A Guide to Bible Study Methods

AS TAUGHT BY

Mark Strauss
Overview

Title: Bible Study Methods
Speaker: Dr. Mark Strauss, Bethel Seminary

GOALS
This is an Academy level class that answers the following questions:
What is a Bible Study? Why do we study these specific 66 books? What type of literature are we studying?
What are the practical steps we should take? How do we determine a word’s meaning? How do we apply the text to our lives?

REQUIREMENTS
7 sessions
2 hours per week (lesson and discussion)

PREREQUISITES
None

FORMAT
Audio, Synced Slides
BiblicalTraining.org

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DISTINCTIVES

World class. All Bible classes are taught by world–class professors from major seminaries.

Holistic. We want to see students move through content to deep reflection and application.

Configurable. Ministries can use BT lectures as well as their own to design their educational program.

Accessible. BiblicalTraining is a web–based ministry whose content is provided at no cost.

Community–based. We encourage people to learn together, in mentor/apprentice relationships.

Broadly evangelical. Our materials are broadly evangelical, governed by our Statement of Faith, and are not tied to any one church, denomination or tradition.

Partners. We provide the content and delivery mechanisms, and our partner organizations provide the community and mentoring.
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Your Speaker


EDUCATION

Ph.D., Bethel Seminary, San Diego, CA
ThM, Talbot School of Theology
B.A., Westmont College
Student’s Guide

We are pleased that you have chosen to use materials from BiblicalTraining.org. We trust that you will find them to be of the highest quality and truly helpful in your own spiritual growth and that of your church. Please read through the following guidelines; they will help you make the best use of this guide.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Listen or watch the lesson. The lesson for each chapter is designed to be listened to outside of your meeting. Each lesson lasts for an hour. This is a crucial step. If the meeting time with your fellow students is going to be productive and encouraging, everyone in the group needs to have listened to and wrestled with the lesson.

Take notes. This guide has the outline for each lesson with a summary of the teaching for each major point. If you are unable to take notes while listening to the lesson, please work through the guide at some point before your meeting.

Questions. Each chapter closes with a series of questions. Some of the questions are data based, confirming that you understand the information. Other questions are more reflective, helping you move beyond the important accumulation of knowledge to challenging you to think through what you are learning about God, yourself and others, and finally to application. Our encouragement is to think through your answers before your meeting and then use the meeting to share your thoughts and interact with others.
Meeting Together. Meet together with your group. While some people may have to study on their own, we strongly recommend finding a group with which you can study. A group provides encouragement to finish the class. Interacting with others, their understanding and insight, is the most effective way to sharpen your own thoughts and beliefs. Just as you will need the help of others from time to time, so also they will need your help.
Mentor’s Guide

If you are leading the group or mentoring an individual, here are some suggestions that should help you.

Your role is to facilitate. This is not an opportunity for you to teach. In fact, the less visible role you take, the better. Your role is to listen and bring out the best in the other people.

Preparation. Be sure to have done your homework thoroughly. Have listened to the lesson and think carefully through the questions. Have an answer for each question that will get the conversation going. A great question is, “What is the Lord teaching you this week?”

Creativity. What works to help one person understand may not help another. Listen to the conversation and pray that the Lord help you bring out the greatest interaction among all the people.

Correct error. This is difficult. If someone says something that isn’t right, you don’t want to come down on them, telling them they are wrong and shutting down their participation. On the other hand, if you let an obvious error pass, the rest of the group may think you agree and what was said was correct. Look for gracious ways to suggest that perhaps the person’s comment was incorrect.

Focus. Stay focused on Jesus and the Bible, not on church or religious traditions.

Lead the discussion. People don’t want to listen to a sharing of common ignorance. Lead by asking questions that will prompt others to think.

Silence. Don’t be afraid of silence. It may mean nothing more than people are thinking. But if the conversation lags, then ask thought–provoking questions to get the discussion started, and then step out of the way.

Discipleship. Be acutely aware of how you can mentor the people in the group. Meet with them for coffee. Share some life with them. Jesus’ Great Commission is to teach people to obey, and the only way this happens is in relationship.
Different Perspectives. People process information and express
themselves in different ways based on their background, previous
experience, culture, religion and other factors. Encourage an atmosphere
that allows people to share honestly and respectfully.

Privacy. All discussions are private, not to be shared outside the group
unless otherwise specified.

Goal. The goal of this study is not just increased knowledge; it is
transformation. Don’t be content with people getting the “right” answers.
The Pharisees got the “right” answer, and many of them never made it to
heaven (Matt 5:20).

Relationships. Share everyone’s name, email and phone number so
people can communicate during the week and follow up on prayer
requests. You may want to set up a way to share throughout the week
using Slack or WhatsApp.

Finish well. Encourage the people to make the necessary commitment to
do the work, think reflectively over the questions, and complete the class.

Prayer. Begin and end every meeting with prayer. Please don’t do the
quick “one–prayer–covers–all” approach. Manage the time so all of you
can pray over what you have learned and with what you have been
challenged. Pray regularly for each individual in the meeting.
Introduction to Hermeneutics (Part 1)

It is important to recognize your presuppositions when you study and interpret the Bible. The writings of the Bible reflect diversity in authorship, genre and cultural background. The common theme, that unifies the Bible as a whole, focuses on the story of creation, fall and redemption.

PART A - PRESUPPOSITIONS FOR INTERPRETATION

This introductory course in “hermeneutics” (interpretation of the Bible) covers what the Bible, God’s Word, is and how we ought to approach it. We begin by looking at the presuppositions we bring to our study of the Bible and their effects.

Bible Study Methods
I. THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD

The first presupposition, which we as Evangelicals take as a given, is the presupposition that the Bible is God's Word. Let us consider two aspects of what that means.

