

How to Study the Bible

Aim: Learn the structure of Scripture, the covenants that frame the storyline, how genre shapes meaning, and a faithful method for interpretation and application.

1) The Books of the Bible & Their Categories

Why categories matter: They set expectations—how to read a passage, what questions to ask, and how to apply it.

Old Testament (39 books)

- Law (Pentateuch/Torah): Genesis–Deuteronomy

Purpose: Origins (creation, fall, covenant), God's promises to Abraham, Israel's formation, covenant law for life in God's presence.

- History: Joshua–Esther

Purpose: Records Israel's life in the land, monarchy, exile, and return—how God's covenant promises play out in time.

- Poetry/Wisdom: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon

Purpose: Worship, wisdom for life under God, reflection on suffering, joy, and fear of the Lord.

- Major Prophets: Isaiah–Daniel

Purpose: Covenant prosecution (calling Israel/Judah back), judgment and hope, promises of a coming King and new covenant.

- Minor Prophets: Hosea–Malachi

Purpose: Twelve shorter prophetic books echoing the same themes—repentance, justice, hope, restoration.

New Testament (27 books)

- Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John

Purpose: The life, death, resurrection of Jesus—the climax of God's promises.

- History: Acts

Purpose: The risen Christ builds His church by the Spirit through the apostles.

- Epistles (Letters): Romans–Jude (Pauline & General)

Purpose: Explain and apply the gospel to doctrine, discipleship, church life, and mission.

- Apocalypse/Prophecy: Revelation

Purpose: Unveil Jesus as victorious King; encourage perseverance through symbolic imagery and prophetic promises.

2) The Two Covenants: Old & New—and Why They Matter

Covenant: God's solemn relationship with His people, with promises, obligations, and signs.

Old Covenant

- Main context: Given through Moses at Sinai (Exod 19–24).
- Features:
 - Law given to a redeemed people (Exod 20:2).
 - Priests, sacrifices, temple/tabernacle for God's holy presence.
 - Blessings/curses tied to obedience in the land (Deut 28).
- Limit: Could expose sin but not transform hearts (Jer 31:31–34; Rom 3:20).

New Covenant

- Promised: Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 36:25–27.
- Established by Jesus' blood: Luke 22:20; Heb 9:15.
- Features:
 - Forgiveness of sins once for all (Heb 10:10–18).
 - Spirit-written law on the heart; new birth/transformed life (2 Cor 3; Titus 3:5–6).
 - One multi-ethnic people in Christ (Eph 2:11–22; Gal 3:26–29).

Why this matters for study:

- It frames the storyline (creation → fall → promise → Israel → Christ → church → new creation).
- It clarifies continuity and fulfillment (shadows in the Old find substance in Christ; Col 2:16–17; Heb 8–10).
- It guides application (e.g., sacrifices fulfilled in Christ; holiness still required, now empowered by the Spirit).

3) Bible Genres & How to Read Them (with Examples)

Narrative (Story/History)

- What it is: God's works in real time/space; shows His character and purposes.
 - How to read: Trace setting → conflict → resolution; watch for God's covenant faithfulness.
 - Examples: Gen 12; 1 Sam 17; 2 Kgs 18; Acts 2.
2. Law (Legal Instruction)
- What it is: Covenant stipulations for Israel.
 - How to read: Distinguish moral principles, civil/ceremonial aspects; read through Christ's fulfillment (Matt 5:17; Heb 10).
 - Examples: Exod 20; Lev 19; Deut 6.
3. Poetry
- What it is: Parallelism, imagery, emotion in worship and lament.
 - How to read: Expect metaphor; feel the force; connect theology to prayer.
 - Examples: Psalms 23; 51; 103.
4. Wisdom
- What it is: Skill for godly living under the fear of the Lord.
 - How to read: Probabilities, not guarantees; context and genre prevent misuse (Prov 22:6; Eccl 3).
 - Examples: Prov 1–9; Job 1–2; Eccl 12.
5. Prophecy
- What it is: God's word through prophets—covenant lawsuit (sin), warning (judgment), and hope (restoration/Messiah).
 - How to read: Note near/then and far/future horizons; symbolic language; tie to covenant themes.
 - Examples: Isa 9:1–7; Jer 31; Mic 6:6–8.
6. Apocalyptic
- What it is: Symbol-rich visions revealing heavenly realities and the end, to fuel hope.
 - How to read: Expect symbols, numbers, and OT echoes; major on the main point—God wins through the Lamb.
 - Examples: Dan 7; Zech 1–6; Rev 1; 12–14; 21–22.
7. Gospel
- What it is: Theological biography proclaiming Jesus as Messiah and Lord.
 - How to read: Compare parallels; trace claims, signs, discourses, passion/resurrection.
 - Examples: Mark 1:1–15; John 1:1–18; Matt 5–7; Luke 24.
8. Parable
- What it is: Short story teaching kingdom truth.
 - How to read: Look for the main point; locate audience/context; avoid over-allegorizing.
 - Examples: Luke 15; Matt 13.

