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Chapter 1

The Study of Scripture

“The Bible is deep enough for an elephant to swim in, and shallow enough for a child to play in.”

The Work of Bible Study

Proverbs 25:2 “It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter.”

If the Bible is gold (Psalm 119:72, 127), then it requires the arduous work of mining, and if it is bread (Matthew 4:4), then we must eat it by the sweat of our face (Genesis 3:19). Perhaps the hardest work a person can ever do is to study the Bible. The study of the Bible requires a *worthy workman*, not a *slothful slackman*. The man or woman who sets out to study the Bible must be a labourer, not a loafer—and that is just why most Christians do not study the Bible, because they are simply too lazy to do it. The idle soul shall suffer hunger.

Studying, if done right, is an intense and exhausting form of working. When Solomon taught, gave heed, sought out, set in order, found out, wrote out, and admonished others with the words of truth, he said that so “much study” was “a weariness of the flesh” (Ecclesiastes 12:9-12). Indeed, if Darius wearied himself all day with the unchangeable law of the Medes and Persians, labouring till the going down of the sun in order to deliver Daniel, how much more will a “king and priest” to God wear out themselves in an all-day study of the eternal and unchangeable law of God (Daniel 6:14-15)! No one ever deeply respected their plate of food until they were in the fire and smoke of the kitchen, and no one ever deeply respected their Sunday sermon until they sat to study the Bible for themselves.

1 Timothy 5:17 “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who **labour in the word and doctrine.**”

3 Ways to Learn the Bible

There are three personal disciplines which every student of the Bible must master in Christ’s school in order to learn the Bible for themselves: reading, meditating, and studying the word.

- Bible **Reading**: Read the Bible carefully and considerately
- Bible **Meditation**: Memorize the Bible thoughtfully and thoroughly
- Bible **Study**: Study the Bible investigatively and interrogatively

This threefold Biblical gilded chord will not be quickly broken. Each of these disciplines must be practiced regularly in order for a believer to learn the word of God. Generally speaking, Bible reading will make you *know* the Bible, Bible meditation will make you *remember* the Bible, and Bible study will make you *understand* the Bible. The Bible commands all three disciplines: read the word (Deuteronomy 17:18-19), meditate upon the word (Joshua 1:8), and study the word (2 Timothy 2:15).

One man says, “don’t read the Bible, study it!” Another quips, “meditating upon the Bible is what makes you really learn it more than anything else!” Another says, “simply reading the old book is just enough for me!” All of these perspectives are wrong. We must do all three:

read, meditate, and study the Bible. A fundamental problem in the Christian life comes when someone practices one of these disciplines to the neglect of the others.

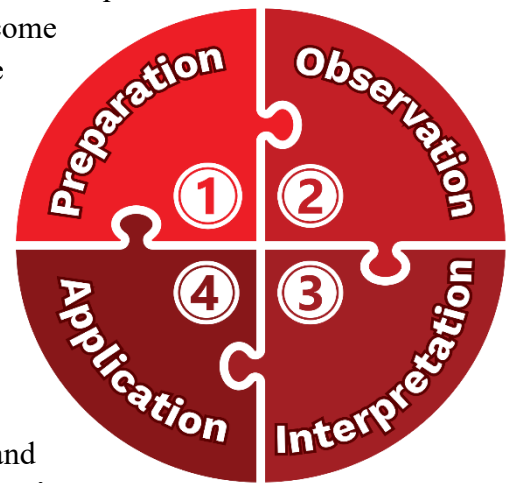
- Bible **reading** without Bible **meditation** makes a *superficial* student of scripture.
- Bible **study** without Bible **reading** makes an *unstable* student of scripture.
- Bible **meditation** without Bible **reading** makes a *shaky* student of scripture.
- Bible **reading** without Bible **study** makes a *shallow* student of scripture.
- Bible **study** without Bible **meditation** makes a *sterile* student of scripture.
- Bible **meditation** without Bible **study** makes a *simple* student of scripture.

Now then, as you come to study the scripture, never forget that this is but one way to really learn the Bible. We can actually add the *hearing* of scripture to this list too, which, in the biblical usage of that word, basically means listening to the word preached.

A Method for Bible Study

1 Peter 1:10-11 “¹⁰ Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: ¹¹ Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.”

