



How To Do A Manuscript Bible Study

A Method For Studying The Epistles

There are many reasons why every Christian should learn to study the Bible. In 2 Timothy 2:15, we are exhorted to study God's Word for three reasons: 1) to be one of those whom God approves, 2) to be a workman for God who needs not be ashamed, and 3) to correctly handle the word of truth.

The Lord wants His people to be in relationship with Him, and to be advancing His Kingdom. This can only happen as we correctly interpret Scripture. Herein lies our problem: we all make interpretations of the Bible as we read, but are they correct interpretations? There is a cultural and time difference, as well as, a language barrier that must be overcome. First, we must recognize that these barriers exist every time we study the Scripture. Then we must learn the proper ways of overcoming these obstacles. That is what this study assignment is all about. It is also highly recommended that you read [How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth](#), by Fee and Stuart.

The effective study of God's Word will enable you to feed yourself and to teach others how to personally develop a relationship with Jesus through the Bible. No longer will your relationship with the Lord be through "second hand" information from Bible teachers, pastors and authors.

"If you give a man a fish he can eat for a day, but if you teach him how to fish he can eat for a lifetime."

How to study the Epistles using a manuscript:

The books of the Bible that come after Acts in the New Testament are known as the Epistles. An epistle is another word for a letter, and most of these letters were written to an individual or church to address specific situations. However, even though many of the references within these letters are culture specific, we still have the ability to take from them timeless truths that can be applied today.

Here is a list of practical, stepwise instructions that will help you study these letters. This is not the only way to study the epistles, but it is one very useful way.

1. Start out by creating your manuscript. Copy and paste the entire epistle from biblegateway.com onto a Word document (or similar program). Remove all paragraph titles and divisions, chapter and verse numbers, so that it reads like one long script. Print out a copy so you can write on it. If you need an example, there is an already created manuscript of the book of Philemon following these instructions.
2. Research the background of the letter: who wrote it, why it was written, and to whom it was written. To do this you may want to use:
 - a. [The New Bible Dictionary](#), J.D. Douglas (editor), Eerdmans Publishing Co.
 - b. A commentary on the book you are studying. This will give you the most detailed background.
 - c. If you have a study Bible, the book introduction often contains background information.
3. Read the epistle through several times in one sitting to become familiar with its contents.
4. Begin to develop the habit of locating places mentioned on a map. Many Bibles have a map section in the back. A Bible Atlas will also give you many maps and lots of information.
5. Make your own paragraph and chapter divisions on your manuscript.
6. Write a title for each chapter and paragraph (try to keep the title short, and use words from the text itself if possible).
7. Now you are ready to dig into the first chapter or section. Read it through at least three times. (Use at least one other translation).



8. Make a list of words that are unfamiliar to you. Look them up in a dictionary or Bible Dictionary. Write out definitions.
9. Observe ideas, words, phrases, sentence structure, and the logical flow of argument.
10. Circle or underline repeated words, key words and phrases, all the verbs or commands (colored pens and pencils may be used).
11. Look for contrasts or comparisons.
12. How do local customs affect the actions or thoughts of the characters?
13. Notice connections between sentences, between paragraphs, and between larger units of thought. Draw lines showing these connections.
14. Ask yourself: How does the author see this situation that makes him think, feel, or write this way?
15. What course of action is the writer encouraging?
16. What Biblical truth is being taught?
17. Begin to apply the truths to your life: what idea is being taught about God? Man? How will this knowledge make a difference in my living? How will this affect my attitude and relationship with God? With man? When will I put this into practice? What steps will I take? Who will help me or hold me accountable?

More ways to immerse yourself in the text:

For the following chapters or study divisions you may repeat the process. Try adding these methods of study:

- Paraphrase the text you are studying (put it in your own words).
- Write a summary of your text (restate it in fewer words, but include every thought).
- Outline.
- Make a list of questions you have for further research.
- After you have studied through the whole epistle, make an outline of its entire contents.
- Write out key verses and memorize them.
- Tell others what you are learning.
- Read a commentary or two to clear up any ideas that are still unclear or to enhance your knowledge of the book.