

MANUSCRIPT BIBLE STUDY

OVERVIEW:

With most Bible study, we rely on prepared lessons, commentaries, familiar questions, or the insights of gifted leaders. There is a better, easier way, a Bible study method that lets every participant handle the words of the Bible on their own and together. The method is called Manuscript Bible Study.

Without direct engagement with the text, people risk more than ineffective learning. They risk misrepresenting God's Word, reinforcing assumptions, and standing before Him having spoken where the text does not. Leaders bear this weight, but participants are not exempt. Those who never learn to study deeply for themselves are left dependent, vulnerable, and unprepared when the teacher is absent.

Manuscript Bible study addresses this at its root. Alone or in a group, you begin with the passage itself—no lesson plan, no commentary, no discussion strategy. Yet this simple approach repeatedly produces deeper understanding and more honest application. It requires a shift in mindset: from managing outcomes to trusting Scripture to accomplish its work.

Manuscript study reshapes teaching and learning simultaneously. Everyone begins with the same unadorned text, opening multiple paths for observation, discussion, and reflection. Core groups become capable of handling Scripture independently, seeing structure, weighing interpretations, and applying principles accurately. The life of the story emerges naturally, and application becomes compelling because it grows directly from the text. Above all, manuscript study restores confidence in Scripture itself, training teachers and learners to trust that God's Word—rightly attended to—forms minds, convicts hearts, and produces obedience without constant mediation.

PREP:

Choose five to ten verses for a couple of hours of study. Copy and paste the passage from an online Bible into a document. Double- or triple-space the text, and remove all headings and paragraph breaks, but leave the verse numbers. This document is called the manuscript. If you are studying in a group, print a copy for each participant.

Depending on the purpose of the meeting and the experience of the participants, preparation may vary:

- No work done at all before the meeting
- Only Part 1 (Observation) completed
- Several or all parts are completed independently as determined by the leader

What matters is not the amount of preparation, but that everyone does the same kind of preparation. The goal is for every participant, including the leader, to encounter the text fresh, together. This discipline protects the group from hidden hierarchy, prevents subtle steering or premature conclusions, and reduces dependence on the leader's insight. More importantly, it preserves confidence in Scripture itself to teach and mature people directly. In a manuscript study, authority belongs to the text—not to the person who spoke first, prepared the longest, or knows the most.

MANUSCRIPT BIBLE STUDY

It isn't necessary to do all 10 parts of the Manuscript Study. In fact, in most cases, that isn't realistic for a group Bible Study. A leader should always choose at least one item from observation, interpretation, and application. For example, from observation, pick Parts 1 and 2. From Interpretation, pick Part 7, and from Application, pick Part 8. If a person is teaching or writing on a passage, we strongly encourage using all 10 parts.

PART 1: Study the Manuscript OBSERVATION

Observation is the first step of manuscript study. The goal is not to interpret or apply the passage yet, but simply to notice what is there. Read the passage slowly and repeatedly, marking what you see. Use shapes, colors, or symbols to highlight different discoveries.

PART 2: People List OBSERVATION

List the people or groups involved. and list anything that describes them or what they did. Think of the passage from each person's viewpoint, and write what they may have thought and felt (technically Interpretation).

List every person or group mentioned in the passage. For each one, record:

- Exact words or phrases from the text that describe them or their actions
- What those descriptions suggest about their mindset or beliefs
- What the passage indicates about their emotions or responses

Try to view the passage from each person's perspective. Ask, *"If I were this person, responding to these circumstances, what would I be thinking or feeling—and what evidence in the text points me there?"*

Avoid speculation that is not grounded in the passage. If something is uncertain, note it as a possibility rather than a conclusion.

PART 3: Context Information INTERPRETATION

Context helps us understand the passage as the original audience would have heard it. On this page, consider what was happening around the text—religiously, historically, politically, culturally, or economically—that may shed light on the meaning. The goal is not to gather facts for their own sake, but to notice anything that clarifies *why* the words and actions in the passage mattered then—and how that compares with our experience now.

Not every category will apply to every passage. Use only what is relevant and helpful.

Instructions

MANUSCRIPT BIBLE STUDY

For each category below, note any background information that increases understanding of the passage. When possible, briefly compare their world to ours: *What would have felt familiar, strange, costly, risky, or obvious to them that may not be to us?* Use trusted resources if needed (study Bibles, Bible dictionaries, historical notes), but keep observations concise and connected to the text.

