

# HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

## Lesson #1: Bible Basics to Keep in Mind

### In This Lesson

Page 1: Why Study “How to Study?”

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Page 2: An Overview of Our Study

Page 3: The Most Common Mistake in Bible Study

Page 3: Should I “Mark” My Bible?

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## Why Study “How to Study?”

At first, it may seem strange to study “how to study,” until we remember *what* we are studying: the very Word of God!

Scripture claims to be God’s Word (2 Timothy 3:16). If that claim is true, then the importance of how we handle Scripture is impossible to overstate. But so many people are intimidated by personal Bible study.

This class is meant to take away that intimidation. Studying the Bible does not have to be intimidating, but it does take work. And throughout life—and in eternity—it will prove to be worth all the effort and prayer.

“The Bible is a book to be studied and revered...It is a book ultimately from Heaven!” wrote Wayne Jackson. Let’s approach it with reverence and respect. “Study to show yourselves approved unto God” (2 Timothy 2:15).



## An Overview of Our Study

While studying the basics of Bible study could run for many months, we plan to try to give some basic tips that will lead into our class's further study, and, hopefully, your desire to study Scripture on your own:

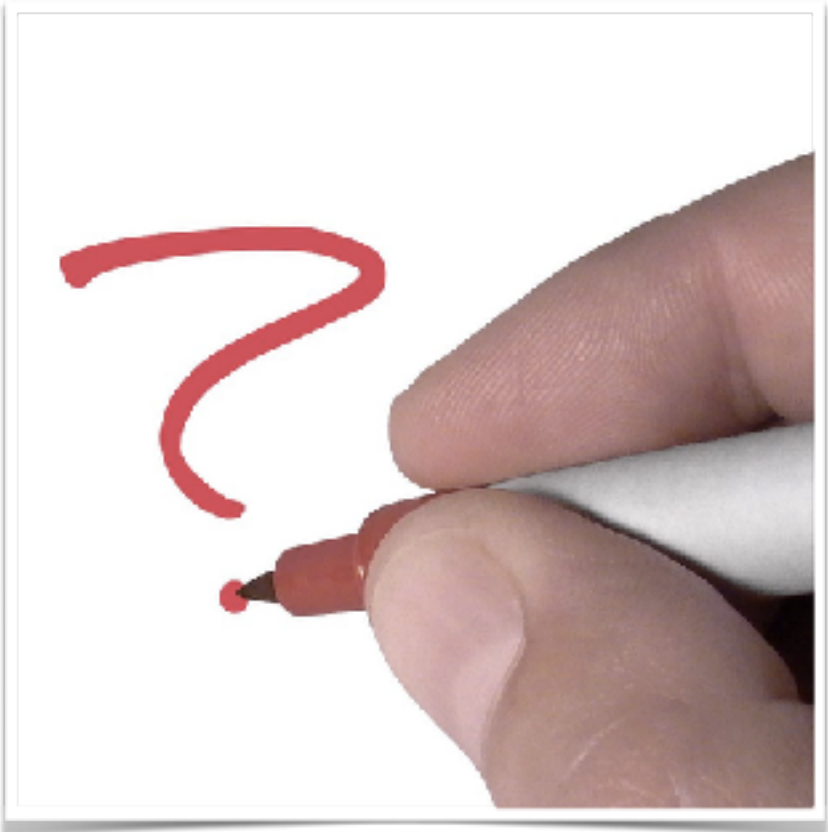
- Week 1: Questions to Ask and the Most Common Mistake
- Week 2: The Theme of the Bible and Periods of Bible History
- Week 3: The Importance of Word Studies
- Week 4: A Simple Method to Study a Context
- Week 5: Review and Practice of "In Context" Study
- Week 6: Studying by Topic or Biography

## 5 Questions We Must Ask

When we open the Bible and start to study, there are certain questions we need to ask of the text itself. These do not answer all our questions about the Bible, but they do give us the "ground-floor" knowledge we need to understand a text.

Ask the following:

1. Who is speaking/writing?
2. To whom is he speaking/writing?
3. What type of literature is this? (prose, poetry, proverb, prophecy)
4. Is this in the Old Testament or New Testament?
5. Is this the Patriarchal age, Mosaic age, or Christian age?





