



HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

Prepared By Charles Brian Knight

An in-depth, detailed, hands-on approach to dissecting the Scriptures

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Introduction

Did you know that *how* we read the Bible is just as important as reading it? The Bible is a book containing a collection of books. Books are meant to be read in their entirety. The Bible is a self-revelation of the one true God, therefore it must be interpreted in light of the intent of the original Divine author through a human writer in a specific historical setting. The Bible was written for all people. God accommodated Himself to speak to us clearly within a historical and cultural context. God does not hide truth—He wants us to understand! Therefore, it must be interpreted in light of its day, not ours. The Bible cannot mean to us what it never meant to those who first read or heard it. It is understandable by the average human mind and uses normal human communication forms and techniques. The Bible has a unified message and purpose. It doesn't contradict itself, though it does contain difficult and paradoxical passages. Thus, the best interpreter of the Bible is the Bible. Although we can never be absolutely certain we know every original intent of the author, many indicators point in its direction: The genre (literary type) chosen to express the message. The historical setting and specific occasion that elicited the writing: The literary context of the entire book. The textual design (outline) of the writings as they relate to the whole message. The specific grammatical features employed to communicate the message. The words chosen to present the message.

Five Inappropriate Methods of Bible Study

- 1) Ignoring the literary context of the books of the Bible and using every sentence, clause, or even individual words as statements of truth unrelated to the author's intent or the larger context. This is often called "proof-texting."
- 2) Ignoring the historical setting of the books of the Bible by substituting a supposed historical setting that has little or no support from the text itself.
- 3) Ignoring the historical setting of the books of the Bible and reading it as the morning hometown newspaper written primarily to modern individual Christians.
- 4) Ignoring the historical setting of the books of the Bible by allegorizing the text into a philosophical/theological message totally unrelated to the first hearers and the original author's intent.

5) Comparing a doctrine, or contemporary issue unrelated to the original author's purpose and stated message. This phenomenon often follows the initial reading of the Bible as a means of establishing a speaker's authority. This is often referred to as "reader response" ("what-the-text-means-to-me" interpretation).

What The Bible Is

The Bible is the inspired revelation of God to mankind. It was preserved for us in written form. (2 Tim. 3:16,17; 2 Pet. 1:20,21).

Origin of the Bible

The Bible came into existence as God revealed Himself to human agents in such a manner that they recorded accurately and free from human error whatever was divinely disclosed to them (2 Tim.3:16,17; 2 Peter 1:20,21) This process is called inspiration, which means that God breathed His Word into the minds of the human authors. They, in turn, under the Holy Spirit's control wrote down what was given to them (see also 1 Cor. 2:6-16). The result of inspiration is a written revelation once for all given and thoroughly accredited. Fulfilled prophecy, miracles, and the fulfilling of God's will through human experiences, all attest to the fact of the inspiration of Scripture.

What the Bible consists of

The Bible consists of 39 books of the Old Testament and 27 books of the New Testament. These 66 books together form one book, the Bible.

Producing The Scriptures

The Old Testament came into being from around 1400 B.C. (the time of Moses) to 400 B.C. (the time of Malachi). The New Testament was produced from about A.D. 40 to A.D. 100.

Theme of The Bible

The Bible reveals God's plan and purpose for the redemption of fallen man. Thus the central theme of the Bible is the redemption and reconciliation of mankind. (2 Cor. 5:17-20; Eph. 1:7-10; Col. 1:19,20).

Central Figure of the Bible

The central figure of the Bible is Jesus Christ. Everything hinges upon Him. He is the author and finisher. (Heb.2:9,10; 12:1,2).

Languages of the Bible

Hebrew is the language of the Old Testament, with a few small portions written in Aramaic (Dan.2:4-7:28; Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26; Jer.10:11) Both Hebrew and Aramaic belong to the Semitic group of languages, spoken by the decedents of Noah's son Shem (Gen.10:22).

Greek is the language of the New Testament—not formal classical Greek of the intellectuals but the common or "koine" Greek, the universal speech that came into the Greco-Roman world following the conquests of Alexander the Great. This language was widely spoken from 300 B.C. to A.D. 330.

Why The Bible Was Written



To reveal God.

To reveal truth.

To reveal the meaning of life.

To reveal the origin and nature of mankind.

To reveal sin.

To reveal Jesus Christ.

To reveal salvation.

To reveal the destiny of the soul.

It is my hope that all who use this book do so patiently, sincerely, and with a firm desire to become better disciples of the Master.

