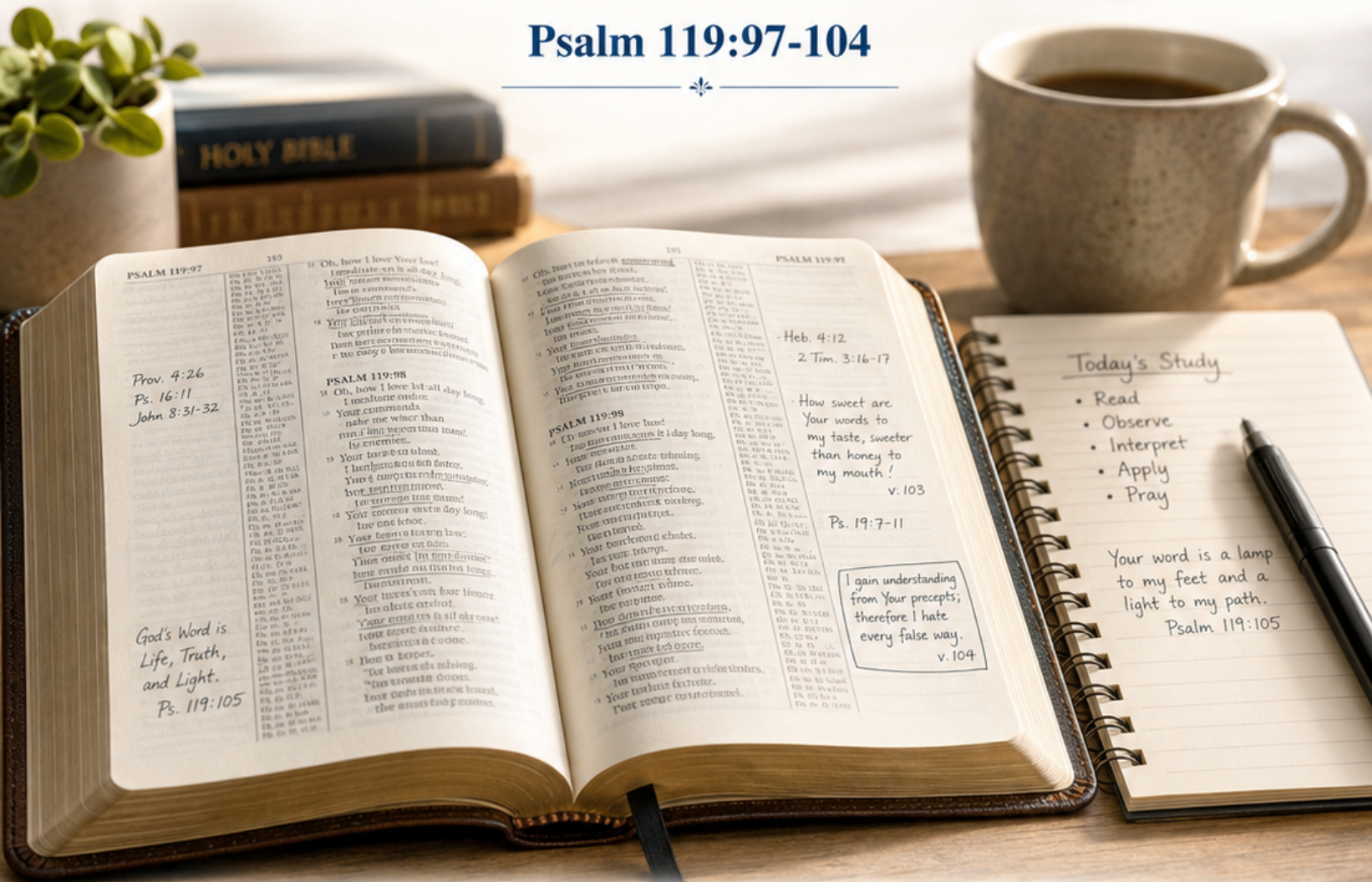


How To Study the Bible

By Pedro Gelabert

Psalm 119:97-104



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How To Study the Bible

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Psalm 119:97-104

Many have repeatedly asked me: “What can I do to deepen my understanding of the Scriptures as I study the Bible?” We can’t forget the famous quote attributed to James: *“The Scriptures are shallow enough for a babe to come and drink without fear of drowning and deep enough for the theologians to swim in without ever touching the bottom”*. Aside from your daily reading of the Bible you should set aside some time, at least 1 hour and a half, as often as you may want to make it, for some serious meditation upon the Scripture. Here are some of the things I have done in the last 30+ years of my Christianity. I hope it is useful to you as well.

