

# 1 Opening the Bible

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The Bible is a collection of 66 books divided into two parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Bible was written over a period of several hundred years. Two languages were used, Hebrew and Greek. It was written by many different authors. But these authors were not just writing their own words. They were writing what the Holy Spirit told them to write. They were *inspired* by the Holy Spirit.

Peter states, “For no prophetic message ever came just from the will of man, but men were under the control of the Holy Spirit as they spoke the message that came from God” (2 Peter 1:21). Every Christian believer should have a time of daily Bible reading and prayer to feed his spirit! But this kind of reading should not take the place of disciplined study of the Word of God. This course will teach you to study the Bible.

## ***lesson outline***

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- Need for Study of Scripture
  - Living
  - Faith
  - Service
- Approach to a Revealed Book
  - Spiritual Qualification
  - Supernatural Qualification
  - Revelational Qualification
- Foundational Guides to Understanding
  - Literal Meaning of Language
  - Progressive Revelation
  - Scripture Interprets Scripture
  - Basic Harmony of the Whole
- Overview of This Course
  - Question and Answer Technique
  - Basic Principles of Interpretation
  - Bible Study Methods

## ***lesson objectives***

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When you finish this lesson you should be able to:

1. Define disciplined study.
2. List three ways in which the study of the Bible changes people.
3. Explain the meaning of revelation.
4. List three qualifications which make the approach to the
5. Bible different from the approach to other books.
6. Define “literal meaning” with reference to language.
7. Explain the concept “Progressive Revelation.”
8. Define “context” with reference to interpretation of Scripture.
9. State the main theme that can be traced throughout the Bible.

10. List the three main topics of study that will be presented in this course.

### ***learning activities***

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1. Carefully read the preliminary section in this independent study textbook.
2. Read this lesson's introductory section, outline, and objectives.
3. Look over the key words. If they are not familiar to you, check their meanings in the glossary.
4. Study the lesson development. Look up and read all references to the Scripture, and answer in writing all of the numbered study questions. You will get more out of this course if you make it a practice to put something of your own in writing before you look ahead to the answers.
5. Take the self-test at the end of the lesson. Check your answers carefully. Review those items answered incorrectly.

### ***key words***

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Understanding the key words we have listed at the beginning of each lesson will help you as you study. You will find key words listed in alphabetical order and defined in the glossary at the back of this independent-study textbook. If you are in doubt about the meaning of any of the words on the list, you may look them up now or when you come across them in your reading. Please take time to learn the definitions of any new words, since they add to a complete understanding of this course.

biographical  
context  
devotional  
figurative  
finite

infinite  
inspired  
literal  
reincarnation  
revelation

study  
supernatural  
synthetic method  
topical

## lesson development

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### NEED FOR STUDY OF SCRIPTURE

**Objective 1.** *Define disciplined study.*

**Objective 2.** *List three ways in which the study of the Bible changes people.*

The ultimate intent of the Bible is to change lives. What you learn from it should make a difference in your attitude and actions. The Holy Spirit is not interested in imparting intellectual knowledge only. His goal is to prepare a man of God spiritually and intellectually for good works. Your goal in understanding Bible truth, then, is to apply it to your life. The classic verse declaring the *inspiration* of Scripture and the goal of Scripture is 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Read it in your own Bible. Note the goal, “That the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed.” The Word of God can only do this for you as you study its pages. Disciplined study is *defined as diligent application of the mind, careful examination of the facts, and deep thought about them.* In thinking about the facts, you will draw some conclusions and make some decisions. When these decisions become part of your life, it will become more based on scriptural principles, and you will be fulfilling 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Now let us discuss three ways in which the Bible changes our attitudes and actions.

### Life

Only the Bible can answer your questions about life. Left to himself, man does not know how to live or how to die. His behavior is filled with selfishness and greed. His lot is bitterness and despair.

The entrance of the Word of God brings light. God’s rules for living lead to peace, joy, and satisfaction. The second and third chapters of Titus are beautiful chapters on Christian living.

For we ourselves were once foolish,  
disobedient, and wrong. We were slaves to  
passions and pleasures of all kinds. We spent

our lives in malice and envy; others hated us and we hated them. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior was revealed, he saved us . . . the Holy Spirit . . . gives us new birth and new life . . . (Titus 3:3-5).

Study of Scripture should change our ways of living.

## Faith

“To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see. It was by their faith that people of ancient times won God’s approval” (Hebrews 11:1-2). Faith for forgiveness, for understanding God’s plan in the world, for the reality of eternal life in Christ Jesus, all must come from the words of the Bible. Jesus said, “The words I have spoken to you bring God’s life-giving Spirit” (John 6:63). Without the Bible to guide him, man puts his faith in wrong things such as idols, forces of nature, or material possessions. Studying the Bible will not only show you the living God who deserves and commands your faith, but the Holy Spirit will use that study to cause faith in God to develop and mature within your heart.