A. The Bible Is Inspired by God.

The Bible is inspired by God, which means that the Bible came to us from God through the Holy Spirit to the Biblical authors. Key Passages: Acts 2:16, Acts, 4:25, Hebrews 3:7, 2 Timothy 3:16-17.
B. The Authority of Scripture

The Bible as God’s Inspired Word carries God’s authority over personal experience, reason, and tradition.

Over Personal Experience

We don’t allow our human experience to determine what we believe or the behaviors we practice, we submit to Scripture’s commands, Scripture's authoritative statements.

Over Reason

Scripture is also authoritative over rationalism and naturalism, which means we allow for miracles and assume that apparent contradictions can be explained.

Over Tradition

Ultimately, though there is benefit to tradition, Scripture has the final authority over creeds, church traditions, cultures, and tendencies.

II. THE INTERPRETER MUST BE BORN AGAIN

The interpreter must be in a relationship with Jesus Christ in order to comprehend, fully comprehend God’s Word. Key Passages: 2 Corinthians 4:4, Hebrews 4:12

III. THE INTERPRETER MUST BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

Not only must they be born again, but they must actually be empowered to understand God’s Word and be guided in their
understanding of God's Word through the Holy Spirit. Key Passage: John 16:13

PART B - THE NATURE OF THE BIBLE: UNITY AND DIVERSITY

The terms, unity and diversity, help us to understand what the Bible is and how we ought to approach it.

I. DIVERSITY OF THE BIBLE

A. Kinds of Diversity

By diversity, we mean that the Bible is a diverse collection of literary works spanning a diversity of time (approx. 1500 years), written by a diversity of authors (approx. 40 people), formulated in a diversity of languages (Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic), and composed in a diversity of genres (narratives, poetry, laws, letters, proverbs, etc.).

B. Implications of Diversity

What are the implications associated with this great diversity of Scripture?

We must adapt methodology for various kinds of literature.

We must alter our interpretive approach based on the genre of the Scripture we seek to understand. Examples: we read Proverbs differently than Daniel, and Psalms differently than Isaiah.

Bible Study Methods
We must recognize the progress of revelation.

There is a development of doctrine in Scripture wherein later stages of the Bible clarify the earlier passages leading to a more refined understanding. Key Passages: Hebrews 1:1-3.

We must allow the biblical writers to speak for themselves.

The third implication is we must allow the biblical writers to speak for themselves, before we can seek an internal unity behind their diverse expressions of faith.

II. UNITY OF THE BIBLE

A. Unity of Theme

*Despite the diversity, the Bible possesses a unity of theme: the actions of God in bringing redemption to creation through Jesus the Messiah. See Luke 24:13-27.*

B. Implications of Unity

What are the implications of the Bible’s unity?

The Bible is one story.

The first implication of the unity of Scripture is that the Bible is one story from beginning to end, though made up of diverse literature, though made up of many, many short stories, in one sense every book of the Bible relates to God’s ultimate redemption. Examples:
Joseph in Genesis 37-50, Esther.

III. A SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY BECOMES A POSSIBILITY.

Because of the Bible’s unity, a systematic theology is possible, which means we can ask the question “What is truth?” and develop answers based on Scripture which are complete, cohesive, and not contradictors.
QUESTIONS

1. How have you learned to study the Bible? What resources have you found helpful or illuminating in your previous study?

2. Describe how you approach a passage of scripture when beginning to study it?

3. Why are you in this class? What would you like to gain? What motivates you?

4. What stuck out to you in this lesson? What is one thing discussed in the lecture which you are excited to learn more about?

5. What is the significance of the presuppositions discussed in this lecture?
6. Do you agree that a faithful Bible interpreter must be a Christian? Why or why not?

7. How does the Holy Spirit assist and enable a Christian in interpreting the Bible? Why is this important?

8. This lecture discussed the Bible’s authority over our personal experiences, reason, naturalism, and tradition. Which of these aspects of the Bible’s authority is the easiest for you to accept? Which is the most difficult?

9. What kinds of diversity were discussed in the lecture? Can you think of other kinds of diversity which were not discussed which may impact Bible study? Which of these kinds of diversity were intriguing to you? What about them interests you?
10. How does the Bible as the Word of God affect how the reader/student should approach studying it? What attitudes should a faithful reader/student cultivate? What practices can facilitate these attitudes?

11. What do the unity and diversity of the Bible say about the God who inspired it?

12. Christ taught that his followers should be faithful *hearers and doers* of the Word. Are there aspects of your life which are not in line with the teachings of the Bible? In what ways do you sense God is inviting you to grow in this area. Take some time to pray, confess, and ask the Holy Spirit to lead you in the way of truth. Share with a friend, mentor, or one who disciples, and ask them to pray for you.
Introduction to Hermeneutics (Part 2)

Hermeneutics is the science and art of biblical interpretation. The science of hermeneutics provides methods, rules, and a measure of objectivity while the art of hermeneutics speaks to the skill that is learned through practice. The goals of exegesis are to determine the meaning of a passage in its original context, and to determine the significance of the passage for today.

I. HERMENEUTICS IS THE SCIENCE AND ART OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION.

We define hermeneutics as the science and art of biblical interpretation. It is a science in that there are methods, there are rules, there is a measure of objectivity. It is also an art in the sense that it is a skill that is learned.
II. THE GOALS OF HERMENEUTICS

What are the two goals of interpretation / hermeneutics?

A. Exegesis: To Determine the meaning of a passage in its original context.

Our first goal in interpreting Scripture is to draw out the author’s original meaning, that is exegesis. Define and describe:

Exegesis:

Eisegesis:
Key Question for Exegesis - Where does meaning reside? Three possibilities:

   Author
   Text
   Reader

Clarifications on exegesis

There are important clarifications with reference to exegesis and the original author’s intent.

