

6 Steps to Study the Bible



Quick Guide

INTRODUCTION

The Bible is God's primary vehicle for communicating with us revealing to us who He is, who we were created to be, and how we are to live. The Bible has one divine author—God. God used over 40 different human authors who each wrote from different perspectives and in their own style, but who all were inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit to write God's message (2 Peter 2:21). The Bible is one book but is made up of 66 individual books—39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament.

If you've read the Bible, you are probably familiar with some of the stories in the Bible and facts about the Bible. It can be challenging to take these far-off events of over 2000 years ago and make them meaningful and applicable to our lives today. Often the approach is to glean some moral lesson from the hero characters and their stories. But it is important to remember that the Bible has one hero—the triune God with Jesus Christ being the centerpiece of all the Scriptures. To accurately apply the Bible to our daily lives, we need to take steps to ensure we are reading and interpreting it correctly. that is the goal of 6 Steps to Study the Bible.

6 STEPS TO STUDY THE BIBLE

- 1 } • Get Your Bearings
- 2 } • "Them/Then"
- 3 } • Author's Aim
- 4 } • Bridge the Gap
- 5 } • Timeless Truth & The Cross
- 6 } • "Us/Now"

OBSERVATION: WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

Accurate interpretation begins with prayer and observation of the text, both the content and context of the passage.

Read Patiently, Prayerfully, & Repeatedly

- Be patient with the text and with yourself.
- Pray before, during, and after reading. When you're having trouble understanding a verse or passage, stop and pray!
- Read the text repeatedly! Over and over and over...



GET YOUR BEARINGS

What is the genre? Genre sets the expectation for how we approach the text.

The individual books of the Old and New Testaments were written by a diverse group of human authors, but also in a variety of styles or genres. Just as we have different expectations when reading a recipe card compared to reading a novel, we read the Bible based on the particular genre of that book. Some books even contain more than one genre. For example, in Exodus, we find both narrative and poetry. It is important to know the genre of the book you are reading in order to accurately understand and apply the Bible to life. There are **five basic Biblical genres** to keep in mind when reading the Bible:

- Historical Narrative
- Poetry & Wisdom
- Prophecy/Apocalyptic
- Gospels
- Epistles (New Testament Letters)

Where does this passage fall in the timeline of Scripture?

- Old Testament or New Testament?
- Where in the storyline of the Bible does this passage fall?

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"THEM/THEN"

Read Thoughtfully—Understand the CONTENT

"Big 6" Questions: Who, What, When, Where, Why, How?

- Who are the people in the text?
- What is happening in the text?
- What are the events taking place?
- What is the point being made?
- When did the events in the passage take place?
- Where is this taking place?
- How did this occur? How are people/places connected?
- Why is this included? Why does this person say that?
- Why is this important?

Read Purposefully—Put It in CONTEXT!

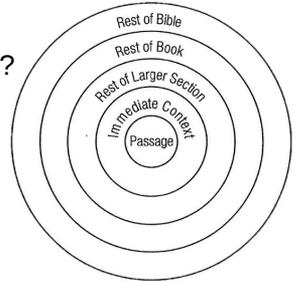
- Consider printing out the text, double-spaced, and use it to mark up the text, as you read.
- Observe the content of the text using the "Big 6" Questions.
- Note the literary and historical context.
- Note how the passage connects to the surrounding context.
- Make a list of your observations from the text OR draw the passage, outline the passage, or make a chart to help record what you observe.

There are 4 Types of Context we want to observe:

- **Surrounding**
- **Literary**
- **Historical-Cultural**
- **Theological** (*we will do this in Step 5*)

Read Telescopically—Surrounding Context

- How do the parts relate to the whole of the passage?
- How do sentences connect to paragraphs?
- How do the paragraphs relate to one another?
- How do paragraphs connect to the chapters?
- Look for repeated themes and ideas in chapters and the whole book.
- How does this book fit into the Old or New Testament, and into the whole story of the Bible?



Literary Context (Words In the Text):

- **Note the author and audience:**
 - Who is the author and what do we know about him?
 - To whom is he writing?
- **Begin by observing sentences**—Look for:
 - Repetition of words
 - Contrasts of items, ideas, or individuals (simile/metaphor)
 - Comparisons of items, ideas, or individuals (simile/metaphor)
 - Lists—what items are in the list and in what order
 - Cause and effect
 - Figures of speech
 - Conjunctions—hold phrases together (but, and, therefore, so)
Note the purpose of the conjunction—what does it connect?
 - Verbs—past, present or future tense
 - Pronouns and who or what they identify
- **Observe paragraphs**—Look for:
 - General to specific
 - Questions and answers, dialogues
 - Purpose/result statements
 - Actions/Roles of people and of God
 - Emotional terms and tone

Historical & Geographical Context (World Around the Text):

- Make notes on key people, places, events, and times
- Look for and make note of cultural or geographical references
- Use a Bible Dictionary, Bible Atlas, or Bible Encyclopedia

INTERPRETATION: WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

Interpretation is important because our understanding of the passage, “what it means to me”, is not always the same as the divinely-inspired, human author’s intent. We are looking for the author’s intended meaning for the original audience. Our observations from reading purposefully and telescopically help us to see the author’s intended meaning for the original audience.