Here we learn the diligence of the holy prophets, which were some of the best Bible scholars that ever walked the earth. After receiving the revelation of God (Preparation), the prophets followed some simple procedures for handling God’s truth with care. Like Apollos, they spoke and taught *diligently* the things of the Lord. They *enquired, searched, and prophesied* with the utmost diligence. That is, they made **enquiry, scrutiny**, and then continued relating their **prophecy**.



- First, notice that the prophets **enquired** diligently (Observation). They asked questions about the prophecies they received. Daniel prayed and fasted often with a multitude of questions about God’s revelation (Daniel 9:3). He asked, “How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?” (Daniel 12:6), and “O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?” (Daniel 12:8).
- Next, notice that the prophets **searched** diligently (Interpretation). They sought to understand the deep meaning of the prophecies they received. Daniel performed some diligent research into the revelations of God and his truth, reflecting upon his own prophecies (Daniel 7:28), in addition to researching and comparing them with the writings of others prophets, like Jeremiah (Daniel 9:2).
- Finally, notice that the prophets **prophesied** diligently (Application). They faithfully related and recorded the prophecies they received to others. Whenever and whatever Daniel learned from the Lord, he revealed to the world, which made him “ten times better” than the magicians and astrologers of Babylon, as he often volunteered to interpret divine dreams (Daniel 2) and signs (Daniel 5).

Chapter 2

Preparation

“There is always a prepared place for a prepared person”

A serious student of scripture must first lay the groundwork for his study of the word before he begins studying. Our Bible study will only go as far as the cornerstone of preparation determines it to go. There are four things a Bible student will do to prepare for their study of God’s word: Own, Outline, Overview, and Organize the word.

A. **OWN** the Book/Passage into your Heart

- **Read** every word in the book/passage. This will help you to *contextualize* the whole of what you will be studying. The simplest thing you can do before digging is the work of surveying. After reading the whole book/passage several times, you will become more effective as you dig into the word.
- **Listen** to every word in the book/passage. This will help you to be *familiarized* with everything you will be studying. Faith comes by hearing, and so does understanding. Playing and looping the audio Bible of the sections you intend to study will acquaint you with the words, phrases and nuances that only the spoken word can bring out.
- **Pray** through every word in the book/passage. This will help you to *personalize* all that you will be studying. Interpretations belong to God, so only God can teach you his word. It is for this reason that the book of God is best studied on one’s knees. The God of the word knows best the meaning of the word of God. This is why many parts of the Bible are simply prayers (e.g., the Psalms). Schedule devoted prayer time to read slowly and prayerfully through your book/passage before attempting to study it, praying about whatever occurs to you as you read with those biblical words which the Holy Spirit teaches.
- **Memorize** every word in the book/passage. This will help you to *internalize* each phrase that you will be studying. The blessed man meditates day and night in God’s law, and the blessed student of scripture meditates day and night in their text of scripture. A lawyer memorizes case law before they go to court, a physician memorizes human anatomy before they perform surgery, and a preacher should personally memorize the passage they will claim to give the sense of publicly. The best practice is to memorize and meditate upon the words of the scripture before attempting to dissect them. It is the work of children to use something before first considering it; the work of adults is otherwise.

B. **OUTLINE** the Book/Passage into a Structure

- **Write** your own outline of the text in question. If it is a book, outline the whole book. If it is a chapter, outline the entire chapter. If it is only a passage, by all means, make a simple outline of that section of scripture. An outline will provide a helpful guide as you look more closely into the words, and act as a kind of map that you can refer back to in case you start to miss the forest for the trees in your exploration of the Bible.
- **Review** the outlines of others. After you have done some preliminary sketching out of the part of the Bible you want to study, you will be immensely aided by checking out some other outlines that were drawn up by other Bible students before you. Examining their

charts and diagrams will assist you in fixing or focusing your outline with greater accuracy to the Bible section in question. You can find these Bible book or chapter outlines in online webpages or commentaries.

- **Refine** your outline. Put the finishing touches on your outline with everything you have thought about on your own and discovered from others, and form it into a workable and usable outline. Consider even drawing or designing your own diagram with this information in order to make it easier to follow personally and to share with others.

