

Exploring Bible Study Series

How to Study the Bible

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Exploring Bible Search Series

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*“I have hidden your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you.”
Psalm 119:11*

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“Jesus must become greater; I must become less.” John 3:30

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Exploring the Bible

How to Study Scripture

Introduction

The following introduction on how to study the Bible is found at the beginning of every book in this series. Our goal is simply to challenge you to seek a deeper understanding about how to correctly use God's Word.

Think of it this way: If a person grew up in a culture where people run in a strange way with arms flapping that looks more like a skip and leap than a run and was always told that this was "running." Because of what they've been exposed to, when they are told to run, they are going to do it all wrong. And they'll keep running wrong until either common sense hits or someone shows them the right way.

In a similar manner, because of what they have experienced and been exposed to, many Christians have developed beliefs that are not Biblical, a

shaky foundation for what they do believe and a number of bad habits when it comes to Bible study.

Our goal in this introduction is to challenge you to base your beliefs on Scripture and to deepen your understanding of how to study God's Word.

Let's get started...

The Right Foundation

"A house is only as good as the foundation on which it is laid."

Jesus said,

"Everyone therefore who hears these words of mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man, who built his house on a rock. The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat on that house; and it didn't fall, for it was founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of mine, and doesn't do them will be like a foolish man, who built his house on the sand. The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat on that house; and it fell—and great was its fall."

Matthew 7:24-27

God's Word is a believer's foundation. It is the living water from which every part of life flows and it changes how you see situations, people and all of life in general.

Picture it this way: Pretend I have a pair of yellow-tinted sunglasses and a pair of blue-tinted glasses. When I put on the yellow glasses, everything looks yellow. When I put on the blue glasses, everything looks blue. What I am looking through changes the way I perceive what is around me. In the same way, when you look at life through the lens of Scripture, it changes how you perceive the people, situations and the other circumstances that surround you. You see life different when you're looking *through* God's truth.

The problem is that most believers don't interpret life through the truth of God's Word. And to compound the problem, most believers carry the Bible in their hands but not their hearts. Scripture memory, for most, is left

to children's programs and Scripture reading happens on Sundays. Most of what they learn about God's truth comes from other people and not the Bible itself.

What I was 15 years old, I attended church. I knew the Sunday School answers. I was even teaching VBS and one day after Bible school, I was walking out of my church when God spoke to my heart as clearly as I have ever heard Him. In my heart He simply whispered, "You have been saved for 8 years but you don't KNOW me."

I went home and for the first time in my life I began to read God's Word because I wanted to. Not because someone told me to. Not because I was expected to. Not because someone would give me a prize if I did. I read the first seven chapters of Matthew. The next day I read seven more. The next day I finished Matthew and started on Mark. By the end of the week I couldn't put it down. It was like a feast on the table. In less than a month, I had read the entire New Testament and I had fallen absolutely in love with Jesus Christ. During this time, He became more real to me than even things I could see and touch and feel.

I thought I *knew* the Lord, but I had built my entire walk with Christ around attending church. That's where I learned Scripture. That's where I listened to the preacher and Sunday School teachers and they were the ones who taught me. Suddenly, God was my teacher and everything was new. As a Christian, Jesus Christ changed my life through His Word.

There is a reason that so many people who attend our churches on Sunday feel a deep emptiness. There's a reason that they look in the mirror and think, "Surely God made me for more than this" Or, "There's got to be more to life than this." And there is but it is only found on the other side of complete surrender to Jesus Christ.

Lordship is when everything you have and own and want and dream, when your entire life and everything in it, completely and absolutely belongs to God. This is when you'll discover a life like no other—the life that you were created to have in Christ Jesus. This is a life that is not characterized by simply attending a church building a few times each week but of daily walking with the Lord.

Jump back to the story of Adam and Eve. Here is a picture of how we are supposed to be. They walked with God. They talked with God. This was

not burdensome. They weren't striving to achieve a greater place in His eyes or to gain more love or attention from Him. They were whole.

Religion comes from a Latin word meaning "back to bondage," because joining a religion meant putting yourself under the bonds and rules of that system of belief. God, however, has not saved us to a religion but to a relationship. Through the Blood of Christ, He has bought you back to set you free in Christ. The Christian life is not about struggling and striving to achieve a greater status with the Lord. It is not about squeezing my life into a rule book but about the Rule Book Himself coming to live life through my uniqueness. This is the reason that the prophets in the Old Testament predicted a time when God would "write his law on our hearts."

