

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

A One Hour Introduction for Beginners



DANIEL ROGERS

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the Bible:
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Introduction for
Beginners**

Daniel Rogers

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About the Author

My name is Daniel Rogers, and I have been preparing Bible studies, writing articles, and preaching sermons for over ten years. I got my start in high school when our minister organized a time for all the young men at the congregation to lead worship. We would write sermons, lead songs, pray, and assist with communion. During this time, my grandfather coached me in the basics of Bible study. He taught me how to use a lexicon, do word studies, and use the context of a passage to determine its meaning. He emphasized the importance of studying ten times more than what is required for any given subject. In other words, he encouraged me to put ten times the amount of study and preparation for each lesson than what the average person does.

Shortly after graduating high school, I began volunteering at smaller congregations to assist when needed. On my own time, I would read books, involve myself in deep study, and use other forms of media to grow independently from any preacher training school, seminary, or university. Following a few years at secular college, I decided to try out for a minister position in another city. After trying out, I was invited back for a follow up visit and offered the job. At twenty years old, I was preaching three lessons a week, going to college until 3:00PM during the week, and working from 4:30PM-12:30AM at the supermarket as a cashier.

After two years of this, I was offered a preaching position at my home congregation. Now, I had set office hours for four hours a day without the need to work a second job. Instead of studying from eight to twelve each day as was required, I would often stay at the office until 10:00PM at night or continue my studies at home. I don't have this amount of time to dedicate to study any longer, but I do have the same zeal for learning about God. I will often call friends to talk about the Bible

when I drive, listen to podcasts, and sometimes just think about Scripture. Nowadays, I am preaching four lessons a week, writing articles, books, and speaking on the occasional podcast.

I'm telling you this so that you can be confident that if I can learn how to study the Bible, then so can you. It does not require special training or a degree. You do not need letters beside your name or extensive knowledge of Greek and Hebrew to study the Bible. All you really need is common sense, time, a good library, and the willingness to dedicate hours to the art. I may not have a degree, but I have just as many hours of Bible study – if not more – than most people well above my age.

You can learn how to study the Bible!! You don't need to spend thousands of dollars on school. If people don't take you seriously because of a lack of degree, then that is their problem, not yours. I've had discussions with and read after hundreds of people who have bachelors, masters, and even doctorates in religion and, let me tell you, you do NOT need it to be able to study the Bible effectively. A lot of the time, all they have that you don't have

access to is a large debt and a fancy piece of paper to show for it.

Again, I am not doubting the importance and appeal of a degree, but I am doubting the confidence people put into it. Trust yourself and the brain that God gave you to be able to study the Bible. You don't have to depend on a school of higher learning! YOU have access to everything you need.

Audience of this eBook

I am primarily writing for those who are already familiar with most major stories in the Bible. Hopefully, you can name all the books of the Bible from memory, or, at the least, be able to locate them easily at a moment's notice in any Bible that is used within your tradition. For me, that means the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testament found in most protestant Bibles.

If you are totally unfamiliar with the Bible but you want to learn about it, begin reading the New Testament. Start with Matthew, Mark,

Luke, John, and Acts. Then, reread Luke and Acts. After that, read James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, John's letters, and Jude. Then, read through Paul's letters in this order: 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, and Hebrews. The last book is Revelation. Before you read it, reread Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. Then, read Revelation twice and pay attention to the connections between it and the three chapters you read before. If at any point within this you run across a passage that you would like to study, return to this book and the material within it to assist you.

Next is the Hebrew Scriptures. I would begin reading by going through Genesis and Exodus until you are familiar with the major characters and themes. As you do all the above, keep a journal to write down your questions, comments, and observations. Believe me, you will have a lot of questions, and much of it will not make sense to you. The purpose of this multi-month exercise is to familiarize yourself with the Bible. After you do the above, feel free

to read the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures. If I were you, I would read it as I listened to a podcast or Bible study that gives an overview of the Hebrew Scriptures. Be sure to use a variety of sources and be skeptical of every interpretation that you hear.

Lastly, I am not writing to any specific group of Christians. It does not matter if you are protestant, Catholic, liberal, conservative, or not a Christian at all. I simply am writing a guide that hopefully everyone can use to learn how to read the Bible.

