

Harves 
Baptist Church

Pastor Roy Pustam

L.P. #3 Eccles Trace
Curepe, Trinidad

Sunday	10:00am
Sunday	6:00pm
Thursday	6:00pm

How to Study the Bible



Study to shew thyself approved
unto God, a workman that needeth
not to be ashamed, rightly dividing
the word of truth.

- 2 Timothy 3:15

Notes

1. 2 Timothy 2:15
2. Matthew 25:13-30
3. James 1:17
4. Acts 18:1-3
5. Gilbertson, Jim (2000). *Pulpit Commentary (2 Timothy 2:15): PC Study Bible (Version 4.0b)* [Computer Software]. Washington: Biblesoft
6. Guralnik, Dave (1986). *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc.
7. Elliger, K & Rudolph W. (1997). *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Germany : Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart
8. Scrivener, F.H.A (1902) *The New Testament: The Greek Text Underlying the English Authorised Version of 1611*. London: Bath Press
9. 2 Peter 1:20
10. Matthew 24:2
11. Ruth 4:1-17
12. Ruth 4:7
13. Jonah 1:1-3
14. Wilmington, H.L. (1984) *Wilmington's Guide to the Bible*. Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Additional Sources

Couch, M. (2000). *An Introduction to Classical Evangelical Hermeneutics: A guide to the history and practice of biblical interpretation*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications

Wendorf, Todd (2003). *How to Study the Bible*. Retrieved on April 8, 2004 from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/areas/biblestudies/articles/031119.html>

con·text *n.* **1.** the parts of a sentence, paragraph, discourse, etc. immediately next to or surrounding a specified word or passage and determining its exact meaning **2.** the whole situation, background, or environment relevant to a particular event, personality, creation, etc.⁶

1. Biblical Context

When we study the Bible both senses of the word context should be taken into account. The first definition given is what we will refer to as the biblical context. Individual verses in the Bible must be studied in light of the material that surrounds them. Failure to do this may result in disastrous results. For instance, we cannot read the passage about Judas that states, "And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself," and then jump to the Lord's Supper passage where Christ's says, "This do in remembrance of me." This humorous example illustrates a valid point, verses must be studied within their biblical context. Perhaps the best way to illustrate what this entails is through the use of a diagram.

The Elements of Biblical Context



1. **Local Context** – The few verses before and after the verse that is being studied.
2. **Chapter Context** – The chapter in which the verse that is being studied is located.
3. **Regional Context** – The few chapters before and after the chapter that contains the verse being studied.
4. **Book Context** – The book of the Bible in which the verse being studied is located.

5. Section Context – The section of books in which the verse is located.

Old Testament

Pentateuch (Law)

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy

History

Joshua	2 Kings
Judges	1 Chronicles
Ruth	2 Chronicles
1 Samuel	Ezra
2 Samuel	Nehemiah
1 Kings	Esther

Poetry

Job
Psalms
Proverbs
Ecclesiastes
Song of Solomon

Prophecy

<i>5 Major</i>	<i>12 Minor</i>	
Isaiah	Hosea	Nahum
Jeremiah	Joel	Habakkuk
Lamentations	Amos	Zephaniah
Daniel	Obadiah	Haggai
Ezekiel	Jonah	Zechariah
	Micah	Malachi

New Testament

Historical Books

<i>Gospels</i>	<i>Early Church History</i>
Matthew	Acts
Mark	
Luke	
John	

Pauline Epistles

Romans	1 Thessalonians	<i>Pastoral Epistles</i>
1 Corinthians	2 Thessalonians	1 Timothy
2 Corinthians	Philemon	2 Timothy
Galatians	(Hebrews)	Titus
Ephesians		
Philippians		
Colossians		

General Epistles

James	2 John
1 Peter	3 John
2 Peter	Jude
1 John	

Apocalyptic

Revelation

What does this teach me about Jesus? _____

What does this teach me about the Spirit? _____

What does this teach me about me or mankind in general? _____

Why did God want me to read this today? _____



Using the truths that you have learned from the “understand” step, select one or a few, and write down how you have seen those truths played out in life.