Establishing The Proper View

To understand the Bible properly, it is imperative that one first establish the proper view. The proper view is a “Bird’s Eye View,” Looking at all 66 books of the Bible as one connecting and evolving story. That story is the redemption and reconciliation of the human race (Col. 1:19-20). The Bible must be understood and taught within its proper context. The Constant Theme Of The Bible is The Redemption & Reconciliation of Humankind.

A helpful way to describe the story of the Bible is like the unfolding of a drama:

Act 1: Creation (Genesis 1—2).

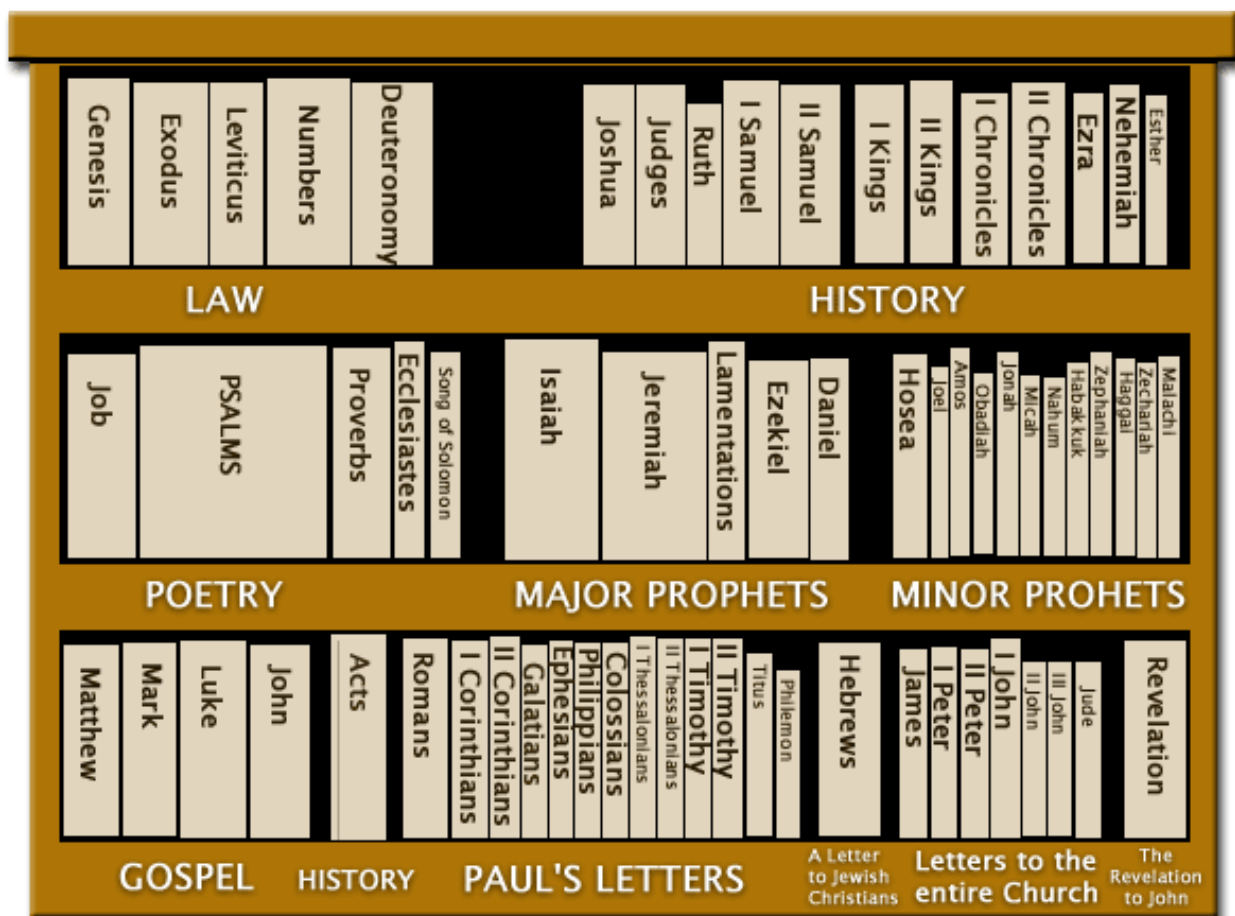
Act 2: Sin & The Fall Of Mankind (Genesis 3—11).

Act 3: What God Plans To Do About Sin (Genesis 12—Malachi).

Act 4: Jesus: The Coming Savior (Matthew—John).

Act 5: The Church & The Gospel (Acts—Revelation).

Act 6: The Consummation of all things.