Preparing to Read

Mindset

Before you ever sit down to study the Bible, you need to first be sure that you have a proper mindset. It is impossible for anyone to read the Bible in a vacuum. We all have our presuppositions when it comes to certain doctrines, interpretations, and even how we view the Bible. I'm not asking you to give up or abandon your tradition, but do not be so foolish as to think that your fellowship is the only one that reads the Bible purely – that is, with an open heart and mind.

I want you to seriously answer this question: could you potentially be wrong about what you believe? If the answer is no, then there is no reason for anyone to study the Bible. In fact, you should be the one writing a book that has all the correct doctrine, so we don't have to try so hard. If the answer is yes, then welcome to the club. We must acknowledge our inability to be perfect in everything as fallible humans. Not being ignorant of our presuppositions, but willing to admit that we have them, is how we can be open to change and being wrong when we study the Bible.

Another question: are you willing to change your opinion? Let's say you are wrong about the atonement theory you hold or your brand of eschatology (study of the end times). Would you be willing to change your view? If no, then there is not much reason to read the Bible. If yes, then beware, changing your mind can alter your circle of fellowship. While you can remain friends, it is hard to attend a church with whom you disagree on key issues. Changing your mind is not comfortable or easy. While I encourage you to have the proper mindset, I must include this warning so that you will not

be surprised when people think oddly of you for not believing what they believe.

Presuppositions

Before I discuss different purposes for reading the Bible, let's talk a little bit more about presuppositions. After several years of study on this topic, I have heard from others and seen for myself that everyone rides upon a theological tricycle. Some use the picture of the barstool, but I agree with Richard Rohr that a tricycle paints the best picture. A tricycle, as the name suggests, has three wheels. The back two wheels simply provide stability while the front wheel does all the work. The front wheel is typically where the pedals are, and it is used to steer the trike.

Each wheel on the tricycle represents a different building block in someone's theology. The back two wheels are Scripture and experience, and the front wheel is tradition. This is true for almost every Christian regardless of the denomination or affiliation. Different groups may claim that they are led by Scripture or by experience or even tradition, but the fact of the matter is that most people

believe what they believe because it is what they were taught by their family or social circle from a young age. Most do not change denominations or major beliefs.

If you can learn to admit this, then you will be able to recognize when you are being led by tradition instead of Scripture and rearrange the tires. What you shouldn't do is copy some fellowships and say that you ride a unicycle of Scripture. While that is ideal, it is not realistic. We all are products of our environment to some extent. Instead, it is best to acknowledge that you will always have presuppositions so that you will be prepared to evaluate them when the time comes.

Again, I must include a warning here: just because you put Scripture at the front of the trike does not mean that you are right. Those two back wheels of tradition and experience will always be there. It is probably best to label the front wheel "MY Understanding of Scripture" – which should not be confused with God's word. Why? Because our understanding can be, and always is, flawed to some degree because we are imperfect.

Consider the following:

What version of the Bible do you use?

Is the Bible inspired by God? If so, how and to what degree?

Should the Bible have 66 books, more, or less?

Does the Bible contain contradictions, discrepancies, or mistakes?

Why did Jesus die on the Cross?

These five questions, and more, have been answered for you from the time that you were a child if you were raised within a Christian environment. Very few people have done any serious work in trying to discover the answers for these themselves. In fact, you may not even know that there are different answers one can give to some of those questions. Let's take it a step further.

Why do you use the version of the Bible that you do? Is it because your family uses the same? Have you always used that version? Did you try several and pick the one that you have?

How do you know that the Bible is inspired/ is not inspired/ is partially inspired by God?

Why do we have this version of the Bible with these specific books? What about the book of Enoch? 1 Maccabees? Gospel of Timothy?

Have you personally studied the alleged contradictions in the Bible?

Are you aware that there are alternative theories of atonement? Can you list the ones you know?

Hopefully, these follow up questions teach you that you have assumptions about the Bible and God that are not your own; they were handed down to you and you accepted them with no questions. While this book will not find the answers to these questions, it will teach you how to find your own answers.

Purpose

Why do you want to study the Bible? What are you trying to get out of it? Are you looking to win a Facebook argument or convert someone to Christianity? Are you trying to convert someone from their church to your church? Are you trying to find the answers to life or trying to find peace? Are you wanting to bring

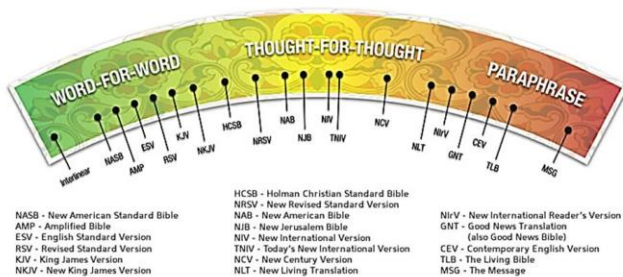
about positive change in the world? Be honest with this answer!