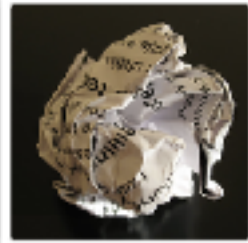
## Should I “Mark” My Bible?

Many people do not want to underline, highlight, or make any other “marks” in their Bible. Some suggest it is because the text is sacred, while I have heard others say that it distracts them when they come back to simply read a passage.

Obviously, this is not an issue worth arguing over, but I believe it is a good idea to have at least one copy of the Bible that you make your own marks and underlines in.

What are some reasons you might think this could be helpful to your personal study? List some reasons below.

# The Most Common Mistake in Bible Study



There are so many different beliefs about the Bible. Sometimes, mistakes are honest. However, many mistakes lead to completely false doctrine, but could be avoided if people would take one important step in their Bible study.

The most common way people “study” the Bible is to start with a verse or phrase. While we should always be hiding God’s Word in our heart—and it is easier to memorize a short statement or phrase—there is more to it than just knowing a few words.

When we just read one statement or phrase, we are missing one extremely valuable thing: ***the context!***

Instead of starting with a verse, we need to start with the Bible as a whole. At the very least, we need to start with the book in which a statement is found and ask our questions (found on page 2) once we get to the statement or verse we are considering.

In other words, the biggest mistake in Bible study is starting with the small picture instead of starting with the bigger picture. When we make that mistake, it can lead to all sorts of false teachings and ideas that are not what God had for us to take away from a passage.

Connected with that, some want to start their Bible study with application instead of interpretation. Simply put: they want to ask, “What does this mean to me?” *before* they ask, “What did this mean when it was written?” Only when we see what the text actually teaches can we then make a proper application.

It all starts with context, both in the text itself and historically!

## Take Home Exercise



Using the questions found on page 2, and the reminder to study the context (page 3), complete the following exercise that we will discuss at the beginning of section two.

STEP 1: Read the book of First John.

STEP 2: Answer the questions found on page 2 about this book.

Who wrote it?

Who was it written to?

What type of literature is this?

STEP 3: See if you can locate the purpose statement of the book. (Hint: It's near the end)

# HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

## Lesson #2: The Theme of the Bible and Periods of Bible History

### In This Lesson

Page 1: What's the Bible All About Anyway?

Page 2: The Promises of God

Page 2: What We Must Believe

Page 3: Christ as the Center

Page 3: Periods of Bible History (list by Andy Kizer)

Page 4: Take-Home Exercise



### What's the Bible All About Anyway?

If someone were to ask you the question, “What is the Bible all about?” how would you respond? While there are many ways to tackle that question, the Bible—for as long as it is—is really about one major theme: God’s plan to redeem sinful humanity through the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Often, this theme is called the “scheme of redemption.” The idea of calling this a “scheme” shows that there is thought and planning to it, as God is not surprised by anything. The word “redemption” literally means “to buy back,” and shows the love of God in that He would desire to have us back, though we sin and break a covenant with Him.

Paul wrote about the “eternal purpose” that God had in place, which was “realized in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 3:11). This reminds us that the scheme of redemption was neither an accident nor an afterthought. It was in the eternal purpose of God, and for it we should be eternally grateful.



## The Promises of God

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Throughout Scripture, God makes promises (or covenants) that show His faithfulness and they reveal the big picture of His plan.

Here are a few key promises:

- To Adam and Eve (Genesis 3; verse 15, directed at the serpent, is a small glimmer of hope)
- To Noah (Genesis 9:8-17)
- To Abram/Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3)
  - Nation (sealed by circumcision)
  - Land (sealed by conquest)
  - Seed/offspring (sealed by Christ)
- To David (2 Samuel 7:11-14)

## What We Must Believe

If the scheme of redemption is the theme of Scripture, then we must believe the following facts that support that theme:

1. God is (Hebrews 11:6).
2. God's law (1 John 3:4)
3. The reality of sin (Genesis 3)
4. Sin has consequences, including spiritual death (Romans 5:12)
5. God's plan for redemption, not mankind's.

While there are many other subjects we must believe, these five basic facts undergird the scheme of redemption, because nearly every other major theme of the Bible (the cross, for example) can fit into this list.





