

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

1. Heart attitude towards the Bible is most important.

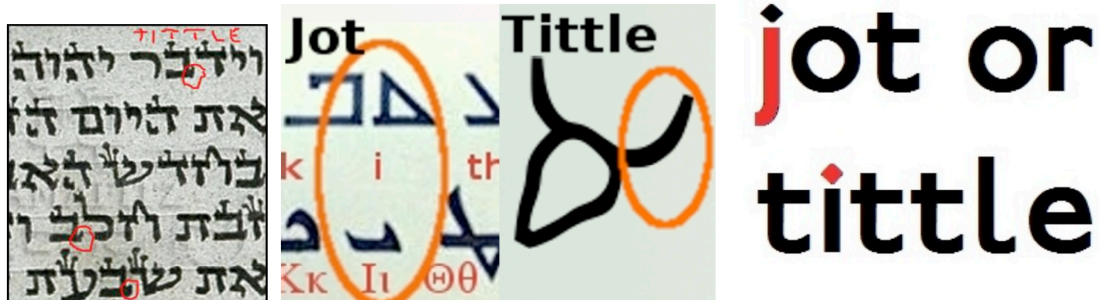
- We'll have to be willing to **obey** what we learn from God's Word. Samuel was instructed to say, 'Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears.' (1 Samuel 3:9).
- Allow the Lord to speak to your heart and conscience and not just your intellect. The purpose of studying the Bible is ultimately to **know God and to be transformed into the image of Christ**.
- The Bible itself encourages us to **search** the Scriptures (John 5:39; Acts 17:11).
- "Ezra had prepared his heart to **seek** the Law of the LORD, and to **do** it, and to **teach** statutes and ordinances in Israel." (Ezra 7:6, 10).
- "I **rejoice** at Your word as one who finds great treasure." (Psalm 119:162). It takes work to find treasures, but it's also a very rewarding experience.

2. Understanding Scripture is only through the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10-16).

- "**No one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God**. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God." Only saved people have the Spirit of God.
- Realize that the Scriptures are **inspired** by God. (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21)
- Let this time of study be an **experience with God** and ask the Lord to **guide** you in your reading. This time of fellowship with the Lord will increase your **love for His Word**. "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day." (Psalm 119:97).
- The Holy Spirit wants to glorify the Lord Jesus (John 16:14). **Recognize Christ** in Scripture and return what you find in worship to God the Father (John 4:23-24).

4. Details are important and can be key to our understanding.

The Bible is God's Word and everything is important. Approach Scripture with this mindset. Matthew 5:18 – “For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.”



The above image gives the idea of what it would be in English lettering.

5. Select a Bible that will encourage you to study God's Word.

- Use a Bible with **good verse references** to other texts without any notes from other Bible teachers. Scofield's, Ryrie's, Nelson's or MacArthur's Study Bibles are good, but may not encourage you to study Scripture for yourself. **First study for yourself**, and consult commentaries later.
- A Bible with **clear text** and paragraphs makes for easier reading. Just remember that paragraph and chapter divisions are not in the original Hebrew and Greek texts.
- Using the **same Bible** all the time will make it easier to find what you noticed before.
- A wide-margin Bible or Bible with blank pages or spaces can be helpful for making notes.
- Try not to use a pen to write notes in your Bible. Use a pencil instead, because you might have to erase it when you grow in your understanding of Scripture.
- Do not underline too many verses, because the next time you read the text, you have emphasized that particular verse and the Holy Spirit might want to draw your attention to another verse.

6. Different Bible translations.

- Use a Bible translation that is accurate to the original text, such as KJV, NKJV, ESV, NASB, DARBY.
- Comparing different Bible translations can be helpful in understanding the text.
- Paraphrase Bibles, such as NLT, Good News or JB Philips can be helpful to understand the text better. Just keep in mind they're unreliable for accuracy.
- Two principles when choosing a translation:

Accuracy to the original Hebrew and Greek text.