“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

- 2 Timothy 3:16

Doctrine: Is there a truth that I need to teach or proclaim? To whom? _____

Reproof: Is there something I am doing that I need to stop doing? Is there something I am not doing that I need to do? _____

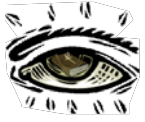
Correction: What life change will I make because of this passage? _____

Instruction in Righteousness: What does the passage tell me concerning how I should go about living the truth of this passage? _____

Appendix

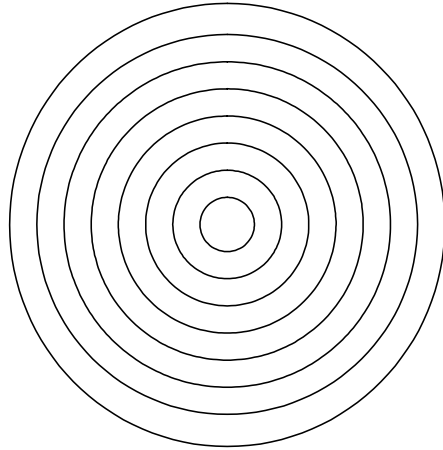
Survey Think Understand Develop Yield

Verse or Passage being studied: _____ Date: _____



Survey

- Whole Context
- Testamental Context
- Sectional Context
- Book Context
- Regional Context
- Chapter Context
- Local Context
- Verse



Unknown words/Definitions



Think

- Who is writing or speaking? _____
- Who is being written to, or spoken to? _____
- What problems were those who it was written to, or those who are being spoken to, facing? _____
- Why does the author or speaker say what he does? _____
- Where does it take place? _____
- When does it take place? _____
- What are the commands? _____
- What are the promises? _____
- What is the "big idea" or main theme of the passage? _____



Understand

What does this teach me about God? _____

6. **Testamental Context** – Distinguishing rather the verse being studied is part of the Old Testament or the New Testament.
7. **Whole Context** – This entails interpreting the verse in light of God’s overall message. . . the whole Bible.

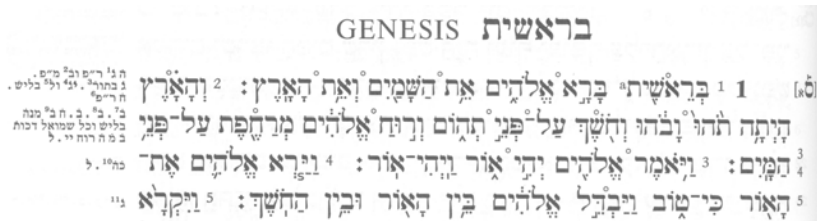
The way that we interpret one verse has a ripple effect on how we look at other verses and ultimately how we interpret the Bible as a whole. That’s why it is so important that when we study the Bible that we look at the context surrounding each passage. Just like a stone that is dropped into water creates greater ripples at the centre of where it is dropped in, the subject matter closest to a verse should be given the greatest consideration. However, all of the different types of context must be given our attention in varying degrees all the way out to the last ripple if we are to interpret the Bible correctly.

The next several types of context align more with the second definition supplied by Webster’s dictionary, which defines context as, “the whole situation, background, or environment relevant to a particular event, personality, creation, etc.” These various contexts deal less with the physical location of the verse in the biblical record and more with the background of the Bible.

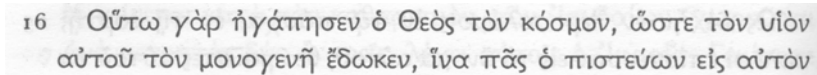
2. Grammatical Context

One such consideration is the grammatical context. The authors of the Bible wrote, for the most part, in the languages of Greek and Hebrew. Greek is the language of the New Testament and Hebrew is the predominant language in the Old Testament. It is important to understand that the language structure of Greek and Hebrew is much different than that of English. Also, the meaning of a Greek or Hebrew word may not be fully conveyed through one English word or phrase. By utilizing Greek and Hebrew study tools, much can be learned about a particular passage. The structure and usage of the original languages should be taken into account if the correct interpretation is to be arrived at.

