



How to Study the Bible

The Study of a Word

I. FROM THE SCRIPTURES

A. Word Occurrence

1. Look the word up in a concordance. Read each of the passages in order to get a feel of the Biblical usage. The same thing can be done on a computer with a Bible study software program.
 - a. In the English language, the meaning of a word is determined by how that word is used in speech and writing. By application, the meaning of a Bible word should be determined by how that word is used in the Bible.
 - b. The Bible often gives hints of meaning in parallel words and phrases located within the context of the word studied.
2. Using a concordance, see what other forms of the word are found in the Bible. If you need to, include these words in your study.
 - a. If your study involves a noun, you may want to include singular and plural forms. If it involves a verb, you may want to group the different forms of the verb (i.e., *see, seeth, seest*).
 - b. These words are often found close together in a concordance. Yet, you may have to consider other scenarios (as in *come* and *came*).
3. Ask yourself if the word can be broken to smaller parts (i.e., *preeminence = pre + eminence*).
 - a. See if the smaller parts can also be found in the scriptures.
 - b. It is usually best in a study to group these words together as you study them. Most software will allow you to display and print out the verses with these words in a combined list.
 - c. By combining these different forms, you get more complete understanding of the usage of the words.
4. Locate the first occurrence of the word. What is its significance?
 - a. The first and last occurrence of a word in scripture is not always of great significance. Be careful not to force meaning into this step.
 - b. However, the first occurrence often gives a hint as to how the word will be used later in scripture. Look for any helps in this matter.
5. Locate the final occurrence of the word. What is its significance?

B. Word Location

1. Locate the foremost occurrence of the word—that is, the book, chapter and/or verse where the word occurs the most. What can you learn about the word from this passage or these passages?
 - a. Sometimes there are several prominent places where a word is used. Look for anything of significance.



- b. The word *love* is used more in 1 John 4 than in any other chapter. The word *law* is prominent in Romans 7. The word *holiness* and its forms are prominent in the book of Leviticus. Studying the word in these passages brings much greater understanding.
2. How many times does this word occur in the Bible? (You may or may not want to include other forms of the word.) How many times does it occur in the Old Testament versus the New Testament?
 - a. How a word is grouped in the sections of the Bible can be significant and can help to understand its meaning and usage.
 - b. For instance, the word *atonement* (and the other forms of the word) is found exclusively in the Old Testament except for one New Testament reference (Romans 5:11). This grouping is critical to understanding the Bible meaning of atonement and how this meaning differs from its common usage in theology.
3. How many times does the word occur in the following sections of the Old Testament (Law, History, Poetry, and Prophets)? In what sections does it occur most? Why?
4. How many times does the word occur in the following sections of the New Testament (Gospels, Acts, the Epistles, and Revelation)? In what sections does it occur most? Why?

C. Word Association

1. What other words are often found with this word? Look for synonyms, antonyms, and modifiers. Why are these words found together?
 - a. Synonyms are words that have a similar meaning (like *petition* and *supplication*). Antonyms are words that have opposite meanings. Modifiers are words that are used to describe another word (in the Bible, one of the modifiers of *feet* is *beautiful*).
 - b. Go back to your concordance or software and go through the verses that have the word. Notice the words that are used in conjunction with this word. Identify them as synonyms, antonyms, or modifiers.
 - c. Pay special attention to the same word being connected to your study word when it is used more than once.
 - d. Attempt to understand and explain why these words are connected.
 - e. In the case of synonyms, attempt to understand the significance between the words of similar meaning.
 - f. You are always looking for something that adds understanding to your study of the word. By this time in your study, you are beginning to be immersed with the word and its usage in the Bible.
2. What phrases are commonly used with this word? What is the significance of these phrases?
 - a. Many words are commonly used with particular phrases.
 - b. For instance, if you are studying the word *word*, you will find the phrases *word of God* and *word of truth* among others.
 - c. These phrases have meanings of their own that can be helpful.



II. FROM THE DICTIONARIES

A. English Dictionaries

1. Definition
 - a. Look up the word in two or three English dictionaries. Write down the definitions that you think might best apply to Biblical usage.
 - b. All of the definitions you read in the dictionaries will not apply to how a word is used in the Bible. You are looking for the definitions that help you understand the Bible word.
2. Part(s) of speech
 - a. What part(s) of speech is this word? What does this tell you about the word and its usage in scripture?
 - b. If the word is an adjective (i.e., *beautiful*), it describes a noun. For example, when you find the word *beautiful* in the Bible (twenty-three times), you should be able to identify what or who it is that is being called *beautiful*. You might then ask why this person or thing is called *beautiful*.