Now, ask yourself this: is your reason for wanting to understand the Bible selfish? If it is, I must caution you: good things can be used for evil. The Bible has been used to justify slavery, segregation, wars, genocide, and many other atrocities. Millions upon millions of people have been beat, cast out, and killed in the name of the Bible. Really dig deep and evaluate your purpose before you continue. Do not add to the chaos.

Resources

If you want to study the Bible seriously, I encourage you to get a variety of resources. You will need at least five different Bible versions, commentaries, language books, topical books, and a Bible study program. In this section, I will discuss each of these resources and, at times, give you examples of each that I have personally used in my own study.

Types of Bible Translations



Not All Bibles Are the Same

Figure 1 <https://newchristian.net/bibles-versions/>

Translations

You need multiple translations because Greek and Hebrew words, like English, can have multiple meanings depending on how the word is used and the context in which is used. Translation is just as much interpretation as it is being able to technically translate words from one language to another. There are also various methods that people use to translate the Scripture, so I would get one version from each philosophy. You will need one word for word translation, one thought for thought translation, one paraphrase translation, one

literal translation, and one interlinear translation that matches your preferred version. Use the chart above to assist in picking out versions that are good for you! Keep in mind that you do not have to purchase one of each of these; online resources are great, free ways to access multiple versions. I will discuss some of those in a later section.

Commentaries

Another fantastic resource is commentaries. When researching the commentary that you need, ask yourself the following questions:

Do I need this commentary for one study or for multiple studies? If you don't think you will use the commentary often, you may focus your search to a free online commentary or eBook. A lot of older commentaries from the 1800s and early 1900s are available for free online. If you will use the commentary over and over, you may purchase it electronically or in print form. Electronic books are great because you can copy, paste, and take and edit notes. They can also go with you on your phone, tablet, or laptop for easy access. Print forms are also beneficial for aesthetic reasons.

I, personally, prefer to hold a book in my hands, but it totally depends on your situation.

Start NOW and organize your electronic library (PDFs articles, videos, etc.). Organize it in a way that makes sense to you with folders and subfolders. This makes it easy to access in the future!

Is there a specific author I like? If your goal in studying the Bible is to teach a class or preach many sermons, then you may investigate getting a set of commentaries by a specific author or group. Personally, I have multiple commentary sets from various religious backgrounds, and I encourage you to do the same. Get commentary sets that focus on the Greek or Hebrew. Purchase sets designed for seminaries and a set for the average reader. Acquire a single volume commentary that covers Bible background. The secret to success is variety. This helps to keep you well rounded and exposes you to alternative, well-studied views.

What books of the Bible do I need commentaries for? Some commentary sets only cover a section of Scripture or specific

books, so it is not always necessary to purchase a full set of commentaries on the entire Bible. For example, if you are teaching out of the Pauline letters, you may not need a commentary on Lamentations or Matthew.

Do you consider yourself conservative, liberal, or by some other label? Regardless of what you label yourself, purchase commentaries from someone to the left of you and to the right of you. Purchase commentaries from people with whom you disagree and with whom you agree. Variety is absolutely necessary if you want to have a good library and be able to research effectively. One way to demonstrate your love for the truth is to challenge yourself with material that you do not see eye to eye with.

Languages

The Bible is written in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. As mentioned before, every translation is also, to an extent, an interpretation; therefore, it is best for you to have a variety (there's that word again) of recourses on the original languages in order to

check the translations and make informed decisions yourself.

I would recommend that you get at least two Greek lexicons and Hebrew lexicons, but more is always better. A concordance is also a valuable tool. Some concordances are on the original language and some are on the English version of the Bible. Having both is great, but if you can only get one, find one that is focused on the original language.

Topical Books

There are two ways to acquire topical books: (1) purchase them as needed and (2) purchase them ahead of time because they look useful. Everyone does both methods, but I will share some personal preferences and strategies.

First, you want to try and find authors that customarily provide a scripture index. This will make things much easier when you need to find a comment about a specific passage.