## Christ as the Center

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The Bible can be divided into three parts that center on Jesus:

The Old Testament: Jesus is Coming

The Gospels: Jesus is Here

Acts-Revelation: Jesus is Coming Again

Ephesians 1:3-14 makes Jesus the very centerpiece of all the promises of God, while other passages (Colossians 2:11-14; Hebrews 10:5-10, et.al.) make it clear that He ended the Old Testament law and brought in a new covenant.

# Periods of Bible History (Andy Kizer)



In his book *The 15 Periods of Bible History*, Andy Kizer divides the Bible into the following major segments:

1. Antediluvian ("before the flood");  
Genesis 1:1-8:12
2. Postdiluvian; Genesis 8:13-11:26
3. Patriarchal; Genesis 11:27-46:7, Job
4. Egyptian; Genesis 46:8-Exodus 11
5. Wandering; Exodus 15-Joshua 3 (includes Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy)
6. Conquest; Joshua 4:1-Judges 3:9)
7. Judges; Judges 3:10-First Samuel 10:27 (includes Ruth)
8. United Kingdom; First Samuel 11-First Kings 11 (includes Second Samuel, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and many of the Psalms)
9. Divided Kingdom; First Kings 12-Second Kings 17 (includes Isaiah, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Jonah, and Micah)
10. Judah Alone; Second Kings 18:1-25:30 (includes Jeremiah, Lamentations, Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah)
11. Captivity; Daniel and Ezekiel
12. Restoration; Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther (also includes Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi)
13. Between the Testaments
14. Christ; Matthew 1-Acts 1 (includes Mark, Luke, and John)
15. Church; Acts 2-Revelation 22 (includes all books in-between)

# Take Home Exercise



Taking into consideration the “theme” of the Bible that we have studied, complete the following exercise:

STEP 1: Read Genesis 12:1-3 and Genesis 15

STEP 2: In the space provided below, write for yourself the list of three promises God made with Abram/Abraham.

STEP 3: Write, in your own words, the significance of each of those promises in view of the overall theme of the Bible.

PROMISE 1:

PROMISE 2:

PROMISE 3:



# HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

## Lesson #3: The Importance of Word Studies

### In This Lesson

Pages 1-2: Why Study All Those Words?

Page 2: Selecting Words to Study

Page 3: Don't I Have to Know Some Foreign Languages?

Page 3: The One Website That Can Expand Your Bible Word Study

Page 4: Take Home Exercise



### Why Study All Those Words?

There are a *lot* of words in the Bible. In the English Standard Version, there are 757,439 words from “In” (Genesis 1:1) to “Amen” (Revelation 22:21).

So why is it important to dig down into the “nitty gritty” and study the words of Scripture when (1) there are so many, and (2) it takes a lot of work?

First, we need to study the words because that is how Scripture came to us! God could have chosen to reveal His will through dreams or just “magically” placing ideas in our heads, but He used words to convey His will. When God inspired Moses or Peter or Amos or Paul to write, He did so using words, so we need to know just what was said and written.

Second, we need to study the words because it helps us fight against false teaching. Many strange teaching can creep into our minds if we just try to “overview” a text without digging down and reading what it actually says. Our world likes to say “the devil



## Selecting Which Words to Study

So, you want to do a word study, but which words? In other words, do you have to study *every word* in a passage?

It's helpful if you do, but the best place to start with your word study is by asking the following three questions:

1. Is there a word that is repeated in the text?
2. Is there a word or words that I do not understand the meaning of?
3. Is there a word that is translated differently from one translation to another?

While there are other ways to choose a word to study, these are three questions that will lead to a good "starter list" of words to study in your personal Bible time.

is in the details," but, when it comes to Bible study, quite the opposite is true!

Third, we need to study the words because it is helpful! While it may seem difficult (and it can be at times), simple word studies can help us see the flow of a passage. For example, words that are repeated or words that are antonyms used in a passage help us see the major statement being made.

Finally, we need to study the words because it adds so much depth and color to our understanding of Scripture. Just one little "nugget" from a word study can unlock a passage in a way you have never seen before.

This lesson is designed to give you a couple of simple tools to help you study the very words of Scripture.





## The One Website That Can Expand Your Bible Study

Blue Letter Bible.

Those three words will expand and even transform your Bible study. The website [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org) is a powerful tool, especially for word studies. Personally, I use it for nearly every sermon.

