

Mastering the Scriptures Principles for Effective Bible Study



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INTRODUCTION

“The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails, they are given by one Shepherd” (Ecclesiastes 12:11).

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:12-13).

“...from childhood (Note: The Greek word *brephos* means infancy) you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 2:15)

1. The Goal of Effective Bible Study

The goal of effective Bible study is getting the mind of God into the actions and attitudes of men.

“‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the Lord. ‘for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isaiah 55:8-9).

“Oh, the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor?” (Romans 11:33-34).

“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and our sons forever . . .” (Deuteronomy 29:29).

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth, and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:10-11).

QUESTION #1: How has the mind of God been revealed to us?

QUESTION #2: How do we get the mind of God into the attitude and actions of men?

2. The Method of Effective Bible Study

Regarding historical, grammatical exegesis...

Historical. Scripture was not written in an historical vacuum. We study every portion of Scripture in light of its historical and cultural context.

Grammatical. God chose the vehicle of three human languages to communicate His Word to us: Hebrew and Aramaic for the Old Testament and Koine (common) Greek for the New Testament. When God spoke; He spoke well. Using the grammatical method we interpret Scripture in light of the nuances of the words and grammar in the text.

Exegesis. This word comes from a Greek word meaning “to lead out” and speaks of pulling truths out of Scripture (exegesis) rather than reading opinions into Scripture (eisegesis). It is critical that we primarily draw our biblical conclusions from the facts of Scripture (inductive study), rather than having already formulated conclusions and attempting to find facts in the Bible to support those conclusions (deductive study).

3. The Process of Effective Bible Study

Regarding hermeneutics...

“Hermeneutics teaches us how to know what the Bible means by what it says.”

“And they read from the book, from the law of God, translating (lit. explaining, using hermeneutics) to give the sense so that they understood the reading” (Nehemiah 8:8).

“And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures . . . Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:27, 45).

PART ONE

DOCTRINAL PRESUPPOSITIONS TO EFFECTIVE BIBLE STUDY

1. Concerning God and His Word

#1. God spoke

“So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth . . .” (Isaiah 55:11).

“ . . . Thy word is truth” (John 17:17).

And over 2600 times in the Bible we read such words as: “Thus saith the Lord . . .” or “The Word of the LORD came unto me”

Sometimes the Scriptures are called oracles (i.e. inspired utterances) (cf. Proverbs 30:1; Proverbs 31:1; Isaiah 13:1; Jeremiah 23:33; etc.)

#2. God spoke through men . . .

“But know this, first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:20-21).

“And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God’s message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe” (1 Thessalonians. 2:13).

“And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, ‘O Lord, it is Thou . . . who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Thy servant, didst say’”(Acts 4:24-25).

#3. God spoke through men that which is both reliable and profitable.

“Thy word I have treasured in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee.” (Psalm 119:11)

“Thy word has revived me.” (Psalm 119:50b)

“Thy word is very pure, therefore Thy servant loves it” (Psalm 119:140).

“Where there is no vision (i.e. divine revelation/hearing from God), the people are unrestrained (i.e. naked and exposed)...” (Proverbs 30:18).

“Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words lest He reprove you, and you be proved a liar” (Proverbs 30:5-6).

“For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished” (Matthew 5:18).

“...I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable...” (Acts 20:20).

“ . . .from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

“...building yourselves up on your most holy faith...” (Jude 1:20).

One theologian has put it all together with this helpful definition of inspiration:

“Inspiration is God’s superintending of human authors so that, using their own individual personalities, they composed and recorded without error in the original autographs His revelation to man.” (Charles C. Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible*, Moody Press, 1978, p. 1983)

2. Concerning Us and God’s Word

Rule #1 - The Bible is to be interpreted literally.

Plain Literal Interpretation

“When the plain sense makes sense, make no other sense.”

Figurative Literal Interpretation

Scripture should be taken to mean exactly what it says unless the context or the expression itself indicates otherwise. For example: Matthew 23:14

Rule #2 - The Bible is to be studied diligently

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15; cf. 2 Peter 3:16).

The Psalms speak of the successful, prosperous believer whose “ . . .delight is in the law of the Lord and in His law he meditates day and night” (cf. Psalm 1:2-3).

