

# The Process of Bible Study and Interpretation

## INDUCTIVE STUDY

(Bibles, Pen and Paper)



Chart the Book

Using several Translations

Note Major Sections

Study the

Immediate Context



Focus on

Passage

(Paragraph)

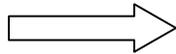
*Print it out triple spaced  
And mark it extensively*

Diagram

Sentences

Note Key Words

and **Phrases** especially crucial, repeated words, figures of speech, and unclear, puzzling or striking expressions



Word Studies

Concordances, Wordbooks  
Lexicons, Dictionaries



## DEDUCTIVE STUDY

(Using external aids)

*"Every Commentator is guilty  
until proved innocent!"*

- **Summarize the Main Point in a brief sentence**
- **Make a preliminary outline (possibly a Sermon Outline?)**

Final Summary  
And Applications

Whole **Bible**  
and its Teaching



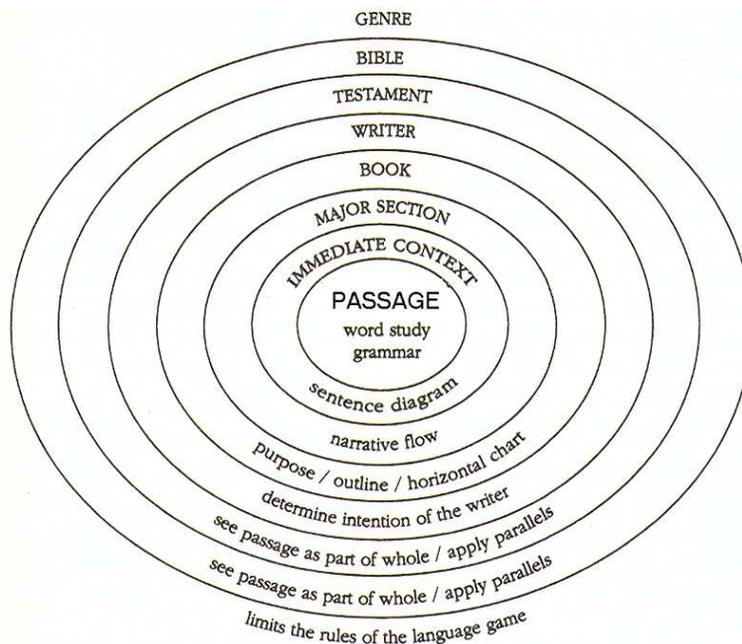
Same Testament,  
Topical Studies

The Writer  
(Other Contemporary writings?)

Historical/  
Cultural  
Backgrounds

Commentaries,  
Bible Histories,  
Encyclopedias,  
Geographies, etc

Cross Ref's  
& Grammatical Aids



## Determining Meaning: Contexts:

"Every text without a context is a pretext" - be careful.

Every Passage has both a Historical and a Logical/ Literary Context.

**The Historical Context** requires you know as much as you can about the author, his biblical audience, the historical and cultural situations – in short, anything outside the text that will help you to better understand it. Bible Handbooks, Introductions, Surveys, Histories, Commentaries, Dictionaries and Encyclopedias are very helpful here.

**The Logical/ Literary Context** requires consideration of the passage in its immediate context as well as within the literary structure and argument of the book of the Bible in its sections and as a whole. Break down the whole into its sections or paragraphs, summarizing each one briefly. And then try to determine how your passage fits into these.

## Determining meaning: Grammar:

The basic unit of speech is the sentence, with its basic parts the words. However it is best to consider the basic unit of the concept or meaning to be the paragraph. Since Paragraph divisions, like verse and chapter divisions, have been added, the boundaries of the paragraph need to be examined and thought through. Different versions may place paragraph breaks in different places. The paragraph is the context of the sentences in it. Some Bibles indicate paragraphs, however if yours doesn't, make an effort to determine the paragraph and the basic concept that that paragraph is presenting.

1. **Simple "diagramming of sentences:** Subject-verb-object- modifiers, clauses, etc. is very helpful.
2. **Always look to the preceding and following verses.** Every verse has a context: chapter, book, testament, Bible as a whole. In general, ignore verse divisions, as they were added long after the Bible was written.
3. **The more complex the grammar, the more precision is possible in meaning.** Hence Pauline doctrine- Hebrew Poetry is more difficult, but more precise, than narrative material. Greek is a much more precise language than Hebrew, and both have verb forms and participles quite different from English. A translation like the NASV tries to follow the original grammar more closely.
4. **Always take in consideration the passage's contexts,** working outward from the passage itself to its more immediate contexts, then the larger sections, the purpose of the book, its writer, intended audience, and finally its place in the Testaments and the Bible.