Tools For Study

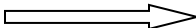
Paper Bibles

I love to write notes, especially in the Bible, since many Bibles contain commentaries that offer very limited spiritual insight. I like to make my own links throughout the Bible (chain-reference), to help trace thoughts and connect principles expressed throughout the entire writ. Some Bibles already have these links, usually called *cross-references*. These are a great aid to your study of the Bible.

So, let’s first talk about what kind of Bible to buy for your Bible Study Time. Let’s first mention the old-school choices, which is what I had when I first became a Christian

A Good Study Bible has these features:

- 1- Wide Margin – to write your notes and links
- 2- Center column cross-references
- 3- Concordance – to look up word occurrences
- 4- Dictionary – to look up meanings



the Lord, God chose the sancti- ed through ed you to that you f our Lord ners, stand things we by word of rist him- loved us!	2:15 +5 Ro 1:8 Heb 1:4 1Th 5:8 4Pe 1:2 2:14 +5 Ro 8:28 3:11/29/1Th 1:5 2:15 +5 1Co 16:13 +5 1Co 11:2 2:16 +5 Php 4:20 +5 1Co 11:2 2:17 +1Th 3:2 2Th 3:3 3:1 +1Th 4:1 +5 1Th 5:25 +1Th 1:4 +1Th 2:13 3:2 +5 Ro 15:31 3:3 +5 1Co 1:9 +5 Mo 5:27 3:4 +5 2Co 2:3	ought to were not id nor did w paying for worked n tolling so t den to any because w such help, selves a me even wher gave you t work, he
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You can also have a separate Bible Dictionary/Encyclopedia and exhaustive concordance if you like. They are useful in looking up names/places. Nowadays with the Internet and mobile apps, you can find many bibles that have these features and more. More of that in a bit. Most important is the ability to be able to write in your Bible, as you learn and make connections of themes throughout the Scriptures. For this reason, I like the wide-margin bibles. I also like the cross-references, since they point me to verses throughout the Bible that carry similar words or thoughts.

Electronic Bibles

Most of these features are available and built into electronic bibles. Not all electronic bibles are built the same, though. I will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the most popular ones as of this writing. Since I use a PC and Android, I will list the ones I’ve used on that platform. They are all also available for iOS.

Good Electronic Bibles

1- **E-Sword** is available for Windows/iOS. I think it is the most comprehensive bible study software out there. It is free, although you need to pay for certain bible, commentary, graphics, and dictionary modules.

a. Pros

- i. You can write extensive formatted notes on each verse. The text editor is powerful, like a limited MS Word editor. You can even paste graphics and pictures into it.
- ii. Many modules available for different bible translations including Greek and Hebrew bibles, as well as interlinear bibles.
- iii. Commentary, atlas, graphics like timelines and maps, and dictionary modules are also available. Many of them are free.
- iv. Also available for iPad and iPhone. This allows you to have your notes on the go.

b. Cons

- i. Not available for Android Users.
- ii. The one killer feature not available on E-Sword is its inability to sync your notes across platforms automatically. You can make sure your notes are synced between your desktop and laptop by syncing certain folders on DropBox, SugarSync, GDrive, or OneDrive. You can ask me about how to do this.

c. Bottom Line

- i. Been using it since the turn of the millennia. It is my primary tool for bible study. Very reliable software. It is where I keep most of my bible commentary notes.
- ii. Powerful bible study features
- iii. Updated frequently
- iv. Check it out: www.e-sword.net

2- **OliveTree** is available on all platforms. I've been using it since the days of the Palm Pilot. That's when I became acquainted with it. They've come a long way. It is free, although you need to pay for certain resources, like some bible translations, commentaries, charts and maps, and dictionaries.