Simply type in the word or verse you are wanting to study and go from there. You can find definitions, other ways the word is translated, and even how to pronounce the original words.

As with any tool, there are drawbacks, but for simple word studies, this is an invaluable tool.

(Oh, and it's free.)



## Don't I Have to Know Some Foreign Language?

It is true that the Bible was written in Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament). While it would be helpful if we were all fluent in those languages, you do not have to have a Ph.D. in these languages to do a word study and understand the passage better.

Here are some simple steps you can take to do a word study.

1. Compare English Translations. This is the easiest way to do a word study! Read the same verse or group of verses from two or more translations, simply noting the differences in word choice. I recommend one translation that is easier to read (NIV, for example) and one that is a bit older but that uses more technical language (ESV, KJV, NASB, for example).

2. Use a Concordance. A concordance is simply a list of where words are used in the Bible. (Strong's, for example). While it can be useful to have a book like this, you can do the same thing online, too. Knowing where else in Scripture the same word is used (maybe in a more familiar passage) is very helpful to grasp the full meaning.

3. Find Out What the Original Word and Where It Is Used. No, you don't have to know Greek or Hebrew! Using [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org) (see lefthand side), simply type in your verse, click on the word, and it will show you what the original (Greek or Hebrew) word means and where else it is used. (For fun, you can also find out how to pronounce it!) Keep in mind that, just like English words, most of these words have more than one definition. Still, knowing that definition helps you get a full picture of what the writer had in mind.

**BONUS Step:** If possible (especially in Greek words) see if you notice any English words that might have come from those original words (*phobia* and *deakonas* are common examples). Having that little bit of information can be helpful to helping you "cement" the word into your mind.

## Take Home Exercise



STEP ONE: Read Philippians 4:2-13

STEP TWO: Do a simple word study on the word “content” (verse 11).

Find:

Where else is this same word used?

It is translated in other ways in other English translations??

Is it translated in other ways in other passages?

STEP THREE: Does your “quick” study of this passage shed any new light on Philippians 4:13? If yes, in what way?

# HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

## Lesson #4: A Simple Method to Study a Context

### In This Lesson

Pages 1-2: The S.T.U.D.Y.  
Method of Dan Winkler

Page 2: Take Home Exercise



### The S.T.U.D.Y. Method of Dan Winkler

When you select a passage to study, how do you tackle it? While there are all sorts of methods, I like one that brother Dan Winkler teaches, because it is only five steps, and helps take a simple walk through a text. Brother Winkler shares this from the word “study.”

S = Set the Picture

This is where you consider the context that we have studied in these lessons so far. We must take into consideration the whole picture of the book we are studying.

T = Tax the Text with Questions

Remember those “five questions” we studied some time ago? This is where they come into play. Who is writing? To whom? Why? etc. It is worth keeping these answers somewhere convenient so, when you return to that passage (or another from

## Take Home Exercise

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Using the "S.T.U.D.Y." method, spend some time with 2 Timothy 4:6-8.

For class next week, bring your one sentence summary as well as any applications you considered after your study of this great text.

the same book) you have them on hand.

### U = Unravel the Context

To do this, consider studying paragraphs, and also look for words that "pivot" the text (wherefore, therefore, but, etc.). This is also the time to make note of words that repeat throughout the text.

### D = Dissect

This is where you conduct your word studies. Pay special attention to verbs and verb tenses, as well as making notes of words you struggle to understand.

### Y = Yoke it All Together

Summarize your study into one sentence that gives the flavor of the text. Then begin making application to your life.

# HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

## Lesson #5: Special Studies (Topical and Biographical)

### In This Lesson

Page 1: There Are Other Types of Study!

Page 2: 4 Steps to a Topical Study

Page 2: A List of Topics to Start With

Pages 3-4: Biographical Studies

Page 3: One Tip for Your First Biographical Study



### There Are Other Types of Study!

So far, we have noticed the importance of studying passages in their context, and we have given many tools for doing just that. However, there are other types of study that can be valuable in personal Bible study.

This lesson is designed to give just a few tips for two types of those special studies: topical studies and biographical (or character) studies.