As Paul said in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I that live, but Christ living in me. That life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me."

Christ Jesus has come to live His life in and through me. I have been justified (saved) by grace through faith and am now being sanctified (made holy) through the "renewing" of my mind from who I once was to who I now am. I have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light and now through His Word, He teaches me how to be the person He created me to be.

When you received Christ, you died to your sin and self and He raised you to a new life. You are a new creation. The old is gone. The new has come (2 Corinthians 5:18). You are free in Christ – not free to sin but free from sin. And, now, in Him you find completion and an "abundant" life (John 10:10) with joy unspeakable (1 Peter 1:7-9) (even in the midst of great sorrow) and peace that passes understanding (Philippians 4:7) (even in the midst of a storm). You now get to live in a dynamic, daily relationship with the God of all creation.

Truths about Scripture

“Give diligence to present yourself approved by God, a workman who doesn’t need to be ashamed, properly handling the Word of Truth.” 1 Timothy 2:15

To correctly handle God’s Word, there are few foundational truths you need to know:

God Word is True – The Bible is true. God does not lie and He does not make mistakes. Scripture is truth without error and contraction. By faith we accept His Word as our guide for daily living.

God’s Word is Inspired – The Bible is a “living” Word. Just as the Lord blew breath and life into Adam, His Word is God-breathed. The Lord used human authors, inspired by His Holy Spirit to write His truth for all Mankind.

God’s Word is Comprehensive – The truth of Scripture covers all of life. There is nothing absent from God’s truth. It is our guide in *all* things.

God’s Word is Eternal – Truth doesn’t change. Cultures change. Feelings change. Times change but truth remains. Picture it like the Law of Gravity: A thousand years ago, if I threw a rock up, it would fall down. Today if I throw a rock up, it will fall back down. A thousand years from now, if I throw a rock up, it will fall back down. The Law of Gravity doesn’t change, and in a similar way, God’s spiritual laws don’t change either. A thousand years ago, it was wrong to tell a lie. Today it’s wrong to tell a lie. A thousand years from now, it will still be wrong to tell a lie. God’s Word is full of eternal truths and these truths are an extension of God’s character. Since the Lord does not change (Hebrews 13:8), these truths won’t change either. His truth is set and forever it will stand and neither changing times nor changing cultures can alter it.

God’s Word is Clear – Even though there are parts of Scripture that show us that God hasn’t told us everything (i.e., there’s a lot about Heaven, we won’t know until we get there), He has clearly told us everything we need to know to receive Him, follow Him and to be the people that He created us to be. His truth is clear and is spiritually discerned by His Holy Spirit to those who know Him (1 Corinthians 2:14).

God's Word is Personal – Too many believers only know God truth for how someone else interpreted it to them. This was never God's design. You don't know God through someone else. Your relationship with Him is one-on-one. Teachers and preachers will help you to know Scripture but you should never believe something just because someone told you it was true. Always seek it out in God's Word and see it for yourself. Be ready to back up *everything* you believe with the truth of Scripture.

For example:

Do you believe that it's wrong to lie? Why do you believe this? Where does Scripture say this?

Do you believe that Jesus is perfect and without sin? Why do you believe this? Where does Scripture say this?

Do you believe that adultery is wrong? Why do you believe this? Where does Scripture say this?

Do you believe that Jesus died on the cross and rose again? Why do you believe this? Where does Scripture teach this?

Do you believe that there is only one way to be forgiven of your sins and go to Heaven? Why do you believe this? Where does Scripture say this?

Do you believe that it is wrong to get angry? Why do you believe this? Where does Scripture say this?

Do you believe that it is wrong to gossip? Why do you believe this? Where does Scripture say this?

Do you believe that you should seek God first? Why do you believe this? Where does Scripture say this?

Do you believe that shouldn't worry about anything? Why do you believe this? Where does Scripture say this?

Did you catch the statement above that isn't true? Read them again and really think about why you believe what you believe. Can you back up your beliefs from the truth of God's Word or have you developed your beliefs

primarily because that's what other people told you to believe? Or, do you believe what you believe because it sounds right? What's the foundation for your beliefs?