Readability: The New Testament was originally written in Koine Greek, the common language spoken by the people, and not in the Classical Greek. This tells us that God intends us to be able to read the Scriptures in our own language.

7. How should we use Bible commentaries?

- The following verses give us a healthy balance:

1 John 2:26-27 – “These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same **anointing [of the Holy Spirit] teaches you** concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.”

Ephesians 4:11-12 – “And **He Himself gave** some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and **teachers**, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ ...”

Most of what we know we learned from other people. It is God's mind that we are taught by sound and godly Bible teachers through oral and written ministry, but ultimately it is the Holy Spirit in us who teaches us. We need to be searching the Scriptures ourselves and not blindly follow Bible teachers. At the same time we need to respect the fact that the Scriptures have been read and studied by others for many centuries.

8. Some Bible Helps:

- Strong's Exhaustive Concordance
- Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words
- Biblical encyclopedia (ex. Wycliffs, Ungers)
- Online/ Computer Helps, such as E-sword, Biblegateway.com, Blueletterbible.org
- Interlinear Bible
- Bible commentaries

Good Bible Study is marked by these three things:

- a) Observation
- b) Interpretation
- c) Application

OBSERVATION

- Observation involves skilful reading. Read the whole section without being distracted. Use pen and paper to write down what you observe. You'll forget if you don't write it down.
- Make distinction between **narrative** (ex. Genesis, Gospels, Acts), **poetry** (ex. Psalms, Song of Solomon), **prophecy** (ex. Isaiah, Amos, Revelation) and **letters** (ex. Romans, Titus, James).
- Who is the author of the passage? What do you know about him?
- Whom is the author addressing? God's people? A specific church? Unbelievers?
- What is the context before and after the passage?
- What are the most important terms, key words and/or concepts in this passage?
- What terms and/or figures of speech do you need to define so you can better understand the passage?
- Are there any commands, promises or warnings in this passage?
- Can you find any repetition of words or ideas in this text?
- Are there people or places crucial to this passage? Find out all you can.

INTERPRETATION

- Outline the passage: What do you think are the main points and sub-points of what the author is saying here?
- State what you think the author is saying in this passage in one or two sentences.
- What was the meaning of this passage to the author's audience?
- After you have done all the above questions then check commentaries (not before) to see if what you have found goes along with what other godly men have found.
- Some rules of interpretation to remember to avoid confusion and misinterpretation:

a) **Dispensational differences** – Ex. David in Psalm 51:11 says “Do not take Your Holy Spirit from me”. The N.T. says that the Holy Spirit will abide with us for ever (John 14:16). Also, what is said to Israel in the Old Testament (O.T.) is not always the same as what is said to the Church in the New Testament (N.T.).

b) **Context** – Ex. Matthew 7:1 “Judge not, that you be not judged”. This text is misused to tolerate all kinds of sin. The context explains how to understand this verse.

c) **Scripture is explained by Scripture.** Does your interpretation of one Bible verse correspond with the rest of Scripture? (2 Peter 1:20-21)

d) **Take the Bible literally unless the Bible clearly shows figurative language.** “The Bible itself follows the normal or literal method of interpretation. For example the O.T. prophesied that Christ would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), that He would ride on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9), that He would be punished for our sins (Isaiah 53:4-8). And He did all those things just as literally predicted. In quoting the O.T., the N.T. writers treated it as a normal, human instrument of communication.” (Roy B. Zuck in ‘Basic Bible Interpretation’)

e) **Recognize typology & illustrations in Scripture** (ex. Melchizedek as type of Christ), but don't go into the extremes of allegorizing, i.e. looking for supposed secret or hidden meanings totally unrelated to the text. (ex. Psalm 1:3, “He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water”, was explained by one church father as speaking of the cross and baptism).

- **Challenges in Bible interpretation:**

a) **Time gap** – We can't ask the apostle Paul or Peter.

b) **Geographical gap** – We don't live in the Middle East (A Bible atlas and encyclopedia are helpful for this).