B. Etymology References

1. Study the etymology of the word. Can you apply it to its Biblical usage? How? If you are not sure, merely make notes about its etymology.
2. For instance, the word *compassion* comes from two Latin words meaning *together + to suffer*. That is, to have compassion is to suffer together with someone. The word *comfort* comes from two Latin words that mean *together + strength*. That is, to have comfort is to have strength with you.
3. Etymologies are not always helpful in understanding the Bible meaning of a word. Do not force a connection if you cannot find one that is clear.

C. Build Your Definition

1. What is a base meaning of the word applicable to its usage throughout the Bible? This should be a very simple meaning that captures the most basic emphasis of the word as used in scripture.
 - a. The base meaning of a word is the simplest meaning that can be applied to the greatest number of uses of the word in the Bible.
 - b. Find a simple definition that would fit every use of the word. If this is not possible, get as close to this meaning as you can.
2. Now, based on the dictionary definitions and your survey of the use of the word in scripture, write in your own words a definition of the word as it applies to Biblical usage.
 - a. You should be getting a good feel for the Bible meaning of the word now. Use your new understanding to write out a full definition in your own words.
 - b. Remember, this definition is according to how the word is used in the Bible, not according to how it is used in common speech today.



III. FROM OTHER RESOURCES

A. Bible Dictionaries

1. Look up the word in a couple of Bible dictionaries. What do they add to your understanding of the word?
2. This is a return to the dictionaries to see what you might have missed.

B. Modern Versions (Perversions)

1. Check several passages where this word is used and compare it with three or four other versions of the Bible. Is the word changed? To what?
2. How does this weaken the passage?

IV. PUTTING IT TO USE

A. Outline

1. Outline the various uses of the word as it is found in the Bible. Establish subdivisions of the base meaning of the word and determine which references use the word according to its different subdivisions.
 - a. A base meaning is often applied in several different ways in scripture. In this step, you are to determine and list these various uses.
 - b. For instance, the word *temptation* in scripture has the base meaning of *trial*. However, sometimes it refers to a testing of the faith by affliction or other means and sometimes it refers to a solicitation to commit evil. Sometimes, both meanings are combined.
2. Now make a practical outline of the word that can be used for teaching or preaching.

B. Illustrations

1. Look for modern day uses of the word that match with the way the scriptures use the word.
2. For instance, in Genesis 15:5 the word *tell* means to count. This is not necessarily how we use the word today, but it is still common for people to think of the person at the bank who counts their money as the bank teller.

C. The Questions Remaining

1. Write out any questions you still have about the word and its usage.
2. The most basic level of Bible study is to ask questions about the Bible and then seek to discover the answers.
3. Bible study is a never-ending process. Despite all you have learned from your study, you will have yet more questions that have not been answered. Write these out so that you may discover their answers at a later time.



_____ (word)

_____ + _____ + _____ + _____ (word breakdown)

FROM THE SCRIPTURES

WORD OCCURRENCE

- Number of References: _____
- Number of Occurrences: _____
- Other Forms of the Word: _____
- First Bible Reference: _____
- Last Bible Reference: _____

WORD LOCATION

- How many times is this word in the **Old Testament**: _____
- How many times is this word in the Law: _____
- How many times is this word in the History: _____
- How many times is this word in the Poetry: _____
- How many times is this word in the Prophets: _____
- How many times is this word in the **New Testament**: _____
- How many times is this word in the Gospels: _____
- How many times is this word in the Book of Acts: _____
- How many times is this word in the Epistles: _____
- How many times is this word in Revelation: _____
- Is there a certain book of the Bible where this word occurs most frequently: _____
- If so, what book is it?: _____
- Is there a chapter of the Bible where this word occurs most frequently: _____
- If so, what chapter is it?: _____

WORD ASSOCIATION

- What other words frequently occur with this word: _____
- What phrases frequently contain this word: _____



_____ (word)

FROM THE DICTIONARIES

ENGLISH DICTIONARIES

- What definition(s) seem to best fit with the Biblical usage of the word: _____

- Give the part(s) of speech: _____

ETYMOLOGY REFERENCES

- What is the given etymology for this word: _____

BUILD YOUR DEFINITION

- What is a base meaning of the word: _____

- Based on your study what is the most accurate definition of the word: _____

FROM OTHER RESOURCES

BIBLE DICTIONARIES

- What additional information was gleaned from a Bible Dictionary, if any: _____

MODERN VERSIONS (PERVERSIONS)

- Is this word removed or changed some in modern versions: _____

- Which of the versions make the change: _____

- How does the change weaken the passage: _____
