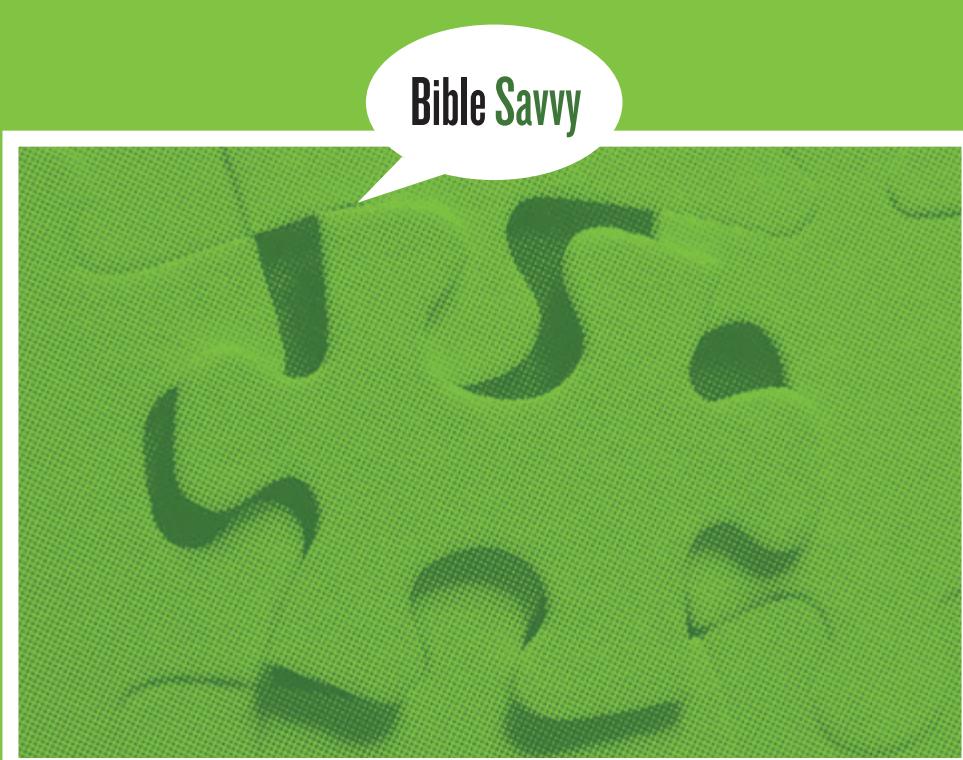


## **STUDY GUIDE**

**Context: How to Understand the Bible**

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**Bible Savvy**

# CONTEXT

## Study Guide

The *Study Guide* questions at the end of each chapter have been designed for your personal benefit. *All* questions can be used for personal study and, if you're part of a discussion group, for preparation for your group meeting. If you are part of a small group, you will find the questions preceded by the group icon  are especially useful for discussion. Your group leader can choose from among those questions when the group meets.

## Chapter I: The Historical Setting

### Icebreakers

*Icebreaker 1: Do you enjoy putting jigsaw puzzles together? Why or why not?*

*Icebreaker 2: Describe a key event or circumstance in your past that would provide others with some context for understanding who you are today.*

1. What is hermeneutics? Why is it important for a proper understanding of the Bible? What is the most basic ground rule of Bible interpretation?
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How does Christianity differ from most other major world religions when it comes to objective facts? What bearing does this have on how we interpret the Bible?
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Have you ever traveled or lived in a foreign culture? If so, describe a few of the differences between that culture and your own.  
  
  
  
  
  
  - Why is it important to *cross the cultural rivers* when reading the Bible? (Or, what might happen if you don't cross the cultural rivers when reading the Bible?) What resource(s) will help you understand the culture of whatever Bible passage you're reading?
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What are the five *journalistic questions* that should be asked of every Bible passage?

*For items 5–8, answer the expanded journalistic questions that are asked of each Bible text. Then you will have the opportunity to craft some journalistic questions of your own—and answer them—for a final passage.*



5. Read Leviticus 16; then answer the following questions:

*Who* was Aaron (i.e., what unique role did he play in ancient Israel and what were the responsibilities of that role)?

*What* was the Most Holy Place—and *what* was so special about it?

*When* was Aaron allowed into the Most Holy Place? What is meant by the name given to this annual day?

*Where* was the live goat sent and what was the significance of that destination?

*Why* was the Day of Atonement to be day of rest, when no work was done? (Hint: What does this say about the contribution that God expects from people in order for them to be forgiven?)