1. The author’s intended meaning is found in the text; our approach is text-centered.
   Though we are looking for the author’s intended meaning, that can only be found in the text because the author is not accessible.

2. Meaning is text-centered
   Our second clarification is that meaning is text-centered. It is the author’s intent as discernible from the text, from the text itself, and its context (everything around the text).

3. The text is historically positioned
   The text is an utterance which is grounded in a time and place, and its meaning is found in that historical positioning. Every passage, every sentence, every paragraph in the Bible has a specific place, has a specific time, has a specific historical position, and, because it has a historical position, it has a meaning in that position.

*Bible Study Methods*
The Bridge Illustration
The chasm between us as readers and the biblical authors represents the time, the place, the culture, the language difference. The first goal of interpretation/hermeneutics – exegesis – can be understood as crossing the cultural and linguistic bridge that separates us as readers from the biblical authors.

B. Contextualization

The second goal of hermeneutics/interpretation – contextualization – is determining the contemporary significance of the author’s original intent and message, how that text applies to our particular life situation, to our culture, to our context. In the bridge illustration, contextualization is crossing the bridge back to the present.

Read the following passages. Make note of why contextualization is important in each case.
Exodus 29:38

Deuteronomy 21:18

Leviticus 19:19
The Bible is sometimes so hard to understand is because it was not written to you.

One of the reasons the Bible is so hard to understand is we do not live in that cultural context, we do not speak that original language, we do not always know all the circumstances, all the situations, everything that was going on.

But although the Bible was not written to you, it was written for you.

_Bible Study Methods_
In other words, this is God’s word for you even if it was not written to you. Because the Bible is divinely inspired, because the Bible is God’s word, it has truth and application and relevance to us today.

Contextualization and application

The reason we use the word contextualization (instead of application), is it means *appropriately* taking that message and applying to a new context.
III. AVOID SHORTCUTTING THE HERMENEUTICAL PROCESS

We have seen what hermeneutics is, we have seen the goals of hermeneutics, a final point within this lecture is avoiding shortcutting the hermeneutical process which result in mistakes we want to avoid.

A. Application without Exegesis

The first mistake is application without exegesis; in other words, applying God’s word without fully understanding God’s word.

Subjectivity - assuming that whatever I first understand the text to mean is what it means to me

Proof texting – assuming that what we already believe, assuming we know what the Bible is going to say, is what a certain text means, without properly considering the context

B. Exegesis without contextualization

Some people do exegesis without contextualization, or they might understand what the text meant, but then they misapply it (or don’t seek to apply it) to their life today in some way.

Common liberal error - not seeking to apply Scripture to one’s own life, but only seeking to describe its original meaning.

Hebrews 4:12

Bible Study Methods
Common Conservative Error 1 - confusing eternal principles with cultural applications
1 Corinthians 14:34

Common Conservative Error 2 - the magic answer book, searching Scripture for the answer to a specific problem and so taking a passage out of context
Genesis 31:13

Luke 4:43

Isaiah 33:20

IV. SUMMARY

This lecture covers the process of Biblical interpretation and discusses the goals of hermeneutics and the shortcuts to avoid; summarize your learnings from this lecture on hermeneutics. Fee and Stewart said, "A text cannot mean today what it never meant in its original context." Appropriate contextualization, appropriate application has to come from appropriate exegesis, determining what the author meant in their original context.

QUESTIONS
1. Why do we need to interpret the Bible? How would you explain the importance of interpretation to a friend who says they just need to read the Bible?
2. Describe the difference between exegesis and eisegesis. Why is exegesis preferable?

3. How does the inspiration of Scripture (see Lecture 1) lead us to seek the author’s intent when we read the Bible? Describe the interrelatedness between the author’s intent and the meaning of the text.

4. What does a sound hermeneutical method guard against?

5. Why is important to determine the author’s intended meaning? How can we know that we have interpreted a passage correctly? Should we leave interpretation up to the “professionals” or should all do it?
6. Why do we need to contextualize? What are some of the dangers of leaving out the step of contextualization? What are some of the dangers of failing to do exegesis first? Which step are you more likely to leave out? What are some safeguards that you could put in place to avoid skipping a step in the hermeneutical process?

7. Draw out the bridge illustration and explain it to a friend. Be sure to talk about the challenges that you face in doing exegesis and contextualization, and where they both fit in the bridge illustration.

8. Consider the examples discussed in the contextualization section (Exodus 29:38, Deuteronomy 21:18, Leviticus 19:19, Exodus 35:2, 1 Peter 5:14, 1 Corinthians 11:5, 1 Timothy 5:23). Explain why contextualization is necessary for one of these passages. Consider how a reader might contextualize this passage in a different way.

9. Why is it necessary to have both sound exegesis and contextualization? Consider your normal method of Bible study. In
what ways can you grow in your Bible study in order to have a balanced hermeneutic?

10. In what ways might a sound hermeneutic deepen your relationship with God?

11. In what ways might a sound hermeneutic affect your day to day life?
Four Key Principles of Exegesis

The first goal of hermeneutics is to determine the author’s intended meaning of the text. The interpretation process must take into account the genre of the literature and the historical and literary context. The meaning of the text controls our application.

I. SUMMARY OVERVIEW OF THE HERMENEUTICAL PROCESS

Here we get into the process of interpretation by looking at four principles of exegesis, the four steps we take to
A. A Text Has One Meaning: The Author’s Intended Meaning

Our first principle of exegesis is that, in general, a biblical text has one meaning and that meaning is the author’s intended meaning. We are looking to determine what the author intended.