a. Pros

- i. You can sync all your notes, highlights and resources across all platforms. This requires an OliveTree account. This is the killer feature of this app.
- ii. The text editor is great for the bible portion, but terrible for the note writing section. All highlights you make on each different bible are stored and synced across platforms.

b. Cons

- i. Terrible text editor for notes. No rich text, no bolding or highlighting. Just plain text.
- ii. There are only two bible modules they offer for free. Most every other resource is paid.

c. Bottom Line

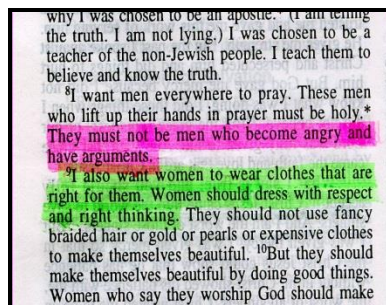
HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

- i. This is the app I use on the go, when listening to sermons and lessons when I'm not at home. I write all my notes in the app.
 - ii. Check it out: <https://www.olivetree.com/>
- 3- **Blue-Letter Bible** is a web app available on any browser, and also an app available on Android and iOS. Everything on it is completely free. It features powerful textual interpretation tools like an interlinear bible, Greek and Hebrew lexicons, cross-references, dictionaries, and maps.
 - a. Pros
 - i. Excellent for deep bible study due to the comprehensive Greek and Hebrew lexicons and Interlinear tools
 - ii. The best tool for word etymology studies.
 - b. Cons
 - i. Offerings limited on the charts and maps
 - ii. Writing of notes is not supported
 - c. Bottom Line
 - i. Great for word etymology
 - ii. Check it out: www.blueletterbible.org
 - iii. Scripture Mark: <https://www.blueletterbible.org/smark/index.cfm>
- 4- **YouVersion** is a bible app available on the web, Android and iPhone. Many of us in the church use it. It is very popular due to its social media features.
 - a. Pros
 - i. Has the greatest number of versions of the bible available to read for free
 - ii. Great bible reading plans and calendars
 - iii. You can read and listen to the bible
 - iv. Not all versions are available to listen to.
 - v. Social media features
 - b. Cons
 - i. Note taking is not the greatest on this app; limited and awkward
 - ii. Highlighting of passages is limited and awkward.
 - c. Bottom Line
 - i. Great for bible reading plans
 - ii. Check it out at <https://www.bible.com/>

Tips As You Read Through the Bible

Highlighting/Underlining

As I read a particular chapter or book I have chosen to study, I usually just start out by highlighting verses or phrases that jump out at me. When I'm reading and I come across a passage that is particularly convicting or stimulating, I love to highlight it, and perhaps even make a poster out of it to put it on my wall. That's how I've memorized many of the passages I know by heart. When I highlight on a paper bible, I try to use a dry highlighter, so that the ink doesn't run through the page. You can get these new *drylighters*, as they call them, in an



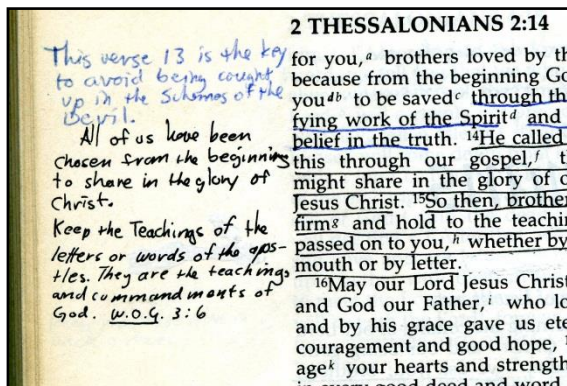
office supply store. They come in many colors, and you can even color code your own Bible.

1. **RED/MAGENTA** = warnings, condemnations, punishments and evil; also, convictions I need to have.
2. **BLUE** = References to things having to do with the power of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit; also, Life and Death passages.
3. **YELLOW** = important topics or themes, principal ideas in verses; encouragement.
4. **GREEN** = blessings, rewards, triumphs; practical applications to my life; etc.
5. **ORANGE** = convictions because of sin, suffering, discipline applications, etc.; anything having to do with the fall of man or Jesus' atoning sacrifice.
6. **PURPLE** = anything having to do with the godhead, the Lord God doing something or saying something.

