

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE



STUDENT'S STUDY GUIDE

Dr. Stanford E. Murrell

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Chapter 1

The Deductive Method of Bible Study

Definitions of Key Terms

- **Deductive approach.** The type of study which begins with a premise and then looks for the facts (Bible verses) to support that premise is called the deductive approach. Care has to be taken not to make the Bible mean whatever one wants it to mean. The deductive approach goes from the general to the specific. With this method the study of the Bible can become very subjective and almost any meaning can be derived.

A man and his wife were having an argument about who should brew the coffee each morning. The wife said, *"You should do it, because you get up first, and then we don't have to wait as long to get our coffee."* The husband said, *"You are in charge of the cooking around here and you should do it, because that is your job, and I can just wait for my coffee"* Wife replies, *"No you should do it, and besides it is in the Bible that the man should do the coffee."* Husband replies, *"I can't believe that, show me."* So she fetched the Bible, and opened the New Testament and shows him at the top of several pages, that it indeed says ... *"HE-BREWS"*.

- **Inductive approach.** The type of study, which first observes all of the relevant pieces of information and then interprets those observations, is called the inductive approach. With the inductive method there is movement from the particular to the general.
- **Inductive Bible study.** Our objective, hopefully, will be to focus upon the inductive Bible method which first observes the text to be studied, interprets those observations, and then applies the truths learned to one's own life and to others.

The Purpose of Bible Study

Bible study develops out of the belief that God has spoken (Heb. 1: 1-2) and that a portion of what He has said is contained in the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16a) and is written for our instruction (1 Cor. 10: 11; 2 Tim. 3:16b) that the man of God might be equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:17).

God has spoken. *Hebrews 1:1 God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, 2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;*

God has spoken through the Scriptures. 2 Timothy 3:16 “*All scripture is given by inspiration of God.*”

God has spoken for the benefit of mankind. 2 Timothy 3:16b Scripture is given “*for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.*” Bible study therefore has a two-fold purpose.

- The Bible was written for individuals to understand what was written and why.
- The Bible was written in order to apply its teachings to our daily walk with the Lord.

Two Dimensions to Bible Study

At this point one might ask, “*How does a person understand what a writer said and why, so that what was written may be applied?*” Two dimensions of Bible study will help us to answer this question.

- There is a spiritual dimension in the study of the Bible.
- There is a human dimension in the study of the Bible.

The Spiritual Dimension

By spiritual dimension we mean the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. Illumination is a theological term that informs us that God's message, sent through His human instruments, is understandable. It is understandable because the Holy Spirit clarifies and brings understanding of the written Word to the mind of the believing Christian.

- *John 16:12-15 I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. 13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. 14 He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. 15 All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.*
- *1 Corinthians 2:9-3:2 But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. 10 But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. 11 for what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. 13 Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are*

spiritually discerned. 15 But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. 16 For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

- *1 Cor 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. 2 I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.*

In other words, the Bible is a spiritual book as per 2 Peter 1:21. “*For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*”. It is God's revelation to man, and man needs the attending work of the Holy Spirit to help him understand it. As the psalmist said in his prayer, “*Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law*” (Psalm 119:18).

The Human Dimension

Coupled with the spiritual aspect of understanding is the human aspect that demands effort not an effort which is detached from the illuminating aspect of the Holy Spirit but an effort that is interdependent with the Spirit's work. *Ezra 7:10 For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments. 1 Corinthians 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.* According to the concept of inspiration, human authors were moved by the Holy Spirit to write what God spoke, without any violation of their human personality. In other words, inspiration means that human instruments wrote in a manner suited to their personality and style. Consequently, the *Bible* can be studied from a human perspective as would other forms of human communication. In this course we will be trying to teach you an approach for doing just this.

Two Approaches to Bible Study: The Deductive Method vs. the Inductive Method

Ezra 7: 10 says, “*For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments*”.