Second, try to find a library near you that has a large religious section. There is bound to be plenty of books there that you can use for free,

but they will also be willing to order books on your behalf.

Third, if you are lucky, you may find a library that has an attached dollar bookstore. These types of stores take donations of old or unused books from the library or other sources. There are also online vendors that purchase preacher's libraries in bulk or take donations and resell books for next to nothing.

Fourth, don't be afraid of using electronic resources. Many PDFs of old books are online that you can easily access through a simple search. It may not be your preferred method of reading, but you can't beat free in many cases. Ask my wife: books add up fast!

Fifth, in the inside cover of some topical books, I will write one or two-word notes accompanied with page numbers to serve as quick references for interesting quotes, a nice chart, or compelling points. It is also a good idea to label each page with a main theme or point to make finding material easier. In some cases, I will even summarize each chapter to ensure that I understood what I read as well as to serve as a future reference for myself.

Sixth, while they are not books, many authors and scholars post articles, videos, and audios online that are free to access. Use these in the same way that you would a book and organize them well. It is also a good habit to create a text document to document those resources as you would in point five. Use timestamps or page numbers to make it easily accessible.

Bible Study Programs

The two types of Bible study programs are free and paid. While the paid versions have more functionality, free programs will be able to satisfy the needs of most beginning Bible students. For years, I used E-Sword alongside Bible Hub in my studies. E-Sword is great for collecting resources and Bible Hub is ideal for language studies.

E-Sword is a downloadable PC program and smart phone app that can be customized with additional resources created by people online called modules. Many of these resources are free, but you can pay for specific ones if needed. Bible Hub is an online application that is great for quick word studies. There are, of course, other options out there that people

prefer to use, but I cannot recommend these two highly enough.

Alternatively, you can go with a paid program like Logos. It offers packages that you can pay for upfront or put on a payment plan. Personally, I use this program exclusively because of its ability to sync between my tablet, phone, and computers. It also has amazing search capabilities, note taking options, word studies, and mobile education. Tutorials are available through Logos to help you utilize this program to its fullest potential.

Basics of Breaking Down a Passage

Now that we have the proper mindset, have our goal in mind, and have a nice collection of resources, let's discuss how to break down any Bible passage. I will provide you with steps to follow, and some of them may be instantaneous or obvious, but I will write them out regardless. At the end of this book, I will follow this process to break down a verse!

What verse are you studying and what book and chapter is it in?

What is the setting of the verse? Is it a letter? Is someone speaking? Is it narration?

If it is a letter, who is writing and to whom are they writing? When was the letter written? Where was the letter written?

If it is a conversation or speech, who is speaking and to whom are they speaking? When did they speak? When was the book that recorded the dialogue written? Who wrote the book and to whom did they write? What events precede and follow the dialogue?

What is the setting or purpose of the book or letter? Is it just history? Is there a stated meaning of the entire book? Is there an implied meaning?

What section of the Bible is the book found in? Is it part of Torah, history, wisdom and poetry, major prophets, minor prophets, gospels, Acts, epistles, or Revelation? What does that say about the default genre of literature found within the passage? Is the passage you are studying fall within that genre or is it of a different type? For example, if you are studying Matthew, you can expect typical history, but

within Matthew Jesus speaks apocalyptically (uses highly symbolic language) about future events (e.g., Matthew 24).

Once you get to this point, you have set the context for the passage in question. All these answers provide the proper framework to understand and interpret the passage but do not guarantee that your interpretation will be correct as you have to consider the role that your own life plays in interpreting the Bible. Nevertheless, doing this puts you in a much better position than most.

Now, write down, or simply think about, your initial impression of the passage. What does it mean at face value? Does the face value change depend on the genre of literature? Does your impression of it make sense considering the context? Is there something in the passage that confuses you? Maybe a word or phrase?

Now that you have set the context and briefly considered the passage, let's work on uncovering the meaning of it. Keep in mind, the above process may take seconds. For example, if I hear the phrase "Jesus wept," my mind immediately goes to John 11:35 which

was a narration penned by the apostle John who was commenting on Jesus' reaction when interacting with the friends and family of the recently parted Lazarus. I know that Jesus has mentioned that He is about to die and that He would raise Lazarus from the dead. Other facts and details about the book and context come to mind as well, but I will not bother you with those at this time. The point is, setting the context for a passage takes work at first until you can immediately recall the setting of the books of the Bible.