Act 1: Creation (Genesis 1—2).

- A) God creates all things beautiful & perfect.
 - 1) The earth, space, & all life.
 - 2) God demonstrates the goodness of His nature through creation (Rom 1:20).

Act 2: Sin & The Fall of Mankind (Genesis 3—11).

- A) Adam & Eve disobey God (the human race progresses further away from God).
 - 1) God enacts His eternal plan of redemption & reconciliation (Gen. 3:15).
 - 2) God begins to intervene among mankind to ensure the success of His plan.
 - a) The Flood.
 - b) Tower of Babel (dispersing of nations).
 - c) Calling & promises to Abraham.
 - d) Protecting Jacob & his family

Act 3: What God Plans To Do About Sin: (Genesis 12—Malachi).

- A) God continues His promise by making Israel a great nation.
 - 1) The children of Israel (Jacob) become numerous.
 - 2) God calls Moses to free them from slavery & make them a holy nation.
 - 3) Israel constantly rebels, God judges them, but keeps them as a nation.

Act 4: Jesus: The Coming Savior (Matthew—John).

- A) The Life & Death of Christ (God was with Him, Acts 10:37-38).
 - 1) God raises Jesus from the dead & appoints Him as Lord & Christ (Acts 2:32,36).
 - 2) The story of the Bible culminates in Christ (Luke 24:25-27; 44-49).

Act 5: The Church & The Gospel (Acts—Revelation).

- A) The Church is the promised kingdom of God that will endure forever (Daniel 2:31-45).
 - 1) The church is the Grand Holy Body & Kingdom that God planned from eternity:
 - a) Ephesians 1:3-10.
 - b) Ephesians 2:12-22.
 - c) Ephesians 3:1-10.

Act 6: The Consummation of all things.

- A) Once all of God's will is completed, the earth will be destroyed, man will be judged.
 - 1) Acts 3:19-21.
 - 2) 2 Pet. 3:1-14.
 - 3) 2 Cor. 5:10
 - 4) 1 Cor. 15:24-28; 1 Thes. 4:13-18; 1 Thes. 5:1-11.



Choosing The Proper Translation

Choosing the proper translation for Bible study is crucial to receiving a proper understanding of the Biblical text. All Bible translations fall under the Three Major Translation Styles.

Dynamic Equivalence (thought-for-thought) When Biblical translators translate the meaning of each thought.

- 1) New International Version (Dynamic with formal)
- 2) Today's New International Version (Dynamic with formal)
- 3) Holman Christian Standard Bible (called "optimal equivalence")
- 4) New English Translation (Dynamic with formal)
- 5) New Century Version ("Free translation")

Formal Equivalence (word-for-word) When Biblical scholars attempt to translate each word based upon the word usage at the time of the writing. The intent is to come as close as possible.

- 1) American Standard Version (1901).
- 2) New King James Version (1982).
- 3) New American Standard Bible (1995).
- 4) English Standard Version (2001).

Paraphrase is a re-statement of a translation in modern terms and vocabulary— often grossly exaggerated, and far removed from the original context.

- 1) The Living Bible (1972).
- 2) The Message (2002).

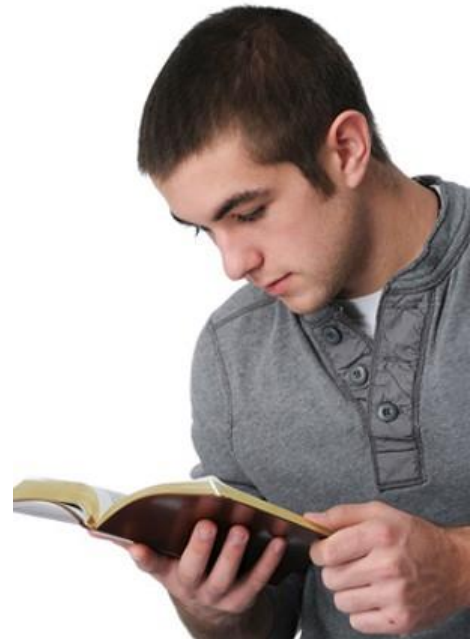
Example...

James 1:19-20 (ESV)

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

James 1:19-20 (The Message)

Post this at all the intersections, dear friends: Lead with your ears, follow up with your tongue, and let anger straggle along in the rear. God's righteousness doesn't grow from human anger.



Identifying The Setting

- 1) The Author (II Thessalonians 3:17).
- 2) The Audience (1 Peter 1:1).
- 3) Period of writing (Amos 1:1; Luke 2:1-3).
- 4) Occasion & Purpose of the writing (1 Corinthians 7:1; 1 John 1:4).
- 5) Names & Places (Acts 13:1-4).