Explanation: All of the statements above are correct except for one. It might sound right but it's a twisted truth from Scripture. It is *not* wrong to get angry. God's anger against sin is obvious in the Bible. Jesus in Matthew 4 was angry about how the Temple was being misused and about how the religious leaders were taking advantage of the worshippers. It's not wrong to get angry—In fact, if you will be like Jesus, there are certain matters that *should* make you angry. There is a righteous anger, but even if you're angry for the right reasons, it is still wrong to lose control in your anger.

Take a look at Jesus in the Temple. He made a whip to drive out the animals, but the animals could be re-gathered. He turned over tables but the coins could be picked up. But did you ever notice that He didn't release the birds? They would have flown away. Even in His anger, He was completely controlled and even compassionate in the choices He made.

This is what we find in Scripture: Anger is not sin if:

- You are angry for the right reason.
- You take care of it in the right time.
- You have the right response.

So here's the question. Are you going to believe this because you're reading it in a book and the book told you it was true or because you find it in the Bible? Notice that I didn't put any Scripture references with these—It sounds right, but is it?

Here's another question...I want you to read it and then answer "yes" or "no" in your mind.

Ready... Is everyone a child of God?

What did you answer?

Now, why did you answer this way?

I will often stand in front of a church and ask them the following questions, telling them that I want them to answer aloud:

- Does God love good people? (*Everyone will say yes.*)

- Does God love bad people? (*Everyone will say yes.*)
- Does God love all people? (*Everyone will say yes.*)
- Does God want everyone to go to Heaven? (*Everyone will say yes.*)
- Is everybody going to Heaven? (*Everyone will say no.*)
- Is everyone a child of God? (*Half usually say yes. Half say no.*)

So, what is the right answer according to the Bible? The answer is no. Not everyone is a child of God. Everyone is a creation of God but only those who have received Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior are the “children” of God.

How do we know this? Because that’s what the Bible says...

In John 1:12 we read, “But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become God’s children, to those who believe in his name.”

To say that everyone is a child of God sounds good in our culture and even in the culture of some of our churches, but it’s just not true. According to Scripture this belief is absolutely wrong.

This is the reason that we want Scripture to be your foundation for truth. Anytime you hear or read someone telling you some truth from God’s Word, don’t ask, “Does this fit with what I already believe?” because what you already believe might not be right. Instead ask, “Does this line up with the truth of God’s Word?” If not, then don’t accept it as truth...Not until you see it for yourself. Go seek it out. Find it and then know that it is true or false.

To have the right system of beliefs, you first have to build your beliefs on the right foundation.

Understanding Scripture

I know a church that stands up every Sunday when the pastor reads the main Scripture passage and they all say together, “God said it. I believe it. That settles it.”

This sounds good but it bothers me. Shouldn’t it just be, “God said it. That settles it.” It doesn’t matter whether “I believe it” or not, my belief can’t change the truth.

Furthermore, all the time, I hear people say, “Let me tell you what this Bible verse means *to me*.”

Why not say, “Let me tell you what this Bible verse means”?

The meaning of Scripture doesn’t change from person to person. It won’t have one meaning for Sally and another for Joe. Eternal truth does NOT change. It might have a thousand applications but one interpretation.

And be careful not to interpret Scripture based on your experiences. “Because I experienced such and such, this is what this verse means to me.”

Remember, we see our experience through the lens of Biblical truth. We don’t view Biblical truth through the lens of our experiences.

Don’t base what you believe on your experiences. “Because this happened, I know this verse to be true.” Again, you’re building on a shaky foundation. Experiences can change but the truth is constant. In other words, “Regardless of my personal experience, I know this verse is true because God said it is.”

Two Methods for Studying Scripture

There are many methods for studying Scripture but the key to any effective Bible study is how much it truly comes from the Bible. Commentaries and other study aids are fine but always remember that the most important part of a Bible study is the Bible.

Here are two simple, Bible-based methods to help you understand Scripture better:

(1) Anytime you read a Bible passage and especially a Bible story, the following questions will help you to better evaluate what is going on and how the truths of that story or passage apply to your life:

- Who are the characters in this story (Keep in mind that God is always there. If this is a Bible story, you will answer using the characters in the story. If, for example, you are looking at a passage

in the book of 1 Corinthians, you will have other “characters” who will help you understand the context: Who wrote this? Why did they write it? To whom were they writing?)

- What did they say or do? Why did they do this?
- What eternal truths are found in this story or passage?
- What can you learn from this story? How does it apply to your life?

(2) Anytime you read Scripture, ask the following:

- What did this mean back then? (In context)
- What does this mean now? (Remember, eternal truths don’t change.)
- What will this always mean? (What is the eternal truth that you find answered in all three of these questions?)