I don't highlight everything, since then your whole bible would eventually be highlighted! Then how are crucial things going to stand out? Use highlighting sparsely. You can also incorporate underlining in different colors or double underlining.

Most bible apps also have highlighting/underlining features. You can make your own color code. ☺

Note Writing/Cross-Referencing



On your wide-margin Bible you can write notes on the margin of your Bible and track your understanding of the particular verses associated with the notes you write. As you grow spiritually and add notes to the margin of your Bible, you can see how your understanding deepens. You can also write your own chain reference as you study themes throughout the entire Bible. You do this by highlighting the reference verse and then on the margin you add the next passage in the chain, and so on. In the example below you can see an annotation and the next link to the Word of God (W.O.G.) study, 2 Thes 3:6. You can also add your own comments, or summary, or point you believe the passage is making. Sometimes I write down questions next to the passage. The answer is the verse itself, and the question is what I would ask myself or someone else I am teaching.

Some have asked me, *how are you able to write so small in the margin of your Bible?*

Answer: Buy something called a *rapidograph*. It is a writing instrument architects and some artists use to write very small fine lines. Some rapidographs are expensive, but if you get the disposable kind, they should be quite affordable.

When you come across passages you don't understand, it is good to keep a separate notebook handy. My wife usually keeps a notebook where she writes words she needs to look up in a dictionary, or questions she asks herself about the passage she is reading. We then work together to find the answers to these questions from the Bible itself, and then proceed to chain reference these to the original verse that caused the question. This is perhaps one of the best ways to increase your understanding and depth of insight into the Scriptures.

Don't be afraid to write in your Bible. I've written many things that I later changed, using whiteout or some other form of erasing ink. I change what I've written if I realized I had the wrong thought about a particular verse, or I want to add a more enlightening reference, or a deeper thought about the verse.

When you are doing a topical Bible study, chain all the verses through your Bible and slowly you will be building your own, customized, referenced Bible. You can also write the summarized version of the topical Bible study on a blank page, usually in the back of your Bible. If you don't have blank pages your mentor will show you how to glue onionskin (tracing) paper in your Bible using white (Elmer's) glue. You may want to draw lines, using a ruler, on your paper for easy writing. If your Bible does not have empty pages, glue on some of your own blank pages. This way you can always look in the back of your Bible for the complete outline in case you need a quick answer to a question, or a Scriptural reference.

Writing in your electronic bible is perhaps the easiest and most maintenance-free way of keeping up with your notes. Just make sure you know how to back up your digital notes in case your computer or phone crashes! It would be a shame to lose all those notes you worked so hard to write!

Preparing For Study

1- Proper time: early in the morning. You must make the time; you won't find it. It has to be your best time, a quiet time.

2- Proper attitude:

- a- Physically alert
- b- Morally & spiritually pure – *Matthew 5:23, 24*
- c- Mentally alert & eager to learn

3- Proper place

- a- A place where you can shut out the world, without distraction.
- b- Well lighted, ventilated

4- Proper provisions/tools

- a- Good study bible
- b- Good QT journal or Prayer journal
- c- Notepad for research

5- Proper procedure

- a- Be still and quiet, relax
- b- Get into reading right away. This will get your heart ready. Find out what God is saying to you.
- c- Read regularly from Psalms & Proverbs. Read from other places – balanced.
- d- Meditate on God's word:
 - 1- Is there a command to obey?
 - 2- A promise to claim?
 - 3- A sin to avoid?
 - 4- A new truth to hold?

6- Pray

- a- Audibly
- b- Clearly
- c- Succinctly
- d- With conviction
- e- If your mind wanders, pray about what makes you wander

7- Obey Gods word & confess your sins when you don't.

I have these following passages memorized, and for a long time I had posters of these passages posted in my Bible Study area as reminders: **2 Tim. 3:14-17; Heb. 4:12-14; 2 Tim. 2:15**

In each chapter or passage you are studying, write down the following until you condition yourself to think of these things on your own:

Bible Passage: _____
Key verse: _____
Main Idea: _____
Godly attributes contained: _____
How God relates to you in this passage: _____
What God is teaching you: _____
What you must do now: _____
Your prayer: _____

Advanced Tools

As you grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus, you will begin to form convictions based on the word of God, and your mind must rightly divide the word of truth (**2Tim 2:15**). We need to know something about *exegesis* (Critical explanation or analysis, especially of a text), or how to let the Bible interpret itself (**2Pe 1:19-21**). This way of studying the Bible is called hermeneutical study, or *hermeneutics* (The theory and methodology of interpretation, especially of scriptural text).