The following steps are not in a required order, but it is the order that I typically follow.

How do the alternate translations word this passage?

What major words are used in the passage and where else are they used in the chapter, then book, then Bible? Is the translation of that word or words here unique? Would a different English word fit better?

If it is a passage in the Hebrew Scriptures, what New Testament authors cite this passage? How do they understand the passage?

If it is a New Testament passage, are there any citations of the Hebrew Scriptures in this passage? One great resource to use for this is the New Testament's Use of the Old Testament tool in Logos! There are also books that do the same thing.

What is the context of the passage the New Testament text is quoting?

Are there other writers in the New Testament that cite that passage? What are the contexts of those passages?

Is there a common theme in this passage that is found within that chapter, then book, then Bible?

Are there any passages that you discovered from the above methods that assist in your interpretation of this passage?

Now that you have done most of the work yourself, what do the commentaries, topical sources, and other resources say about this passage?

Do you agree or disagree and why? Keep in mind to use as many resources as you possibly can in order to survey a wide range of opinions.

Once you have done the above, you should have a wealth of information about this passage. One of the best parts about doing the above is building a database within your mind of valuable references, citations, and quotes that you can refer to when you are studying future passages.

Most people, seminary students or not, will not take the time to do the above, so if you follow this process consistently, then you will set yourself up for success. You will be exposed to more information than you could ever use, but the value you will bring to Bible studies cannot be measured. People will begin to look up to you as a student of the Bible, and do not be surprised if people ask to borrow your books!

Advanced Biblical Study

The above process will give you a well-rounded understanding of most Bible passages within their specific contexts, but you can take the study even further in order to fit that passage within the larger biblical narrative. I personally treat the Hebrew Scriptures a little differently than I do the New Testament when it comes to this step, so I will first explain my reason for doing so. Then, I will cover how to dig deep within the pages of the Hebrew Scriptures and then the New Testament.

The Veil

The New Testament authors, as well as prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures on occasion, stated that the ancient messengers did not always understand the time or nature in which their prophecies would be fulfilled (1 Peter 1:10-12). Paul went as far to say that the Law does not provide a clear picture of God because of the weakness of the readers (2 Corinthians 3).

The veil that was put over the nations would be removed in Christ. Jesus, in other words, revealed the nature of God and fulfilled the Old Covenant in its entirety (Matthew 5:17-18). Now we, through the Christ, can see God face to face and truly know Him and have a relationship with Him like never before.

That being said, we must be careful when reading the Hebrew Scriptures. We must take into account the veiled nature of the Writings and be sure that we consider each passage from the perspective of the God whom Jesus reveals. Without taking this precaution, we may misinterpret key prophetic passages about the

nature of kingdom of God or misunderstand God's nature.

How then do we approach the Hebrew Scriptures?

How to Study the Hebrew Scriptures More Effectively

Have you ever wondered why New Testament authors such as Matthew or Paul seem to pull passages out of the Hebrew Scriptures at random to apply them to the first century church? This is a problem that has afflicted Bible students for centuries. Their way of using the Hebrew Scriptures is confusing to us because we are separated from them by 2000 years, we do not speak the same language that they did, and we are not as familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures as they would have been. One thing that has been helpful to me, however, is understanding that, in many cases, the Hebrew Scriptures are layered.

What I mean by that is that there are layers of meaning to the Hebrew Scriptures, especially prophecies, that need to be studied individually before the intended meaning can be found. Those layers are literal, deeper, comprehensive,

and mystery. We will use the story of Jonah as a way to demonstrate these various levels.

The literal meaning is the most basic level, and it is usually the least helpful to us in the long run and causes the most needless divisions. The literal level is where many Christians spend most of their time, and it is the level that hangs most people up when studying the Bible. The meanings at this level are important, but they do not usually encapsulate the purpose of the passage. The literal meaning of a passage is not why it survived for thousands of years, but the truth in that passage is the reason for its perseverance.

One example of this level is found in the story of Jonah: who did swallow Jonah? Was it a fish or a whale? Is a whale considered to be a fish by the ancient world, or did they know that they were mammals? How did Jonah survive? These questions consume time in Bible class, but there is no real takeaway that we can apply to our lives. Surely, God did not include this story in Scripture just to talk about this fish/whale/ sea monster! Don't get me wrong, it is important that we study the literal level, but it

should not be the hill that we die on. So many people labor to justify this level that they never get anything substantial out of the passage.