C. **OVERVIEW** the Book/Passage

- **Record** answers to basic questions about the text. Ask and answer some elementary questions about the document before you, and don't neglect to find out the most basic information about what you are soon going to take a magnifying glass, or even, a microscope, to.
 1. *Person* by whom written
 2. *People* to whom written
 3. *Period* at which written
 4. *Place* where written
 5. *Purpose* for which written
- **Read** related Bible passages about the text. Does your Bible book/passage have a parallel book/passage? If you are studying Jude, it would be wise to read 2 Peter 2 in tandem with it. Before diving into a study of Matthew, you would be benefitted by first reading the other synoptic evangelists, like Mark and Luke. Not only that, but you should read the biblical histories that act as preludes, postludes, and accounts of the story in question. You will understand the exalted reign of David better if you read about the long humble path he took to get to the throne of Israel. If you are studying 1 or 2 Corinthians, read about Paul's time in Corinth in the book of Acts (Acts 18) first.
- **Review** overviews of the text. These will provide historical and cultural information which you may have no idea about. They will also be beneficial in attaining a solid grasp of the context and purpose of the book/chapter/passage before you. You can find these book or chapter overviews in online articles and book resources (e.g., commentary introductions).

D. **ORGANIZE** the Book/Passage into a Useful Format

Depending upon the end-goal for the given Bible study you are aiming at, you should begin with a provisional **ordering of the Bible text** to be studied **into a format that you can be editing** as your study progresses. This will give you a sense of purpose that will carry you through the difficulties of Bible study when the going gets tough, and keep you, though faint, yet pursuing. Such a tentative plan for getting fruit by your Bible study will serve as the joy set before you that will empower you to carry your cross, however heavy it may become, and whatever it may cost you. This light at the end of the tunnel will sustain your willing spirit when your flesh becomes weak.

If you are going to preach a sermon, then make a **brief sermon outline of your text(s)**, with title and points (remember, this may certainly change a little or a lot throughout your study). If you are going to write a paper/article, then make out **chapter/section header(s)**, or prepare a sketch of what you will talk about with the knowledge you glean from your Bible study.

Chapter 3

Observation

“What makes one person a better student than another? He can see more.”

The first creation began with light (Genesis 1:3), and the new creation begins with light too (2 Corinthians 4:6). A sinner is saved when their eyes are opened (2 Corinthians 3:14-16), and a saint is edified by simply having the eyes of their understanding are opened. Hagar was right next to a well of water, but it is only when God opened her eyes that could she could see it (Genesis 21:19). Balaam only saw his danger when he was given the sight to see it (Numbers 22:31). We have a need to anoint our eyes with a spiritual eye salve, so that we can see!

All good interpretations are extensions of good observations. You cannot interpret what is not there. It has been observed, that, the more time we spend in *observation*, the less time we will spend in *interpretation*, and the **more accurate** our results will be; but the less time we spend in *observation*, the more time we will spend in *interpretation*, and the **less accurate** our results will be. There are two keys to making you a good observer of the scripture, where you will both see and observe wondrous things out of God’s law in your Bible study: Comment on and Consult with the word.

A. COMMENT on the Text

By the time you commence with observation, your spiritual senses are already filled with thoughts, ideas, concepts, and even some initial conclusions. **Write all of those down.** What do you see? Write it down. What does that mean to you? Write it down. What is going on in the text? *Write it down.*

As a Spirit-filled person, you may be surprised at all of the spiritual insights you will gain by just simply pouring out all of your thoughts with a pen or keyboard on paper or a screen. As you jot down all of your initial contemplations on the text, your pen may become that of a ready writer, and your heart will begin inditing a good matter. If you will just start writing about what you can see, then you will find that you know and see much more than you now see yourself to know.

B. CONSULT the Text

Now that you have said or wrote out your peace, it becomes time to let the Bible speak for itself. Asking questions of the Bible is the best way to get an answer of God from it. There are six powerful and probing questions which you can use to plumb the depths of the scripture, and see every corner and angle of it: *Who? What? Where? When? Why? Wherefore?*

- **Who?**

Who are the people in the text? What is said about them? What do they say about themselves?

- **What?**

What is happening in this text? What are the events? *What* is the argument/point? *What* is the intention of the writer in writing this?

- **Where?**

Where are the things spoken of in this text taking place? *Where* are the characters in this text coming from or going to? *Where* is the writer writing from?

- **When?**

When did the events in this text take place? *When* did these things occur in relation to other events in the Bible?

- **Why?**

Why is this here in the text? *Why* does this follow/precede? *Why* was this said/done?

- **Wherefore?**

Wherefore is this written, or, what difference does this make to my beliefs or behaviours? That's what it says, so what, or what for?