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

There are three basic rules to hermeneutics, or three ways we know the Holy Spirit communicates with us through the Bible:

- 1- By Direct Command (*Acts 1:2; 10:42, 48; 2:38, 39*)
- 2- By Example (*1Co 10:6-11; Phil 3:17; 1Pe 2:21; Acts 2:42-47*)
- 3- By Inference (*1Co 10:13; Ephesians 5:32, 33*)

Other things to consider as you study...

- 1- Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?
- 2- Who is speaking?
- 3- Who is the audience?
- 4- Why is the advice being given? (*Usually to expose motive & intent*)
- 5- What is the historical, cultural, personal, or spiritual significance?

Remember the three-prong approach the Holy Spirit used through Paul to encourage the churches:

- 1- Theology
 - a. Always remember that God so loved us that He gave us His only Son
 - b. God is the King, Creator of the Universe
 - c. The Holy Spirit lives in us, He washes us and renews us
 - d. The church is God's chosen vehicle to declare the Gospel
 - e. Don't forget your commission and your ambassadorship in Christ
- 2- Motivation
 - a. The grace of God; His mercy and the love there is in Christ. All these are our motivation to properly understand the practices outlined in the New Testament.
 - b. God has chosen you! Not because of who you are but because He is love! He entrusts a ministry to you!
 - c. Remind the saints and yourself what a great salvation you have; how much God loves you and what He has given you in Christ. This is how Paul starts almost every letter. Reminding the saints of WHO they are in Jesus because of the salvation they accepted.
- 3- Practice
 - a. Because of these things we need to live a life worthy of the calling
 - b. We need to seek the heavenly things
 - c. We need to focus on the above
 - d. We need to dedicate ourselves to prayer, God's Word, fellowship and the breaking of bread
 - e. We do this not to get saved, but because we have been saved!

Four Approaches to Bible Study

- Character Study - centering on a particular character, to study their response, conviction and interaction with God's work and calling.
- Expository Study - this would be a verse-by-verse study to extrapolate truths relating to cultural backgrounds, doctrine, and context. This is one we are doing when we read/listen to the bible in a year.
- Thematic Study - topical bible study centered on a theme to understand doctrinal truths.
- Narrative Study - seeks to find context and extrapolate derivatives to understand a passage, character, event, situation, or doctrinal truth. This is also one we are doing when we read/listen to the bible in a year.

Filters of opinion and extremes. These will help you avoid extremes in thinking and will help you sift through the opinions of others and your own to arrive at truth.

Remember the Bible says to avoid all extremes... (*Ecclesiastes 7:18*)

Love is the grand filter everything must go through. Also, mercy... (*Mat. 12:1-7*).

- 1- Specific vs. General. Is there a reference to something very specific and particular, or is it a generalization applicable to all? [Ex. *Thief on the cross Luke 23:39-43; Cornelius Acts 10; Everyone Acts 2:38*]
- 2- Form vs. Function (Purpose vs. Procedure/Why vs. How). [Ex. *Where and how do we truly worship God? John 4:20-24; What is the purpose of circumcision? Gal 5:3-6; Col 2:11-12*]
- 3- State vs. Process [*We are saved when we are baptized, but we need to work out our salvation: Mark 16:16; Phil 2:12. Same with sanctification (1Co 6.11; Heb 10:14) and glorification (Rom 8:17, 30) in Christ.*]
- 4- Principles vs. Rules. *Rules attempt control, principles aim at changing your perspective. Gal 5:15ff; Micah 6:6-8; Jer. 31:31; Col 2:6ff (spv.20ff); Mat. 9:13; 12:7*
- 5- Literal vs. Figurative. What should we take *literally* and when is something considered *figurative* (not to be taken literally)? Usually poetry is denoted as having figurative elements, to be understood from a figurative sense, like a metaphor or symbol. Many times in the New Testament figures of speech are used in order to enhance our spiritual understanding of the things eternal. Objects are used that we can understand to represent things eternal, for example: *fires of hell, streets of gold in Heaven*, etc. [Other examples: *Mat. 5:27-30; Joel 2:28, Rev & Eze.*]

Other Scriptures to consider when tackling difficult passages:

2Pe. 3:16 Some scriptures are difficult to understand. Be careful you don't distort something because you want to sound like you know it.

