

# THE CHAPTER ANALYSIS METHOD OF BIBLE STUDY

## *How to Do an In-depth Study of a Chapter of a Bible Book*

The second stage of studying a book of the Bible is to do a chapter analysis of each of the chapters of that book. After the survey study has been completed and you have a pretty good grasp and overview of the book, begin examining its individual parts. Since most chapter divisions are suitable and useful, it is best to examine the parts in this way.

### DEFINITION

Chapter analysis involves gaining a thorough understanding of the material of a chapter of a book by looking carefully at each paragraph, sentence, and word in an intensely detailed and systematic manner. The three parts of this method are a Chapter Summary, a Verse-by-Verse Analysis, and a Chapter Conclusion. These parts may be done on the given form or on blank pieces of paper.

### WHY DO A CHAPTER ANALYSIS?

Chapter Analysis, when done along with the Book Survey and Book Synthesis methods, enables us to understand the Bible in the way in which it was written—in whole books. It is also a method in which we use limited outside helps, thus enabling us to learn the Scriptures on our own.

**STEP ONE — Write Out a Chapter Summary**

**STEP TWO — List Your Observations**

**STEP THREE — Ask Interpretation Questions**

**STEP FOUR — Correlate Your Chapter with Other Scriptures**

**STEP FIVE — List Some Possible Applications**

**STEP SIX — Write Down Some Concluding Thoughts**

**STEP SEVEN — Write Out One Application**

*Note:* Dawson Trotman, founder and first president of the Navigators, believed that this method is the major means of a Christian's intake of the Word of God. Hundreds of men and women in the early days of the organization were trained to do chapter analysis and received by it a biblical education comparable to that available in Bible institutes and colleges. Since that time, a number of excellent books have been published that expand on this method in detail. If this method especially interests you, I suggest you obtain

some of the books listed at the end of this chapter. They provide excellent additional insights into this popular study method.

## SIMPLE STEPS FOR DOING A CHAPTER ANALYSIS STUDY

In this method you begin with an introduction (chapter summary), which is Step One, then do a verse-by-verse analysis (Steps Two through Five), and finish with a chapter conclusion (Steps Six and Seven).

### STEP ONE: *Write Out a Chapter Summary*

You begin this step by reading and rereading the chapter many times. All you are doing here is making general observations on the chapter as a whole. After you have read it through several times, describe the general contents in one of the ways about to be described. Do not try to interpret what you see at this time, but merely aim to become familiar with the chapter. You may summarize it in one of the following ways:

1. *Paraphrase it.* The simplest way is just to rephrase the chapter in your own words. Summarize it in such a way that you could read your paraphrase to another person. You can check some recent paraphrase versions of the Bible for examples of this.
2. *Outline it.* Another simple way to summarize is through an outline that follows the paragraph divisions of the chapter. Give a title to each paragraph, then place some subpoints under each one.
3. *Rewrite it without the modifying clauses and phrases.* Use just the subjects, verbs, and objects in your summary. This is a great way to summarize some of Paul's writings, for example, where run-on sentences (especially in the King James Version) are hard to understand because of their complexity.

After you have completed your chapter summary, give a title to the chapter, using either your title from the book survey or a new one that occurred to you during this study.

### STEP TWO: *List Your Observations*

This step begins the verse-by-verse analysis of the chapter. You start with the activity of observation. In this step you are looking in detail at every sentence and word and then writing down everything you see. You are trying to answer the question, "What does it say?"

Before you can begin to interpret the meaning of a verse or passage, you must first look at what it actually says. The purpose of observation is to saturate yourself completely with the contents of a Bible passage. The mark of good Bible students is that they have trained themselves to observe things in the text that others overlook.

*Overlooking biblical facts—reasons why.* There are three reasons why we often overlook things and miss so much in the biblical text: (1) We rush through a passage too quickly. So we need to slow down and not indulge in speed-reading. (2) We don't write down our observations. Louis Agassiz, a 19th-century professor of zoology at Harvard who taught his students the art of observation, used to say, "A pencil is the best eye." We

need to write down what we see, and then we will begin seeing more. (3) We give up too soon. The longer we squeeze a lemon, the more juice we get out of it—to a point. But unlike lemons, the Bible never goes dry. We can study a text a hundred times and never exhaust the riches that are in it. So we shouldn't give up too soon; rather, we should keep on looking—the longer the better.