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AUTHOR'S AIM

From your observations, what do you think was the author’s intended message or main point of the text for the original audience? Summarize the message of the passage for the original audience in a few sentences.

Read Thoughtfully

- Look for the aim of the author.
- Grasp and summarize the main idea of the paragraph.
- Keep a list of any unanswered or unresolved problems in the text.

Write out the author's message or aim in one or two sentences using past tense verbs.

Once we determine the author’s original message intended for the original audience, we can then take steps to find the meaning for “us/now.”



4

BRIDGE THE GAP

Bridge the gap between the ancient world and our world today.

Note Differences and Similarities: “Them-Then” and “Us-Now”

- Compare the biblical audience with our time and culture today.
- What parts of the text apply only to the biblical audience?
- Note any differences in language or terms used, in the situation, in cultural differences, and in the covenant.

Make a list of differences and similarities.

5

TIMELESS TRUTH BRIDGE & THROUGH THE CROSS

Gospel Context:

- When considering the original meaning and the differences from the gap between the ancient world and ours, how does the gospel make a difference to the meaning of this passage?
- Is there a particular point of the gospel that impacts the meaning of the text for “us/now”?
 - Jesus' Incarnation
 - Jesus' Life and Teachings
 - Jesus' Death and Resurrection
 - Jesus' Ascension
 - Jesus' Second Coming

Timeless Truth (Theological Context):

- What are the timeless truths or principles of the passage that applies to all people across time? **Make a list.**

A Timeless Truth Principle should:

- Be reflected in the text
- Timeless and not tied to a specific situation
- Not be culturally bound
- Correspond to the rest of Scripture
- Relevant to both the biblical and contemporary audience

Try to summarize the timeless truth of the passage in one or two sentences using present tense verbs.

Consult the Biblical Map:

Do the principles you noted fit with the rest of Scripture? Use cross-references to determine other places this passage the timeless truth is used.

APPLICATION: HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO MY LIFE?



"US/NOW"

What does this timeless truth mean for my life?

- Do I really believe what I have learned about who God is? If so, how does that change the way I view God, myself, others, and the world?
- Does how I think about God day to day fit with the picture of Him that I have just read and studied?
- Is there anything I want to change in my life in view of this? What action will I take today?

Read Meditatively

- Ponder, reflect, and think about the text throughout the day.
- There is a close connection between meditating on the truth of God's Word and applying it to our lives.
- Joshua 1:8, Psalm 1:1-2, 119:97

1

GET YOUR BEARINGS

What is the genre of the passage/book?
Where does the text fall in the timeline of the story of Scripture?

4

BRIDGE THE GAP

What are the differences between the original audience and us?
"Them/Then" vs. "Us/Now"

2

"THEM/THEN"

What is the meaning of the passage for the original audience?
How did they understand the text?

5

TIMELESS TRUTH

What is the timeless truth of the passage?
How does the gospel & Christ's work on the cross affect the meaning of this passage?

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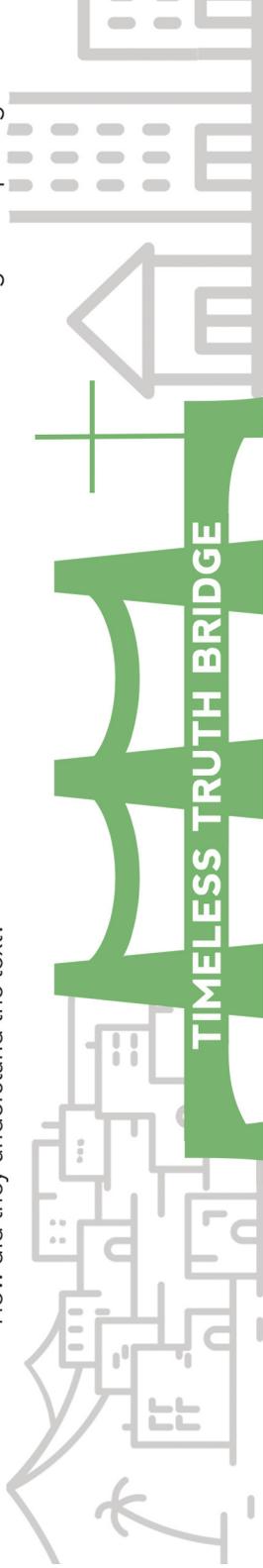
AUTHOR'S AIM

What is the author's intended meaning & message to the original audience?

6

"US/NOW"

- How does this passage inform or change my view of God?
- How does this truth impact my life?
- What action do I need to take?



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