Double Meaning?
Can be more than one meaning in a biblical text and are there exceptions to the one-meaning rule?

a. Word Play

One exception to the one-meaning rule would be what we could call word plays or puns where there is an intentional double meaning introduced into the text.
Example: Rev 1:1 “The revelation of Jesus Christ”
Mark 2:23-28 “So, the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”

b. Dual Fulfillment of Prophecies

Another example of double meanings is what we call dual fulfillment of prophecies – when the author had one meaning in mind it would seem from the context, but the text is applied differently in a later context.
Example: Isaiah 7 “the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel.”
B. The Meaning of a Text is Genre Dependent

The meaning of a text depends to a great extent upon its literary form, its genre. Each of these literary forms has certain rules, certain principles of interpretation, and, in order to comprehend God’s message to us through that particular literary form, we have to understand how that form works.


Rev 13:1 – Apocalyptic literature

Ecclesiastes 1:2 - Wisdom literature

Philippians 1:1 – Letter

C. Context is the Key to Interpretation

The third fundamental principle of exegesis is that context is the key to interpretation because the context of a passage determines its meaning. And here, we have to distinguish between two different kinds of context: historical context and literary context.

Historical Context

a. General Historical Context

Historical context refers to the total life situation in which the book arose. There are three subcategories here to identify.

Geographical Context

And so, understanding that geographical context is critical to recognizing the author’s intended meaning. Ex. John 4:3-4, 1 Cor 1
Social and Political Context
The historical political backdrop is a crucial part of the historical context for understanding the author’s intended meaning.

Religious Situation
Understanding the religious situation is essential to understanding the author’s intended meaning.
Examples: Matt 23:5-7, Heb 9:13, Heb 10:3-4

Mark 12
The parable of the tenant farmers in Mark 12 illustrates how understanding of religious, social, cultural and historical contexts are required in order to fully understand the author’s intended meaning.

b. Specific Historical Context/Life Situation
The specific historical context relates to the circumstances from which a book arose. Issues like the authorship, issues like the date, the provenance, which means where the document was written from, the recipients, to whom the document is written, and the purpose and occasion for which it is written. Ex, 1 Corinthians.

Literary Context
Literary context refers to the progress of thought in the book or the progress of the argument. The key question to ask with reference to literary context is “what is the point?”. We determine this by methodically increasing our scope of inquiry (as if they are concentric circles), beginning with the smallest unit of meaning, the word, followed by the sentence, followed by the paragraph, followed by the larger section, and finally with the whole book, letter, or document in view.

Bible Study Methods
a. Words
Since all words have a range of possible meanings, not generally one single meaning, so meaning does not reside in words, meaning resides in *words in context*. The meaning of words is determined by their context.

b. Sentence
You see the point is the sentence does not have meaning apart from it being an utterance within an historical context and part of a larger paragraph.

c. Paragraphs
Paragraphs are arranged together into larger sections/chapters, and larger sections form into a book, and together as a unit move the author’s argument forward in a specific way.

d. Book
We move outward even further from the book, because the book itself has a larger context within the OT/NT, part of a larger corpus, like Paul’s letters, or the Gospels. That larger corpus, it is a part of that literary context.

e. Broader Context
And then from the New Testament documents we can go even further out in our concentric circle to the larger world of the Bible, all the books of the Bible form part of this broader literary context. By literary context we mean moving outward from the smallest unit of meaning and recognizing that we can really truly only understand God’s word when we read it within its broader context.
D. The Text Itself Must Be Given Priority

The fourth key principle of exegesis is that the text itself must be given priority; the text sets the agenda.

A Circle or a Spiral?

A spiral from inductive to deductive reasoning:

Our study of Scripture is a constant process moving from facts to propositions and then making proposals and confirming them; it is a spiral from inductive to deductive reasoning.

A spiral from text to context

The biblical text sets the agenda, the meaning of the text controls our contextualization, our application, rather than our context determining the meaning of the text. The meaning of the text controls our contextualization, our application, rather than our context determining the meaning of the text.

Examples: Sin, the Rapture

Clarification: What about interpreting the Bible literally?

I have intentionally left out the idea of interpreting the Bible literally, because I do not really believe that principle is valid in the way it is generally spoken about.
QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important to determine the author’s intended meaning rather than bringing your own meaning to the text? How does this principle help us when we come to controversial passages or topics in Scripture?

2. Why is determining the genre so important? Think of some modern-day examples of where the genre affects the meaning of something that is written or spoken. Are we more tuned in to the genre today than when we read Scripture?

3. What is your favorite Biblical genre in the Bible? What do you enjoy about reading and studying that genre? What is your least favorite Biblical genre? What do you not enjoy about reading and studying it?

4. What are the components of determining the historical context and the literary context? How can these be identified? How can these guard against reading our meaning back into the text?
5. When someone says that what they said was taken out of context, what do they usually mean by that? Scripture was given to us in specific historical and social contexts, how does this affect how we interpret certain passages?

6. Why must the text always be given priority? What are some safeguards you could put in place in the interpretive process to make sure the text determines the meaning of the passage?

7. What do you think about using the word “literal” when discussing the process of interpretation? What are the various ways that you have seen it used? What would be a better term to use?

8. Review the examples discussed in this lecture. Which of these, when examined in the way described, provided insight and meaning to the passage that you had not appreciated or noticed before? How is that impacting you and how might you respond to that?
Ten Steps for Exegesis (Part 1)

In this lecture, we get into the practical details for how to exegete a passage. Dr. Strauss explains the first four (of ten total) steps for English Bible exegesis: 1) identify the genre, 2) get the big picture, 3) develop a thesis statement and 4) outline the progress of thought. This lecture teaches new skills and provides examples for you to put them into practice.

I. REVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

Exegesis is the meaning of the text; contextualization is the significance for today.
II. TEN STEPS FOR EXEGESIS

In this session we are going to cover and look at ten steps of exegesis (determining the original author’s intended meaning), the first four in some detail, and, in the next session, we will cover the next six steps, five through ten, in our ten steps of exegesis.