Paul wrote to Timothy, “*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*” (2 Timothy 2:15). For our own walk with the Lord and the instruction of others, we need to set our hearts to **study** His *Word* and to handle His *Word* accurately.

While it is sometimes easy to read a portion of *Scripture* several times and write down a few truths, or consult a commentary or two to hear what others say about a passage, there is no substitute for the joy one receives when the Holy Spirit grants insight and wisdom through the diligent work of personal study. Also, nothing helps us communicate more effectively or enthusiastically than when we share a truth or insight that the Holy Spirit has personally given to us in our study. But how does one do this?

When Paul wrote to the church of Corinth, he told them, “*Let all things be done decently and in order*” (1 Corinthians 14:40).

In the same chapter he wrote, “*For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints*” 1 Corinthians 14:33.

When we look further at the nature and works of God, we see that there is order in the Godhead (1 Cor. 11:3), in creation (Gen. 1), in the church (1 Cor. 14:33), and in relationships (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5). There is order even in the natural life of man. As the farmer follows methodical steps when he plants his crops, so a cook follows a definite sequence when she prepares dough for bread and batter for cake. Such order in the works of God and man forms a strong exhortation to us to have order in our Bible study. Let us look at two common approaches of Bible study that provide an orderly framework. They are deductive study and inductive study.

Deductive Bible Study

Deduction is the process of reasoning from a known principle to an unknown, from the general to the specific, or from a premise to a logical conclusion. In *Bible* study, deduction starts with a premise and uses the Bible to support this premise. For example, one may start with the premise that God is love. He then opens his Bible and seeks to demonstrate that God is love. Since the deductive method calls for us to select and make an assertion about a topic, it is not the best method to use when doing general Bible study.

First, the premise may be wrong. We may believe that a passage says something when in reality it says something quite different. It is possible to hear something taught, the *Scriptures* alluded to and then, when the Bible is read to “see” what was being communicated. For example. As a child I was taught that Russia is to be found in Ezekiel 38 – 39. But when the Scriptures are read in context there is nothing at all about Russia in the *Bible*.

Second, because our goal is to discover what an author says, we do not want to presume anything until our research is complete. Another approach is needed.

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Induction is the opposite of deduction. It is reasoning from particular facts or individual cases to a general conclusion. When applied to *Bible* study, induction means we study *Scripture* first and then make a conclusion. For example, one might ask, “*What should I believe about salvation?*” Then he would study as many references to salvation as possible before drawing any conclusions. Since induction forces us to come to grips with what a writer says without first presuming what we think he said, it is the method we will use in our Bible study course. The inductive approach allows us to study a book, a passage, or a topic. Such studies are called synthetic, analytical, and topical, respectively.

- The synthetic approach studies a book to discover the purpose of the entire book.
- The analytical approach focuses on passages or individual parts of a passage to understand how this part is used in relation to the whole.

- The topical approach seeks to understand what Scripture says concerning any given topic.

There are dangers with the inductive Bible study. One danger is a failure to consider the whole counsel of God on a matter. Another danger is to emphasize one *Scriptural* truth and pit it against another.

Student's Study Guide

Review

Chapter 1

The Deductive Method of Bible Study

1. Define the deductive method of Bible study.

Answer.

2. Define the inductive method of Bible study.

Answer.

3. What dangers are inherent in the deductive method of Bible study?

Answer.

4. Are there any dangers in the inductive method of Bible study?

Answer.

5. Define the term “*illumination.*”

Answer.

Personal Reflection and Application.

1. Formulate in three sentences or less what your personal current purpose is for *Bible* study.

Answer.

2. Does your private preference agree or differ with the inductive approach to Bible study?

Answer.

Student's Study Guide

Review

Chapter 2

The Inductive Method of Bible Study

Regardless of whether the inductive method is applied to a book, a passage, or a topic, induction always has two parts—

- observation
- and interpretation.

If one reverses this order or fails to observe it at all, his inductive Bible study will become deductive, subjective and open to error. The inductive Bible study method can be diagrammed.

