

18. How to study the Bible alone *Part 2*

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Whenever I study the Bible, there is one item I grab first. It is not my computer which has many Bible commentaries in software. It is my legal notepad. After I read the texts from the Bible, I grab this pad and start to write down whatever the Lord impresses upon me in observation, interpretation and application method.



Why do I need to write it down? Because I remember what Sir Francis Bacon once said, "Reading makes a broad man; speaking a ready man; and writing an exact man". Writing helps me to process from abstract concepts in my head to precise and concise words in logical sentences. I highly recommend you have a notepad when you study the Word of God.

A. COMMON METHODS OF BIBLE STUDY

1) **Inductive (Exegesis)** – This method of Bible study "pulls out the facts." We come to the Scripture in an orderly way to find out what it says, what it means and what it means to us! Definition of Inductive Bible Study: "in logic, the process of reasoning or drawing a conclusion from particular facts and the conclusion reached by such reasoning"

2) **Deductive (Eisegesis)** – This method "starts with a premise and shares opinion." People do it not because it's inspired, but because they find it inspiring to go off on their favorite topic. Some pastors have a tendency to take isolated texts and pull them out of context to force their points. By the way, a text without its context is a pretext. This can be dangerous - the premise must be accurate.

B. INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY METHOD

While God's plan has been to give His people pastors and teachers, there is no substitute for personal study of the Scriptures. The inductive method challenges the student to form conclusions only after observing and analyzing the elements of immediate context and normal word meanings.

Here are the steps you can go through to achieve a proper inductive Bible study method:

- 1) **Pray** - Ask God to reveal His truth and instruction to us
- 2) **Read** - the text a minimum of three times
- 3) **Observation or Outlining** - What does it say?
- 4) **Interpretation** - What does it mean?

5) Application - What does it mean to me? It requires actions from "I, My, Me and Myself"

C. THE PROCESS OF OBSERVATION – a.k.a. OUTLINING

Observation is an act of noticing something, paying special attention to it, examining it. What does it say? What do I see? Observation moves from the general to the specific, investigating the facts in a passage. Inductive students should be curious. They shouldn't take anything for granted.

Good observations are the key to inductive Bible Study. If this step is not done well, with great care, the rest of the study will be weak. Remember we are interested in what the text says, not what we think!

1) Make a simple outline of the text. Find the basic structure of the passage.

2) Write down key words or phrases of actual Bible text.

Record the major facts you observe.

3) Ask and answer these simple questions about the text:

- Who? - Who are the characters mentioned in the text? What relationship do they have with each other?
- What? - What are the key truths or happenings?
- Where? - The geography and location of the events?
- When? - The time sequence of events. What is the historical setting, the lifestyle of the people?
- Why?
- How?
- What words need to be looked up to determine a range of possible meanings?
- What is the main point of the section?
- What recurring words indicate a main idea?
- What elements, arguments, or illustrations does the author use to support the main point?

At this point, it is extremely important not to include your personal interpretation. Remember, this should be a strict observation - what the Scripture says.

D. THE PROCESS OF INTERPRETATION

Only after doing a lot of careful observation should you ask, "What, then, does the Holy Spirit mean by these words as they relate to the words that precede and follow?", not "What do these words mean to me?" Now it is the process of interpretation.

If we don't get the proper interpretation according to the Holy Spirit, we will naturally have wrong applications. It is very important for us to interpret the Scripture according to the Holy Spirit's way, not the way we think it should be interpreted.

In other words, observation and interpretation should be strictly objective, not subjective. Just facts, just facts, ma'am.

The more we study the Bible, the better our interpretation will be.

1) What was the content? Find the purpose or main point of the text

2) Study the passage in its context.

3) Compare the passage with others. Use 'Treasury of Scripture Knowledge.' As I've said many times before, the best commentary of the Bible is the Bible itself."

E. THE PROCESS OF APPLICATIONS

What does it mean to me? How should I respond? Examine yourself and your walk with the Lord. How does this passage apply to us today? Look for: Examples to follow; Sins to forsake; Errors to avoid; Promises to believe; Commands to obey; Actions to take.

Ask the question: How can I personally respond to the truth presented in this passage?

Application must be relevant to the time that the passage is taught. Some of the application presented in the NT was the application for that time of the church and doesn't necessarily apply to us today in a different culture and different time. We will always have more interpretations than observations and applications.

F. GUIDELINES FOR INTERPRETING MESSIANIC PROPHECIES

Many controversial Messianic prophecies could have been settled if the interpreters had stuck with one basic principle and six rules of interpretation.

The basic principle of Messianic prophecies

The prophets often described future events in one picture without indicating that they would be separated by periods of time. It is like seeing mountain peaks in one view without realizing the distance of the peaks between them.



Jesus used the principle of prophetic perspective when He read the Scriptures in a Nazareth synagogue. He opened the scroll to Isaiah and read:

Luke 4:18-19 "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; 19 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."