A. Identify the Genre (the Literary Form)

The first step coincides with one of our principles and that is the first step of any interpretation is to identify the genre, to identify the literary form. Put simply, you will misread a text if you do not correctly identify its form. Example: a children’s fairytale vs a historical narrative.

Identifying the genre, the literary form, is critical, is important with any work of literature, because the genre determines the rules by which we understand the text. So, for this step the question you ask is what are the rules for understanding this literary form?

B. Get the Big Picture: Establish the Historical and Literary Context

Our second step of interpretation is to get the big picture and by that we mean to establish the historical and literary context of the document that is under study.

Historical Context

The historical context, as we have talked about, means the life setting of the letter or the book. The best way to get the big picture is to read the entire letter or the entire book all the way through looking for its overall themes.
a. Epistle

Read the entire epistle in one sitting in order to get the big picture and identify the author, the recipients, the occasion and purposes, the main themes. Examples: 1 Corinthians, Galatians

b. Gospel

Read the entire gospel (ideally in one sitting) in order to get the big picture and identify the author, the historical, religious, and political setting, the portrait of Jesus Christ presented, plot – especially the climax and resolution. Examples: Mark, Luke

c. Prophetic Literature

Read the entire prophetic books (ideally in one sitting) in order to get the big picture and understanding the historical, religious, and political setting within Israel’s history, determining their central message, identifying the key themes. Examples: Isaiah, Amos

Now there is another side of getting the big picture, and that is reading the book deductively or confirming and refining the results that we have discovered by reading inductively.

Literary Context

We also need to identify the literary context, the progress of the book as it moves through the argument that is developed or the plot as it is developed, and the best way to determine that is to outline the entire book.
a. Step 1: Break the book down into each of its main paragraphs.  
Your goal is to identify each paragraph and summarize each paragraph with a brief phrase, a short phrase.

b. Step 2: Group related paragraphs into sections.  
Your goal is to group the paragraphs by theme and then summarize the theme of each section.

c. Step 3: Group the sections into larger units  
Then then would be to look at those sections and see if they can be grouped together in even larger units.

d. Step 4: Reverse the process for steps 1-3 to develop your outline.  
Take each of those larger units (Step 3) as a major point within your outline; and then each of the sections (Step 2) becomes a sub point; and each of those paragraphs then become your sub-sub points.

*Bible Study Methods*
Cardinal Rule of Getting the Big Picture:

It is essential to establish the historical and literary context of the passage under study no matter how short on time you are.

Shortcuts for Getting the Big Picture

Use good tools to help determine literary and historical contexts. For historical context, use Biblical surveys, introductions, and dictionaries; for literary context, use a Bible handbook or commentary.

C. Develop a Thesis Statement

Our third principle is to develop what I would call a thesis statement or big idea for the individual passage in one sentence. Examples: Psalm 23, Philippians 1:12-18.

Identify the subject and the complement.

Hints for developing the thesis statement:

a. What one theme gives this passage unity?

b. Look for a theme that occurs repeatedly.

c. Try outlining the passage.

d. Test out a theme by asking “does every verse relate to this theme?”.

e. Turn your subject into a question and the complement should answer this question.
D. Outline the Progress of Thought in the Passage

We have already talked about outlining as a means of identifying the main idea or the thesis statement, but now we will talk about a few helpful points on how to actually outline the progress of thought.

Qualifications of a Good Outline

a. Every point in a good outline must first relate directly to the big idea, relate directly to your thesis statement.

b. Every good outline should clearly and accurately explain the progress of the argument in the passage, meaning you should be able to see how each point relates to the point made before it and after it.

Two Kinds of Outlines: Parallel and Progressive

a. Parallel Outline

A parallel outline is where each of the sub points is parallel to one another generally answering some question about the thesis statement. To develop a parallel outline, turn your thesis statement into a question. Example: Philippians 1:12-18

- Introduction: The advance of the gospel despite Paul’s imprisonment.

- Point 1: the gospel is advancing through Paul’s testimony to the palace guard, (verse 13).

- Point 2: the gospel is advancing through the courage given to others to proclaim it, (verse 14).

- Point 3: the gospel is advancing despite the false motives of some, (verses 15-16).
• Conclusion: the most important thing of all is that Christ is preached (verse 18).

b. Progressive Outline

A progressive outline progressively develops the flow of the argument or the progress of the story. Each point must still directly relate to the thesis statement, but there is progress rather than parallel. Examples: Romans 12:1-2 (see also Mark 2:13-17)

Thesis statement: In light of God’s free gift of salvation Paul calls believers to present themselves as living sacrifices in God’s service. Here is a progressive outline of that passage.

• The command to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, verse 1a.

• The reason to present your body as a living sacrifice, verse 1b.

• The means of presenting your body as a living sacrifice, verse 2a.

• The result of presenting your body as a living sacrifice, verse 2b.
III. SUMMARY

Our first four steps of exegesis are 1) identify the genre, 2) get the big picture, 3) develop a thesis statement and 4) outline the progress of thought. In our next session we will go through the remaining six steps of exegesis.
QUESTIONS

1. What are the first four steps of exegesis? How does God speak to His people through His Word when it is rightly interpreted? How does these steps help us get to the author’s intended meaning?

2. Why is it important to know the literary form of a passage? What are the differences in the way parables and historical narrative communicate truth? How does that change what you are looking for in a particular passage? Is one more “truthful” than another? Pick two genres not discussed in this chapter (Narrative, Poetry, Law, Wisdom Literature, Apocalyptic, etc.). Write down some notes on what you should consider in order to see the big picture for a passage in the two genres selected.
3. How are both inductive and deductive approaches to reading and studying helpful? How do they complement one another? Pick a short book of the Bible (e.g. Philemon, Obadiah, or Ruth), read through it, and outline the main idea and flow of thought for the book. What do you notice about the book as a whole when you study in this way?