The inductive method is a product of analysis and synthesis. Whether one is observing or interpreting, he first investigates or studies before drawing any conclusions. Once accurate conclusions and interpretations are reached, the third and final stage can be accomplished which is applying the truths to our lives. We call this third step "*Application.*"

These three steps of observation, interpretation, and application complete the cycle of inductive Bible study. Bible study is complete when an application is made first to ourselves, then to others. *James 1:22 "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."*

While application is last in the process, this does not imply that it is last in importance; it simply points out its relationship to the process of Bible study. What we believe the Bible says by way of observation and interpretation touches our lives by personal application in the same way that a seal leaves its imprint on wax. If the "seal" or our understanding of Bible truth is defective through lack of Bible study then the imprint on our lives will be proportionately defective.

Furthermore, even a perfect seal will never leave its imprint if it is not applied to the wax. Diligent Bible study that leads to perfect understanding is still just theory until it is applied to our lives.

Note: *While we have divided the process of Bible study into separate steps-observation, interpretation, and application-we recognize that the way we normally think, combined with the illumination of the Spirit, will not exclude deductive thinking nor prohibit the overlap or simultaneous outworking of the individual steps. Our purpose in this course is simply to establish the process in a logical manner so that you may learn it. Once learned, you should shorten or modify these steps in accordance with your proficiency.*

Student's Study Guide

A Student's Worksheet

Chapter 2

The Inductive Method of Bible Study

Studying a Passage

In this study we will only be teaching how to study a passage of *Scripture*.

Step One: Reading the Text

Suppose you wanted to study Matthew 28:16-20. How would you begin to study it?

First of course you would read the passage so let us do that together. *Matt 28:16 "Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. 17 And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. 19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."*

Step Two: Observing the Text

Having read the text the next step is to observe what has been written. Asking yourself questions will help. List five observations just on verses 16-17 of this passage.

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Another Reading of Inquiry

Now please write five more observations.

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With this second request to observe more about the text, you can begin to appreciate the value of time and mediation that is involved in study which is why much study is a weariness to the flesh (Ecclesiastes 12:12).

A Point to Remember

“There is a difference between a superficial reading of a text and a thoughtful reading. Serious Bible study involves both”.

It does no good to be impatient with *God’s Word*. There is much that will be lost through impatience. *“Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10)* is not only a cultural challenge it is a personal challenge as well. Patience with *God’s Word* yields rich rewards spiritually as Mr. Spurgeon noted in one of his lectures to his students (*The Bible: The Perfect Library*).

Student's Study Guide

A Student's Review

Chapter 3

General Bible Knowledge

In order to test your general Bible knowledge you are going to be asked to answer the following questions. The objective is not to embarrass anyone but to stress the importance of learning a timeframe for Bible events, the books the events are located in, a historical flow, the theme of the Bible and the style of writing that describes particular events. Let us begin.

1. How many books are there in the Bible?

Answer.

2. How many books are in the Old Testament?

Answer.

3. How many books are in the New Testament?

Answer.

4. Give a three fold division of the *Old Testament*

Answer.

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-

5. Give a four fold division of the New Testament

Answer.

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6. When did creation take place?

Answer.

7. In what chapters and books of the *Bible* are the following events recorded.

Answer.

- Creation _____
- The Fall _____
- The Flood _____
- The call of Abraham _____
- The birth of Moses _____
- The appointment of Joshua _____
- The call of Gideon _____
- The dedication of Samuel _____
- The story of David and Goliath _____
- The kingdom divided _____
- The prophecy of the suffering Messiah _____
- A prophecy of 490 years _____
- The birth of Christ _____
- The woman at the well _____
- The fall of Jerusalem _____
- The new heaven and new earth _____

8. What style of writing characterizes the Psalms?

Answer.

9. What style of writing is found in Jonah?

Answer.

10. What style of writing characterizes most of the Bible?

Answer.