9. Epistle (Letter)
 - What it is: Occasional, pastoral instruction applying the gospel to churches and leaders.
 - How to read: Track the argument; doctrine → practice; situational issues.
 - Examples: Rom 3–5; Gal 3; Eph 1–3 then 4–6; 1 Pet 1.
 10. Discourse/Sermon
 - What it is: Extended teaching (e.g., Sermon on the Mount; Hebrews as a “word of exhortation”).
 - How to read: Follow logical flow, key themes, repeated words.
 - Examples: Matt 5–7; Heb 1–2; 12.
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4) How to Approach Scripture for Proper Understanding

A. Posture & Prayer

- Reverent dependence: Ask the Spirit for illumination (Ps 119:18; 1 Cor 2:12–13).
- Humility & obedience: Come ready to believe and obey (Jas 1:22).

B. Method (A Clear Process)

1. Context, Context, Context
 - Literary: What comes before/after? How does the paragraph fit the book’s flow?
 - Historical: Who wrote it? To whom? When? Why?
 - Canonical: How does this passage fit the whole-Bible story and covenants?
2. Authorial Intent (Grammatical–Historical)
 - Observe words, grammar, structure, key terms, and contrasts.
 - Define terms by usage in the book and across Scripture, not by modern assumptions.
3. Genre Sensitivity
 - Read poetry as poetry, narrative as narrative, apocalyptic as symbolic—but anchored in OT allusions.
4. Scripture Interprets Scripture
 - Use clearer texts to interpret harder ones; trace themes across Testaments (e.g., temple, sacrifice, kingdom).
5. Christ-Centered Fulfillment
 - Jesus is the telos of Scripture (Luke 24:27, 44–47).
 - Ask: How does this text point to or flow from Christ and the New Covenant?
6. From “Then” to “Now” (Application Bridge)
 - Then: What did it mean for the original audience?
 - Timeless principle: What truth about God, humanity, sin, salvation, or discipleship is taught?
 - Now: How does that principle apply to believers under the New Covenant, in the church, by the Spirit?

7. Guardrails

- Avoid proof-texting and eisegesis (reading in your view).
- Distinguish description vs. prescription.
- Major on the main point; don't build doctrine on obscure texts alone.
- Read in community (teachers, creeds/confessions, responsible scholarship).

C. A Simple Study Framework (Use This Weekly)

1. Pray for understanding.
2. Read the passage repeatedly (different translations can help).
3. Observe (mark repeated words, key connectors, promises/commands).
4. Interpret (context + genre + cross-references + covenant/Christ).
5. Apply (heart, habits, church life, mission).
6. Respond (worship, repentance, obedience, prayer).

Quick Reference: Examples by Genre (for class discussion)

- Law: Exod 20:1–17; Deut 6:4–9
- Narrative: Gen 50:19–21; 1 Kgs 18:36–39; Acts 13:1–3
- Poetry: Ps 1; Ps 23
- Wisdom: Prov 3:5–6; Eccl 12:13–14
- Prophecy: Isa 53; Mic 5:2
- Apocalyptic: Dan 7:13–14; Rev 21:1–5
- Gospel: John 20:30–31; Mark 10:45
- Parable: Luke 18:9–14
- Epistle: Rom 12:1–2; Eph 2:8–10; Titus 2:11–14

WALKING ON WATER
BIBLE CHURCH