Analyze The Writing: *Identify Thematic Categories.*

- 1) Greeting (Galatians 1:1-5).
- 2) Command (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).
- 3) Doctrinal (The Issues: Core teachings of the Christian Faith (Ephesians 4:4-6).
- 4) Metaphoric (Figure of speech: Matthew 7:3-5).
- 5) Apologetic (Defending the Faith: 1 Corinthians 15)
- 6) Admonishment (Cautionary, warnings, thing to avoid: 2 Timothy 3:5)
- 7) Edification (Uplifting & encouraging: (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).
- 8) Expository (Detailed or lengthy explanation of a point or subject.

Analyze The Writing: *Identify Chain-Verses*

Chain-verses or “references” are a series of additional verses outside of a main verse or context which provides further support for a verse or text under consideration.

Example...

Suppose you are reading about the subject of faith and want to learn more about it so you may teach others. Below is an example of a chain-reference in action.

Hebrews 11:1: Defines what faith is.

Hebrews 11:6: States the necessity of faith.

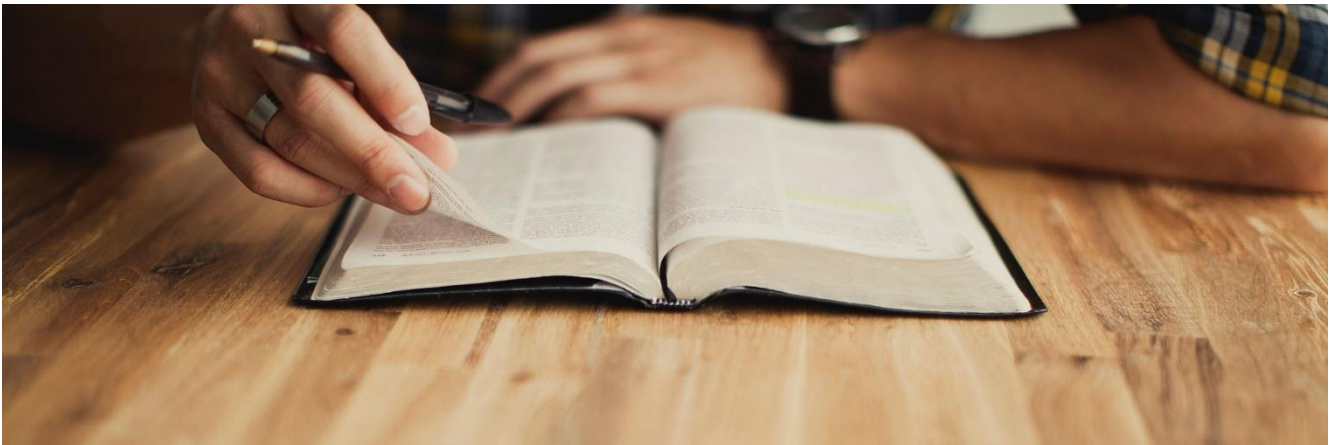
Romans 10:17: Identifies the source of faith.

James 2:14-26: Describes how real faith behaves.

Identify The Unknowns: *Word Meanings*

To gather a true sense of what you're reading, words must be defined from their original language. Many mistakenly attempt to define ancient words using modern dictionaries.

The Old Testament was written in Hebrew. The New Testament was written in Koine Greek. The words we read... what did they mean during those ancient times, to those ancient cultures? Different words can convey different meanings to different cultures. To study the Bible accurately is to put one's self into the culture of the time. One cannot properly understand the Bible by using modern definitions and concepts to define ancient ideas and concepts.



Identify The Unknowns: *Difficult Passages*

- 1) Define words.
- 2) Take the entire writing into consideration.
- 3) Compare other Bible translations.
- 4) Use Bible encyclopedias.
- 5) Compare several commentaries (only as a last resort).



Making Sense Of The Text

Context Is King

Any other context besides the context of the time of the authors writing is foreign to the Bible. Biblical context is not our own. It's not Evangelicalism, Catholicism, the Reformation, the Dark Ages, nor the early Church Fathers. Biblical context is the context in which it was written—its own context.

Reading Isn't Seeing

One cannot fully understand the Biblical text properly by simply reading alone. A given page reveals certain frameworks (insights into the author). These frameworks need to enter our minds as we try to interpret the Bible.