1Pe. 3:15 We must be prepared to answer everyone who asks us about our hope...

2Tim. 4:1-5 People tend to wander off from sound teaching and believe myths...

Rom 14:1-7 Don't justify what you do over someone else's faith. Love is to be our main reason to do and say things.

Isaiah 1:1ff Be careful you don't become dumb over the things of the world...

Micah 6:6 A pure and humble heart is what God desires. Make sure you seek after love (wisdom put into practice) and not only wisdom, to puff yourself up.

Some themes that have generated controversy over the centuries:

- 1- Lord's Supper – How often should we observe it? What do we eat and how do we observe it?
- 2- Women wearing a veil – Is it necessary for women to wear a veil to pray?
- 3- Lord's Day – When is the Lord's Day? What is the Lord's Day?
- 4- Whether or not to use musical instruments – Is the Bible silent or specific about this issue?
- 5- Qualifications for eldership – Must elders have more than one child to be considered elders? Can they have been divorced and remarried biblical or only married once in their lives to qualify?
- 6- Fruit of the vine with or without alcohol – Is drinking alcohol at all a sin, or is the sin getting drunk on alcohol?
- 7- Divorce and remarriage – When is it permissible to divorce? Can I get remarried after I get a divorce?
- 8- Law vs. Grace (What is a covenant and how was it put into effect? How do we follow it?) – Do we follow the New Covenant in the same spirit as the Israelites followed the old? Is the New Covenant about following rules? How do I know when something applied under the Old Covenant?
- 9- Biblical Canon – How do we know which books should be in the Bible? What is the Apocrypha?
- 10- Worship of God (Liturgy or Regeneration?) – Do we worship God one day a week? What is worship? How do we worship God, by observing rituals or by our attitude and transformation of our thinking?
- 11- The Collection (Contribution) – How should we take up the collection? How often?

There are many other issues that can come up. You can add them to the list and study them out carefully before accepting an unclear position on it by someone else. Make sure you are clear of what the Bible says or doesn't say. ☺ You can use these **10 Keys to unlocking the deep wisdom found in the Scriptures**:

- 1- Recognize the nature of the document you are studying – word for word it is God's word. Translations and interpretations are not God's Word.
- 2- Understand God wants you to understand the Bible
- 3- Be aware of the different covenants in the Bible
- 4- Discern between the different types of narratives – poetry, history, figurative and literal
- 5- Distinguish between the permanent and the temporary
- 6- Separate custom (culture) from principle

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

- 7- Understand the difference between the circumstantial (temporary) and the spiritual
- 8- Respect the context – immediate (near) context and remote (other passages which speak about the same idea or topic)
- 9- Understand the nature of apocalyptic language in the scriptures
- 10- Understand the difference between worship of God and service to God

Some other great study tools you can use especially if you are a beginner:

- 1- A Study Guide to Greater Bible Knowledge by *Wayne Jackson*
- 2- Background Bible Study by *Wayne Jackson*
- 3- Biblical Studies in the Light of Archaeology by *Wayne Jackson*
- 4- Fortify Your Faith by *Wayne Jackson*
- 5- Notes from the Margin of my Bible by *Wayne Jackson*
- 6- Parables in Profile by *Wayne Jackson*
- 7- Treasures from the Greek New Testament by *Wayne Jackson*
- 8- Sketches of Jewish Social Life by *Wayne Jackson*
- 9- Halley's Bible Handbook by *Henry H. Halley*

You can get all the Wayne Jackson books at <https://www.christiancourier.com/> and Halley's Bible Handbook at www.amazon.com.

May the Lord through His Spirit give you wisdom and understanding that you may imitate Jesus in love and mercy and be used to call many to follow Him until He comes again to take us home.