Understanding In Context

Understanding Scripture “in context” means that you examine each verse in light of the whole truth of Scripture. Why was this written? How does this verse fit with everything else that is written in the same book of the Bible? How does it fit with the entire truth of Scripture?

Have you heard the funny story of the man who decided just to open His Bible and whatever verse he first saw, that was God’s message to Him. He flipped it open to Matthew 27:5 that says, “He threw down the pieces of silver in the sanctuary, and departed. He went away and hanged himself.” He flipped it again and found the words of Jesus in Luke 10:37: “Go and do likewise.”

This sounds ridiculous but this is how some people approach Scripture. They choose one verse here and one verse there and come up with a mixed doctrine of belief. Anyone can twist Scripture by picking and choosing at bits and pieces from here and there.

Here’s another example of context:

In Ephesians 4:28, the Apostle Paul writes, “Let him who stole steal no more; but rather let him labor, producing with his hands something that is good, that he may have something to give to him who has need.”

Does this mean that a follower of Christ shouldn't have a job unless it requires him to work "with his hands?" Should Christians only stick to manual labor? Of course not, the context is understood by what he is saying. He is not talking about how a person should work but rather that he should work and not steal so he can not only have for himself but give to others as well."

Here's another example:

Do you know John 3:16? It the best known and most quoted Bible verse but can you tell me its context? Who said it? To whom was he talking? What was happening? What do the verses after say?

This is context. Picture it like a puzzle. You have a lot of individual pieces but there's a big picture on the front of the box. By understanding all the pieces of John 3, you'll suddenly understand it as a part of a bigger picture and the "picture" around it will help you to better understand John 3:16.

The point is that Scripture was never meant to be interpreted one verse at a time. Each verse is interpreted on the basis of every part of Scripture.

Speaking Where Scripture is Silent

Do dogs go to Heaven? Will animals be there? The Bible doesn't say but I've heard many believers comment, "Surely there will be animals in Heaven. After all, I can't imagine God not allowing animals there..."

Did you hear that? In other words, this person believes something is true because the God he pictures in his mind would do this or that...Do you see how dangerous this is, especially where Scripture is silent. You can't base your belief in God on assumptions. That's not to say that you can't make assumptions but you need to be careful to distinguish between God's written truth and your own opinion, what you believe because you "assume" something is true.

Personally, I believe animals will be in Heaven but Scripture doesn't say this. Figuratively, the Bible speaks of Heaven as the lion lying down with the lamb but this isn't a literal statement and the purpose is to show that there will be "peace," not to make a statement that animals will be in the ever-after. Nevertheless, when you look at original creation, Adam and Eve

had dominion over the animals, and the Garden of Eden is the closest picture we get of a perfect man and woman walking with God. And, yes, animals were there. But this is just an opinion that's trying to "figure out" what God didn't tell us. The truth of the matter is that God didn't tell us certain things because we obviously don't need to know them right now. Someday when we see Him face to face, we will understand more.

The Bible says, "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, even as I was also fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

For now, you can know that in Scripture, God has told us plain and clear everything we *need* to know.

I was in a meeting where a pastor said, "I can't imagine that a church member who doesn't attend church on Sunday nights can truly be right with God." He continued to say that he believes skipping church on Sunday night is a sin. Therefore, all who miss Sunday evening worship are not in a right relationship with the Lord.

Now, I ask you, how do justify this "belief" from Scripture? Is there a basis for it? Did God lay down a requirement for Sunday night church attendance? Many churches don't even offer a Sunday evening service. What about them? Did God give us an attendance checklist to measure our rightness with the Lord? No, He didn't and where God is silent, how can I speak? It's not my job to require from His people that which God Himself didn't require.

Be careful not to build your life on assumptions and opinions and don't spend too much time arguing or studying about trivial matters. The Lord has given you a complete knowledge for what truly has significance—everything you need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3).

The Bible and Believing What I Want to Believe

I was preaching at a Christian camp and a young lady approached me with a question. She was a "leader" in her youth group and she asked, "Is it okay that I don't believe that everything in the Bible is true?"

She was sincere and although she seemed sweet and kind, the truth is the truth. So I *spoke the truth in love* (Ephesians 4:15): (I'll explain the italics in the next section.)

"Yes, that's a huge problem," I replied, "because once you start picking and choosing what you want to believe in the Bible, you'll never stop."

