.com/
1906 Jewish Encyclopedia	http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/
Christian Classics Ethereal Library	http://www.ccel.org/
The Catholic Encyclopedia	http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/

How to Study the Bible

Part Five: Application

Application Checklist

1. Is there an example to follow?
2. Is there a sin to avoid?
3. Is there a promise to claim?
4. Is there a prayer to repeat?
5. Is there a command to obey?
6. Is there a condition to meet?
7. Is there a verse to memorize?
8. Is there an error to avoid?
9. Is there a challenge to face?

The Bible is God's instruction book for humanity; owner's manual for a successful life
Key: distinguish between universally applicable principles, those that are limited

1. Is there an example to follow?
 - We are encouraged to emulate positive, faithful role models (Heb 13:7)
 - A biographical study of biblical heroes provides many positive examples
 - Jesus drove out the money changers; He had divine authority (Mt 21:12-27)
2. Is there a sin to avoid?
 - The Bible is a sharp sword that cuts through pretense, reveals our heart (Heb 4:12)
 - The Holy Spirit will use Scripture to convict us, warn us of spiritual danger
 - Tragic failures serve as a powerful warning, Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11)
3. Is there a promise to claim?
 - The Bible is God's Word, God cannot lie (2 Tim 3:16, Heb 6:17-18)
 - Make sure that the promise is general, universally applicable to God's people
 - God will not test us beyond our limit; He will provide an escape (1Cor 10:13)
 - Some promises limited to specific people (Abraham) or to the Old Covenant
4. Is there a prayer to repeat?
 - The Bible contains many examples of prayer recorded for our instruction
 - It is important to note the special circumstances surrounding each prayer
 - Many Old Testament prayers (Psalms) request the death, destruction of enemies
 - As king of Israel, David had divine authority to execute God's law on evildoers
5. Is there a command to obey?
 - The Bible is filled with general and specific commands
 - Need a clear understanding of the applicability of a given command
 - Some were meant for a specific person or group of people
 - Circumcision limited to Abraham's sons; early church controversy (Acts 15)

How to Study the Bible

6. Is there a condition to meet?

- God's promises are not a blank check; certain conditions are stated or implied
- Some promises were made to specific individuals, do not apply to us
- Other promises depend on faith and obedience to God's Word (James 1:5, John 15:7)

7. Is there a verse to memorize?

- All Scripture is inspired; some verses are more relevant than others
- Memorization gives you a biblical foundation for faith, doctrine
- Memorization helps you to answer questions from unbelievers, seekers
- Memorization provides the fuel for meditation; notice details, questions
- Flashcards are a good memorization tool; limit your list, review regularly

8. Is there an error to avoid?

- Scripture was given for sound doctrine; antidote for theological error
- Theological error can keep one from entering the Kingdom of God
- Must be accurate, careful when studying Scripture; willing to change

9. Is there a challenge to face?

- Godliness is more than avoiding sin; taking positive action to live as Jesus lived
- Scripture says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18, Matt 19:19)
- The Holy Spirit will use Scripture to convict your conscience
- Must be open to change, seek His help in transforming your life

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Bible Study Checklist

Observation: What does it say?

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 - a) Look for things that are emphasized, repeated, related, alike, unlike, true to life
 - b) Notice the key terms, basic grammatical structure of each sentence

Interpretation: What does it mean?

Follow these 5 steps after observing a particular paragraph

1. List your unanswered questions (who, what, when, where, why, how)
2. Check other translations if the passage is obscure or difficult to understand
3. Look up unfamiliar terms in a Bible dictionary, lexicon, or encyclopedia
4. Check related passages using the cross references, a concordance or software
5. Consult a Bible handbook, atlas or commentary for more information

Application: How does it apply?

Ask these nine questions of each paragraph:

1. Is there an example to follow?
2. Is there a sin to avoid?
3. Is there a promise to claim?
4. Is there a prayer to repeat?
5. Is there a command to obey?
6. Is there a condition to meet?
7. Is there a verse to memorize?
8. Is there an error to avoid?
9. Is there a challenge to face?