BACK TO THE BIBLE UNIVERSITY
with Woodrow Kroll
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BACK TO THE BIBLE UNIVERSITY

Freshman: Orientation
The Bible is God’s communication to us, and that alone makes it a unique book. However, it is distinctive in many other ways too. It was written over a period of 1,400 years by more than 40 different authors who came from all walks of life. Yet throughout the Bible we find the common themes of mankind’s sin and God’s salvation.

The Bible contains two sections. One is the Old Testament with 39 books written primarily in Hebrew; the other is the New Testament with 27 books written primarily in Greek.

Fortunately for you and me, we don’t have to know these original languages because others, who do, have translated them for our benefit. One of the oldest translations still in common use is the King James Version. First translated in 1611 under the rule of King James I of England, it has gone through many revisions but still maintains the majestic language of the original which is valued by many. A more modern update is called the New King James Version. Other modern English versions include the New American Standard Bible (probably the most literal of the versions) and the English Standard Version (used in this study).

But if the Bible is so special, is there anything more you should know before you begin to study it in earnest? Let’s let the Bible answer that for itself.
1. What are the primary ways God has revealed Himself?

Read Psalm 19:1,7:

1 “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.”

7 “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.”

2. Read these two passages.

Genesis 12:1–3:

1 “Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’”

1 Samuel 16:1–3:

1 “The LORD said to Samuel, ‘How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go. I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.’ 2 And Samuel said, ‘How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me.’ And the LORD said, ‘Take a heifer with you and say, “I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.” 3 And invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do. And you shall anoint for me him whom I declare to you.’”

• Whom do we find speaking?
• What does this say about the words in the Bible?

Compare with 2 Timothy 3:16.
3. Read these passages from Isaiah 53 and John 19.

**Isaiah 53:3:**

3 “He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”

**John 19:6–7:**

6 “When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, ‘Crucify him, crucify him!’ Pilate said to them, ‘Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him.’ 7 The Jews answered him, ‘We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God.’”

**Isaiah 53:7:**

7 “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.”

**John 19:9–10:**

9 “He [Pilate] entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, ‘Where are you from?’ But Jesus gave him no answer. 10 So Pilate said to him, ‘You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?’”

**Isaiah 53:12:**

12 “He poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.”
John 19:16–18:

16 “So he [Pilate] delivered him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus, 17 and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. 18 There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them.”

Isaiah 53:9:

9 “And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.”

John 19:41:

41 “Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid.”

- What similarities do you find between these two chapters?
- If John 19 is the fulfillment of Isaiah 53, what does this say about the trustworthiness of God’s Word?

1. The Bible is composed of five types of literature. Match the books we’ve used in this study to its type.

   a. Psalm   History
   b. Isaiah   Poetry
   c. Genesis   Epistle (Letter)
   d. 1 Timothy   Prophecy
   e. 1 Samuel   Law (Pentateuch)
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One of the qualities of a good artist is the ability to observe the details of his or her subject. When you study the Bible, careful observation is also essential. But, unlike the artist who studies a landscape or a still life in order to paint it accurately, you are observing the Word of God in order to understand its exact meaning and to apply its lessons to your life.

When you come to a passage of Scripture, you will benefit most from your study if you carefully observe such details as:

- The context of the passage. Context refers to the nearby or more remote passages that affect the verses you’re reading. Sometimes the context is right there, so you read the verses right before and right after your passage. Other times the topic is found in verses in other chapters or even other books of the Bible. All passages should be studied in the light of the whole Bible.

- The background of the passage including:
  - The people involved. As you read, ask, “Who?”
  - The places involved. As you read, ask, “Where?”
  - The time. As you read, ask, “When?”

- The actions in the passage (verbs of doing or being). As you read, ask, “What? What actions are people taking? What is going on?”
You may glean some of this information from the passage itself and its surrounding verses or chapters.

Try this as you read 1 Samuel 17:39–51. For context, read 1 Samuel 17:1–38, 52–58.