- The first five verses of Genesis in the original language, Hebrew. (Hebrew is read from right to left.)⁷



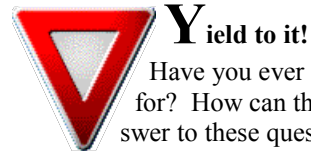
- John 3:16 in the original language, Greek.⁸



It is also important to understand that even though the Bible was written in different languages, at a different time, and by a different Author, namely God through the instrument of inspiration, the stance that we take in interpreting the Bible should be the same as our approach to other works of literature. We should interpret the Bible in a literal or normal sense. This does not mean that we do not recognize that there are metaphors and other figures of speech contained in the Bible. It does mean that we interpret every word in its plain meaning until the text expresses that we should do otherwise. Every verse of the Bible has *one* meaning. Now, we may be able to apply that *one* truth in many different ways in our life, but there is still only *one* meaning. The Apostle Peter put it this way, “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.”⁹ God has not authorized us to make the Bible say whatever we want it to say or whatever we think it should say. Rather, we should strive to determine what He is saying.

When my wife and I were dating we wrote many love letters to each other. Four years of our dating relationship was spent 400 miles from each other, while we attended different Bible colleges. When I sent a letter to her I expected her to read it in a normal sense so that she would get the meaning that I intended. It wouldn't be right for her to make up her own meaning for the letter. When I received a letter from her I would open it with great anticipation and read it. Though many of the letters contained figures of speech and other literary devices, the words were meant to have one meaning. She didn't expect me to take liberty with the letter and apply the meaning to other events or other people, and because I knew the background of our relationship I was able to interpret the letter as she intended. Much in the same way the Bible is a love letter to us

help you better see the truths from the passage of scripture. Using the information that you have learned from the “understand it” step, select one or more truth, and write down how you have seen those principles played out in life. You can use instances from personal experience, an example from the Bible, or relevant stories being reported in the news.



Have you ever stopped to think, “What do we have the Bible for? How can the Bible help me, aside from salvation?” The answer to these questions is summed up in the book of 2 Timothy, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect [complete], thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”⁶ According to this passage the Bible can benefit us in four specific areas:

- Doctrine – Truth that is proclaimed.
- Reproof – Truth that convinces or convicts.
- Correction – Truth that changes.
- Instruction in Righteousness – How to live truth.

The intent of this section is to help you as the student to put the information that you have learned in the other parts of this study into action. The book of James says, “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.”⁷ In order to do this ask yourself these questions and answer those that apply:

- Doctrine:** Is there a truth that I need to teach or proclaim? To whom?
- Reproof:** Is there something I am doing that I need to stop doing? Is there something I am not doing that I need to do?
- Correction:** What life change will I make because of this passage?
- Instruction in Righteousness:** What does the passage tell me concerning how I should go about living the truth of this passage?

Conclusion

As you can see there is more to Bible study than just opening the Bible and reading wherever the pages fall open. To get the most out of the time you spend in God's word and to fulfil the command of 2 Timothy 2:15, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth,” it is necessary to read carefully and fully consider the context of the verse or passage. Using the “S-T-U-D-Y” method will help you accomplish this task, by enabling you to “cut” a straight line around the portions you study so that the individual members will come together in a fashion that does justice to the whole.

What problems were those who it was written to, or those who are being spoken to, facing?
 Why does the author or speaker say what he does?
 Where does it take place? (hint: Maps in the back of your Bible may help with this.)
 When does it take place?
 What are the commands?
 What are the promises?
 What is the “big idea” or main theme of the passage?

Many of these questions can be answered through simply reading the passage. In addition, a good commentary or study Bible can also aid in this process. The most important question in this step is the last one, “What is the ‘big idea’ or main theme of the passage?” Try to express this in as few words as possible while still capturing the full meaning of the portion of scripture.