Then Jesus stopped and rolled up the scroll. People familiar with Isaiah 61:1-2 must have wondered why Jesus stopped in the middle of the second verse. He did not read on because the last part of verse 2:

Isaiah 61:2b And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn,

The rest of the verse speaks of the great tribulation. Jesus said He fulfilled the first part of Isaiah's prophecy in Luke. 4:21. The last part is about His second coming. The prophet, seeing it all in one look, did not know that at least 2000 years would separate those two phases of his prophecy.

The six rules for interpreting Messianic prophecies

1) Interpret in context

As with all Bible passages, consider the speaker, the situation, the people addressed and the subject of the prophecy.

2) Interpret literally

We need to get words their normal meaning, recognizing figures of speech. When prophets specify numbers of days or years, take them literally. Don't interpret prophecy symbolically when a literal interpretation makes sense.

3) Be careful with symbols

Don't give a prophetic passage a symbolic or spiritual meaning when literal interpretation makes sense. For example, the earthquake of Revelation 6:12-17 is exactly that; it does not represent the breakup of society.

4) Look for immediate fulfillment

Look first for the elements of a prophecy that were fulfilled within a few years, and then consider fulfillments during Christ's first and second comings.

5) Be consistent

Don't treat Christ's predictions in a different way from Old Testament prophecies.

6) Don't go too far

Some questions about end time events must remain unanswered.

G. THE NECESSARY ITEMS FOR SERIOUS BIBLE STUDENTS

A **Study Bible** provides introductions and outlines for each book of the Bible, footnotes, maps, cross-references, doctrinal summaries, historical and cultural background, time charts and a basic commentary on the text.

An **Exhaustive Concordance** offers an alphabetical listing of every word of the Bible and every place where that word is found. Make sure you choose a concordance that matches the translation of the Bible you use. The standard concordance for the King James Version, Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, has a helpful numbering system that provides a number connecting words to their root words in the original languages.

A **Bible Dictionary** provides definitions and general background information for the people, places, things, and ideas of the Bible.

A **Treasury of Scripture Knowledge** has been an enduring cross-reference resource for Bible students worldwide. This highly respected and nearly exhaustive compilation of cross-references was developed by R.A. Torrey from references in the Pastor Thomas Scott's Commentary and the Comprehensive Bible. With nearly 500,000 cross-references it is the most thorough source available.

A couple sets of **Bible Commentaries** would offer helpful explanations a lot of historical and cultural backgrounds that would take a long time to research.

To buy all these resources, it would cost quite a lot of money. Or you can buy Bible software for your computer. Nowadays, there are so many excellent Bible computer programs in the market. But if you have cable, Satellite or DSL connection for your computer internet, you can go visit www.BlueLetterBible.org that provides all the resources I mentioned just now and much more at no charge.

H. HOW TO USE A COMMENTARY

Commentaries are indispensable to effective Bible study, but they must be used properly. I recommend that you consult them only after you have carefully worked through the passage yourself.

After you have done your best to understand a passage, then consult one or two good commentaries. If you use them before you have done your own work, you will short-circuit your thinking. If you evaluate only what others have written, you are robbing yourself of the thrill of discovery and the joy of creative, Spirit-led Bible study.

What kind of results can you expect by using commentaries after your own study first?

1) Sometimes they will confirm your understanding of the passage.

You can be confident that you are on target in your conclusions.

2) Sometimes they will refine your understanding of the passage.

The commentators may present insights that didn't come to your mind, thus deepening and enriching your understanding of the passage.

3) Sometimes they will lead you to reconsider your interpretations.

Occasionally you will find that the commentaries present conclusions somewhat different from your interpretation. You may also discover that the commentators differ from one another. When this happens, you'll be glad you did your own homework. It will help you evaluate the views expressed. After careful thought, you may select an interpretation quite different from the one you had when you started.

4) Sometimes they will show you that your understanding of the passage was almost entirely wrong.

Reading the commentaries may give you information that will make you realize you have overlooked or misunderstood an important element in the passage or verse you have been studying. When this happens, go back to the text and think it through again.

Do some of the commentary books I use contradict my own study sometime? Yes, time to time. In those cases, those commentaries are wrong. No, just kidding. I prayerfully re-evaluate the study. I might change my direction or keep it. It depends on what the Lord wants, not my ego.

I. THE BIBLE IS OURS

Many people think that they won't be able to understand the Bible, no matter how hard they try. Yes, we cannot understand everything in the Bible. But when we continuously try our best, it will get easier and more exciting to know His truth.

The Bible, the speaking Word of God is ours. Not only do we possess it physically in our hands, but also we can possess it through our spirits. Let the Speaking Word of God speak to you everyday because you diligently seek God's Word through His Spirit. Let your Bible be yours.

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.