PART 4: Greek and Hebrew Words INTERPRETATION

On Page 1, you marked words or phrases that seemed important, unclear, or loaded with meaning. This page is where you return to those words and explore them more deeply. Studying the original Greek or Hebrew can clarify meaning, reveal nuance, and prevent misunderstandings—but it is a tool, not a requirement for faithful study.

Instructions

Select one or more of the words you marked with a (?) in the manuscript. Using a tool such as **Blue Letter Bible** (available as an app or at www.blueletterbible.com), look up the original Greek or Hebrew word.

You will need to learn how to navigate to:

- **Interlinear** – to see the original word behind the English translation
- **Lexicon** – to understand the range of meanings
- **Parsing** – to see how the word functions grammatically

Do not rush this step. Look for clarity, not novelty. Ask, “*Does this information confirm, sharpen, or correct my understanding of the passage?*”

Tutorials (optional help)

- Navigating the Interlinear
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9oINRh6CM0>
- Using the Lexicon
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVzQDxCSbIA>
- Understanding Parsing
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01jekComL1c>
- Word studies in Blue Letter Bible
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kh-QdQLFxes>
- Biblical grammars resource
<https://www.blueletterbible.org/resources/grammars.cfm>

PART 5: Cross References INTERPRETATION

Cross-references help us understand a passage by seeing how it relates to other parts of Scripture. On this page, use cross-references only for the purposes listed below. When cross-references move beyond these uses, the study shifts from manuscript work into a broader topical study—which is valuable, but different.

MANUSCRIPT BIBLE STUDY

When to Use Cross-References

Use cross-references only if they do one of the following:

1. **Recall**
Is it likely that a person in the passage—or the original audience—had another Scripture, event, or promise in mind?
2. **Backstory**
Does another part of the Bible describe earlier events or circumstances that help explain what is happening here?
3. **Parallel**
Is there another passage that records the same event or teaching?
4. **Future Reflection**
Does a later passage look back on, quote, or clearly reflect the words or ideas in this passage?

If a cross-reference does not fit one of these categories, note it elsewhere or save it for a separate topical study.

PART 6: Possible Interpretations List INTERPRETATION

Not every phrase or idea in a passage is immediately clear. This page is a place to acknowledge uncertainty honestly and think carefully through different possibilities. Listing multiple interpretations helps prevent rushing to conclusions and keeps the interpretation grounded in evidence rather than assumption. Clarity is not increased by ignoring alternatives. Good interpretation considers and tests them.

Instructions

Identify words, phrases, or ideas in the passage that seem unclear, debated, or open to more than one reasonable understanding. For each one:

1. List **all plausible interpretations**, even those you may not prefer.
2. Evaluate each interpretation based on:
 - The immediate context
 - The flow of the passage
 - Observations made on earlier pages
 - Relevant cross-references already identified
3. Note strengths, weaknesses, or tensions for each option.

Do not force a final decision if the text does not require one. It is acceptable to leave some questions open.

PART 7: Relay in Your Own Words INTERPRETATION

This exercise asks you to recount the passage in your own words as if you were there—or as if you heard about it firsthand and were telling someone else. The goal is not to rewrite Scripture or add new meaning, but to test your

MANUSCRIPT BIBLE STUDY

understanding by expressing the events clearly and honestly.

As you recount the passage, pay attention to what the text suggests about the people involved: their circumstances, decisions, relationships, beliefs, and possible emotions. This step helps surface assumptions and forces you to ask, “*Is that actually in the passage?*” and “*Can I really say that?*” If you cannot support a statement from the text or context, mark it as a question.

Instructions

Recount the passage as a continuous narrative. Include details such as:

- Actions and decisions
- Relationships between people
- Circumstances and pressures
- Emotions or motivations that are stated or reasonably implied
- Sensory or situational details present in the text

Do **not** take creative license or fill in gaps with imagination. When something is unclear, turn it into a question rather than a statement (for example: *Did Paul feel hopeless here?*).

This exercise is meant to wrestle honestly with the details of your study and to deepen understanding of the passage as a whole.

PART 8: Original, Today, Tomorrow APPLICATION

Application flows in one direction: **Original** → **Today** → **Tomorrow**. We begin by placing ourselves in the world of the original hearers. Only after we understand what obedience would have required *then* do we ask what faithfulness looks like *now*.