The deeper level is just below the literal level, and it is the place to which most Bible class teachers travel. The deeper meaning to Jonah is the story of the prophet. He was given a duty, he ran away from that duty, God punished him, he went where he was told to go, and he was upset with the outcome of his preaching. So, the story of Jonah is individualized to be about one man who is struggling with his faith. It is used to teach us to answer God's call without delay or question. This is a helpful to many Christians, but there is even more to Jonah than this!

The comprehensive level is where things begin to get spicy! It is where we see how this book fits into the Bible's story of Israel. The end of Jonah is quite disappointing if we stick with the literal and deeper meaning. Basically, Jonah pouts because everyone in Nineveh repents, and he was hoping that God would destroy the city like He did Sodom and Gomorrah. God, in response to this, causes a plant to grow over

Jonah and then has it destroyed by the hot sun. Jonah, being quite dramatic, begs for death, so God gets onto him for having more compassion for a plant than an entire city of people and animals. Then the story is over. Jonah doesn't repent. There is no resolution. Why does the text do this?

The story of Jonah to me is bigger than Jonah. It is trying to answer the question, "How do we cope with the reality that our enemies have brought us into captivity? How should we treat them? What would God have us to do?" So, Jonah, then, represents Israel and her struggle with her enemies. From this perspective, we see why Jonah was included in the Bible, and we can take even more meaning from it by answering this same question in our own lives.

Finally, we have the level of mystery. This is discovering how the story fits into the entire Bible – not just the Hebrew Scriptures. We have now gone from "who did swallow Jonah" > Jonah as an individual > Jonah as a representation of Israel > how the book fits within the gospel. Jesus, in Matthew 12 assists us at this level by referring to His own death

and resurrection as the sign of Jonah. The story of Jonah then becomes more than just an isolated question that Israel had to answer, but it provides us with the ultimate solution to Israel's problem: being compelled by the love of Christ through His death and resurrection to love your enemies and bless those that persecute you.

Not every passage can be broken down like this (at least I can't do it at this moment), but do you see how much more meaning can be found in a passage when looked at from this angle? While the first three levels can be understood just using the passage, its context, and a general familiarity with the story of Israel, the mystery level also requires a decent knowledge of the New Testament. Of course, a good center column reference, search tool, or concordance can help too!

How to Study the New Testament More Effectively

While I have given you the basics, there is an additional step that you can take that will give you a better overall understanding of the New

Testament and how the Hebrew Scriptures relate to the New Testament.

In a previous section, I suggested that you find any references to the Hebrew Scriptures in the passage you are studying. This is the beginning step to what I am about to tell you. After you find references to the Hebrew Scriptures in your text, study the contexts of those passages. Then, see if there are any other New Testament passages that reference that text, and study the contexts of those passages. From there, study these new passages and try to find any other references to the Hebrew Scriptures outside of what you already found. Study the context of those passages, find other writers who quote them, and repeat.

As you are doing the above, take note of key words, themes, ideas, and write down the references in some way. You may even make a chart to visualize the similarities between these various texts. After you find passages with common and related sources in the Hebrew Scriptures, keep a lookout for those themes and ideas that you took note of in your daily Bible reading. As you come across these new

texts, though they do not have a direct citation of the Hebrew Scriptures, take note of them and include them in your growing database. This is where an organization system similar to the one I already introduced would come in handy.

Again, we are looking for quality connections – not just similar words. Once you practice this method of studying for some time, you will be able to use it to your advantage when you come across a difficult passage that you have trouble interpreting. Use the information gathered from the above study or start a new study around this passage to help understand it. In other words, use clearly established themes, timeframes, and key words to understand the passage that is giving you trouble.

There is no reason that you would be unsuccessful following this pattern. You don't require extensive training or a degree. You can use common sense and creativity.

Conclusion

Before you ever pick up the Bible, prepare yourself by getting into the right mindset. Don't deny that you have presuppositions but admit them so you can deal with them when they appear. Otherwise, you won't even recognize that you have them. Keep your goal for reading in mind as well.

Get a wide variety of resources to assist you in your studies. Read from various backgrounds so you get a balanced perspective.

Be sure to establish the context of each passage by asking the questions "who, what, when..." Sometimes studying the verses or chapters

around a passage is more important than studying the passage itself!