• Who are the people involved?
• Where are they?
• When is this happening?
• What is the main action? What else is happening here?

This is fairly straightforward when you look at a passage centered on a person or event. But in other cases, you may need to look specifically at something like the verbs or actions. Let’s put the power of observation into practice with Psalm 37:1–11.

Read through the passage at least twice. Drawing upon what you learned in yesterday’s lesson, what kind of Bible literature are you reading (history, poetry, prophecy, etc.)?

1 “Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers!
2 For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb.
3 Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness.
4 Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.
5 Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.
6 He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday.
7 Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him;
fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way,
over the man who carries out evil devices!

8 Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath!
    Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.

9 For the evildoers shall be cut off,
    but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land.

10 In just a little while, the wicked will be no more;
    though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there.

11 But the meek shall inherit the land
    and delight themselves in abundant peace.”

1. First, let’s start with the context. Does Psalm 37:1–11 have a context?
   Is it part of a larger body of Scripture? If so, what?
   You may notice that it’s part of the Psalms, but its setting doesn’t depend on any of the other psalms around it. Yet verses 1–11 do relate to the following verses 12–24. Do the latter verses tell you anything that helps you understand verses 1–11?

2. Next, go through the passage and look for words that show action or being (verbs). Write them down or underline them in your Bible.
   For example, the first action word or verb in verse 1 is “fret not” or “do not fret.”
   Continue through verses 1–11 and identify all the other verbs. (You’ll find a lot.)

3. Now that you’ve discovered all the actions, go back and identify all the persons who do or should do the actions (e.g., the psalmist; God or even the reader).
   What are some characteristics of the persons you found (either stated or implied)?
4. Is there any evidence that might give you a hint about the place or the time or other circumstances of this psalm?

You may need to find information from outside resources. In our next lesson, you’ll see how to research with Bible helps and learn from the experts. If you have a Bible dictionary, a concordance, commentaries or a good Study Bible, you are well on your way. If not, you may want to use the Internet to find these resources.

God’s Word is loaded with riches. Some are in plain sight as you read, like jewels spread on the ground. Others require work to dig them out. But wherever and however you find them, you will grow in spiritual wisdom and knowledge as you make them your own.

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Junior: Focus on the Core
At times you’ll study a Bible passage that has valuable lessons in it, but the setting or circumstances make it hard to understand. It may include names you don’t know (and can’t pronounce), activities unfamiliar to you, places that don’t jog your memory or a time frame that needs to be researched. What can you do to get a handle on these passages?

Let’s try one now.

Read 2 Kings 19:14–19 two or more times.

“Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord and spread it before the Lord. And Hezekiah prayed before the Lord and said: ‘O Lord, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth. Incline your ear, O Lord, and hear; open your eyes, O Lord, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God. Truly, O Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands and have cast their gods into the fire, for they were not gods, but the work of men’s hands, wood and stone. Therefore they were destroyed. So now, O Lord our God, save us, please, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O Lord, are God alone.’

Once again, start with the skills you developed in earlier studies.

• What is the nature of this passage? Is it poetry, prophecy, history, an epistle (letter) or law?

• List some things you may have trouble understanding about these verses.

• What can you learn from the context to help you know what’s going on? (Hints: You’re reading about a good king of Judah. To find information in the context about him, go back to 2 Kings 18:1 and read through 2 Kings 20:21. For this lesson, don’t
try to understand everything in the whole passage, but concentrate on the danger Judah is facing from its enemy, Assyria, especially in 2 Kings 19:1–13.)

• Locate the persons involved in 19:14–19.
• What words of action or being (verbs) do you find?
• What about places, time frame or other circumstances?

After you’ve researched as much as you can on your own, you may find there are several things you simply can’t figure out. So, what can you do? Here are some common books that can help you.

1. A good Study Bible. This is a Bible with explanatory notes linked to the text. It normally has other helps such as brief doctrinal studies, Bible reading suggestions, a basic concordance (See below.), maps and other valuable study aids. If you can’t afford a complete library, it’s worth the sacrifice to get a trustworthy Study Bible with cross-references.