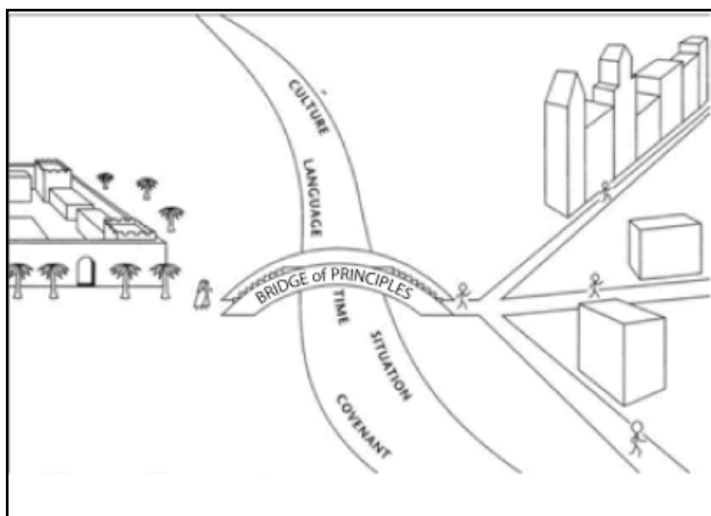
c) **Cultural gap** – Different customs (ex. The expression "gird up your loins")

d) **Language gap** – The Bible was written in Hebrew and Greek. Every language has expressions and words that are difficult to translate. Also, the Greek text of the N.T., for example, does not differentiate between capital and lower case letters, doesn't contain chapter, paragraph and verse divisions and doesn't use any punctuation like periods and commas. On top of that, the order of words is quite different than in English.



So for example Hebrews 10:12-13 looks like this in English when literally translated from Greek:

"he but one on behalf of sins having offered sacrifice in perpetuity sat down at right hand of god from then on expecting until are put the enemies of him footstool of the feet of him" (as given in "The Interlinear Bible" by Jay P. Green)



The NKJV renders it, "But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool."

****Illustration to left:**
Bible times is pictured on the left (with palm trees),
Present time is on right (with tall buildings).

APPLICATION

- What does this passage mean for believers and for me today?
- How should understanding this passage change your life?
- The acronym SPECS:
 - a) Is there a Sin to be forsaken?
 - b) Is there a Promise to be claimed?
 - c) Is there an Example to be followed?
 - d) Is there a Command to be obeyed?
 - e) Is there a Stumbling block or hindrance to be avoided?

The Bible can be studied different ways. You can study a

- **Chapter or Section of a Bible book:** Ex. Mark 12:18-27
- **Subject:** Ex. Justification
- **Person:** Ex. David
- **Bible Book:** Ex. 1 Thessalonians
- **Apologetic subject:** Ex. Deity of Christ
- **Comparison of Bible Books:** Ex. Gospel of Matthew & Gospel of Luke

Here are some helpful tips when doing Bible study on a topical subject:

1. Believe that God wants to bless you if you study His Word in a prayerful attitude. Ask Him for guidance.
2. Use your concordance to find all or most important texts on your subject. Write them down and read the context in which these texts are found and compare Scripture with Scripture. Remember that Strong's Concordance is based on the King James Version.
3. Take time to observe the texts and write what you learn on paper, so you don't forget.
4. Do not start your study by looking up Bible commentaries written by others. Doing that later may be helpful.
5. Observe the differences and similarities of your subject between the Old and New Testament.
6. Looking up the meaning of Hebrew (O.T.) and Greek (N.T.) words can be helpful in your study. You can use the numbering system in Strong's Concordance.
7. In some cases knowledge of the cultural background of what you're studying can be helpful. A Biblical encyclopedia can be used for this purpose.
8. All Scripture points to the Lord Jesus. How does your subject relate to Him?
9. When studying this subject, it's important to ask, "What do these verses mean in its context?" And secondly, "How does all this teaching apply to me today and what can I learn from this?"
10. When presenting your subject to other people, make sure you support your conclusions with Scripture references.