*Asking questions.* As has already been discussed, the secret of good Bible study is learning to ask the right questions (see the Introduction at the beginning of this book). The number of questions you can ask of a text of Scripture increases in proportion to your willingness to stick with it. As you continue growing in Bible study skills, the type and number of questions you ask will improve and you will be able to observe more and more. The key to good observations, then, is a combination of diligence, patience, asking many questions, and writing down everything you see.

To help you in your observations, appendix F lists 30 ideas from which you can select the ones that will suit your study.

### STEP THREE: *Ask Interpretation Questions*

After observing all you can in the passage under study, you are ready to move on to interpretation. This step involves asking questions about meaning, then trying to find answers to them. In this exercise you discover the biblical writer's purpose and message by uncovering what he means by his idea.

Interpretive questions include asking *what* or *why*. Some examples:

- Why did the writer say this?
- What is the meaning of \_\_\_\_\_?
- What is the significance of \_\_\_\_\_?
- What is the implication of \_\_\_\_\_?
- Why is this important?

You should be able to think of many other interpretive questions to ask. Never think that any question is too silly or dumb. Always write every question down on your form even though you may not find an answer to it. Later on, in studying another chapter, you may be able to answer it; if so, come back to this chapter's form and fill in the answer. Remember that the more questions you ask, the more you will draw out of the text.

*Listing difficulties.* When you are writing down your questions, it is a good idea to include any *difficulties* you have in understanding what is being said. Two common types are *personal difficulties*—questions you would like answered in the future, or items for future study, and *possible difficulties*—matters that don't bother you at this time, but would be good to study so you can help others who might be bothered by them.

*Finding the right meaning of the text.* After you have listed all your questions of interpretation, you need to start finding some answers. There are several ways to do this.

1. *Check the context.* You should always start here, for often the answers to your questions will be found in the verses preceding or following the text. Always interpret a passage in light of its context. To review the context, you may have to go back to your observations or your book survey to answer these questions:

- Who is speaking?

- Who is being spoken to?
- When is it being spoken?
- Where is it being spoken?
- What is the occasion or circumstance?
- What is the *main* subject of the message?
- Is the aim of what is being said revealed?
- What other background material clarifies this statement?

You can avoid a great deal of misinterpretation by first checking out the context of a verse.

2. *Define the words and phrases used.* You must interpret your text according to the correct and proper meaning of the words. Look up the important words in a Bible dictionary, word study set, or English dictionary.

3. *Study the grammar and structure of the sentences.* Sometimes a problem of interpretation can be cleared up by diagramming a sentence or by understanding what grammatical usage the writer intended in the paragraph.

4. *Compare several translations of the text.* Use different recent versions of the Bible to see how the various translators rendered a particular word, phrase, or paragraph.

5. *Study the background of the text.* Interpret your text in light of the historical, cultural, geographic, economic, social, and political backgrounds of the book, including the current events of that time. This shows you the value of doing a book survey study before attempting a chapter analysis study. Use your reference tools to check on the background, the writer's purpose in writing the book, and other pertinent factors.

6. *Compare your text with other passages of Scripture.* This next step—correlation—will give you some answers to interpretive questions as you compare Scripture with Scripture.

7. *Consult a commentary as a last resort.* If you have tried diligently to find the meaning of the text yourself and your cross-references have not helped you, consult the works of great Bible scholars. There is a place for commentaries in Bible study, but it comes *only after you have done your own work*. Compare your interpretation with the writings of devout Christians and see if yours agrees with theirs. If you have a correct interpretation, you may be sure God has shown it to some other sincere Bible students in the past. If you can't find anyone who agrees with you, you have probably got a wrong interpretation.

#### STEP FOUR: *Correlate Your Chapter with Other Scriptures*

This step involves finding cross-references for the verses of your chapter in order to further explain the meaning of the text. It is based on the principle of interpretation that says, "The Bible interprets itself; Scripture best explains Scripture." You can often interpret passages that are not clear by passages that are. Ask yourself, "How do other Scriptures relate to and explain this one?"

*Steps in cross-referencing.* Here are some practical ways to correlate verses:

1. First, look for cross-references within the same book you are studying. This is *internal* correlation.

2. Second, compare statements in other writings by the same author. This is *external* correlation.

3. Then, compare with other books in the same testament.
4. Finally, compare references in all of Scripture.

You can find cross-references in a study Bible or reference Bible or by looking up similar words in a concordance.