BIBLE STUDY TOOLS

Bible Application: for Bible *texts* and *searches*

Bible Dictionary: for Bible *word definitions*

Bible Concordance: for Bible *word searches*

Bible Cross References: for Bible *references*

Bible Atlas: for Bible *maps* and *charts*

Bible Commentaries: for Bible *commentary*

All available with **e-Sword**

Chapter 4

Interpretation

“Any text out of context is just a pretext for a proof text”

It does not really matter what the Bible means *to me*, but rather what the Bible means *itself*, or what the author meant when he wrote it. The best way to come to the Bible is not to ask, “What do I say the Bible says?” But, “What does the Bible say?” We must come to the Bible as the oracles of God, and let them speak to us, instead of let us speak for them. There is only one true interpretation of any text, even though there may be many applications.

Bad interpreters twist the Bible by handling it deceitfully (2 Corinthians 4:2), and making it say what it does not say (2 Peter 3:16). Good interpreters submit to scripture, search the scripture, and spell out the scripture, giving the sense of the words instead of giving their nonsense to the words. Truth be told, we do not make the Bible come to life, the Bible makes us come to life (Hebrews 4:12). There are four keys to proper biblical interpretation: Content, Context, Comparison, and Consultation.

A. CONTENT

To rightly interpret the word, you must first analyze the content. By analytically disassembling the text into many parts, you will be able to understand how the text works as a whole. Analyze the genre, the phrases, and the words.

- **Scripture Genre**

What is the genre of this passage/book?

- **Scripture Phrases**

What kind of sentence(s) are in this verse? What parts of speech, forms of speech, and figures of speech, are being used here?

- **Scripture Words**

What is the meaning of this word in this text? What are its other meanings?

B. CONTEXT

Interpretation of a text requires an understanding of its context. Interpret according to the context, not against or apart from it. Stay within, and don't stray out from, the literary, historical, cultural, and geographical context of the Bible.

- **Literary Context** – The words of the text of scripture itself.

This has many layers: first the *context* of the passage, then of the *section*, then of the *book*, and then of the *testament*. The scripture cannot be broken, so no interpretation can violate any of the higher concentric circles of literary context. What says the scripture? That is the reigning question.

- **Historical Context** – The timing of the writing and events described in the text.

Historically speaking, there are many *social*, *political*, and *technological* influences that bear upon the text in question. Knowing these factors will paint the picture more accurately of what is going on in the gilded page. What says history?

- **Cultural Context** – The societal norms, customs, etc., that bear upon the text.

The Bible was written—and the events of the Bible were played out—within a series of cultural contexts. Knowing the cultural *values*, *language*, and *customs* of that timeframe will open up to us some of the wording and actions that we read about in God’s word. What language was being spoken? What customs prevailed in these times and in this region and among this people? What says the culture?

- **Geographical Context** – The physical location and condition of the events in the text.

The set on which the Bible’s events took place will reveal to us much about the significance of biblical descriptions and locations. What was the terrain like? The weather? What were the city size(s), journey distances, etc.? And what was this location known for, by the way? What says the geography?

C. COMPARISON

The greatest interpreter of scripture is scripture itself (see 1 Corinthians 2:13). Most of what you need to know *about* the Bible is found *in* the Bible. The brighter parts of the word can shed more light on the darker parts of the word, just as fellow witnesses can make a story more clear by corroborating or expanding upon what another true witness has described. What phrases, verses, passages, or stories of the Bible are related/relevant to this text or idea? Perform comparisons of words, verses, and even passages to get at the true meaning of a text of scripture.

- **Word Comparison:** Bible Concordance

Search and see how key words and uncertain words in the text at hand are used in other parts of the Bible. When comparing textual words with other occurrences in the Bible, remember that the priority of consideration will be in the following order: occurrences in the *same book* → occurrences by the *same author* → occurrences in the *same genre* → occurrences in the *same testament* → occurrences in the *same Bible*.

- **Verse Comparison:** Bible Cross-Reference

Compare textual verses with similar verses, or verses that are like those verses. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established. There is not a great truth in the Bible which is only to be founded upon one single verse, but often will have multiple scriptural witnesses that agree together. Look up all of the potential cross references for the verses in your text, and see if any other place in the Bible can help advise you on the proper interpretation of your place of study in the word.