## Service

Biblical knowledge of God and His ways brings us the responsibility of sharing that knowledge with others. The world is hungry for the truth of God. It is God’s plan that His kingdom grow because of this principle of sharing. Jesus shared in this way. He taught people, then He sent them to teach others. Luke 10:1 tells of His sending out 72 men ahead of Him into the towns where He was about to go. They could share with others what they had learned from Jesus. We too must share in this way.

## Application

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**1** Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Use those verses to find the answers for the following questions:

**a** The Scriptures, inspired by God, are useful for what four purposes?

.....  
 .....

**b** What are the two ultimate goals of the action of Scripture on the life of the believer?

.....

**2** Circle the letter before each statement that is true:

**a)** Studying and reading are the same thing.

**b)** Studying takes more effort than mere reading because it means that you must examine the facts and think deeply about them.

**c)** The Bible should be studied to discover God's will for living, for faith, and for service to Him.



## APPROACH TO A REVEALED BOOK

**Objective 3.** *Explain the meaning of revelation.*

**Objective 4.** *List three qualifications which make the approach to the Bible different from the approach to other books.*

Revelation is changing divine truth that was formerly unknown and unknowable to knowable and known truth. It is when God makes known His truths to the minds of men. When a Christian believer uses the word "Scripture," he refers *only to the Bible*. Christians believe that the Bible is God's only inspired message to man. Understanding this fact is the necessary starting point for any study of the Bible. Revelation makes the approach to the Bible unique (special, one-of-a-kind) in the three ways listed below.

## Spiritual Qualification

By *spiritual qualification* we refer to a spiritual quality that anyone who wishes to correctly understand the Bible must have. Usually, a knowledge of the language is all that is necessary to understand a book. But the Bible is different. To understand Scripture, a certain spiritual understanding is also necessary. God Himself gives such understanding to each person who believes in Jesus Christ as Savior.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:13-15. Answer the two following questions on verse 14. Only one answer is correct for each question.

### Application

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- 3** Why is it impossible for the man who does not have the Spirit to understand God's gifts? Because
- a) he does not try hard enough to understand.
  - b) he is not sincere in his desire to understand.
  - c) their value can be judged only on a spiritual basis.
- 4** When the man who does not have the Spirit tries to understand the truth of God, how does it seem to him?
- a) As difficult but worth serious study.
  - b) As nonsense.
  - c) As brilliant new ideas.

Be sure to check your answers.

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## Supernatural Qualification

*Supernatural* means something which is outside of the natural realm. If something is said to be supernatural, it belongs to an order of things beyond our observable physical universe. Miracles, happenings that cannot be explained by normal means, are said to be supernatural. The Living God of the Bible is a God of miracles. As the Creator of all, He is Lord of all.

The miracles you will read about in the Bible are not imaginary events such as you might find in folk tales or Greek myths. Bible miracles are serious, historical facts. The cloud that led the Israelites (Exodus 40:36) was not an imaginary cloud. When Jesus fed the five thousand (Matthew 14) with five loaves and two fish, you can be sure that the people ate real food and were satisfied, just as it is recorded.

The miracles of the Bible have nothing in common with magic, sorcery, or witchcraft. They are not based on whim or fancy. They always have a logical purpose. They are never done to entertain or to flaunt power. Jesus is Lord. His acts are based on His perfect intelligence. His Lordship extends to everything. “For through him God created everything in heaven and earth, the seen and the unseen things, including spiritual powers, lords, rulers, and authorities. God created the whole universe through him and for him” (Colossians 1:16).

### ***Application***

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- 5** (Circle the letter before each item that is true.) Why is the supernatural element in Scripture so important to understanding the Bible? Because
- a)** it is necessary to decide if the miracles are real or imaginary.
  - b)** miracles in the Bible are to be taken as sober, historical facts.
  - c)** God is the Creator of all things, and all things are subject to His power, even things outside the natural realm.
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### **Revelational Qualification**

We have to approach the Bible with the understanding that when God’s truth is revealed in ordinary words, these words become richer in meaning. These common words are enriched in meaning because the Spirit of God is using them to communicate spiritual truth.



For example, the New Testament word *love* has been given more than ordinary meaning in the light of the Cross. The love of God which caused Jesus to die for our sins is a far deeper kind of love than that which one ordinarily understands. Therefore, it is important to your Bible study that you allow the Holy Spirit to enlighten every word.