11. Define each of the following styles of writing.

Answer.

- Parable.
- Figurative language.
- Apocalyptic imagery.

12. In reading a text is it proper to discern if the meaning of the passage is one of praise, rebuke, didactic [teaching] or conciliatory?

Answer.

A Student's Exercise

1. Make a list of the books of the *Bible* and count how many chapters are in each book.
2. Plan a schedule for daily *Bible* reading. You can determine if you will spend time morning and evening in the *Word* or all in one sitting.

Chapter 4

Six Facets of Bible Study

A Brief Review

Bible study is a continual process of analysis and synthesis combined with the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. With a view of being guided by the Holy Spirit the student of the *Bible* should apply the three-step inductive method involving observation, interpretation and application.

Within this framework other tools are applied to the text as questions are raised and answered regarding background, literary style, structure, [how the author arranged and organized his material] meaning [or what did the author intend to say] and the spiritual truths to be derived.

But all of these tool are meaningless if the *Bible* is not read. If we dare to be the godly men and women then we must read the *Scriptures*. Reading will make us familiarize with basic facts, acquaint us with persons, organize us as to time periods, introduce us to culture, expand our view of God's redemptive plan, and develop our overall understanding of Scripture.

As someone once said, "*When we suffer a cut, we should bleed Bible.*" Reading will help us reach this level. There are, however, different ways one can read.

- The *Scriptures* may be read simply to fill the heart and mind with a principle or truth as in devotional reading. While this is essential to spiritual growth it is not enough. There are individuals who read the *Bible* in a spiritual state only to ignore its harsh realities or doctrinal difficulties. Such *Bible* reading will not produce strong soldiers of the Cross.
- The *Scriptures* may be read simply to fill the mind with general knowledge and facts such as inspectional reading. There is danger in this approach because knowledge can puff up. The intake of *Bible* doctrine on a daily basis is vital to spiritual maturity but doctrine does not always change the heart.
- The *Scriptures* may be read to gain a detailed understanding of a passage or book as is done in analytical reading. The danger in this is to read the book to find material for discussion or arguments, not to be changed or challenged by the *Word*.

A Point to Remember

*“God is interested not only that we read His Word
but also the way in which we read it.”*

Initial Inspectional Reading

When serious but devotional reading of the *Bible* begins, the first requirement towards fully understanding a passage is to become familiar with it. Inspectional reading is one method of accomplishing this aim. Inspectional reading examines the whole book in which a passage occurs because almost every book has an overall purpose to which each individual passage contributes something. In other words, the writer's general purpose in writing was a major factor in determining which topics, themes, and truths he included. Inspectional reading will enable the reader to see how a specific passage contributes to the entire book by viewing it in relation to the other aspects of the content.

In general, inspectional reading is of two types:

- pre-reading
- and a superficial overview.

In pre-reading a person can become acquainted with a passage and book of study. This is done by turning the pages and reading a paragraph now and then reading in different portions of the book to observe the general content. Some questions might be asked as this general perusal of pre-reading begins. For example,

- *“How many chapters are in the book?”*
- *“How is this book divided?”*
- *“Does the narrative develop according to any general time line?”*
- *“What are the names of individuals involved in the book?”*
- *“With what subjects does the book begin and close?”*
- *“Does this book belong to a general type or category of literature such as prose, wisdom, poetical, prophetic, and epistolary literature?”*
- *“When did the author live?”*

Once there has been a general inspection of a book, give it a superficial reading. This will give a greater awareness of all the contents.

- **Read the book through without stopping** to look up or ponder things you do not understand. What you do understand will help you the next time through.
- **Try to read the book in a limited amount of time**, say, one hour at the most. Obviously, some books may have to be split into two or more reading sessions.

- **When you have finished, meditate** over what you think the general purpose of the book might be and what themes were included throughout the book. Also think over how the book was arranged.