*Types of cross-references.* There are several different types of cross-references, including the following:

- *The pure cross-reference.* This is sometimes called the parallel cross-reference because it says almost exactly the same thing as the verse you are analyzing.
- *The illustrative cross-reference.* This type, which may involve a real event or person in history, illustrates what the verse you are studying is saying.
- *The contrasting cross-reference.* This type says the opposite of what your verse says. It may look like a contradiction, but it is actually approaching the subject from a different viewpoint.

One word of caution: Be sure to check the *context* of the verses you choose as cross-references. Otherwise you may be making them say what the writer did not say.

#### STEP FIVE: *List Some Possible Applications*

The last part of the verse-by-verse analysis is to write down some *possible* applications. Remember that your goal in Bible study is not just interpretation but application. Because of the many applications a chapter may have, you will only be *listing* them here. Later on, in Step Seven, you will choose *one* of these to write out and to work on for a week. You have already seen that you cannot work on more than one application per week. It is better to record just one and fully apply that truth to your life than to write down several applications and then fail to implement any of them.

#### STEP SIX: *Write Down Some Concluding Thoughts*

Go back over the results of the first five steps, review them carefully, and write down some concluding thoughts on the chapter. These can include additional observations, some of your interpretations, themes you have discovered, possible topics and people you want to study in the future, words you may want to do a word study on, and any number of other thoughts that come to mind.

#### STEP SEVEN: *Write Out One Application*

Now go back to the possible applications you listed in Step Five and choose one of these to work on this coming week. By now you should have had plenty of practice at writing out applications that are personal, practical, possible, and measurable. If necessary, refer back to the Devotional Method of Bible Study (chap. 1). Don't forget to put your application in the present, not future, tense. Ask yourself, "What am I going to do about this *now*?"

## HOW TO FILL IN THE CHAPTER ANALYSIS FORM

Use the form at the end of the chapter or write out your study on your own sheet of paper with the necessary divisions.

### ***Filling Out the Form***

First fill in the reference for the chapter you will study. You may want to study only half a chapter if it is a long one. After a few readings, fill in your own title for the chapter, either from your book survey study or a new one that you thought of in these readings. Next, you should summarize the chapter, using one of the three methods suggested in Step One.

As you begin the verse-by-verse analysis, write down the verse numbers in the columns provided and follow that with your observations, interpretations, correlations, and possible applications. Use additional pieces of paper or forms as needed.

On the back of the form write down your concluding thoughts and that one application.

### ***Sample Filled-out Form***

See the example of Ephesians 1 at the end of this chapter.

### ***Assignment***

See the assignment in the Book Survey Method of Bible Study (chap. 9) for suggested assignments as to which books of the Bible to study using these three methods.

### ***For Further Reading***

More good Bible study books have been written on this method than on any other. As your inclination and finances allow, purchase some of these for your own library and reference.

### ***Good Books on Chapter Analysis***

*Methodical Bible Study* by Robert A. Traina (Zondervan) [Very advanced] *The Navigator Bible Studies Handbook* (NavPress)  
*The New Joy of Discovery in Bible Study* by Oletta Wald (Augsburg Fortress)  
*Personal Bible Study* by William Lincoln (Bethany Fellowship)

### ***Good Books on Interpretation***

*Basic Biblical Interpretation* by Roy Zuck (Victor)  
*Basics of Bible Interpretation* by Bob Smith (Word Books)  
*Getting the Message* by Daniel Doriani (Presbyterian & Reformed)  
*Grasping God's Word* by Scott Duvall and Daniel Hays (Zondervan)  
*How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart (Zondervan)  
*How to Understand Your Bible* by T. Norton Sterrett (InterVarsity Press)  
*Protestant Biblical Interpretation* by Bernard Ramm (Baker)

## CHAPTER ANALYSIS FORM

**CHAPTER**

Ephesians 1

**CHAPTER TITLE**

“God’s Great Purpose for Our Lives.”