## Application

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**6** The Bible is written in

- a) uncommon words.
- b) ordinary words with enriched meanings.
- c) words that are not literal.

**7** Match each kind of approach with the sentence that refers most directly to it.

- |                                                                                   |                          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| ... <b>a</b> Only a believing Christian can properly understand Scripture.        | 1) Supernatural approach |
| ... <b>b</b> The miracles you will read in the Bible are facts.                   | 2) Spiritual approach    |
| ... <b>c</b> The Holy Spirit has enriched the meaning of many words in the Bible. | 3) Revelational approach |

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## FOUNDATIONAL GUIDES TO UNDERSTANDING

### Literal Meaning of Language

**Objective 5.** Define “literal meaning” with reference to language.

#### *The Bible Follows Normal Rules of Language*

The *literal* meaning of language is the natural or normal way it is used. It follows the ordinary sense of the words. In Scripture, this means that the words have ordinary meanings. The Bible is not written in a secret code. You learned in the previous section that the Holy Spirit gives language enriched meaning, but this does not mean that the basic meaning of the words have been altered. When in Mark 8:27 we are told that

Jesus and His disciples went away to the villages near Caesarea Philippi, we know that there were villages in that area and that they did visit them. This is the literal meaning of Scripture. It means what it plainly says.

Language can also be used in a *figurative* way. Figurative means the expression of one thing in terms of another. It presents pictures to the mind that illustrate other ideas. This is a perfectly proper use of language and is illustrated in John 7:38. In this verse Jesus says, “Whoever believes in me, streams of life-giving water will pour out from his heart.” Figurative language is used to explain a thing by picturing something to which it can be compared. Jesus pictures a person with streams of water pouring from his heart. A reasonable person can see that this is using language in a somewhat different way than usual. John adds a note of explanation, so there will be no doubt about the meaning. “Jesus said this about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were going to receive” (John 7:39). Literal and figurative language will be discussed more fully in Lessons 3 and 4. But in general, the Bible can be taken at face value to mean what it says in the normal way that language is usually understood. God revealed it to man to be a source of information to him, not to conceal truth from him.

### *Human Language Has Limitations*

Every coin has two sides. On one side, the Bible is understandable to ordinary people because it is written in ordinary language. But on the other side, how can an *infinite* (limitless) God explain infinite truth to *finite* (limited) man? Since man is finite, his language is finite also. We say that God has accommodated Himself to man. That is, He has put spiritual truth in as simple a form as possible so we can understand some of it. You cannot understand everything there is to understand about God. But, you can understand the things that are important for you to know.

Romans 1:20 reveals that God created nature with the intent that it would help man understand what God is like! And to help overcome the limitation of language and human

human understanding, the Bible uses figurative language to illustrate truth.

It is hard for us to understand what God is like! The Bible says that God is Spirit (John 4:24). Yet God has unlimited power to see, to act, to hear. Some translations of the Bible use the word eyes when they really mean God’s power to see everything. They use the words *right arm* when they mean God’s power to act. These expressions are intended to help our understanding, not to mislead us into thinking that God is physically limited as we are. The Holy Spirit knows our limitation. He has used language in ways that will help the human mind grasp His truth.

### Application

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**8** Answer the following questions with words from this section of the lesson.

- a** What is the word used to describe language in its usual or normal use?  
.....
- b** The words of Jesus which said that streams of water would pour out from a believer’s heart were being used in what way?  
.....
- c** What word describes the truth of God as being beyond our understanding?  
.....



## PROGRESSIVE REVELATION

**Objective 6.** Explain the concept “Progressive Revelation.”

God not only accommodated Himself to the language of man, but to his sinful condition. The story of the Bible opens with Adam and Eve in the presence of God in the Garden of Eden. Their sin resulted in banishment from God’s presence.

That separation from God was, and is, very deep and far-reaching. Man was sealed in a prison of his five senses. Nothing seemed real to him unless he could see it, touch it, taste it, feel it, or hear it. Sin had cut him off from God. The infinite love and patience of the Holy Spirit worked slowly back into the consciousness of men. The Israelites had to be chosen as a living object lesson. The law had to be given. God's plan had to be worked out over long years of history. He had to find special men like Abraham and Moses who were sensitive to His voice. He sent prophets to preach His words. Finally, "when the time had fully come" (Galatians 4:4, RSV) God sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. By His death on the cross, Jesus made a bridge for man to come to God once again.

Through all of this, God was giving man more and more information about Himself. This had to be progressive information for two reasons: (1) the human mind could only take in so much truth at a time, and (2) sin had made man morally unable to contact God. Isaiah understood this when he said teaching had to be given, "line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little" (Isaiah 28:10, RSV). Because of progressive revelation the Redeemer God is seen more clearly in the New Testament than in the Old Testament.