Then I ask, "Out of curiosity, what part of the Scripture do you have a problem with?"

"Well," she said, "I don't really agree with what it says about homosexuality."

"Okay," I replied. "Now, I want to ask you a question and I want you to be very honest with me. I find that many people who pick and choose what they want to believe, remove the parts that contradict either what they are doing or what someone they care about is doing. And instead of dealing with the truth, they want to justify their sin by simply pushing out that part of Scripture. Am I right?"

"Yes," she said and continued to tell me about her best friend who was a lesbian. She didn't want her beliefs to ruin what had been a lifelong friendship.

You can't straddle the fence with truth. Either the Bible is true or it is not. Either you accept the whole or you reject every part of it. You can't pick and choose because once you start down this path, you'll always justify anything you want under the labels: "I just don't believe that." "That's just not for me." "I don't really think God meant that." "That doesn't fit with who I believe God is."

All of these are twisted thoughts. In the beginning, God created man in His image and a great downfall in Christianity today is that many people try to re-create God in their own image. They re-fashion Him and His Word to fit their lives.

Speaking the Truth in Love

Now, before we continue, let me explain why I put *spoke the truth in love* in italics a moment ago.

In Ephesians 4:15 the Bible talks about “speaking the truth in love.”

In sharing with hundreds of churches, we often see sin and unbiblical beliefs that go un-confronted. I have often been told that the reason for this is that they want to “speak the truth in love” and confronting sin directly and challenging what people believe, especially face-to-face, doesn’t seem very loving. I have also been told that there is a fear that confronting matters might cause division and they want to “guard the unity of the church.”

First, it might not *feel* loving in the world’s eyes to look at someone and say, “That’s wrong.” But we are talking about a different kind of love here. This is not the world’s kind of “love”. This is God’s love—*real love*, and His love has zero tolerance for sin and false doctrine.

Think of it this way: God *is* love (1 John 4:8)—He doesn’t just *have* love. He *is* love...You see, I can say, “I have a glass of water,” but it’s a far different matter if I say, “I am a glass of water.” Do you see the difference? You cannot separate God’s love from His character. Love is not something He does. It is who He is—He *is* love and it is His love that challenges sin and falsehood. Show me someone who is unwilling to confront sin in a fellow believer’s life and I’ll show you someone who isn’t walking in love. Show me a Christian who is okay with tolerating false doctrine in the church and I’ll show you someone who lacks the love of Christ.

Picture it like this: If I see someone walking towards a cliff and I know the truth of the situation is that they are going to fall and get hurt, am I showing love if I stand back and just watch? But what if they don’t like being told that they’re wrong? What if they disagree? What if they don’t like me anymore? I don’t see God debating these questions.

Speaking the truth in love requires that I speak the truth. Love is what drives me to speak the truth. This doesn’t justify being unkind or ungodly in *how* I speak the truth but love compels me to share it whether they believe it or not. There is no love where there is no discipline and people twist God’s truth when they hide behind the idea of “speaking the truth in love.”

After all, let’s look at the context of that verse:

“...that we may no longer be children, tossed back and forth and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error; but

speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all things into him, who is the head, Christ..." (Ephesians 4:14-15).

Do you see how it makes more sense in context? If you read the whole chapter, you'll see even more clearly how the Apostle Paul is challenging false belief and confronting sin, the very things that many people use this verse to avoid.

Second, I want you to know that any "unity" that a church may have where sin and false belief are un-confronted is a false unity that pretends at following God. It is Christ who unifies us. We are one *in Him*. Outside of this, people are just playing church.

The Power of Scripture

The truth of God's Word is very powerful but I am often asked, "What if I am sharing Scripture with someone who doesn't believe it?"

Recently I was in Georgia and a young lady who is passionate about reaching her school for Christ asked me this question. Here is how I answered her...

Let's pretend that I'm holding a sword and you look at me and say, "I don't believe in your sword." If I poke you with it, won't you still bleed? Believing that something isn't real doesn't remove its power. God's Word is powerful.

The Bible says in Hebrews 4:12, "For the word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and is able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

If a person doesn't believe it, don't stop using it. Their belief can't change reality and their rejection can't remove its power.

Chapters and Verses

The Bible was not originally written with chapter breaks and verses. Parts were written as a historical record. Others are collections of proverbs or poetry. Much of the New Testament are letters written to individuals or to churches and of course, the first five books of the Bible are the Law.