**1. CHAPTER SUMMARY**

Introduction (1:1–2)

- I. The Revelation of the Purpose of God (1:3–14)
  - A. The summary statement—what he has given us (1:3)
  - B. The basis of our salvation (the work of God the Father) (1:4–6)
    - 1. Chosen to be holy and blameless (1:4)
    - 2. Adopted as his sons (1:5)
    - 3. Grace freely given us (1:6)
  - C. The benefits of our salvation (the work of God the Son) (1:7–12)
    - 1. He sacrificed himself for us (1:7)
    - 2. He lavished grace on us (1:8)
    - 3. He revealed his will to us (1:9–10)
    - 4. He made us part of his inheritance (1:11–12)
  - D. The bestowment of our salvation (the work of God the Holy Spirit) (1:13–14)
    - 1. He revealed Christ to us (1:13)
    - 2. He sealed us as God’s children (1:13)
    - 3. He guarantees our inheritance (1:14)
- II. The Response of Prayer to God (1:15–23)
  - A. The foundation of the prayer (1:15–17a)
    - 1. For faithful and loving believers (1:15)
    - 2. To a faithful and loving God (1:16–17a)
  - B. The formulation of the prayer (1:17b–20a)
    - 1. Prayer for wisdom (1:17b)
    - 2. Prayer for enlightenment (1:18a)
    - 3. Prayer for experiential knowledge (1:18b–20a)
  - C. The finale of the prayer (1:20b–23) Acknowledgment of ...
    - 1. Christ’s resurrection (1:20b)
    - 2. Christ’s dominion over all (1:21)
    - 3. Christ’s headship over all (1:22)
    - 4. Christ’s lordship over the church (1:23)

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<sup>1</sup> Warren, R. (2006). *Rick Warren's Bible study methods: Twelve ways you can unlock God's word* (189–197). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

## 2. OBSERVATION

### What does it say?

Eph.	V.	
1:3	God has blessed me 3 with EVERY spiritual blessing.	
4	God chose me to live 4 a life of holiness.	
5	God has adopted me 5 into his family.	
7	Through Christ I have 7 been forgiven.	
9	God has revealed his 9 will to us through Jesus Christ.	
11	I am made an heir of 11 God through Christ.	
13–14	The Holy Spirit in me 13–14 is a guarantee of my salvation and acceptance.	
16	Paul prays for the 16 Ephesians.	
18	Paul prays for others' 18 enlightenment.	

## 4. CORRELATION

### Where else is it explained?

V

## 3. INTERPRETATION

### What does it mean?

V.	
God thinks the world of me.	
I must obey God and his commandments.	
This means that I belong to him forever.	
Christ is the only one who can forgive sins.	
Christ is God's total revelation of himself.	
I have all the privileges of being an heir.	
This means I am important, that God gave me so great a guarantee.	
I need to pray for fellow Christians.	
I need to pray that others may know God's will.	

## 5. APPLICATION

### What will I do about it?

3	1 Peter 1:3 2 Peter 1:4	Thank God for what he has done for me.
4	Romans 8:29 Exodus 20:1–17	I must make sure I’m leading a holy life.
5	Galatians 4:5 Philippians 2:13	I need to act as belonging to God’s family.
7	Mark 10:45 Romans 3:25	I must thank God for the totality of his forgiveness.
9	Galatians 1:15 Ephesians 3:9 Hebrews 1:1–2	Bible study is an essential if I’m to know God’s will.
11	Romans 8:16–17 Acts 20:32	I should thank God for this great gift.
13–14	John 3:33 Ephesians 4:30 2 Corinthians 5:5	I need to live my life in such a way as not to offend the Spirit who lives in me.
16	Philippians 1:3 Romans 1:8–10	I need to pray for John, Sue, and Bob.
18	Acts 26:18	I need to pray this for Charlie and Gail.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

This chapter shows what God has given his people—he has blessed them with every spiritual blessing there is. It goes on to list many of those blessings in the Trinitarian work of salvation. This is what God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have done for us. Reading a section of Scripture like this should give us a real sense of worth, because this is God’s commentary on what he thinks of those who belong to him.

The proper response to this grand revelation should be a prayer of thanksgiving, adoration, and praise, which is exactly what Paul does at the end of the chapter.

## **7. A PERSONAL APPLICATION**

I need to develop more of the spirit of prayer as Paul does here. He is so overwhelmed by what God has done for us that he spontaneously prays. I need to meditate on what God has done for me and so respond back to him with a prayer of adoration and praise as well.

To implement this, I will reread Ephesians 1 five times, substituting “I” and “me” for the pronouns in the chapter and then spend time praying without asking anything for myself, but directing all my requests toward God and his glory.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Warren, R. (2006). *Rick Warren's Bible study methods: Twelve ways you can unlock God's word* (198–201). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.