6. Read Joshua 3.

*Who* was Joshua?

*What* would the crossing of the Jordan River at flood-stage signify? [JIM: Is *signify* the right word? Do you mean, “What is the implication of people crossing the Jordan River at flood stage?”]

*When* did this event take place in the history of ancient Israel?

*Where* were Joshua and God’s people headed?

*Why* were the priests, who were carrying the ark of the covenant, the first ones to step into the water?

7. Read Luke 15:11–32.

*Who* were the three major players in Jesus’ parable—and *who* did each of them represent?

*What* was especially distasteful about the younger son’s plunge to pig level? *What* was especially meaningful about the father’s gift to this son upon the boy’s return?

*When* did Jesus tell this parable (i.e. what occasioned it)?

*Where* did the father see the returning son—and what does that tell you about this dad?

*Why* was the older brother angry? *Why* had he been missing out on the blessings of his father's house?

8. Read 2 Corinthians 8:1–15.

*Who* were the Macedonian believers and how did they differ from the Corinthians?

*What* was Paul collecting money for?

*When* did Paul first raise the issue of giving toward this project with the Corinthians and what does that say about his bringing the subject up again in this letter?

*Where* did Paul draw the Corinthian's attention for an example of supreme generosity?

*Why* were the Corinthians not in a generous mood?

*Now that you've gotten the hang of answering some journalistic questions, it's time for you to craft a few of your own. Create a who, what, when, where and why question for the following passage. Then answer your questions.*



9. Read Ruth 3.

*Who* (somebody other than Ruth, since her profile has already been covered in this chapter)...

*What*...

*When*...

*Where*...

*Why*...



10. What did you learn from this exercise about the importance of understanding a Bible passage's *historical setting*?

## Chapter 2: The Literary Setting

### Icebreaker

*What genre of literature do you enjoy the most—and why?*

1. Although baseball, football, and basketball all come from the world of sports, they are played by very different rules. What does this analogy teach us about interpreting the Bible?
  
  
  
  
2. Why is it bad hermeneutics to dismiss the Old Testament law that prohibits homosexuality on the basis that some other laws are obviously obsolete?
  
  
  
  
3.  Read the fourth commandment in Exodus 20:8–11. This is a difficult law to categorize because it seems to qualify as two different kinds of law. Which two? (Pick from *moral*, *ceremonial*, and *civil*.) Explain your answer. (Romans 4:5 may help you identify one of the categories.)
  - What principle(s) do you see behind this law (i.e., how is it applicable today)?
  
  
  
  
4. Read the brief story in Matthew 8:5–11. What is the overall theme of this narrative? Which elements of the story seem to be *descriptive* and which ones are *prescriptive*?
  
  
  
  
5.  Many of David's psalms praise God for delivering him from his enemies. What are some of the probable back stories to these psalms of deliverance? (If you're unfamiliar with the Old Testament, take a look at 1 Samuel 17:32–50, 1 Samuel 18:6–11, and 2 Samuel 15:1–14.)
  - How does knowing the backstories to David's psalms of deliverance help you apply these psalms to



your own life?

6. Isaiah 55:1–3 is an example of the poetry that can be found in the *Books of Prophecy*. Explain the figurative language in these verses. (What are the *wine*, *milk*, and *bread* that Isaiah is referring to?) How does Isaiah's poetry here make his message more poignant?



- What do you learn about God from this brief snippet of poetry?

7. What's the single rule for understanding proverbs? What danger will you run into if you fail to heed this rule?



- How would this rule impact your understanding of Proverbs 16:3's application to your life?

8. Why is it important to know Bible *history* when interpreting prophecies about *future* events?



9. What are the two different ways to read all the prophetic passages about the future restoration of the nation of Israel?

10. Find out the occasions (purposes) that prompted Paul to write the following epistles. You will need a study Bible to locate this information

*Romans*

*1 Corinthians*

*Galatians*

*Philippians*

*1 Thessalonians*

*Philemon*



11. How might you retain the rules you learned in this chapter for future use as you read the Bible?

## **Chapter 3: The Theological Setting**

## Icebreaker

*Does the word theology have a positive or negative ring in your ears? Explain.*

1. Why must the Bible, given its wide diversity of human authors, always agree with itself? What is the practical application of this principle? Explain why this is so.
  2. How does progressive revelation account for the fact that sometimes the Bible seems to disagree with itself?
  3. Write out a theology of prayer based upon the Scriptures and insights covered in this chapter.
  4. Using the concordance in your Bible, summarize what Jesus teaches about hell.
  5. Read John 3:1–2 Choose three words that you find interesting and that are cross-referenced in your Bible. Write down what you learn about each of these three words from looking up the cross-references.