APPLICATION — ORIGINAL (PAST)

To understand a passage fully, we must first imagine what it would have been like to experience it firsthand. Stay within the historical moment of the text. Resist modern assumptions.

Instructions

1. Imagine yourself living at the time the passage was written.
 - What would you have been expected to do?
 - What would you realistically have been willing—or unwilling—to do?
2. Consider the community impact.

MANUSCRIPT BIBLE STUDY

- How might the gathering of believers have changed if this passage had been taken seriously?
- 3. Identify resistance.
 - What obstacles, costs, or fears would people of that time have faced in obeying the passage?
- 4. Consider lived experience.
 - Emotions, relationships, decision-making processes, risks, reputations, losses, hopes.
 - Think in terms of **two days** and **two years** after the passage was heard.
- 5. Identify false beliefs.
 - What misunderstandings, fears, or assumptions might have undermined obedience to the passage?

APPLICATION — PRESENT (TODAY)

Only after working through the original setting do we ask how the passage speaks now.

Instructions

1. Consider your:
 - **Activities**
 - **Relationships**
 - **Decisions**

Does this passage instruct, correct, encourage, or warn you?

2. Does this passage apply to others today?
 - Who has similar attitudes, circumstances, pressures, or beliefs?
3. Longevity of application:
 - How will this passage still shape your thinking two weeks from now?
 - Two months from now?
 - Two years from now?

PART 9: Core Doctrines — *If This Is Really True...*

FORMATION / MOTIVATION

This page uses foundational Christian doctrines to confront the reality of obedience. The purpose is not to derive doctrine from the passage, but to bring what Christians already confess to bear on the choice to obey or resist what Scripture says. This exercise is especially helpful when a person understands what they should do, but feels little urgency, weight, or motivation to change.

Instructions

For each doctrine listed below, assume it is fully true—not abstractly, but concretely and personally.

MANUSCRIPT BIBLE STUDY

Ask:

“If this doctrine is true right now, what does that make obedience or disobedience mean?”

Do not soften the implications. Do not aim for comfort. Press each doctrine until it exposes what is actually at stake in responding to the passage.

Write honestly. This page is not for public performance, but for clarity of conscience.

Page 10 Rows

Who God Is and His Interests

If God truly has absolute authority, perfect knowledge, and unlimited power—and sees every thought, motive, and action—how does that change the seriousness of obeying this passage?

People’s Rebellion

If human resistance to God is real and persistent, how might disobedience here align with deeper patterns of self-rule or avoidance?

The Purpose of All That God Did

If history is moving toward God’s intended end, how does obedience or refusal here place you within that story?

Spiritual Forces

If unseen spiritual realities influence allegiance, resistance, and deception, what pressures or oppositions might be present in this decision?

Heaven / Hell

If eternal outcomes are real and just, what weight does this give to the choices called for in this passage?

Good News / New Life

If God truly offers forgiveness, transformation, and freedom, what is being refused—or embraced—through obedience here?

God’s Love / True Love

If God’s love is both sacrificial and demanding, how does this passage define what love actually looks like in action?

(Additional doctrines may be added as appropriate.)

Guardrail note (important)

Doctrine does not exist to be admired, but to be obeyed.

If belief does not change response, it has not yet been faced honestly.

PART 10: Change Formation — From Conviction to Practice

(unchanged except for alignment)

MANUSCRIPT BIBLE STUDY

Everything on Page 11 now follows naturally: once the **weight of reality** is felt (Page 10), this page asks how to move forward faithfully and wisely.

PAGE 11: Change Formation — From Insight to Practice **FORMATION / LEADERSHIP**

Understanding does not automatically produce change. This page helps translate conviction into movement—whether in an individual life or a community. It is especially useful for teaching, leadership, and long-term discipleship. The purpose is not to manipulate behavior, but to steward change wisely.

Instructions

Using the principle(s) identified earlier, think intentionally about what real change would require. Be honest about resistance, capacity, and pace. This page may be filled out personally or collaboratively.

Page 11 Rows

Why Is This Urgent?

What is at stake if nothing changes? What loss, harm, or missed opportunity does the passage highlight?

Get People on Your Side

Who would need to understand, support, or model this change for it to last?

Create a Vision for What Could Be

What would faithfulness look like if this passage were lived out well?

Remove Obstacles / Find Power

What habits, systems, fears, or dependencies block change?

What resources—spiritual, relational, practical—enable it?

