

How to Study the Bible



Let's define what "Expository" means!

Expository Definition: Intended to explain or describe something

Expository Bible teaching and preaching details the meaning of a particular text or passage of Scripture. It explains what the Bible means by what it says.

The opposite of this is using the Bible to support our own views, beliefs, and ideas. It is making the Bible say what we want it to say. This is dangerous!

The Bible study method used for expository teaching is called "Inductive Bible Study."

People in the Bible who practiced Expository preaching/teaching:

- Ezra: Nehemiah 8:1-8
- Jesus: Luke 24:27
- Peter: Acts 2:16-36
- Stephen: Acts 7:1-54
- Paul: Acts 13:15-48
- Writer of Hebrews: Book of Hebrews
- Etc.



*How can I do Inductive Bible study?
Thankfully, it is **not difficult!***

Here are some important rules:

1. We must affirm and submit to the authority of God's perfect Word.
2. The text can never mean what God does not intend for it to mean. Every text has only one meaning—God's intended meaning.
3. The goal is not applying the text however we like, but to apply it how God intends. (Avoid asking "what does this mean to you?"—the goal is not to please ourselves, but to understand it as God intends.)
4. Context is very important.
5. The Scriptures are primarily about God. He is the primary point.

There are three steps to Inductive Bible Study:

1. **Observation**: What does it say?
2. **Interpretation**: What does it mean?
3. **Application**: What must I do?

Notes

More Information on Inductive Bible Study

The process of inductive bible study is accomplished by answering basic inductive questions. These questions appear below along with explanation that will aid you in answering them. Although every question should be asked in every study, not all the questions will have an answer. In this event do not force an answer, simply move to the next question.

Observation

The inductive method of Bible study involves three major steps with the first being Observation. The purpose of Observation is to gain a sense of what the passage is saying without getting into the details.

1) Who is the author of the book being studied?

At times the answer to this question appears within the text itself in what is referred to as the "salutation." At other times the author's identity is not specifically stated in the text. In instances such as these, the author's identity may be determined by consulting reference works outside the Bible. Even then, however, you may find no definite answer, but that is ok. Just move to the next question.

2) When was the book written and under what circumstances?

As with question one this information can often be found in the salutation of the book you are studying. For example, many of the prophets identify what king was in power during the time of the prophet's writing. In other cases, you may be forced to find the answer to these questions within the book itself.

3) Who is involved in the passage being studied?

To answer this question, simply identify the main characters that appear in the passage to be studied. Look for the names of individuals and/or groups of individuals (disciples, Pharisees, etc.).

4) Who is speaking and being addressed in the passage?

Although the answers to these questions can also be found in the opening verses (salutation) of many books of the Bible (1 Corinthians 1:1-2 for example), narratives such as those found in the Gospels may require you to read the verses which precede the passage you are studying to acquire pertinent information.

5) What are the key words and/or phrases in the passage?

When answering this question identify those nouns, verbs or descriptive phrases which play a major role in shaping the author/speaker's original intent in a passage. Give special attention to those which are repeated as well as those whose meaning is not readily apparent or obvious.

6) What words or phrases are repeated?

By answering question 5, you will have more likely answered this question. However, for the sake of being thorough, scan through the passage again identifying those terms or phrases used two or more times.

7) What is being compared and/or contrasted in the passage?

A comparison occurs when word, thought, truth, or action is being likened to something else in order to make a point more clear. Although they are not always a definite sign of a comparison, the terms “like” and “as” are good indicators to watch for. In Psalm 1:3, for example, the “blessed man” is described as being “like a tree planted by rivers of water.” Contrasts occur when a word, thought, truth, or action is set alongside its opposite. Conjunctions such as “but” are often (but not always) good indicators to look for.

8) What are the cause/effect relationships in the passage?

Cause and effect relationships occur when one portion of a passage (cause) leads to or results in another portion of the passage (effect). Cause and effect relationship are often (but not always) indicated by the following terms: therefore, for, that, for this reason, etc.

9) What literary form is used in the passage?

Literary forms can be divided into two main groups: poetry and prose. Prose includes historical narrative, gospel, letter, and prophecy. Poetry includes psalms and wisdom literature.

Interpretation

The purpose of interpretation is to determine what a passage of scripture means. As with the step of observation, this purpose is accomplished by addressing certain inductive Bible study questions. Those questions appear below along with explanation and examples that will provide you with help in answering them.