As we study these matters, though, we must keep the words of Psalm 119:160 in mind: “The sum of Thy Word is truth” (KJV). The key is the word “sum.” The concept behind that is that we must have all that Scripture says on a matter before we have the full revealed truth. As we look at topical and biographical studies, that one point must always be in mind. We must do our best to gain all that Scripture says on a matter before we run to make conclusions.

## Some Interesting Topics

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On pages 131-140 of his book *A Study Guide to Greater Bible Knowledge*, Wayne Jackson lists several topical studies that would be good for a beginning Bible student. Here are just a few of the things he lists:

- Memorable Prayers in the Bible
- Famous Songs in the Bible
- Revivals in the Bible
- Names of God
- Titles of Christ
- Great Sermons in the Book of Acts
- The "I Have Sinned" Admissions in the Bible
- The Nature of God
- Words for "Worship"
- The Reigning Christ

## 4 Steps to a Topical Study

A topical study is just what it sounds like. It is a survey of Scripture to find out what the Bible says about one particular topic. However, with the breadth of Scripture, how can we make a good topical study? Here are a few pointers.

1. Select a topic that is (1) interesting to you, and (2) narrow enough to make for a good study. For example, a topical study of "family" might be interesting, but it could take years to try to find all the passages that deal with that broad topic. However, a study of "marriage and sexual relations" is a narrower topic that lends itself more easily toward a topical study.

2. Have a good resource to help find the verses. Just reading the Bible through (of course) is a wonderful thing to do, but when it comes to studying a topic, it is not efficient. A resource such as *Nave's Topical Bible* is invaluable in helping the student pinpoint passages about one subject.

3. Remember to read passages in their context. Though we are doing a topical study, we still need to understand how a subject is being dealt with in its context. That is the only way to make proper application.

4. Have a way of recording your findings. What is it you are wanting to know about this subject? When you find those passages, how will you answer those questions? Where will you record your findings? You may find that an old-fashioned notepad is the best place to start, because you will, likely, write all sorts of things to start with, before you narrow down your study to the things that are of the most interest to you.



## One Tip for Your First Biographical Study

Biographical studies are rich, but it is easy to fall into the trap of wanting to make your first study of a “major” Bible person (David, for example). That is a wonderful study, but his life covers so much of the Old Testament (and he is mentioned a number of times in the New Testament) that it could be downright overwhelming to start with such a major figure.

Other persons to consider for a first study might be Ruth (or Naomi), Jonathan, Josiah, or several of the “minor” prophets.

The reason is simply that the amount of material is not overwhelming and they make for a good place to start the practice of peppering the text (and their lives) with questions.

## Biographical Studies

Many Bible students love biographical (or character) studies, because they make the Bible come alive. We can pepper the subject of our study with questions and do our best to put ourselves in their shoes.

As with any type of study, though, there are certain steps to take that make these far richer for the Bible student. One of those is to make certain that we are studying the same person each time a name is used! The easiest way to illustrate this would be to remember that King Saul in the Old Testament and Saul of Tarsus in the New Testament are not the same person!

However, at other times, this is not so obvious. When studying people in the Bible, it is helpful to have a resource such as *All the Men of the Bible* and/or *All the Women of the Bible* on hand. These inexpensive books help us make certain we are studying one person and not mixing up two people who happen to have the same name.

Once we have settled on one person to study, we need to isolate the texts that speak about that person, read them in their context, and then ask several questions to help us make our study come alive.

Here are a few questions to ask as you study an individual:

1. Does his/her name mean something significant? (or did a name change signal something important?)
2. Does this person's family history shed light on something significant in his/her life or in a situation they are facing?
3. If we know about this person's youth, is there something in his/her upbringing that is significant?
4. What are the character traits this individual displays that are admirable (if any)? What character traits are displayed that are evil (if any)?
5. What other people were friends or associates with this person and how were they influenced?
6. How did this person face difficult situations and crises in life?

7. What is the lasting impact of this person (if any)?

Once these questions have been answered, it is time to evaluate your life in light of theirs. Are there traits they had that you can learn from (both positive and negative)? Are there ways they influence others—or were influenced by others—that you need to learn from (again, both positive and negative)?

When completing a biographical study, it is worth spending serious time in prayer that you do not elevate the person too highly, nor put them down too lowly, because the focus of Scripture is not on these individuals, but on your relationship with the Almighty. These biographical studies are simply a way to enhance your relationship in the day-to-day living of life.