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Bible Studies

# Understanding the Bible

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## Understanding the Bible

### A Few Interesting Facts

If you don't remember anything else from this little booklet, please forge this into your memory bank: There are Three (3) necessary, but simple steps for understanding the Bible:

- 1. Open your Bible**
- 2. Pray**
- 3. Read your Bible....every day.**

It really is no more complicated than that. You can't even begin to imagine the things you will learn about God, about Jesus, about life, about yourself, from the Bible, until you 1. open it and 3. read it.

But....I know so little to start with....I'll be confused....it won't make sense....there will be words I can't understand....I can't pronounce all the names....so many people have so many different opinions about what things mean....how will I ever understand it?

That's where 2. pray comes in. You see, God Himself wrote the Bible. He "breathed" it into 40 men over a period of 1,500 years. Everything each of those 40 men wrote agrees with everything the rest of the 40 men wrote. It is all from God.

So, if He wrote it, He knows how to explain it to us. He knows where to direct us for answers within the book itself. After you open your Bible, pray – talk to the Author – and ask Him to open up your understanding. He wrote it for you. He will answer your prayer.

The following facts about our Bibles are taken from a very good little book – one you will want to have in your library:

Bruce and Stan’s Guide to the Bible, a User-Friendly Approach, authors: Bruce Bickel and Stan Jantz, Harvest House Publishers. Copyright 1998. ISBN# 1-56507-795-4

1. The Bible is God’s Word to Man. Keep this in mind as you begin to read the Bible. God didn’t make the effort to write this amazing book so that it could float around in space or sit on a shelf. It is a direct message from God to man. From God to you.

2. Here are some significant numbers which relate to the Bible:

40 \_\_\_\_\_

1,500 \_\_\_\_\_

66 \_\_\_\_\_

39 \_\_\_\_\_

27 \_\_\_\_\_

(40 different Bible Writers, writing what God directed them to write over a period of 1,500 years. 66 Books in the Bible – it’s really more of a library than a book - , divided up into 39 books in the Old Testament, and 27 books in the New Testament)

3. It’s Inerrant. The Bible is without error. Everything in it agrees with everything else that is in it.

4. It is "God-breathed". In other words, when God chose a man to write a certain book of the Bible, He "breathed" the words into that man, in much the same way He "breathes" life into every newly conceived baby. The words were God's, and the personality of every writer shows through, too.
  
5. The Main theme of the Bible is Jesus. Jesus didn't just appear in the New Testament, like some new theme of the Bible. The whole point of every word of the Old and New Testaments was to tell people about their Savior – the One Who would someday come....or the One Who already came....depending on whether you lived in New Testament times or Old Testament times.
  
6. How Do I know the Bible is the Word of God?
  - Well, primarily we know it because God says it is. II Timothy 3:16 says: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." Or, as Pastor Ken says, "Everything in the Bible is good for knowing what's right, for knowing what's wrong, for correcting what's wrong, and for growing"
  - Next, from "Bruce & Stan's Guide to the Bible", they quote Josh McDowell, noted Bible teacher, who says that only God could have created a book which:
    - Has been transmitted accurately from the time it was originally written
    - Is correct when it deals with historical people and events
    - Contains no "scientific absurdities"
    - Remains true and relevant to all people for all time.

7. Why a book? Why didn't God just send an angel with His Word, so the angel could get everyone's attention – an obvious Word from God – and then proclaim it? I'm sure God had His reasons, but it seems to me that there are two major ones:

- Weak people that we are, we probably would have started worshipping the angel instead of God.
- The written Word, once recorded, does not change. It can be compared, from generation to generation, to be sure it is always the same.

8. How did the Bible get to me? This is really interesting to me – and I'd like to keep it very simple by describing the three steps every piece of scripture has gone through as it traveled from the pen of the original writer to the book I have sitting on the corner of my desk:

- Inspiration. Every word written by 40 different writers was totally inspired by God. II Timothy 3:16
- Canonicity. Through the centuries, first by the Old Testament Jewish leaders, and then by the New Testament Christian leaders, different books of the Bible were critically judged and met stringent requirements to be considered part of the "canon", or total book of the Bible. They had to all agree with each other. They had to be considered the Word of God by the people who were currently reading them. They had to speak with God's authority, have the authentic stamp of God (so to speak) on them, and have the powerful impact on human lives that the Word of God would of course have.
- Transmission. From one generation to the next, the Bible, in its many books, was transmitted carefully and accurately.