4. Have you seen examples of a pastor preaching too little or too much of a text? What are some of the dangers if we preach/teach too little? Too much? What are some safeguards for making sure we preach/teach the text?

5. Practice developing a big idea and an outline for each of the following passages: Psalm 23, Mark 2:13-17, and Proverbs 3:5-6.

6. Try to develop a big idea and outline for the book of Jude or 3 John. Is your choice better suited for a parallel outline or a progressive? Ensure each point is connected to the thesis statement and to the points before and after it. Read over your outline and reflect on the passage. What is the Holy Spirit illuminating for you as you read your outline?

*Bible Study Methods*
Ten Steps for Exegesis (Part 2)

Examining the final six steps in exegesis process (At the 26-minute mark, the verse reference, John 14:6 should be John 14:26).

A. Step 5. Consult Secondary Sources on Your Passage.

Our fifth step of exegesis is to consult secondary sources, especially good commentaries, in order to go beyond a surface reading of the text. Good commentaries will be your best secondary resource for serious study in preparation for teaching and preaching.

Expository Commentaries

Expository commentaries are exegetically focused commentaries whose goal is to identify the author’s original meaning of the text in its original context.

Bible Study Methods
Commentaries and Their Proper Use

A commentary is a work which comments on a particular book of Scripture. Commentaries will deal with the progress of thought in the book.

Different Types of Commentaries

List the different kinds of commentaries.

Commentary Series

List the most important commentary series of expository and technical commentaries.

Evaluating and Choosing Commentaries

Here are some questions to ask when evaluating a commentary:

a. Is the commentary well organized and easy to use?

b. Does it provide a good introduction to the book including the literary genre, historical context, purpose and occasion?

c. Does the author discuss interpretational problems?
d. Does the author give a fair and balanced treatment of problems or is the author clearly biased in one particular direction?

e. Does the work comment on each verse or is it only section by section?

f. Is there a bibliography to pursue further research in the commentary?

g. Does the author exhibit awareness of recent works related to the issues in the book or is it only older works that are cited?

h. Does the author document his or her sources, especially references to ancient writers or customs?

i. Does the author include hints for application or contextualization as part of the work?

j. Does the commentary follow the main theme or argument of the book well relating each section to the flow of the book or are there just many scattered exegetical comments?

Here are some questions to ask when choosing which commentary to use:

k. What are your needs?

l. What are your original language skills?

m. How much time do you have to study the text in question?

n. Ask those with more experience what the best commentaries are.

Tips for Using Commentaries

Bible Study Methods
a. Do not let using a commentary replace your personal Bible study. The text itself, not a commentary, is always given priority.

b. Do an inductive study of the passage prior to consulting a commentary.

c. Consult more than one commentary, particularly on problem passages.

d. Beware of simply seeking a commentary who agrees with you.

e. Watch out for the theological biases, both those of the commentator and also your own.

Steps six, seven, and eight are related to step five in that when you are consulting the commentaries you are doing a more detailed study of the words, of the sentences, of the paragraphs, of your passage, you are seeing interpretative problems and resolving those problems.

B. Step 6: Analyze Syntactical Relationships

Analyzing syntactical relationships means examining the sentences and how they relate to each other. It means identifying the main clause of each sentence and the subordinate clauses and identifying the function of those subordinate clauses.

C. Step 7. Analyze Key Terms and Themes

Analyzing key terms means doing word studies; our next lecture goes into detail on this.
D. Step 8. Resolve Interpretive Issues and Problems

Step eight, then, is to resolve interpretative issues and problems related to the essential meaning of the text. Every passage will raise interpretive questions. It is important to discern which problems are essential to resolve.

The key principle for discerning what is an essential issue is does it affect the essential meaning of the text. Is it going to change your thesis statement? Is it going to change your main points of your outline? Is it going to change the way you approach, teach and apply the text?

Principles for Resolving Problems

My first principle is there are no unique principles to solving problems; it really is a matter of doing good interpretation. The basic principles we have set out for exegesis apply directly to solving problems.

John 14:26, “The Holy Spirit will teach you all things.” There is a passage given to Jesus’ original twelve disciples but certainly has application for us.

1 John 2:20, 27, “You have an anointing from the Holy One and you all know the truth.”

We can know the truth because the Holy Spirit is our guide. It does not replace examining the text in its historical and literary context, but it does remind us that ultimately it is the Holy Spirit who guides us into all truth.

_Bible Study Methods_
E. Step 9: Evaluate Your Results from the Perspective of Wider Contextual and Theological Issues

Step nine is to evaluate our results in the context of the theology of the Bible as a whole. Review the concentric circles of literary context Lecture 3.

F. Step 10: Summarize Your Results

Finally, step ten is a summarizing step that simply says summarize your results, revise and refine in light of the nine previous steps, with particular attention paid to the thesis statement, outline and progress of the passage.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the ultimate goal of Bible Study? How can you make sure Bible Study doesn’t become purely an academic exercise where your only goal is to know more? How does studying with others help in this process?
2. Who are the leaders or mentors in your life whose opinions you trust? Do you have a person whom you regularly consult on the meaning of Bible passages? What is the proper role of commentaries in the Bible study process? How is a commentary like a trusted friend or mentor? How is it different?

3. Reflect on your own theological or interpretive biases. What is the best way to identify your own biases? What are some ways to make sure you are open to views other than your own? Are there limits to “listening to the other side?”

4. What is the role of prayer in Bible study? Spend some time in prayer about the passage you are currently studying. What are some ways to make prayer a regular part of your study time?

5. Choose one of the following passages and begin to work through the ten steps of exegesis: Psalm 23, Mark 2:13-17, Romans 12:1-2, and Philippians 1:12-18.