The apostle Peter spoke of some of the apostle Paul’s epistles being “hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of Scriptures, to their own destruction” (2 Peter 2:16).

Bible reading is truly a treasure hunt — cf. Job 28

Rule #3 - The Bible is to be applied generously.

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable . . . for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16).

cf. 1 Corinthians 10:1-14. What is the major point of this passage?

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

“For the overseer must be above reproach as God’s steward...holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict” (Titus 1:7-9).

PART TWO DIVINE PREREQUISITES TO EFFECTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Prerequisite #1 - A Regenerate Heart

“. . . the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we (i.e., believers) have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God. . . . But a natural man (i.e., an unbeliever) does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised” (1 Corinthians 2:11-12, 14).

“Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures, or the power of God?” (Mark 12:24)

Prerequisite #2 - A Receptive Life

cf. James 1:19-27

Prerequisite #3 - A Clear-Thinking Mind

Memorization and meditation: Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1-3; Psalm 19:7-9; Psalm 119:9-11; Ecclesiastes 12:11-12; John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16 and Hebrews 4:12).

PART THREE

DOCTRINAL PUBLICATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE BIBLE STUDY

“But beyond this, my son, be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body” (Ecclesiastes 12:12).

Suggested Bible Study Tools

1. Two Whole Bible Translations
2. One Bible Paraphrase
3. One Complete Bible Concordance
4. One Bible Encyclopedia or Dictionary
5. One Dictionary of New Testament and Old Testament Words
6. One Bible Handbook
7. One Systematic Theology (Bible Doctrine)
8. One Commentary of the Whole Bible
9. Commentaries on Specific Books of the Bible
10. Other Helpful Biblical Resources
 - A topical Bible
 - An inter-linear Bible (presenting side-by-side versions)
 - A Bible atlas containing maps and charts (Note: Some are found in the back of many Bibles)
 - ☐ • A guide to parallel passages (e.g. A harmony of the Gospels)
 - ☐ • A single volume dictionary or textbook on church history
11. Secular Helps
 - An exhaustive dictionary in the same language as your Bible version
 - A grammar textbook in the same language as your Bible version.
 - A general knowledge encyclopedia
 - A thesaurus that lists words in groups of synonyms and antonyms

PART FOUR

DESIGNATED PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE BIBLE STUDY

P.O.I.A.P.

Step One:	Preparation: Anticipating God's Direction
Step Two:	Observation: Asking The Right Questions
Step Three:	Interpretation: Answering The Right Questions
Step Four:	Application: Applying The Right Answers
Step Five:	Presentation: Announcing The Good News

Step One: Preparation - Anticipating God's Direction

1. Begin with P.R.A.Y.E.R. (Praising, Repenting, Asking, Yielding, Entreating, Rejoicing)
2. Make a commitment to strive to find the single meaning of the text.
3. Proceed with caution—drawing conclusions from the facts of Scripture (inductive exegesis).

Step Two: Observation - Asking The Right Questions

1. Study the background of the book (See Appendix 2 and do a survey on the book).
2. Read the entire book and chapter a number of times in many translations.
3. Examine carefully the specific passage in many translations.
4. Ask appropriate questions (Who? What? Where? When? How? Why?).
5. Look up cross-references.
6. Write down any further observations.

Step Three: Interpretation - Answering The Right Questions

1. Do particular word studies (synonyms, antonyms, figures of speech, idioms, repeated words and phrases, etc.).
2. Watch for specific details in the grammar (tenses, voices, moods, person, number, prepositions, conjunctions, etc.).
3. Write down what others say about the text.
4. Begin problem solving—deciding on what seems to be the best view.

Step Four: Application - Applying The Right Answers

1. Answer the question: So what?

2. List:

- commands to obey
- promises to keep
- truths to know
- actions to take
- sins to forsake
- examples to follow
- things to avoid
- new thoughts about God

Step Five: Presentation - Announcing The Good News

1. Share what we have learned.
2. Organize the presentation.
3. Select appropriate illustrations.
4. Scan or file all research and message notes.

Concluding Challenge:

It has been well said that the Bible is a HIM book. It's focus is none other than Him—the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself said,

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me” (Matthew 5:39)

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