**1.** By the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC (Before Christ), the Old Testament books had been carefully assembled, and then translated from their original Hebrew language into the accepted language of the day: Greek. This

Hebrew to Greek translation as called the  
**"Septuagint"**

2. By the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD (After Christ), all 66 books of the Bible were together and recognized as the authoritative, total Word of God. This completed group of Bible books was translated into Latin, the accepted language of the day – and called the **"Vulgate"**
3. From the 4<sup>th</sup> Century until the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Vulgate (in Latin) was the only accepted translation of the scriptures, used exclusively by the Roman Catholic church. The Catholic church taught that Latin was the only language acceptable to God for the teaching of the scriptures. In 1384 a brave man named **Wycliffe** translated the scriptures into English from the Vulgate, and many of his followers were persecuted and even killed by the Roman Catholic church for possessing copies of the scriptures in any language except Latin.
4. By the year 1520 **Martin Luther**, from a prison cell, also had caught the passion from God to translate the scriptures into a more commonly-used language. He translated them into German – from the Vulgate.
5. Then in 1534 a man named **Tyndale** did even more. He went back to the original Hebrew and Greek and translated the entire Bible into English. The Catholic church was furious – and Tyndale was eventually burned at the stake, praying out loud at the hour of his death that somehow the King of England would change his mind and allow the scriptures to be read by the common man in English.
6. In 1611 Tyndale's prayer was answered. King James of England commissioned a team of men to translate

the Bible into English. **The King James Bible** was the result.

7. As we finish this list, it is also important to back up our timetable a little and note that possibly one of the most important inventions in the history of man also made a huge impact on the Bible. **In 1455 Gutenberg invented the printing press.** Before this, it would take 10 months to reproduce one copy of the Bible by hand. After 1455, hundreds of thousand of Bibles were in use all over Europe. The printing press was ready and available in time for the new Bibles in English to be distributed to the common man.

*"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever." Isaiah 40:8*

9. What about different translations today? Can we trust them?

Here's the thing. If you have only one translation of the Bible, read it. It is the Word of God. If you have a choice, then choose a Bible which was translated from the original Hebrew and Greek, over a Bible translated from another version of the Bible. Which popular versions are direct translations from the originals?

- King James Version (KJV)
- New King James Version (NKJV)
- New American Standard Version (NASB)

10. You will never learn it all. If you are just starting out in Bible study you may be a little intimidated by all that you don't know. You may be thinking: I can't do this – I don't know enough. How will I

every learn it all? So rest easy. You never will know it all. Nobody will. No Bible scholar on earth ever knows it all.

When I first started to garden I remember feeling frustrated and discouraged and overwhelmed when I would look at other people's gardens. They seemed to know which plant to put where in a garden so that heights and colors and bloom timing would make a perfect picture. I thought: I can't do this – I don't know enough. How will I ever learn it all? I found, though, that if I would just start small and learn a little at a time – maybe a new plant each season – I soon would be able to accumulate the knowledge I so jealously desired.

Bible study is similar. You are never going to know it all. So start small. Start with one book of the Bible and go slow. Each little bit of information will build a base for the next little bit, and before you know it, you'll have a base for understanding more than you ever thought possible.

11. Are there any resources I can use for help?

Absolutely. Here are some I recommend, all available at Christian Bookstores:

- A Study Bible. This is a Bible with extra notes in the margins, generally at the bottom of each page. These notes will explain verses and give you extra information about culture and geography. A good study Bible is an investment.
- Concordance. Most Bibles have a brief concordance at the back, or you can buy a full-sized concordance. Simply put, you can look up any word in a concordance, and find a list of verses where that word is used.
- Bible Dictionary. This useful tool will give you a definition or background information for Bible terms.
- Bible Commentary. Many men and women write commentaries on the scriptures. Reading a commentary is just like having a

conversation about a particular passage with another person who is interested in that passage, and knowledgeable about what it means. Warning: of course, be sure you are reading a commentary written by a person who believes the Bible is totally true, and who wants to teach truth, not just their own ideas.