- **Passage Comparison:** Bible Parallel Passages

From time to time there will be a passage of the Bible which directly or indirectly parallels the passage you are working with. That passage may provide you with information which your passage has left out, and without which you would lack a true understanding of what is really taking place there. Comparing textual passages with similar passages in the Bible will fill voids that may be caused by a true but one-sided text.

D. CONSULTATION

For thousands of years, the Holy Spirit has been guiding an innumerable multitude of men of God into all truth regarding the living word he inspired. There is no new thing under the sun, and there is nothing new in theology except that which is false. There are hundreds upon thousands of commentaries and commentators of scripture, so just about any true interpretation you will make of the scripture has already been discovered a long, long time ago.

At the end of the biblical-interpretative process in your Bible study, the reading of commentators on your text of scripture will help to confirm or correct your interpretations by giving you a multitude of counsellors, where there is safety and establishment (Proverbs 11:14; 15:22). After doing personal diligence and becoming your own sort of Bible commentator, in the reading of a few commentaries, your interpretation will become very strong. Indeed, a commentator can also be a kind of John the Baptist to you when you study the Bible, preparing the way for the even greater insights you will make into your text.

Notwithstanding, you must always read commentaries with a very critical mind, abhorring that which is evil, and cleaving to that which is good. If the Bereans were noble because they searched the scriptures daily to see whether Paul's preaching was so, then in order for our Bible study to be a noble pursuit, we must do the same with both Bible and Bible commentaries. After all, what is a commentator, but a very precise, verse-by-verse, and exact preacher? All of the Bible is infallible, but all external Bible commentaries are fallible. The only infallible Bible commentary on the scripture is the New Testament's commentary on the Old Testament.

“Prove all things; hold fast
that which is good”

(1 Thessalonians 5:21).

The best and most profitable commentaries to read are the ones from the modern era. You should probably read at least two or three commentators on your text for a thorough Bible study, but reading as many as 12 may serve as a great blessing to your study. There are basically four different kinds of Bible commentaries available to the student of the holy scripture:

- **Ancient** Commentaries (2nd–6th centuries AD)
- **Medieval** Commentaries (6th–16th centuries AD)
- **Modern** Commentaries (16th–20th centuries AD)
- **Contemporary** Commentaries (20th century–present)



Chapter 5

Application

“There are four things necessary in studying the Bible: admit, submit, commit, transmit”

The real purpose for studying the Bible is to be a workman with it (2 Timothy 2:15)—to use what you have learned for the good of yourself and especially for the good of others. Just as a student is educated so that they can get gainful employment, we in like manner study the Bible so that we can serve the Lord with our knowledge. We get knowledge so that we may know how to answer every man (Colossians 4:6), and we learn so that we can teach others. We must live according to the sacred rule laid down in the word: *as every man has received the gift, even so minister the same one to another* (1 Peter 4:10). All that you receive from God, you must either **share a part**, or **give away the whole**. This is also why Jesus did all of his studies (Luke 2:52):

John 17:19 “And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.”

None of your data or deliberations compiled in the steps of preparation, observation and interpretation will avail you anything unless you organize them together for a purpose. Information is not instruction. How you will order all things together will depend upon the end in mind you have for your Bible study. There are several simple ways to utilize the truth that you received from heaven:

- For a **question/conversation** (*social* setting)
- For a **sermon/speech** (*church* setting)
- For a **lecture/lesson** (*classroom* setting)
- For an **article/blog** (*online* setting)
- For a **book/paper** (*literary* setting)

Beside a presentation to others, the most important aspect about Bible study is an application to oneself. Before preaching to others, “O my friends” or “O my church,” you must preach to yourself—“O my soul”. It is wise to be taught, it is even wiser to teach others, it is the wisest to teach yourself. It will do us no good if, after we have preached to others, we ourselves become a castaway. Paul admonished the Ephesians elders that before they could take heed to all the flock, they must first *take heed to yourselves* (Acts 20:28). Ezra **sought** and **caught** the law before he **taught** it (Ezra 7:10). As you study the word of God, let the word of God study you; as you observe it, let it observe you; as you interpret it, let it interpret you; as you apply it, let it first be applied to yourself. If you will teach others, *first teach yourself* (Romans 2:21), or else you shall have the greater condemnation.

1 Timothy 4:15-16 ¹⁵ Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. ¹⁶ Take heed **unto thyself**, and **unto the doctrine**; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save **thyself**, and **them that hear thee**.”