Establishing Holy Habits

As a person becomes better acquainted with individual books, their general *Bible* familiarity and factual knowledge will naturally grow. Therefore, *Bible* explorations should turn into a daily habit that is independent of any *Bible* study projects that are presently being worked on so as to keep the *Bible* fresh in the mind.

The establishment of holy habits may be harder to do than said. That is why it is sometimes easier if there is established a daily personal schedule of reading. A simple way to do this is to divide the *Bible* according to the number of chapters it contains. For example, since the Old Testament has 929 chapters and the New Testament has 260, one must read 3.25 chapters a day to go through the *Bible* one time in a year (1, 189 chapters divided by 365 days). Or to read through the *Bible* twice a year, you would have to read 6 ½ chapters per day.

Different Ways of Reading the Bible

- Actual organization of such reading can occur in many formats. Some choose to read straight through from Genesis to Revelation.
- Others like to alternate between a book of the *Old Testament* and a book of the *New Testament*.
- Another method is to read book by book, ending each session with one chapter from the Psalms and/or one chapter from the Proverbs. One may read the *New Testament* through twice for each time the Old is read.
- Some enjoy reading through the same book each day for a month. A combination of these methods will provide fruitful variety. Whichever option you choose, be consistent and faithful. The dividends will be extraordinary.

Analytical Reading

Distinct from Inspectional Reading there is Analytical Reading. Analytical Reading is the main basis for gaining detailed information from a passage. It seeks more than a general familiarity with content as it looks for arrangement or organization of the material and tries to discern what problem(s) the author may be seeking to resolve. When reading analytically, the reader strives to understand the meaning of words and sentences and is cognizant [aware] of the author's style. The underlying theme of the passage is sought. The goal of analytical reading is to help determine what exactly an author said and why.

Background

As one reads through a book of the *Bible*, it is easy to see that it is often written to specific people, talks about historical events, mentions dates and addresses real issues of concern. Since the writer is not writing history for history's sake, it is assumed that the historical events and situations used are chosen to reflect the writer's overall message and his intention for writing. As a result, *Bible* students will want to research the background of a passage or book and ask specific questions.

- “*Who wrote the book?*”
- “*At what point in history do the events occur?*”
- “*What were the circumstances under which it was written?*”
- “*To whom did the author write?*”
- “*What other peoples, countries, and nations were influential at this same time?*”

Literary Style

Because God wrote through the personality of different people, each book and passage has its own unique literary style suited to the writer's personality. This means the *Bible* student must observe literary form and details sometimes called “*genre*.”

- “*What literary devices or style has the writer used to declare his message?*”
- “*Did he use prose, poetry, narrative discourse, parable, figurative language, or apocalyptic imagery?*”
- “*What is the underlying feeling in the passage? Is it praise, rebuke, didactic, or conciliatory?*”
- “*What is the nature of the grammar used? Is it composed of commands, statements of fact, questions, or wishes? In what tense did the author write?*”

Structure

How an author arranged and organized his material is known as “structure.” Since each writer wrote in conformity with the accepted usage of his day, each passage has order. Understanding this order and seeing how the writer developed his thoughts will lead the *Bible* student into a clearer understanding of the passage. It may even help inspire his own thinking later when it comes to preaching or teaching a passage.

Meaning

Even after all of the above has been done, *Bible* students still find the need to understand specific words, phrases, and sentences. For example, the *Bible* speaks about renewing the mind, but what does it mean to "*renew*" the mind and how does one do it? Studying in this manner helps the student to develop his understanding of the meaning of these various words, phrases, and sentences.

Truths Derived

Finally, one must look for the truths stated in the passage. Because each writer's message was from God and because each writer intended that his readers heed the truths of His message, we need to be aware of the same truths so that we may apply them to our lives. We need to ask ourselves what circumstances the readers faced that we confront today? What truths, commands, or rebukes apply directly to us? What was specifically said to the reader that is only indirectly related to us?

Conclusion

Here are six facets of Bible study: Reading for inspection and analysis, discovering background material, observing the literary style, searching for structure, seeking for spiritual meaning and making personal application.