First word:

Second word:

Third word:



6. Read Colossians Now, read it a second time, along with all the corresponding footnotes in a study Bible of your choice. Record the top three insights that you gleaned from these footnotes. (Remember that you can purchase an *NIV Study Bible* app for your iPhone and begin using it in the next five minutes!)



7. Jesus says in Mark 10:11 that “anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery.” Period! If this were the only biblical text on divorce, you would have to conclude that divorce is always prohibited—no exceptions. But using your Bible’s concordance, cross-references, and footnotes, construct a fuller theology of divorce (i.e., especially noting if there are any circumstances in which God permits it).



8. In what sense is every Bible reader a theologian? Why should this motivate you to pay attention to theology as you’re reading the Bible?

## Chapter 4: The Immediate Setting

### Icebreaker

*How many different meanings for the word “run” can you come up with?*

1. Explain the three translation philosophies behind the various Bible versions.



- What is the Bible translation that you most often use? Why? Which category of translation philosophy does it fall into? What are the strengths and weaknesses of such a translation?



2. If you want to interpret the Bible correctly, you must learn to recognize key words as you read. Take a look at the following passages and note the most significant word(s) or phrase(s) in each:

- *Genesis 45:3–9* (this one is so obvious you might miss it, but you can check your answer by comparing it to what you find in *Genesis 50:20*)

*Deuteronomy 28:1–14*

*Ezekiel 33:1–9*

*John 15:1–8*

*1 Corinthians 9:19–23*

*Hebrews 9:11–14*

3. The *Amplified Bible* is constructed on what premise? What is the weakness of such a premise?

4. Read Joshua What command does God repeatedly give Joshua? From the context of this chapter, how does a person come by these two characteristics?



5. The opening declaration of Jesus' ministry, recorded in Mark 1:15, is: "The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" If the kingdom of God was the first thing out of Jesus' mouth, this must be a very important biblical topic. Using your concordance, briefly summarize what the Gospel of Mark teaches about this subject.



6. Based upon what you have learned about the kingdom of God in Mark, is this a present or a future reality? Explain. (The *NIV Study Bible* has an extremely helpful footnote along these lines for Luke 4:43.) What bearing does this have on your life today?

7. In Matthew 5:14, Jesus announces to His followers: "You are the light of the world." But this verse doesn't say what is meant by that metaphor. You'll need to look at a wider context to discover what it means to be *light*. How would you define being *the light of the world* according to the context of:

a. the Matthew 5:14–16 paragraph?

b. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7 (cite broad categories)?

c. other New Testament writers in 2 Corinthians 4:5–7; Ephesians 5:8–13; 1 Peter 2:9; 1 John 1:5–9; 2:9–10?

8. The apostle Paul seems to express a negative viewpoint toward God's law in Romans 7, noting that Christ followers have both "died to the law" (7:4) and been "released from the law" (7:6). This has led some believers to conclude that God's law has no relevance for their lives today. But read Romans 7 in its entirety and sum up this chapter's *balanced* perspective on God's law.

9. This same balanced perspective can be seen in the broader context of the epistle of Romans. Note what Paul says, positively and negatively, about the law in Romans 3:20, 3



- Evidently, there is a very specific sense in which Christ followers are to see themselves as released from the law. In what sense is it no longer applicable to you? In what sense does the law still have a role to play in your life?
- What additional positive remarks do other Bible writers make about God's law—most notably, the psalmist (Psalm 119:1, 18, 44–45, 52, 62, 72, 92, 97–98, 136, 156, 165) and two of the major prophets (Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:26–27)?

10. *Cessationists* believe that the biblical gift of tongues is no longer given to believers by the Holy Spirit today. A key text that is used to support this position is 1 Corinthians 13:8: "Where there are tongues, they will be stilled." *Cessationists* say that the apostle Paul is looking to his near future when the New Testament canon would be completed and there would no longer be a need for revelation from God through tongues. Read 1 Corinthians 13:8–1. What time frame does this context suggest for when tongues would be stilled? Explain.



11. Now read the context of the following chapter, 1 Corinthians 11. Is there any mention of the cessation of tongues in this passage? What *does* Paul say about tongues by way of guidelines for using this gift?