None of this was written as chapter and verse. These were added later to help people navigate God's Word but sometimes when we read Scripture, we tend to stop where the stops are natural. I want to encourage you not to miss something or how certain truths work together by stopping in the middle of a thought, even though a chapter break may be there.

I also want to encourage you to develop a habit of reading each book of the Bible as a book. You don't always have to read a book at one sitting but it does help you to see how all the pieces inside fit perfectly together. And, of course, there's nothing wrong with memorizing a verse here and there but I also want to challenge you to memorize portions of Scripture. Memorize a chapter. Then try memorizing a book. The first time I memorized a book of the Bible (the book of James with 108 verses), it took me three months but I quickly realized that there is no better way to study a book than to be able to close your eyes and read it in your mind. And as you recite it, you'll become aware of other verses in the book where the same word or phrase is used and you'll suddenly see how all of these truths dance in perfect unity.

Ask Questions

When you read the Bible and you come across something you don't understand, ask questions. Ask God. Ask others whom you know are following Christ. And there's nothing wrong with looking at commentaries (although the author's background will usually give you a hint of how strongly you should listen to what he has to say), but don't just believe what you are told. Investigate it for yourself. Don't just skip over parts that you don't understand. Seek answers.

Scripture and Science

I find a lot of Christians who get scared when Scripture and science come together, as if something in science is going to show that Scripture is wrong. God created the universe. He is the Lord of all science. Scripture and science don't contradict and the Bible has proven this time and time again throughout the ages. As science has changed over the centuries, Scripture has not. Don't be afraid to lay the two next to each other but understand that God has the big picture and science is still discovering things that God knew from Day 1. But also, don't write off science with ridiculous statements either. Truly investigate to find how the two fit together in the natural laws of science without contradicting the truths of Scripture.

For example, I knew a young lady who went to her pastor with a question about dinosaurs. “If dinosaurs really lived millions of years before man, then how does this fit with the Bible? Or, did dinosaurs really exist?”

This is a great question but the pastor simply joked it off by saying, “I think all those big bones they dig up are just big cows.”

Not a good answer. I talked to her and explain how science makes sense in the light of the extra evidence that we find in Scripture. So, here we go:

What do we know is truth? God created the world. God created everything. That means that God created dinosaurs too.

When did God create them? When he created other sea and animal life.

What does this mean? That dinosaurs would have been in the Garden of Eden. That Adam would have named them with the other animals. That they would have been on the Ark with Noah. And, yes, Scripture talks about dinosaurs too. The end of Job 40 and chapter 41 describe in detail two kinds. Even David mentions one of these in Psalm 104:26.

These are great verses to show how to correctly approach Scripture too. There are some people who claim that these sections are describing a crocodile (the Leviathan) and a hippo (the Behemoth). I have even seen some Bibles that have section headers that say the same but remember, all those commentary notes in your Bible aren't Scripture but just “helps” that the compilers have put in it. Don't believe something just because a publishing company titles it a certain way. When you have time, take a look at these passages yourself. Does the description really fit a crocodile? I don't know about you but I've never seen a fire-breathing crocodile. And I've never seen a hippo with a tail like a cedar tree!

So why does science say that dinosaurs are millions of years old? Much of this is based on carbon dating, which is basically a way of measuring the age of fossils and the remains of other living organisms. But if you read in Genesis, you'll notice that when God created the earth that there was a layer of water that surrounded it. It was this “upper firmament” that He broke when He flooded the earth. This is the reason that people lived so much longer before the Flood. This layer of water would have scientifically changed the rate of aging. And what did God say with the Flood? That He

was limiting the age of man to 120 years. The removal of this upper firmament would have also affected carbon dating since the way things aged was dramatically changed. Scripturally, the Flood would have happened about 3,500-4,000 B.C. and carbon dating has only been proven accurate to an Egyptian mummy just over 5,000 years ago (around 3,000 B.C.).

Consider this too: Did you know that before the Flood there is no mention of people getting drunk? The first person to get drunk in the Bible is Noah! That's right but some who understand science have speculated that perhaps he didn't know that he would get drunk. Removing a layer of water around the earth would have also increased the aging of wine. It would have greatly increased the speed at which it would become intoxicating.

The worldwide Flood also explains why scientists have often found larger dinosaurs deeper in the sediment layers. Why? Because they were heavier and sank more quickly. It also explains why scientist have found dinosaur remains next to human remains as well as other historical matters such as the breaking up of the continents.