_Bible Study Methods_
Principles for Word Studies

Dr. Strauss leads us into exploring the riches of Biblical words in this lecture. He explains some common misconceptions and gives us safeguards so that we do not wander into exegetical fallacies. If you want to know the way forward in Biblical exploration, then listen in as Dr. Strauss outlines the basic principles for doing Biblical word studies correctly.

I. BIBLICAL AUTHORITY AND THE ORIGINAL TEXT

In this session we are going to zero in on one of our ten steps of exegesis which was analyzing key terms and themes. We focus on this topic both because it can provide helpful insight into God’s word, but also because it has been an area of particular abuse in
the past and we want to caution against the misuse of doing word studies.
Be cautious in referring to the original languages, and only do so when it provides insights that cannot be recognized from reading the English translation

II. BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR BIBLICAL WORD STUDIES (LEXICAL SEMANTICS)

A. Words generally have a semantic range, not one all-encompassing “meaning”

One basic principle of lexical semantics is that words generally have a semantic range, not one all-encompassing meaning. Examples: “field” in English, *charis* in Greek (Ephesians 2:9, Luke 1:30, Luke 6:32, Luke 17:9)
B. Context determines which particular “referent” or “sense” within this semantic range the author intended.

Context determines which sense, which meaning within the semantic range, is intended. Example: the Greek word *charis* in Ephesians 2:8-9 (“undeserved favor or grace”) and in Luke 6:32 (“what have you earned”)

C. Words normally have only one “sense” in any particular literary context.

The third basic principle of Biblical word studies is words normally have only one sense in any particular context. Example: *field* in English. List other words with multiple senses.

D. The meaning of words often changes over time.

A fourth principle, the meaning of words often changes over time.

E. Etymology is never a reliable guide to meaning.

A fifth principle of lexical semantics is that etymology, a word’s component parts or its historical derivation, is never a reliable guide
to meaning. Examples: pineapple, understand, quarterback, Monday, Sunday, sophomore, September, October, November, December.

F. Two Steps for Word Studies

The meaning of a word is determined by two things, its contemporary semantic range (that is, what the word can mean) and the literary context in which it is used. So, there are two basic steps to doing a word study.

Determine what the word can mean by looking it up in a dictionary or lexicon.

The second step is to examine the context to determine which of its possible senses the word means.

III. AVOIDING WORD STUDY FALLACIES

These are some common mistakes that are made when studying Greek and Hebrew words, some word study fallacies to avoid.

A. The “root meaning” fallacy

A root meaning fallacy is the fallacy that every word in Greek has a single core meaning and we can apply that meaning to every passage.
Examples: three Greek words for love (John 3:16, 2 Timothy 4:10, 1 John 2:15)

B. The “etymology” fallacy

The etymology or etymological fallacy is finding the meaning of a word in its component parts instead of its context and literary usage. Examples: Ekklesia, parakletos.

C. The “anachronistic meaning” fallacy

An anachronistic fallacy is the fallacy where a sense which a Greek or Hebrew word developed later is imposed back on its first-century usage. Examples: dynamis, hilaros,

IV. PRINCIPLES TO AVOID WORD STUDY FALLACIES

Here are some final principles to avoid word study fallacies, principles based on these points that we have made in relation to lexical semantics.

A. Meaning is determined by context not word roots.

Our first principle is meaning is determined by context not word roots. We have seen the etymology, the component parts of a word or some core meaning of a word does not determine its meaning. What determines its meaning is its context.
B. Study sentences, not Greek words.

As a rule, study English sentences not Greek words. In other words, read larger sections of the text, they will give you a better idea of the meaning of these words then will minute study of individual vocabulary.

C. Read for the big idea, not the hidden meaning.

It is more important to identify the central message of a larger text or paragraph than it is to unpack the secret meaning of a particular Greek or Hebrew word, because that secret meaning probably is not there.

D. Compare various English versions.

The fourth principle is to compare various English versions. In addition to a good translation, your second-best tool for Bible study is another good translation, because comparing various English versions will give you some of the possible senses that a word can have.

E. Check the better commentaries.

_Bible Study Methods_
Check the better commentaries because commentaries study the word in its context, looking at the meaning of the passage as a whole, talking about the meaning of that word within that passage.

F. The Best Tools for Word Studies

The only reliable, truly reliable, English language word study book is *Mounce’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*.

For Greek, the standard Greek lexicons are your best tools. If you cannot use lexicons, the commentaries always provide good help; they provide good help, because they study the Bible in context. Avoid the older the word study books like *Vine’s Expository Dictionary* and *Vincent’s Word Studies*.

RECOMMENDED READING

- Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics, by Moisés Silva.

QUESTIONS

1. What has been your response when a pastor or teacher refers to the original languages during a sermon or lesson? Reflect on the positive and negative aspects of referring to Greek and Hebrew. Do the benefits outweigh the dangers? Is it more about the heart motivation of the preacher/teacher?
2. What is the value of doing word studies? Can too much emphasis be placed on the meaning of words? How do you strike a proper balance in your studies?
3. Can you think of any word study errors that you have personally heard? What does it do to the authority of the teaching when someone improperly attributes the meaning of a particular word to its “root meaning” or “etymology”? Write down some safeguards for avoiding the three fallacies mentioned in this lesson.

4. Choose a significant word from one of the following passages and do a word study using the techniques and tools that Dr. Strauss mentioned in this lesson: Psalm 23, Mark 2:13-17, Romans 12:1-2, and Philippians 1:12-18.
Bible Study Application

In this lesson, Dr. Strauss discusses two extremes to avoid when applying Scripture. He also gives us five principles to guide our contextualization of a particular passage. Listen in and grow in your ability to apply Scripture in your context to your life in meaningful ways.
I. INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Recall the bridge diagram. Crossing from our current context over the bridge to the biblical world in order to determine the original author’s intended meaning is the process of exegesis. Crossing back from the biblical world to our current context is the process of contextualization or application, determining the significance for us today.