Understand it!

With the preliminary questions answered you are now ready to move beyond the general facts of the passage, and dive into the purpose of the text. Of course, the passage you are studying meant something to the people of Bible times, but it also has been preserved by God so that it would have meaning for you as well. These questions will help lead you in determining what the passage means for Christians living in modern times. Answer those questions that apply to your chosen text.

What does this teach me about God?
 What does this teach me about Jesus?
 What does this teach me about the Spirit?
 What does this teach me about me or mankind in general?
 Why did God want me to read this today?



Develop it!

For those of us who remember an age before digital cameras, a regular part of life, especially after family vacations and birthday parties, was taking film to the store and having it “developed”. As a boy, for me this meant taking the small canister of film to the store and when you came back, like magic, you had pictures! Workers at the photo lab would take the negatives from the camera and “develop” them. The “developing” process made it so that you could see the pictures. In much the same way this phase of the study process is intended to

from our heavenly Father, it is important that we determine, word for word, what His intent is for each verse.

3. Historical Context

Another aspect which must be taken into account is the historical context of the Bible. Much knowledge is to be gained by studying the time period that surrounds a given passage or verse. Whether it’s the weapons of Old Testament warfare or the various musical instruments of the Psalms, history can help us paint an accurate mental picture of the text that we are studying. Among the many benefits of historical research, passages relating to prophecy may be especially enlightened through the study of history. There are several instances where the accuracy of prophecy can be verified by historical sources outside of the Bible. For instance, in Matthew 24 Jesus prophesied that Jerusalem would be destroyed.¹⁰ History attest to the veracity of Christ’s prediction. In 70 A.D. Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman General Titus. The historical context is an important facet to the many sides of Bible study.

4. Cultural Context

Closely related to the historical context of the Bible is the cultural context. When we speak of biblical culture we venture beyond the mere facts of historical data and seek to learn what the people of that time were really like. The Bible deals with multiple societies over the duration of approximately 1500 years. Modern history evidences vast cultural changes over the space of 10 or 15 years, so one can imagine the cultural changes that took place during the events that span the Bible. In addition, not only will the time period of a given passage affect the cultural context surrounding it, but the geographic location and the nationality of the people referenced must also be considered. For instance in the book of Ruth, Boaz takes off his shoe and gives it to the kinsman to signify his right to redeem the land in question.¹¹ The Bible explains that this was the *manner* at that *time* in *Israel* concerning redeeming and changing.¹² In this case, an understanding of the business practices of Jewish society at the time of the transaction is important for interpreting the passage correctly. If we are to rightly divide the word of truth the cultural context must be taken into account.

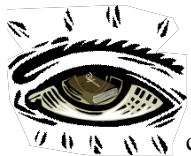
5. Human Context

Another area of context which needs to be factored into our interpretation is the context of human experience. This area really requires no extra study because every human is an expert in the field. However, it does require our attention. It is important to realize that even though characters in the Bible lived lives vastly different from ours, they were still

human. In many ways they experienced the same emotions, limitations, and struggles that we do today. It is critical that the student of the Bible understand that the people and events set forth in the Bible are real; they are not the fictional made up characters of fairytales. When they were cut, they bled. They were just as real as you and I, and were subject to many of the same difficulties experienced by all humans. Many people overlook the area of human context when interpreting the Bible. For instance, many people are extremely critical of Jonah for refusing to go to Nineveh.¹³ However, when the historical and human contexts of the book are considered, the story becomes clearer. The people of Nineveh are revealed in history to be savage people who committed unspeakable atrocities against those who opposed them.¹⁴ This information sheds great light on the actions of Jonah. It is interesting that many modern day students of the Bible will see Jonah's disobedience in refusing to go where God told him, and yet they refuse to carry God's message in much less distressing circumstances than he. It is necessary to put ourselves in Jonah's position and consider the human context to fully understand his disobedience. Not only is the human context a key to understanding the book of Jonah, but many other passages as well. Therefore, if we are to rightly divide the word of truth we must take time to contemplate the human context.