Student Exercise

In preparation for future lectures read the book of Philippians two times using the inspectional method. This means that you will pre-read the epistle the first time through the book looking for specific questions (see page 4) and then make a superficial overview. Be ready to discuss your findings.

Chapter 5

Observation

Several times during His ministry Jesus reprimanded His disciples with the words found in Mark 8:18 “*Having eyes, see ye not? And having ears, hear ye not? And do ye not remember?*” Though the disciples had been with Christ during His great miracles they still lost faith. They saw only what they wanted to see and forgot all else. In the study of the Bible it is possible to see only what we want to see or what we have seen so often before to the point that we yawn at the Bible stories and dismiss the need for serious study of the Scriptures. One cure for this spiritual lethargy is to engage in better observation, which means to train our spiritual eyes and mind to notice the details of the narrative. The fundamental question the student must ask constantly is, “*What does the author mean?*”

Preparation of the Heart

Before a search is made to find the meaning of the Word the heart must be prepared. Every *Bible* study should begin with a devotional prayer in which all known sins are confessed, the mind of Christ is asked for and the request of the Psalmist is uttered, Ps 119:18 “*[Lord, open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law].*”

Purposeful Study

Only when the heart is right with God can there be any hope of achieving the overall purpose of *Bible* study which is to understand what was written and why and to apply this understanding to our daily walk with the Lord.

The Importance of Observation

Observation may be compared to the work of a miner searching for precious gems in the muck and mire of the ground. As the student is initially exposed to a passage of Scripture there are many spiritual gems to unearth. The more time spend “digging” in the Word the more facts will be unearthed and the richer the discovery will be. Skill in observing will determine how much or how little will be found out about a passage. But how does a student of Scripture begin?

Observing the Background

One good place to begin is to discover as much as possible about the background and conditions at the time the author wrote. Such information will help to clarify the understanding of a passage more fully. For example, if the history of the Babylonian Empire is reviewed and the conditions of the Babylonian Captivity remembered, why Daniel wrote what he did will be more understandable. In that instance, the people of Israel had sinned and not repented. In a display of righteous judgment God sent His people into exile. But the exile was to last only seventy years according to the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 25:11-12). Though the Covenant had been broken God was not going to abandon His people. Daniel wrote to tell the people that and to encourage them in their struggles.

Resources for Bible Study

By comparing *Scripture* with *Scripture* it is not hard to get background information on many passages from the Bible itself. But it does take effort. By reading other books of the Bible that relate to approximately the same period of time in the passage being studied a composite narrative emerges. For example, portions of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel record background events for the book of Daniel. In the New Testament the four gospels give background to the book of Acts which in turn gives the setting for the Epistles. In addition to using the Bible itself as a resource tool it is good when possible to consult Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias. Names, places and the book of the Bible being studied can be looked up. Third, books written on Old and New Testament surveys are helpful. Finally, a good commentary will have background information.

Student's Study Guide

Review

Chapter 5

Observation

1. What is the two-fold purpose of *Bible* study?

Answer.

2. Write down the definition of observation.

Answer.

3. Tell why observations are important.

Answer.

Student Exercise

Do your own observational study of 1 Peter 3:1-7 and the whole of Nehemiah 1. Begin by writing out the verses. Make as many observations as you can about each passage of Scripture.

1 Peter 3 3:1 Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; 2 While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. 3 Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; 4 But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. 5 For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: 6 Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement. 7 Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.

Nehemiah 1:1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace, 2 That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. 3 And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. 4 And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven, 5 And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments: 6 Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned. 7 We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses. 8 Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations. 9 But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there. 10 Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand. 11 O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.

Chapter 6

Observing the Literary Style

Learning Different Types of Literature

A part of interpreting the Bible correctly is remembering that the authors of the Bible used different literary styles as they wrote. Therefore, it is important to recognize what type of literature is in the context.