This is a short summary but just an example of how Scripture and science fit together.

Don't Read Into Scripture

Some preachers do a great job pulling truth out of Bible passages. Others, unfortunately, spend much more time reading into the Scriptures about which they are teaching.

Let's get technical for a moment. I want to introduce you to two terms:

Exegesis – The process of drawing out the meaning from a text in accordance with its context. From the Greek prefix “Ex” meaning “out”.

Eisegesis – Occurs when a reader imposes his or her interpretation into and onto a passage of Scripture. From the Greek prefix “Eis” meaning “into” or “in”.

Consider this picture: A man is holding a box. He reaches into the box, pulls out a diamond and shows it to everyone. Now they can see with their own eyes what he has pulled out. Another individual looks into the same box but instead of pulling the diamond out, he simply gives you his own

interpretation about what he sees. His description is an opinion, his perspective of what he is seeing. The diamond is in the box for both of them to see—This diamond represents truth. How they handle it is vastly different.

Similarly, with Scripture, begin to recognize the difference between pulling out the truths of the Bible and imposing your own beliefs, opinions and desires on what Scripture has already said. Learn to watch pastors and teachers too because you might be surprised how much opinion is being served up as truth and how many people are simply eating it up without question.

Life Application

Many churches fall into the trap of having Bible study for the sake of Bible study. But the ultimate aim of Scripture has never been increasing knowledge but the application of truth. In other words, Bible study simply for the sake of learning without applying truth to our lives is un-Biblical.

The Bible says in James 1:22-25:

“But be doers of the word, and not only hearers, deluding your own selves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man looking at his natural face in a mirror; for he sees himself, and goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of freedom, and continues, not being a hearer who forgets, but a doer of the work, this man will be blessed in what he does.”

So as you study Scripture, let your goal be to find instruction for living, not just acquiring more knowledge or puffing yourself up because of what you know. And don't use God's Word as a sermon book where you need to find your next lesson. This is the living Word of God! Share it but as you share it, don't just relay knowledge but the wisdom of how that knowledge affects life every day.

How Biblical is Your Church?

I meet a bunch of pastors each year and I think every one of them believes that their church is built on Biblical principles. But, in truth, how much of what we do is Scriptural and how much is preference or tradition? Sometimes you even encounter church “doctrine” and policy but you don't

find it anywhere in the Bible. And, unfortunately, sometimes even the unspoken rules of church trump the application of God's Word.

For example, why do our churches meet on Sunday morning? Why do some churches meet three times a week and some only one? Why do some churches get all dressed up to serve and have the Lord's supper and others are more laid back with communion? Why do some churches have a big pulpit and others only a stool to sit on?

Every year I see a bunch of church people fighting over the most insane matters. But what's the use of arguing over things that really won't matter in eternity? If you're going to die on a hill, die for Biblical truth and not the color of the carpet or your preference for a church name or on what kind of songs you sang last Sunday. Ouch! That might be hitting just a bit too close to home for some. But truly, if you can't "worship" because the tune isn't your preference, the problem probably isn't the music but your heart.

So, when a pastor tells me that he believes His church is absolutely Biblical, the first thing I usually ask is: "So who does the baptizing in your church?"

Most of them reply that the staff, pastor or deacons baptize. Many of the conservative Bible-believing churches (especially the larger ones) that I've been around have policies about who can and can't baptize. Here's the issue though: There are no guidelines in Scripture for this. We can see examples in the Bible for who baptized but nothing like churches that say only ordained ministers can baptize.

I know a church where they let whoever led the person to Christ baptize them. Their pastor told me about a 6th grader who shared Jesus with his dad, led him to the Lord and after he was saved, the 6th grader baptized his own dad. Do you have a problem with this? If so, why? If there's nothing in Scripture about it, how can I raise a firm issue?

Policies for issues such as this were many times created as the response to fear. What if a dad wants to baptize his son but the dad isn't saved or obviously isn't right with God? What would we do? We don't want to offend anyone, so we need to draw a line. It's called a "fence law." This is something that isn't in Scripture but we want to make sure nobody even gets close, so we'll draw the line back a little further, just to make sure we don't have any problems. And who were the best makers of "fence laws" in history? The Pharisees who so loved God's Word that when He showed up

in the flesh, they didn't even recognize Him and argued with Him because he wouldn't bow to their man-made, flesh-driven traditions.