II. TWO EXTREMES TO AVOID

When doing contextualization, there are two extremes to avoid.

A. Imitating Biblical Culture Exactly

We have to recognize that not every passage in the Bible was meant to be applied to believers for all time. Old Testament Examples: Exodus 29:38, Deuteronomy 21:18, Exodus 35:2, Leviticus 11:9-11. New Testament Examples: 1 Peter 5:14, 1 Timothy 5:23, Mark 6:8
B. Letting the Culture Govern the Message

The second extreme is contextualizing completely, or letting the culture govern the message. Example: The Cotton Patch Gospel by Clarence Jordan from the 1960’s and 1970’s.

III. PRINCIPLES OF CONTEXTUALIZATION

We need contextualization because not every passage in the Bible was meant to be applied to believers of all time. So that brings up a significant question. How do we decide what commands are meant for all time and which are meant for a particular cultural context?

A. Proper contextualization begins with sound exegesis.

The first principle is proper contextualization begins with sound exegesis, determining the original meaning.

B. All Scripture is authoritative, because it is inspired by God.

The second principle of application or contextualization is all scripture is authoritative because all Scripture is inspired by God, 2 Timothy 3:16. Application concerns not whether a particular passage is relevant because all passages of scripture are relevant. The question is how to apply it to our contemporary situation. Example: 1 Peter 5:14

C. Scripture can be applied at the surface level, or at the level of principle.
Scripture can be applied at the surface level, that is directly, or at the level of principle. Example: 1 Peter 5:14 “Greet one another with a kiss of love”

D. Distinguish between the cultural, which is relative, and the super-cultural, which is absolute.

To apply correctly we must distinguish between the cultural, which is relative, and the super-cultural or above culture, which is absolute. Here are questions to ask to help determine whether a text is cultural or super-cultural. Example: 1 Corinthians 11:5
Is the command inherently moral?

The first factor to consider is, is the command inherently moral? something that is right or wrong based directly on the character of God. Examples: Ephesians 4:25 (lying) and 28 (stealing)

Does the context give indications that the passage is above culture?

Here is a second factor to consider: Does the context give indications that the passage is above culture? Ephesians 6:1 “Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” contains a universal statement (“this is right”) and suggests that Paul is making a command that is not culturally specific.

Do we share comparable particulars?

Here is a third principle. Do we share comparable particulars, that is, similar, specific life situations with the first-century context? If so, the command is likely to apply today. Consider these examples

Ephesians 5:18: “Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.” Is drunkenness the same basic issue today as it was in the first century? Drunkenness is the same issue, basically, today as it was in the first century, we share comparable particulars.
1 Timothy 2:9: “I also want women to dress modestly, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes.” Well, braided hair today is not a sign of lack of modesty or ostentatious behavior. Wearing gold or pearls is not usually viewed as flaunting wealth.

Is the command connected to cultural practices current in the first century but not present today?

Here is a fourth factor to consider as to whether something is cultural or universal. Is the command connected to cultural practices current in the first century, but not present today? Example: John 13:12-17

What cultural options were open to the writer?

The fifth factor to consider when asking whether a passage is cultural or universal and that is, what cultural options were open to the writer? When only one option was open the passage is more likely to be culturally relative. Example: Ephesians 6:5

What is the ultimate purpose of this command in its cultural context?

The sixth factor to consider when trying to determine what is universal and what is culturally specific and that is, what is the author’s ultimate purpose of this command in its cultural context? Example: 1 Corinthians 11

E. Individual statements must be placed in the broader context of Scripture.

The fifth principle of contextualization is individual statements must be placed in the broader context of Scripture. We call this the analogy of Scripture.
1. Is all of biblical teaching on the topic uniform or does reflect differences of perspective? Consider the Biblical teaching on the following topics:

Homosexuality (Leviticus 18:22, 29; 20:13; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1 8-11)

Women in leadership positions (1 Timothy 2; Priscilla, Junia, Euodia, Syntyche)

2. Is this part of core biblical teaching or is it peripheral?

Our second sub-point is, is this part of core biblical teaching or it is peripheral, is it on the edge, is it something that occurs only once or twice and is obscure in Scripture? Example: 1 Corinthians 15:29

IV. SUMMARY

Write a summary of this lecture in 3-5 sentences.
Contextualization happens after we have done our exegesis, after we have determined the meaning of the text in its original context. Contextualization is taking that message and determining how it applies today. Contextualization is an essential part of all biblical interpretation, because as Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, “All Scripture is inspired by God and it is profitable for instruction and for teaching and for rebuke, for training in righteousness.”

God’s word is meant not just to be read and understood; God’s word is meant to be applied to our lives. So, the ultimate task of biblical interpretation is to allow God’s word to transform us, to allow it to make us into the image of Jesus Christ so that we can boldly proclaim his message to the ends of the earth so that we can bring the knowledge of God to all people everywhere.
QUESTIONS

1. Of the two extremes to avoid in application, too much in biblical culture or too much in our own culture, is one more dangerous than the other? Reflect on the various dangers inherent in each extreme and how you might avoid them in your application.

2. Can you think of a time when you heard a Biblical passage being interpreted wrongly? What happened as a result of that? How were people affected?

3. What is your view on the authority or role of the Old Testament law and its obligations for the believer? How have Dr. Strauss’ principles for application helped you in your thinking of the place of the law in today’s culture?

4. What do you think is harder, understanding Scripture or applying it to your life? How are the two related? How would you explain to a
friend the importance of applying all of Scripture, even the lesser-known portions?

5. Choose one or more of the following passages and come up with two or three applications for each: Psalm 23, Mark 2:13-17, Romans 12:1-2, and Philippians 1:12-18.

6. Review your notes from throughout the course. What are three takeaways for you from this course? What are 1-3 things you will stop doing in your Bible study? What are 1-3 things you will start doing in your Bible study?