12. I'll end up this section with a 6-point overview of the Bible.

- ❖ The Beginning - The Human Race - Genesis
- ❖ The Jews - Genesis
- ❖ The Rise and Fall of the Jews – Genesis to Malachi
- ❖ Jesus – Matthew, Mark, Luke & John
- ❖ The Church – Acts to Revelation
- ❖ The End - Revelation

That's it. From Genesis to Revelation.

## **OK – How Do I Go About This?**

Good. You are ready to try. I'm first going to list a few of the ways you can go about Bible Study. And then, I will end up with a more complete explanation of one specific form of Bible Study called "Inductive Study".

If you accept my challenge, you will choose one of these methods and start today. And you will commit to God to read your Bible once a day for the rest of your life.

Here are a few methods I have used in my walk with the Lord:

1. Look up the references in the center column of your Bible.

This one is fun and easy and you can take as much or as little time with it each day as you want to. Many Bibles have a center column which has "references". That means that as you are reading through a passage you will see a little "a" or other similar symbol which directs you back to the center column. There, under "a" you will see a few more verses listed which you can look up elsewhere in your Bible. These verses will help you understand the verse you were reading when you noticed the little "a". This was one of the first Bible study methods I used.

2. Take off where you left off.

This is just simple advice from me to you. The best form of Bible study is going through a book of the Bible a little at a time, starting each day at the verse where you left off the day before.

3. Let it wash over you. There may be times in your life when Bible "study" takes more energy than you have. Maybe you are going through a time of grief or extreme stress. You want to be in the Word every day, but you just don't have it in you to sit and study. That's OK. Use that time in your life to just read the Bible. Read slowly. Ask God to help you understand. And let it wash over you. It works.

4. Outline it. This is for the ambitious. Read a passage. Outline it like you would any piece of literature. It will help you get your arms around it.

5. Summarize it. In other words, whatever you read for the day, put it into your own words.
  
6. Memorize it. This is my favorite form of being in the Word every day. I choose a book of the Bible, then tackle it one day at a time, a couple of verses a day. I memorize those verses, then the next day, if I can, I add a couple more to them. If I need to I just review what I've done the day before. Over the last 12 years I have memorized 6 books of the Bible that way. No kidding.
  
7. Inductive. The following sheets in this little booklet will give you more detail on this method. It takes a commitment of probably at least 30 minutes a day, and is a terrific way to really learn each passage you are studying. Start out with a passage of scripture, the following few instructions, a couple of different colors of pens, several different colors of highlighters, and some extra paper. It's fun.

Resource used for this booklet: Bruce and Stan's Guide to the Bible, a User-Friendly Approach, authors: Bruce Bickel and Stan Jantz, Harvest House Publishers. Copyright 1998. ISBN# 1-56507-795-4

# Inductive Bible Study

## 3 Steps to

### Understanding a Bible Passage

#### **1. OBSERVE:** *What does it say?*

(Use pens, colored pencils, markers...and highlight, underline, circle, connecting lines, squares, etc...)

- Figures of speech
- Contrasts
- Comparisons
- Promises
- Commands
- What's confusing?
- Repetition....Special words or phrases used over and over?
- Is there a key verse?
- Put it into your own words

#### **2. ASK QUESTIONS:** *What does it mean?* (a Study Bible will help a lot with this)

- Give your own title to the whole passage
- Give your own titles to obvious divisions in the passage
- What questions do I have as I read through the passage?
- What are the major themes?
- What is the lesson (truth) or lessons taught?
- Is there any other passage in the Bible I can think of that will add insight into this passage?
- What have I learned about God in this passage?
- Where is Christ in this passage?
- Are there any special cultural truths I should take into consideration?

- Does the geography or political climate of the time affect my understanding of this passage?

**3. APPLY:** *What does it mean to me?*

- Based on truths taught, what do I need to do, or change?
- How do I make that change happen?
- What one thing will I commit myself to this week?

***Use the following passage to try this out:***

## **James 1:21-25**

**21** Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

**22** But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. **23** For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his

natural face in a mirror; **24** for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. **25** But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.