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Studying the Bible

Key Passages

- Hebrews 4:11–13; 2 Peter 1:2–4;
2 Timothy 2:14–19

What You Will Learn

- The three parts of the inductive Bible study method.
- How to distinguish between exegesis and eisegesis.
- Why it is important to carefully study the Bible.



Lesson Overview

The inductive Bible study method is a tool that allows us to understand what Scripture is teaching and to apply it to our lives. Drawing ideas out of the text by asking good questions and understanding context will help us avoid twisting God's Word to suit our own desires.

Memory Verse

Psalm 19:7–9

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;
the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;
the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.



Prepare to Learn

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

God has revealed Himself to us in the words of the Bible—His only written revelation to man. We are called to study diligently what has been revealed and to apply it to the way we live our lives. Within the pages of Scripture, we find many exhortations to use what God has revealed in a way that honors Him.

In the Old Testament, we find examples of the Israelites abandoning what God had revealed to them. As a result, the people of that nation became corrupt.

We see in Nehemiah 8 the reading of the book of the Law of Moses before the assembly of Israel after it had been neglected for so long. Hearing the words, the people again understood what God required of them and sought to live accordingly.

Jesus chided the scribes and Pharisees for their failure to understand what God had revealed. “Have you not read?” was His way of pointing out their misunderstandings (see Matthew 12:3–5, 19:4, 22:31). They had added their own ideas into the Scriptures rather than seeking to understand the plain meaning.

As Jesus taught, He constantly referenced the Scriptures as authoritative for guiding our lives. That same idea persisted as the apostles and disciples continued to spread the gospel after Christ’s ascension.

In Acts 17:10–12, we read of the Bereans, who were commended for searching the Scriptures to confirm what Paul was teaching.

In the New Testament epistles, there are many examples of examining the Bible to understand the truth. For example, in Hebrews 4:11–13 we are told that the Bible is like a sword that helps us discern truth from error in our thoughts. And Paul exhorted Timothy to study diligently God’s Word in order to discern what is true (2 Timothy 2:14–19).

We trust that God has revealed to us those things that we need to live lives that honor Him. Peter relates this idea to us in 2 Peter 1:2–4 when he tells us that “all things that pertain to life and godliness” have been given to us “through the knowledge of Him.” How do we know about God? We know primarily by what He has revealed to us in His Word. The doctrine known as the *sufficiency of Scripture* doesn’t mean that the Bible is an exhaustive manual on everything, but that its principles are sufficient to guide us in the different situations we face.

In this lesson, we will teach the three-step inductive study method which will then be used throughout this curriculum to discern what the text of Scripture says. Laying such a foundation is critical if we are to study the Bible in a way that will not distort the text or make it conform to our thoughts. We are to

submit ourselves to the Scriptures, not the other way around.

APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

Many people chide Christians for reading the Bible literally. The Bible contains many different types of literature, but all of them communicate God's truth to us. When we say we take the Bible literally, we really mean that we take it in the sense that it was written. Some sections of Scripture are meant to be read as historical accounts, while others are poetic.

The process of understanding what Scripture says is called *hermeneutics*—a big word describing the process of trying to understand what the Bible means. Learning proper hermeneutics opens a whole new world of truth found in the Bible. There are many different schools of biblical interpretation. These range from liberal approaches (mystical interpretation, naturalistic interpretation, etc.) to the more conservative approach we'll be using (where ideas are considered in context and Scripture is used to interpret Scripture). This second, more conservative method may be new to you. It is often referred to as the grammatical-historical method of interpretation because it takes into account the grammar and context of the passage as well as the historical and cultural setting of the author and the original hearers.

As Christians, we recognize that the Bible is God's very breath revealing His words to us. As we seek to understand what He has said, we should not import our

own ideas into Scripture but rather allow Scripture to inform and evaluate our ideas. Drawing ideas out of the text is called *exegesis* (ex- meaning "out of"), while adding our ideas into the text is called *eisegesis* (eis- meaning "into").

Take Genesis 1 for example. If we simply read that chapter as it is plainly written, we would conclude that God created the universe in six normal days—an accurate exegesis. On the other hand, if we consider that same text by starting with a belief in evolutionary processes occurring over millions of years, we might be tempted instead to interpret those "days" as long ages. In that case, we would engage in eisegesis since we imported the idea of long ages into the text—a practice that can lead to the dangers of compromise and distorted conclusions.

In order to properly exegete a passage, we include three essential components in an inductive Bible study: observation, interpretation, and application. These steps can be subdivided in various ways, but we will stick to three basic parts to teach the process.

To **observe**, we simply ask *who, what, where, when, why,* and *how* questions about the study passage. Who is the author writing to? What words are repeated or emphasized in the passage? Where is the event taking place? When was this written? What type of literature is being used (history, poetry, parable, etc.)? What is the main point of the passage?

By taking time to observe the text, we become familiar with the important words, commands, and main themes that are present. Once we are familiar with the passage, we are ready to interpret what we have read.

To **interpret**, we look at the passage in light of what the rest of the Bible has to say on the same topic. We may identify cross-references, cultural considerations, specific word meanings, context, commentaries, or parallel passages that tell of the same account or provide the same idea. We should be careful during the interpretation stage because there is always the danger of trying to read our own ideas into the text.

After we have observed what the text says and interpreted the key ideas, the next step is to **apply** the Word to daily life. Scripture is full of God's commands to believers to apply what He has communicated—we are to be doers of the Word, not just hearers (James 1:21–24).

Scripture is profitable to us when we apply its teaching to one or more of the four areas identified in 2 Timothy 3:16–17:

- *Doctrine* (understanding of fundamental truths)
- *Reproof* (pointing out sin)
- *Correction* (identifying right actions)
- *Instruction in righteousness* (living by God's commands and principles)

The Word may expose an error in their thinking or a flaw in the way they are living and thus present an opportunity to repent of those sins and to be conformed to the image of Christ.

In summary, right theology leads to right living. We can praise God for the grace He has shown us by saving us and sanctifying us. We can ask Him to mature us and change us into the image of His Son through the power of His Spirit.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Evangelical tradition is built on the understanding that every Christian can read and understand God's Word. The fancy term for this idea is the *perspicuity of Scripture*. The reformers fought to make the Bible available in the language of the people—a privilege we enjoy today—in stark contrast with the teaching of other groups who historically opposed the idea.

The fear that motivated this opposition was that people would take the Bible and misunderstand and misapply it. This has indeed happened on occasion, but those who distort the Scriptures do so “to their own destruction” (2 Peter 3:14–18). Many cults and false religions have been founded on careless use or intentional distortion of the Bible. This makes it all the more important that we handle God's Word carefully.

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



Studying God's Word

What do you know about hermeneutics?

Take notes as you study the following passages.

2 Peter 1:1-4

Hebrews 4:11-13

2 Timothy 2:14-19



Prayer Requests