“Is the passage poetical?”

“Is the passage prophetic?”

“Is the passage a narrative?”

“Did the author use symbols?”

“Did the author use imagery?”

“Did the author use imagery or apocalyptic language to convey the message?”

“Are there parables?”

“Are there allegories or other forms of speech?”

An awareness of these different forms and figures of speech will guard against misunderstanding the intent of the language. Of particular danger is pressing an image too far. The Mormons do this when they take the image of God as a “*Father*” to an extreme to teach their doctrine of the eternal procession of the Godhead. Appealing to passages such as Rom 1:7 the Mormons argue that God was once a man and now has been exalted to godhood. “*To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.*”

Another illustration of how literary style affects interpretation can be seen in Psalm 95:3 where it says, “*For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods.*” Here the second line takes up and further develops a thought begun in the first line. This is called “*synthetic parallelism.*” Another example of literary style is found in Psalm 1:6 where the second line is contrasted with the first by stating the opposite idea. “*For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.*” This style of writing is called “*antithetic parallelism.*” There are many other types of Hebrew parallelism and types of psalms along with a variety of literary forms in other parts of the *Bible* that are worthy of consideration. The larger point to keep in mind is that as a passage is studied try to learn the literary form.

Learning to Observe the Text Itself

In normal *Bible* study the observation of a text usually moves from the general to the specific, from an overall awareness of the passage and its contents to a deeper understanding of the details. The image of a tree comes to mind. When seen at a distance only the broad outline of the tree is visible. Then, as the tree is approached it is recognized and its various parts are observed. So it is with a text. The closer a verse is observed the clearer its parts become and the deeper the understanding is of what the writer is saying.

To summarize this thought, observation that moves from the general to the specific generally involves a five-step process.

- In Step One, the text is read in context.
- In Step Two, general observations are made.
- In Step Three, the structure of the sentences is discerned.
- In Step Four, the main theme or thought is identified.
- In Step Five, the specific purpose of the author is discerned and comprehended.

Once is Not Enough

The necessity of repetition in the reading of a text in order to observe all that is possible cannot be stressed enough. It is suggested that a verse be read at least twenty times in the process of mediation and the chapter before and after at least four or five times. In this way the initial inspectional reading will give way to the settled analytical reading. If this is done there will be a higher level of trust in the observations made.

Student's Study Guide

Review

Chapter 6

Observing the Literary Style

Read John 3 and write down what you believe is the main theme. Be sure to follow the counsel of the *Bible* translator John Wycliffe (1328-1384) who wrote the following. *“It will greatly help you to understand Scripture if you mark not only what is spoken or written, but of whom, and to whom, with what words, at what time, where, to what intent, with what circumstances, considering what goes before and what follows.”* It would not be a bad idea to create a personal observation form.

My Personal Observations

- Text _____
- Who? _____
- Where? _____
- When? _____
- What? _____
- Why? _____

John 2

1. Who (People)?

- *Who are the characters involved, and what can be learned about them from this passage?*

Answer.

2. Where (Places)?

- *What places are mentioned? What buildings, cities, nations or landmarks are noted?*

Answer.

3. When (Time references)?

- *When did these events take place? Is the duration of the action mentioned? At what point in redemptive history does the action occur?*

Answer.

4. **What (Events, ideas)?**

- *What is the basic content being discussed?*
- *What events are taking place?*
- *What ideas are being communicated?*
- *Is the tone of the passage one of joy, sorrow, victory, or defeat?*
- *Are there any key concepts or key words?*
- *What promises, commands or warnings are given?*
- *What figures of speech, if any, are used?*

Answer.

5. **Why (Reason)?**

- *Why does the author say what he says?*
- *What did the author say previously?*
- *What does he say next?*
- *How does the present text bridge the gap between these two aspects of the context? Note. Whenever you see the word “therefore” in Scripture pause to consider what it is there for (cf. Romans 5:1; Ephesians 5:1).*

Answer.