2. A concordance. This book lists the words of the Bible and the references where they are found. Be careful to get a concordance that is based on the Bible version you use since words are not always translated the same way in all versions.

3. A Bible dictionary. Here you'll find explanations of unfamiliar and obscure words. For example, in this Bible passage, you may need to look up Hezekiah, cherubim, Sennacherib, Assyria, etc.

4. A Bible encyclopedia. This series of books greatly expands some of the definitions and explanations. It is, however considerably more expensive than other resources.

5. Bible commentaries. Commentaries give interpretive or devotional comments on the text of the Bible—verse by verse, chapter by chapter, etc. These works vary greatly both in quality and quantity. Some are one-or two-volume commentaries on the whole Bible. Some sets cover every book of the Bible. Others are single commentaries on sections or individual Bible books.
6. Other translations. Comparing Bible versions will often provide a better understanding of Bible passages and shed light on the meaning of formerly obscure words.

You can also find many specialized books such as dictionaries of: theology, Bible places, Bible people, plants in the Bible and Bible animals. Teachers’ commentaries and Bible atlases are also available. Normally, these are not essential, but they can add insight to your study.

If you use the Internet, most of the above resources are available to you, through Web sites like BibleGateway.com, Crosswalk.com and StudyLight.org.

NOTE: We strongly recommend that you talk with a trusted pastor or Bible teacher before purchasing or utilizing any of the above helps. Unfortunately not all books or online resources are sound in doctrine or scholarship.

Here is a sample of resources you can find on the Internet:

- Go to www.crosswalk.com and look under “Bible Study Tools.”
- Select “Dictionaries”; then, “Easton’s Bible Dictionary.”
- Type “Hezekiah” in the search box, and you’ll discover some excellent information about today’s Bible passage.

You can also look at concordances, encyclopedias, commentaries and other resources on the same Web site, and you can compare versions of the Bible. Bible software programs that offer many similar study aids are also available.

Remember, studying God’s Word is how we connect personally with Him. It’s not just learning the facts about people, places and events. So, keep in mind several other key questions to ask as you read a passage:

- What does this passage say about God? His character, His actions, His promises, etc.?
- What do we see here about God’s response or relationship to mankind?
• What does this say about the nature of man? How he acts, what he can do?
• What does it tell us about man’s response to God?

These are questions that begin to help us find the meaning in Scripture, not just the facts. In our next study, we’ll get into two more strategic skills you need to connect with God’s Word:

• Interpretation—what does this passage mean?
• Application—what does it mean to me?

You need both, and you need to use them in the right order.

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BACK TO THE BIBLE UNIVERSITY

Senior: Prepping for Finals
A number of methods have been developed to study the Bible. One approach consists of three simple questions:

- Read It: What does it say?
- Interpret It: What does it mean?
- Apply It: What does it mean to me?

Let's use this approach as we study **Luke 15:11–32**.

**Background:** **Luke 15** has been called the “Lost and Found Department” of the Bible because this chapter deals with things that have been lost (a coin, a sheep and a son) but are found, much to the joy of those involved. Jesus told this series of parables because the Pharisees and the scribes were upset that Jesus was associating with “sinners” (**Luke 15:1–2**). Jesus uses these parables to contrast the Pharisees’ attitude toward those who were lost with God’s attitude of loving restoration.

- Parables: An earthly story that represents a spiritual truth.
- Pharisees: A group of religious leaders who had very strict views about religious practice.
- Scribes: Men who devoted their lives to the study of the Law.
- Sinners: The Pharisees used “sinner” to refer to anyone who didn’t follow the Law as carefully as they did.
1. Read It: What does it say?

- Read Luke 15 in at least two different translations.
- Write out a summary of verses 11–32 in your own words.

2. Interpret It: What does it mean?

- Who does the father represent in this story?
- Who do the sons represent in this story?
- What kind of an attitude does the runaway son have at the beginning of this story?
- What changes his attitude?
- Describe the son’s change and how it’s reflected in his behavior.
- How does the father respond to his son’s return?
- How does the older brother react? How is this visible in his behavior?
- List at least four ways the father demonstrates his feelings toward the son who came home.