- Their personal experience (Acts 26:9-25).
- Their social context (Philippians 3:4-6).
- Their culture (Acts 22:37—23:1-3).
- Their religious context (of their community and outside their community, Acts 26:1-5).
- The way they viewed reality (the world and people around them, 2 Peter 3:10-14).

When it comes down to it, if you don't know how a person thinks how can you interpret what they say? If you can't understand how the Biblical writer is thinking how can you understand what he wrote? Context is critical!



Making Sense Of The Text

Three Major Forms Of Context To Consider

WORLDVIEW CONTEXT

- History. What's going on in the world around the Biblical writer: Before, during, and after the writing (Alexander the Great Hellenizing the world, its language and culture (Acts 6:1f).
- Geography. What are the other surrounding nations, what are they doing? How have surrounding nations affected the audience? (Samaria, Rome, Acts 17:16f).
- Occasion, of which the Biblical writer found himself when he was writing, (or the specific occasion that prompted him to write (2 Peter 3:1-2).
- Religion. What spiritual beliefs and practices were active during the time of writing? (2 Chronicles 33:1-9).

LITERARY CONTEXT

- Literary genre (a type or kind of literature) dictates how a narrative is written, read, and understood (i.e. poetry, parable, fiction, non-fiction, mystery, etc).
- Genre influences meaning.
- Without genre, you cannot ensure that you are giving an accurate interpretation (John 6:35-60).

Example...

“Descent” What does it mean? It lacks context. It lacks genre.

- Descent in genealogy?
- Descent in flight instructions?
- Descent in approaching a slope?

Should you understand the word literally or figuratively?

LINGUISTIC CONTEXT

Word study is imperative to understanding the context. You can't just gather meaning from words alone. Words don't mean anything by themselves.

Example...

“Run”

What does it mean? It lacks context. It lacks genre (Mark 16:16).

- Running for office?
- A score in baseball?
- A runny nose?
- To run a race?

Words must be defined in accordance with the time of writing. How did the author and people of his time understand the word in question? For example, in our current society, nobody uses the word “Gay” to express they are feeling happy. Near the end of the Flintstones theme song there is a line that reads, “*We’ll have a gay ole time.*” Today our society predominately associates the word “gay” with homosexuality. One cannot define ancient word usage of a foreign language using modern word usage from a differing language. Another example is “Baptism.” In New Testament times, it meant to immerse, dip, or submerge a thing. But today, the word can mean to sprinkle or pour. Never divorce word study from context.”



STUDYING THE BIBLE: *Worldview Context.*

Book Name _____

CULTURAL CONTEXT

What cultural aspects of the time support the writing?

STUDYING THE BIBLE: *Worldview Context.*

RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

What spiritual beliefs and practices were active during the time of writing?

STUDYING THE BIBLE: *Word Definitions.*

VERSE	WORD	DEFINITION

STUDYING THE BIBLE: *Word Definitions.*

VERSE	WORD	DEFINITION

STUDYING THE BIBLE: *Word Definitions.*

VERSE	WORD	DEFINITION

STUDYING THE BIBLE: *Word Definitions.*

VERSE	WORD	DEFINITION

STUDYING THE BIBLE: *Word Definitions.*

VERSE	WORD	DEFINITION

STUDYING THE BIBLE: *Word Definitions.*

VERSE	WORD	DEFINITION

STUDYING THE BIBLE: *Key People & Places.*

KEY PEOPLE & PLACES MENTIONED

Person/ Place _____

Background Information _____

Person/ Place _____

Background Information _____

Person/ Place _____

Background Information _____

Person/ Place _____

Background Information _____

Person/ Place _____

Background Information _____

STUDYING THE BIBLE: *Key People & Places.*

KEY PEOPLE & PLACES MENTIONED

Person/ Place _____

Background Information _____

Person/ Place _____

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Person/ Place _____

Background Information _____

Person/ Place _____

Background Information _____

STUDYING THE BIBLE: *Key Themes.*

Scripture _____
Theme _____

Scripture _____
Theme _____

Scripture _____
Theme _____

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STUDYING THE BIBLE: *Key Themes.*

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Theme _____

STUDYING THE BIBLE: *Chain-References.*

Original Scripture _____

Chain-References _____

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STUDYING THE BIBLE: *Chain-References.*

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Original Scripture _____

Chain-References _____

STUDYING THE BIBLE: *Occasion-Context.*

Occasion of which the writer found himself when he was writing

Writer _____

Writer's Circumstances _____

Audience _____

Time & Period of writing _____

Occasion & Purpose Of The Writing

STUDYING THE BIBLE: *My Notes.*