## Determining meaning: Words

The basic bricks of language are words. Word meaning is very important. At the same time it must be remembered that words do not always have the same meaning in different contexts, they change in meaning with time and culture changes. Translated words frequently do not have the same group of meanings as their original counterparts. Ways to determine meaning include examination of the etymology of a word (roots, prefixes, suffixes, compound words, etc.) ; comparatively (ways used in various contexts) ; comparison with synonyms; and in terms of its cultural usage as opposed to classical meaning. There are all sorts of lexical aids available for a Bible student.

### How to determine the meaning of a word:

1. Using **several versions** compare how it is used in the context.
2. Use the **Amplified** to suggest nuances in the original word (be selective - nuances may not be intended at a specific point.)
3. Use **an English dictionary** to clarify definition of English words. Note the Oxford English Dictionary gives different usages at different periods of time. A **Lexicon** may be consulted for the original's words.

4. Using a **concordance** look up verses to compare the usage of the word in the immediate context of the book, then the writer (if he's written more than one such as Paul), Then examine its usage in other writers in the same Testament, then in the whole Bible. Don't expect every usage in the Bible to have the same uniform usage, however by looking at each in its own context (sentence, and paragraph) exciting word studies are possible.

Concordances are often better guides to the meaning of a word than dictionaries, taking in mind the circles of contexts. In going from the New Testament to the Old (hence from Greek to Hebrew), go first to Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Deuteronomy as these usually are more immediate in the minds of the New Testament writers.

5. **Be aware of cognates - words with the same root:** for example: "To Justify, Justice, Just, Justly" The corresponding noun or verb or adverb or adjective may give you a larger variety of contexts and usage.

6. In general, **crucial or repeated words, figures of speech, more unusual and less common words, or those which are puzzling or unclear** are the best words in a verse to start with, rather than very common words like "the" "He" "The Lord".

"Every word must be examined in its contexts both immediate-and throughout the Bible!"

### **Determining Meaning: Cross references:**

1. **There are different kinds of cross references:** Verbal cross reference - a similar expression or wording. Conceptual cross reference - a similar idea or thought. Parallel cross reference - a parallel account or the same event (as in Gospels, Samuel-Kings-Chronicles, etc.). There are also cross references in terms of quotations and allusions.

2. **Cross references are not inspired** - reflect the insights and judgment of the notes writers. They are not exhaustive. Many parallel concepts and words may not be noted. (Concordances are valuable sources for finding your own) They often are chain-links: where from A you go to B which sends you to C and D etc. It is good to follow these to the end. Sometimes you may hit dead ends, unproductive cross references. Don't be discouraged or give up too soon. Don't forget to check references against their contexts, first immediate, and then in the larger. When examining them try to figure out why they were considered a cross reference. Let the clearer passages explain the less clear.

### **Determining Meaning: Figures of speech:**

Make allowance for figures of speech ,but use caution- don't settle for it unless its clearly indicated as such - as in expressions that are out of character such as ascribing animate characteristics to inanimate objects, (or visa versa). A word or words should be understood in a literal sense unless the resulting sense involves either a contradiction or absurdity.Examples of various figures of speech are give in a separate document.

Many of the biblical figures or speech involve the physical of the holy land and surrounding countries. Figurative language is often connected with the history of the people of Israel, with the cultural patterns and daily life of the peoples of Palestine. We should stress the principle idea conveyed rather than dwelling on the minor details. the best test of an interpretation is to put the figure into a literal sense and use it in other passages where the same or a similar figure is used. Any figure is unable to exhaust the meaning of the truth of any passage of scripture. The figures of speech are very much like those in our own speaking and writing. The names of many may be recognized as those we may have learned and promptly forgotten in our high school lit class.

At this point, the literary genre also needs to be taken into account. The genre of the passage being studied should be kept in mind. Poetic and prophetic passages use much more figurative language than narrative passages. Jesus' teaching is exceedingly rich in images, parables, figures mostly taken from everyday life and He uses a wide range of figures of speech. Paul may use figures in expressing theological concepts in his epistles. Old Testament history, Gospel narratives and Acts would be much less likely to have a lot of symbolism than would books like Daniel or Revelation. The principle is to seek a literal meaning unless it is clearly indicated by context that something else is intended. Too often meanings may be derived from figures and symbolism not warranted by the context.