1) How is the passage affected by its cultural/historical background?

As timeless as the message and meaning of the Bible is, one must not ignore the fact that it was addressed to specific people who lived in specific places during specific periods in human history. Because certain cultural, social, geographical, and political factors often exerted an influence on what biblical writer’s both had to say and meant to say, Bible students must be mindful of those factors when interpreting scripture. Although background information is at times implied in the text being studied, familiarizing oneself with it usually requires the use of reference materials outside the Bible such as commentaries, Bible dictionaries, and works devoted to historical/cultural issues of Bible lands.

2) What is the immediate context of the passage?

When referring to “context,” we mean the “setting” in which a passage occurs. The context of a passage can be as broad as the entire Bible and as narrow as the paragraph in which the passage occurs. Here the concern lies with identifying the “immediate” context of a passage of scripture. Steps which should always be taken to identify the immediate context of a passage include: 1) reading the chapter which precedes and follows the passage being studied (or the entire book if it is only a few chapters), and 2) conducting a thorough observation of the passage. Be especially vigilant of repeated words and/or phrases that might indicate an ongoing theme.

3) What key terms or ideas need to be researched?

Here you will work to identify the precise meaning of key terms or phrases from your observation whose meaning influences the author's intent and/or whose meaning is not readily apparent. Like question one above, this type of research requires the use of reference materials outside the Bible such as an exhaustive concordance and/or a Bible dictionary.

4) How does the passage relate to its immediate context?

Here you will utilize all the knowledge you have acquired from observation and interpretation to determine how the passage you are studying specifically contributes to the major issue being addressed by the author or speaker.

5) Are there any related passages which need to be studied?

A long-standing rule of Bible study is that one should "always allow scripture to interpret scripture." One way this is accomplished is by studying passages "related" to your primary text of consideration. One of the best ways to identify related passages is by cross referencing scripture with scripture. Some Bibles also provide cross references in their margins that can be helpful.

6) Summarize the passage in your own words.

With the steps of observation and interpretation complete, you simply put into your own words what the passage means.

Application

The purpose of application is to determine how to put into practice the meaning of a given passage of scripture.

1) Is there a promise to claim or a truth to believe?

When answering this question look for specific promises or truths that are stated obviously in the text.

2) Is there an example to follow?

The answer to this question lies in identifying specific examples alluded to in the passage that are worthy of following.

3) Is there an error to avoid?

In contrast to the previous question, this one requires you to identify specific examples in the text that God would have you not imitate.

4) Is there an attitude to change or a sin to confess?

This question must be answered in two ways. In one sense you must deal with it objectively by determining if the passage you are studying reveals a specific attitude or behavior that is unacceptable before God. With these things in mind you would then examine your own heart and determine if your attitude needs adjustment or if there is an area of sin in your life that you need to acknowledge before God and turn from.

5) Is there a command to obey?

A command is a verb in the imperative/volitional mood used by an author/ speaker to call for a deliberate course of action. Some commands appear in the form of a prohibition and call for abstinence or cessation from certain attitudes or activities.

6) Is there something to praise God for?

Here you are simply identifying anything you view as a motive for praising God.

7) How does this point to the Gospel?

While not every passage gives a complete picture of the Gospel, every passage points to some part of God's story of salvation or reveals our need of salvation.

Bible Study Worksheet

Observation: Discover the facts or accurate information God presents in the passage of Scripture.

1. Who is the author of the book?
2. What is the historical setting of this book?
3. Who is involved in the passage?
4. Who is speaking/being addressed?
5. What are the key words/phrases?
6. Are there repeated words/phrases?
7. Are there any comparisons/contrasts?
8. Are there any cause/effect relationships?
9. What type of writing is this (narrative, poetry, prophecy, etc.?)

Interpretation: Determine what the passage of Scripture means.

1. How is the passage affected by the culture/historical setting?
2. What is the immediate context of the passage?
3. What words or phrases need to be studied further?
4. Are there any related passages of Scripture?
5. How would you put this passage into your own words?

Application: Apply the passage to our lives as God intends.

1. Is there a promise to claim or truth to believe?
2. Is there an example to follow or an error to avoid?
3. Is there an attitude to change or a sin to confess?
4. Is there a command to obey?
5. Is there something to praise God for?
6. How does this passage point to the Gospel?

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