Identify Short-Term Wins

What early, visible steps could confirm that change is possible?

Identify the Next Big Change

What is the most significant shift this passage calls for?

Make It “The Way We Do Things”

How could this value become normal rather than exceptional?

Make Change a Core Competency

What would help people grow in responsiveness to Scripture over time?

Guardrail note

MANUSCRIPT BIBLE STUDY

The goal is formation, not compliance.

Sustainable obedience grows from conviction, clarity, and shared practice.

Study the Manuscript

Read over the passage and find each of these items. Use the shapes or colored pencils to indicate the different discoveries.

Mark the following as you read:

1. **WHO** (*Circle – Red*)
Who is involved? People, groups, or speakers.
2. **WHAT / WHAT HAPPENED** (*Box – Orange*)
What is taking place? What actions, commands, or events occur?
3. **WHEN** (*Underline – Yellow*)
Note time references, sequence, and duration. Pay attention to verb tenses.
(*Optional: Use a tool like BlueLetterBible.com to explore Greek or Hebrew verb tenses.*)
4. **WHERE** (*Double underline – Green*)
Identify locations or settings.
5. **WHY / HOW** (*Dotted underline – Blue*)
Why did they do this? How did it happen? Look for explanations, reasons, or methods.
6. **WORDS TO LOOK UP** (*? – Purple*)
Mark words or phrases that may need clarification. These can be explored later by:
 - Looking up the meaning
 - Examining root word(s)
 - Noting other places the word appears in Scripture(*Optional: Greek or Hebrew study can deepen understanding but is not required.*)
7. **CONJUNCTIONS** (*Two-sided arrow above the word*)
Note connecting words (and, but, therefore, so that, because). Consider what ideas they join.
8. **PARAGRAPH / THOUGHT DIVISIONS** (*//*)
Mark where you would divide the text into natural thought units.
9. **CONNECTIONS**
Draw arrows to link related words, phrases, or ideas.
10. **PUNCHLINE / KEY STATEMENT** (** ... **)
Is there a central point, conclusion, or statement that tells us what the author wants us to understand?

MANUSCRIPT BIBLE STUDY

OBSERVATION INTERPRETATION

People List

Person	Phrases about the Person	Mindset, Beliefs	Feelings

Context Information

Religious	
Geography, Time	
Political	
Cultural	
Economic	
Other	

MANUSCRIPT BIBLE STUDY

INTERPRETATION

Hebrew and Greek Words

Word	Root(s)	Definition	Dictionary	Uses	Other

Cross-Reference List

Cross Reference	Recall, Backstory, Parallel, Future Reference	Summarize

MANUSCRIPT BIBLE STUDY

INTERPRETATION

Possible Interpretations List

Issue or Phrase	What are the Possible Interpretations?	Problems/Likelihood

MANUSCRIPT BIBLE STUDY

INTERPRETATION

Relay in Your Words

Recount the passage as if you were there. Include details, emotions, senses, decision making, relationships, etc. You are not rewriting Scripture. You are dealing with your interpretation of the passage in a very direct way. The purpose is not to take creative license, but to wrestle with the details of your study honestly. If you don't know, turn it into a question (e.g., Did Paul feel hopeless?)

MANUSCRIPT BIBLE STUDY

APPLICATION

Original, Today, Tomorrow – Page 1

Principle, Instruction, Expectation, Change, Opportunity, Attitude, Belief	Results of the Original Change	Obstacles to Change Past	Similar Type Today	Objections to Similarity Type Claims

MANUSCRIPT BIBLE STUDY

APPLICATION

Original, Today, Tomorrow – Page 2

False Beliefs	Demographic Application: Children, Teen, Single, Married, New Mom, Employee, Boss, Retired, Elderly	Two Days, Two Years

MANUSCRIPT BIBLE STUDY

APPLICATION

Core Beliefs, If We Really Knew...

Who God is and His Interests	
People's Rebellion	
The Purpose of All That God Did	
Spiritual Forces	
Heaven/Hell	
Good News, New Life	
God's Love, True Love	

MANUSCRIPT BIBLE STUDY

APPLICATION

Change Management

Why is this Urgent?	
Get People on Your Side.	
Create a Vision for What Could Be.	
Remove Obstacles, Find Power	
Identify Short-Term Wins	
Identify the Next Big Change	
Make it “The Way We Do Things.”	
Make Change a Core Competency	

MANUSCRIPT BIBLE STUDY