A Method for Bible S-T-U-D-Y

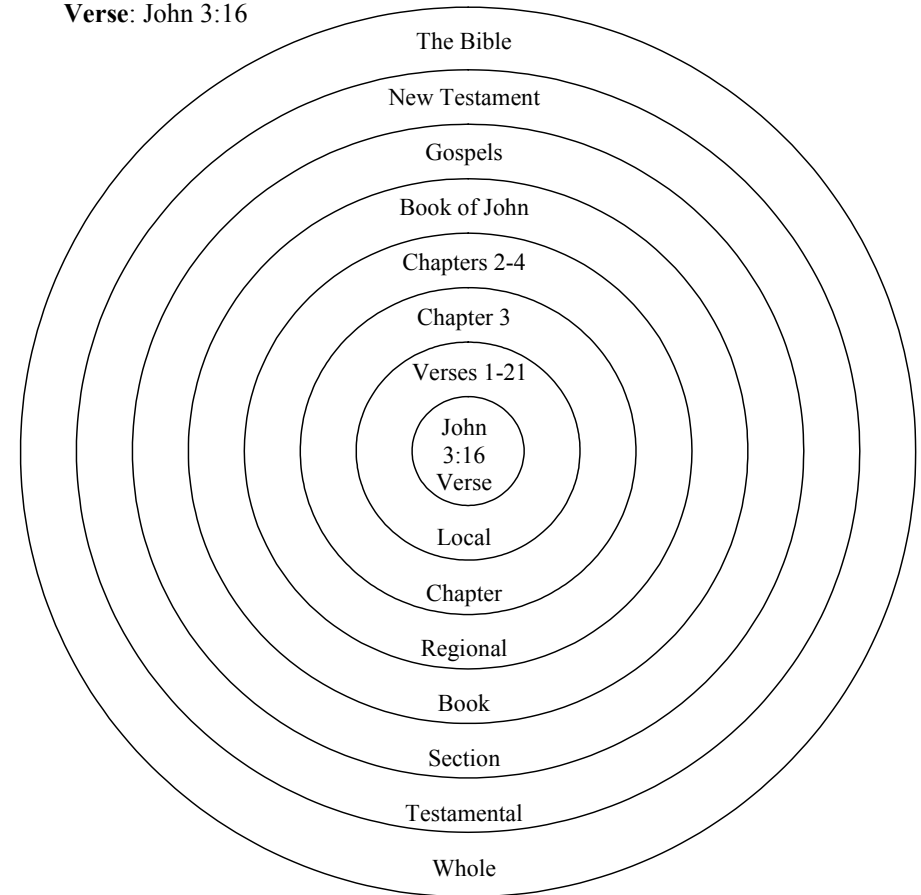
With all of these contexts in mind the next step is to actually put this knowledge into action. The S-T-U-D-Y method is a system that is designed to help the Bible student rightly divide the word of truth, by encouraging the student to ask questions which will help him or her interpret the Bible in context. It is a good idea to write down your thoughts in a notebook or journal. This way, later on you can reflect on what God has taught you.



Survey it!

Read the verse or passage and then locate it within its biblical context. When studying a new passage it may be helpful to actually "map out" the location of the verse as shown in the following diagram. If you are not focusing on a particular verse then complete your "mapping" all the way to the local context circle. If focusing on a whole chapter complete the diagram down to the chapter circle, etc.

Verse: John 3:16



Next, make a conscious effort to consider the location of the verse and how this will affect its interpretation. In addition to locating the verse, if there are any words in the verse or passage which you are not familiar with, take a few moments to look up those word in a dictionary.



Think about it!

After you have successfully located the proper context of the verse, ask yourself the following questions regarding the text. Answer all those questions that apply to your chosen text. (It may help to read through your passage once again at a slower pace.)

- Who is writing or speaking?
- Who is being written to, or spoken to?