

Manuscript Bible Study¹

A Workshop for Internationals

Introduction

We can study the Bible with the help of devotional books, commentaries, dictionaries, and Bible study guides. Our own Bibles might have cross-references, concordances, atlases, and study notes. Yet the original Bibles in Greek and Hebrew did not even have chapter and verse markings. All these aids are helpful, but the Holy Spirit can bring light and understanding to us directly when we study the Bible carefully and prayerfully.

Careful Study of the Word of God

A careful study begins with prayer and a correct view of the authority of the Word.

A careful study works to understand all the words and their meaning.

A careful study asks lots of questions.

A careful study finds out the context of the verses being studied, and makes careful observation of the situation, the characters, the mood, and anything else that will help with understanding.

A careful study searches for the author's meaning, the divine Author and the human author.

A careful study works out how to put into practice what is heard.

This is where we need to begin. Once we have studied and put into practice the passage ourselves, we can work through questions that others have asked, read what others have said about it, and prepare to teach it.

One Way to Study

We will learn one method for careful study of the text. It is called the manuscript method. It uses a typed, double-spaced, single-sided text. There are no headings, and sometimes no chapter and verse markings. You can prepare your own manuscripts with electronic texts that are available from the web or from software programs. My manuscript becomes a reading journal with every inch of the page covered with thoughts and questions.

¹ This handout makes use of the resources of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. It was developed to accompany the *Bible Exploration Workbooks*, www.lifeenglish.net.

Why Should We Study the Bible Like This?

1. With no headings or other markings on the text, we see it with fresh eyes.
2. Double-spaced, single-sided copies allow us to mark words, write notes, write questions, and set the pages side-by-side to compare and connect ideas.
3. When we use this method in a group, we help the students to find out for themselves the meaning of the text. We give them time to read the text and make observations themselves before working as a group.
4. This method keeps us focused on one text. We are not jumping around to other passages. This is especially important for people with little or no Bible knowledge. It means that everyone in the group has an equal chance to present ideas.
5. When we interact with the text, we understand it better.
6. This method focuses on the language of the text. Students of English will find it a valuable way to study the language.

How is a Manuscript Studied?

- ❖ First read through the section once without marking anything.
- ❖ Read it again, slowly and carefully.
 - Divide into paragraphs and sections, and give each one a title.
This helps you find the main idea.
 - Mark key words and phrases
Look up words you do not know.
 - Look for connections between words and mark them any way you wish.
Repeated words
Similar words and ideas, or different words and ideas (compare/contrast)
Cause and effect
Pronouns and their references
 - Ask questions and make observations.
Who, what, when, where, and what is the action
Characters, setting, mood
 - Find the form and purpose of the writing (the genre).
Is it reporting an event or telling a story? (a narrative)
Is it poetry, song, or prophecy?
Is it a letter?
Is it teaching or a logical argument? (such as Paul's arguments)

- Find the main idea and/or the key issues.
 - Look of main points and their support (examples, facts, descriptions)
 - Look for lines of reasoning and the development of ideas.
 - Ask yourself how one section is connected to another.

How is a Manuscript Studied in a Group?

- ❖ Introduction: Review, introduction of the passage, and context-building activities
- ❖ Individual Study Time: During this time you will be encouraged to spend time on your own with the text. (See notes above.)
- ❖ Small Group Discussion: This is the time for each person around your table to share their findings and discoveries regarding the passage. Share what you learned from your individual study time including any insights from using outside resources and how each person titled the paragraphs.
- ❖ Large Group Discussion: This is a chance for each of the groups to share their insight and findings with the whole group. People may also want to share any questions that arose during the small group time and present them to the larger group. The manuscript leader will add insights or a summary at this time as well.

How Can This Method Been Adapted for English Language Students?

The manuscript method involves marking the text for many features at once. For a language learner it is helpful to focus on one or two features of the language, structure, or meaning that are particularly relevant to that text. The Bible study leader should choose what the student should search for before reading and what to observe and mark after reading. It is also helpful to footnote the text with vocabulary and context notes.

Study Aids

Web Resources

<http://www.gospelcom.net/ism> is InterVarsity's International Student Ministry website.

It has resources for students, volunteers, Bible teachers, and ISM workers.

www.gospelcom.net has the Bible in many translations and languages, including an audio version. It has many Bible resources to go with the passages, such as InterVarsity Press' commentaries.

www.umich.edu/ivcf is an example of a student website with lots of resources. It's the site of the undergraduate InterVarsity Christian Fellowship at the University of Michigan.

www.jesusfilm.com has resources for the gospels that go with the Jesus film.

<http://www.lifeenglish.net/> has introductory Bible study workbooks in the *Gospel of Luke* for students around the world. It is written at an intermediate English level.

Computer Resources

You can buy sets of Biblical texts, dictionaries and commentaries for your computer.

Bible Manuscripts

You can make these from the texts on the web. Copy the texts into a word processor and double space. You can also use the electronic copy for word and verse searches.

Books

Bible dictionaries and background books

Commentaries and study notes

Concordances and cross-references

Atlases and maps

Bible study guides and teacher's guides for them

Preparing for a Bible Study with a Bible Study Guide

1. Pray about your personal study and growth. Even if you teach the same text again and again, God can speak to you and teach you something new. Pray for your Bible study group and for the study you will lead.
2. Study the Bible yourself before you read what others have to say, and put into practice a truth or lesson from the text.
3. Write a brief summary of the main point.
4. Fill out the student Bible study guide next. This is an important step. Ask questions you think your students would ask. Write your questions and comments in the margins.
5. After you finish the guide, look back at the questions. Mark the type of question:

Observation	(who, what, when, where, what action, mood, etc.)
Interpretation	(questions about the meaning of the text or a truth about God that is being taught)
Application	(questions about putting the truth into practice in our own lives)
6. Is there some of each type of question? Maybe you can take out some of the questions. Maybe some questions need more questions to help the students understand it and follow it to the answers. Maybe you can begin with a manuscript study instead of the observation questions, and then just use the guide for the other questions.
7. Is the main point brought out in this study? If not, you may need to add a question or two.
8. Read the leader's guide. Compare your notes with the guide, and look for help in teaching the lesson.
9. The guide may help you with timing, but it is helpful to write out a plan and time each part of the lesson. You do not need to be exact.
10. The night before the lesson, read the passage again for yourself and pray about it.