3. Apply It: What does it mean to me?

Jesus used the story of the father and sons to illustrate God’s love for lost people and His desire to restore them. The story resonates in terms of our relationship with God and others. There are three characters: a father and two sons. At some point in your life, you may find yourself in any of these positions.

- How should you respond when you see yourself as the prodigal son? The father? The older brother?
- Go through the story again from each angle and look at how you should or might interact with other people. For example, If you see yourself as the father, how do you relate or interact with the prodigal or the older son based on this passage?
- If you look at your relationship with God, who is our Father, how does this parable shape your view of God? Do you relate to Him as the prodigal son? Or more as the older brother?
- Consider the father’s response to his son’s homecoming. In what way could this affect your attitude toward those who are lost?
For another approach to a passage, you can also use questions like those below to help you understand and apply God’s Word to your life.

- Can you find a promise that speaks to you? A warning? A command to follow?
- What does the passage tell you about God? His character, His actions, etc?
- What do you see here about God’s response or relationship to you?
- What does this say about human nature and how we act or think?
- Is there any action you need to take to adjust your view of God or your response to Him?
- Write down the things you have learned in this passage that you can use in your life.

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BACK TO THE BIBLE UNIVERSITY

Graduation: Life After Class
This is the real world. You’re now ready to do this on your own; you don’t need a study group or leader because you have the skills to open God’s Word and get the most out of your time with Him.

So, let’s review the past four days and sharpen your study skills. As you come to each “day” below, go back and read over the corresponding lesson you did for that day; then put what you learned into practice on a Bible passage: Matthew 27:62–28:7.

62 Next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, ‘Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, “After three days I will rise.” 63 Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, “He has risen from the dead,” and the last fraud will be worse than the first.’ 64 Pilate said to them, ‘You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can.’ 65 So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

1 Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 2 And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4 And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. 5 But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.’"
Day 1: Identify It! *(Freshman: Orientation)*

What kind literature is this? Is it poetry, prophecy or historical narrative?

Look at the passage in your own Bible. If your Bible has an introduction to the Book of Matthew, see what it says about this book.

Day 2: Observe and Analyze It! *(Sophomore: Building Your Skills)*

Study the passage carefully, observing the context—the near or remote passages that help you understand the passage better.

Compare this event as it is found in the other Gospels *(Mark 16:1–13, Luke 24:1–12, John 20:1–18).*

List people and places and indicate the time period in which the events occurred.

Look for verbs showing actions or verbs of being (is, are, were, was, etc).

Day 3: Clarify It! *(Junior: Focus on the Core)*

List some of the things you don’t understand about this passage plus any events or people you don’t know much about.

Use a Bible dictionary, a Study Bible or another outside resource to find answers to your questions.

If you have Internet access, you might try Web sites like BibleGateway.com, Crosswalk.com, and StudyLight.org.

Day 4: Apply It! *(Senior: Prepping for Finals)*

Read and summarize the verses in your own words. (Read it.)

What does it mean? (Interpret it.)

What does the passage mean to you? (Apply it.)

Can you find a promise that speaks to you? A warning? A command to follow?

Write down the things you have learned in this passage that you can use in your life.
• Day 5: Live it Out! *(Graduation: Life After Class)*

Now, find ways to put the things you have learned about Bible study into your daily living as you touch other people and deal with the nitty-gritty of life!

What do you need to do with today’s lesson? Any changes to make?

Who can you tell this week about Christ’s Resurrection and what it means in your life?

Who among your friends and family needs to know that the grave isn’t the end?

Ask the Lord to show you how you can share this story with them.

Pause right now and give thanks to God that you have a living Savior. Thank Him that Jesus is the assurance of your own resurrection, and that you no longer have to fear death.

And remember, you have the skills. Now put them to work. Use your Bible to connect with God.

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