Instead of creating the opportunity to engage people who might want to baptize who are not right with the Lord, many have created traditions to avoid these situations. How sad!

Now, please understand, there's nothing wrong with having organizational policies. In fact, there are certain things churches should be doing as an organization that are required legally. But there is a far difference between an organizational policy and Biblical truth. The traditions of men never trump the truth of God's Word.

But let's go a step further with our illustration on baptism:

Think about the Great Commission:

Jesus said,

“Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.”

Matthew 28:19-20

To whom was this given? This is a call to evangelism and discipleship for all believers, right? We are all called to go. We are all called to share.

Wait a minute! We are all called to baptize? Did you read that right?

Well, what about women? Can they baptize too?

Perhaps, you say, that part didn't apply to women. After all, who was standing with Jesus before He ascended? Perhaps he was just speaking to His disciples, right? The men. But now look at what we've just done...Did you really just read your opinion, preference and tradition into Scripture? Or do you believe what you believe because that's what the Bible teaches.

And, consider this: If that part didn't apply to women, then who is to say that none of it did! You see, once you start dissecting Scripture, there's no stop to the damage it will do.

So if your church doesn't let women baptize...Is this Scriptural or tradition? What do you believe and why?

By now many of you know that I'm "playing" with your beliefs because I want you to put your beliefs to the test. Don't just accept what you've been told or what you've experience but know what you believe and how to back it up from Scripture.

Final Thoughts

As you study Scripture, there are a few other matters we want you to know about:

- (1) **Where did Scripture come from?** God used an amazing process in providing us with the Bible. He inspired more than 40 people over the course of about 3,000 years to pen his Word. And although people will argue about the kind of "inspiration" God used with these authors, you can always hold to the truth that God has provided us with the Scripture He desired for us to have.
- (2) **What is textual criticism?** "Textual Criticism" is the scholarly and literary criticism that is concerned with the identification of textual variations between different manuscripts of Scripture. Did you know that none of the original manuscripts of Bible books (called autographs) exist? We only have copies that were written and re-written over the centuries. The question is, "Are there parts of Scripture that scribes altered either on purpose or by accident when copying manuscripts by hand?" This question can be like "chasing a rabbit" but you must always be careful not to "lose God" in your pursuit. Is God big enough to accurately pass along the truth He wants us to have today? Wasn't it also a miracle how God inspired the original writers through their own personalities and writing styles? Nevertheless, some have trouble accepting the miracle that God can accurately pass His Word to us through the years and because of fear, many church leaders don't educate believers about these matters.
- (3) **What about Bible translations?** The Old Testament was originally written primarily in Hebrew and the New Testament primarily in Greek. In other words, every English Bible is a translation from the original language. There are a number of "translations" and as you will see, some use a higher reading level

and a greater vocabulary and others use more simple words to help with understanding. Some translations are more accurate than others and some Bibles are not “translations” at all but are paraphrases. In other words, instead of translating Scripture word-for-word, a paraphrase takes the meaning of a verse or passage of Scripture and attempts to express it in “plain language.” It is never best to *study* Scripture from a paraphrase.

- (4) **What about my Bible?** Become familiar with Bible translations and the translation that you have. Then take time to read the “Introduction” to your Bible. This is *not* Scripture but explains your Bible translation and other symbols and footnotes in your Bible that will help you understand more how the “book” in your hands has been translated and put together.
- (5) **What about the Commentary Notes in a Bible?** Remember that the Bible is God’s Word. The commentary notes are comments by the people who compiled and published your Bible. Always approach the commentary notes with the same discerning spirit that weighs all information against the truth of Scripture.



Appendix

Need More Help?

Sometimes you just need a little extra help. That's okay and we want you to know that we're here for you. Our goal is for you to know and follow Jesus and to fulfill the purpose for which you were called and created. So if you have questions, just let us know. If you have a comment or a story concerning this book, we'd love to hear that too.

Please contact us at: resources@threethirtyministries.org

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Kolby and Mary Beth King are the founders of ThreeThirtyMinistries, a ministry for the purpose of providing affordable resources, training and events to churches and families around the world. God changed their lives and they are passionate about challenging the church, helping people to understand and know God and to share Him in their daily lives.

Find more resources and learn more about the events and training conferences they can bring to your church or organization at www.threethirtyministries.org.

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“Jesus must become greater; I must become less.” John 3:30



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