Finally, use common words and themes to study the passage in light of the entire Bible. One way to easily do this is by checking for potential quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures in the New Testament passage. If you find one, locate every time it is used, and you will begin to build a virtual center column reference.

I hope you have enjoyed this introductory look at how to study the Bible. If it has been beneficial to you, consider leaving a review to help me out at Amazon or on my website labornotinvain.com. I post updates to my site daily, so be sure to subscribe with you e-mail! Thanks for reading!

Bonus Section: Breaking Down a Passage

Alright, so now that I've given you my process, as a bonus, let's use this process on a passage from the New Testament: **Mark 1:1**.

What verse are you studying and what book and chapter is it in?

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1).

What is the setting of the verse? Is it a letter? Is someone speaking? Is it narration?

Mark 1 is an account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This verse is an introductory verse, and it doesn't contain any dialogue.

If it is a letter, who is writing and to whom are they writing? When was the letter written? Where was the letter written?

Mark is writing, and the audience isn't listed, but many have suggested he is writing to a Gentile audience. The letter was written sometime before the fall of Jerusalem, but there is no way to determine the exact date as far as I am aware.

What is the setting or purpose of the book or letter? Is it just history? Is there a stated meaning of the entire book? Is there an implied meaning?

The stated purpose is found in this verse: to record the good news of Jesus.

What section of the Bible is the book found in? Is it part of Torah, history, wisdom and poetry, major prophets, minor prophets, gospels, Acts, epistles, or Revelation? What does that say about the default genre of

literature found within the passage? Is the passage you are studying fall within that genre or is it of a different type?

This book is found within the accounts of the gospel. This tells me that it is historical narrative, so the events and speech should be taken literally unless otherwise noted.

Now, write down, or simply think about, your initial impression of the passage. What does it mean at face value? Does the face value change depend on the genre of literature? Does your impression of it make sense considering the context? Is there something in the passage that confuses you? Maybe a word or phrase?

At face value, Mark is just introducing the book and stating his goal.

What major words are used in the passage and where else are they used in the chapter, then book, then Bible? Is the translation of that word or words here unique? Would a different English word fit better?

Major words: beginning, gospel, Jesus Christ, and Son of God.

The word “gospel” is used seventy-six times in the Bible, and it is used eight times in Mark: Mark 1:1, 14-15, 8:35, 10:29, 13:10, 14:9, and 16:15. It appears to be the best translation, but the term “good news” is clearer.

The other words seem standard. The word “beginning” is how Genesis 1:1 starts, so I’ll take special note of it.

If it is a New Testament passage, are there any citations of the Hebrew Scriptures in this passage?

The word “beginning” could possibly be a reference to Genesis 1:1 like in John 1:1, but it is hard to say.

What is the context of the passage the New Testament text is quoting?

Well, the context of Genesis 1:1 is an account of the creation, and Paul, one of Mark’s companions, said that there is a new creation in Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17), so it is possible that Mark is framing Jesus’ ministry around a new creation. In the context of Genesis 1:1, the writer speaks of a bird, water, and the Spirit.

Perhaps Mark is referencing this when he records Jesus' baptism just a few verses later.

Are there other writers in the New Testament that cite that passage? What are the contexts of those passages?

John uses the word "beginning" in John 1:1, and Peter and John both talk about a "New Heavens and New Earth" in 2 Peter 3 and Revelation 21. I wonder if that has anything to do with Paul's talk of the redemption of creation in Romans 8?

Is there a common theme in this passage that is found within that chapter, then book, then Bible?

The themes of the gospel, the creation, and recognizing Jesus as Christ and the Son of God permeate the entire New Testament. Perhaps this passage isn't just an introduction. Maybe there is more here than meets the eye.

Are there any passages that you discovered from the above methods that assist in your interpretation of this passage?

Now that I consider it, it does seem Mark's reference to Genesis 1:1 was intentional. It seems obvious now that Mark's gospel has something to do with the new creation in Christ that Paul spoke of.

Conclusion

And there you have it! I skipped some of the steps such as quoting other translations and commentaries, but hopefully you see how easy this process is. Of course, had I gone just a few verses ahead, I would have seen several quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures and would have studied the context of those as well.

This is why I say that anyone can follow this process. Once you get the hang of doing word searches and utilize a few tools to help you do research, Bible study becomes way easier than it was before.

I sincerely hope this book has helped you in some way!