### ***Application***

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- 9** Circle the letter before each statement that is true.
- a)** Man can understand everything there is to know about God.
  - b)** The human mind has limited ability to understand divine truth.
  - c)** God has eyes just like ours.
  - d)** God has total, unlimited sight.
  - e)** Throughout Bible history God has revealed more and more of Himself to man.

**10** Why is the Redeemer God easier to understand in the New Testament than in the Old Testament?

.....



## SCRIPTURE INTERPRETS SCRIPTURE

**Objective 7.** Define “context” with reference to interpretation of Scripture.

One Bible teacher has said, “Scripture is its own best commentary.” He meant that when a passage of Scripture seems difficult, you should try to find other Scripture that sheds light on it. The first place to look is in its immediate context. You found in the glossary that *context* means “all the words around a passage.” Needless to say, this is where familiarity with the whole Bible comes in. We have stressed *study* in this lesson, because it is that serious application of concentration that is needed for digging into the Word. The more familiar you become with all Scripture, the easier it will be to find verses and passages that shed light on other passages.

*Study* is like a pebble dropped into still water. There are ever-widening circles that ripple from it: single words must be interpreted in the light of the sentence, the sentence in the light of the verse, the verse in the light of the section of the chapter to which it belongs, and so on. At the widest point, the whole Bible sheds light on its parts. The total body of Scripture is the total context and guide for understanding any specific portion of it. No strong doctrines can be based on single verses for which no other support can be found. This is not to say they are false, but simply that not enough information is available.

### **Application**

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**11** Define *immediate* context and *total context* with reference to “Scripture Interprets Scripture.”

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Here is a word of caution. It has been said that any theory or doctrine can be proved from Scripture. People have tried to “prove” false notions by looking through the Bible until they found a verse that sounded like what they were thinking.

For example, a woman once told me that the Bible teaches reincarnation. Since I knew that the Bible does not teach such a thing, I asked her where she had found this. She replied by quoting some verses (and misquoting others) which had to do with life after death. She was bringing her own wrong meaning to these Scriptures instead of examining them to see exactly what they said. Careful reading and comparing of Scripture with Scripture would have made clear that Jesus has saved us as individuals (He knows all of His sheep by name). We will inherit eternal life with Him after death. This bears no resemblance to the false doctrine of reincarnation.

## Basic Harmony of the Whole

**Objective 8.** *State the main theme that can be traced throughout the Bible.*

### *Harmony of All Bible Books*

You can use context to help you understand the Bible. All the way from a single sentence to the whole collection of books, there is one single system of truth presented. In fact, you must use the whole system of truth to interpret any individual part of it. This is one of the convincing evidences of revelation. The writings of so many men, over such long stretches of history, are in harmony with each other. The key, of course, is that the Holy Spirit was the true author. Men were just the instruments.

Many themes can be traced throughout the Bible, but the main one is *Redemption through Christ*. The Old Testament pointed to Him in symbols and in prophecy. The New Testament is the record of His life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus said the Old Testament Scriptures taught about Him. After His resurrection, He taught two disciples on the road to Emmaus: “And Jesus explained to them what was said about himself in all the Scriptures, beginning with the books of Moses and the writings of all the prophets” (Luke 24:27).

### *Unity in Meaning*

Unity in meaning reminds us that Scripture does not contradict itself. We must be careful not to bring our own meanings to Scripture when trying to find proof for them. The correct approach is to let the words speak for themselves. As you take a Scripture and examine it thoroughly, its true meaning will emerge. It may or may not be what you expected to find. God has inspired the authors. God does not contradict Himself. Therefore, the Bible will not contradict itself. If there are passages that seem to be opposed to each other, it is because of the student's lack of understanding or lack of information. In such cases, always reserve judgment until further light can be shed on the problem.

### *Application*

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**12** Circle the letter before each statement that is true.

- a)** There is one system of truth presented throughout Scripture.
  - b)** The theme of Redemption can be found only in the New Testament.
  - c)** Jesus taught that the Old Testament contained truth about Himself.
  - d)** You should get meaning from a passage of Scripture rather than bring your own meaning to it.
  - e)** The Bible teaches reincarnation.
  - f)** Scripture will never contradict itself.
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## **OVERVIEW OF THIS COURSE**

**Objective 9.** *List the three main topics of study that will be presented in this course.*

We have titled this section of the lesson an overview because its subsections present main topics of study in this course.

## Question and Answer Technique

As you have worked your way through this lesson, you have already used a little of the question-answer manner of studying the Bible. (See Exercises 1, 3, and 4.) A very good way to get correct meaning from a passage of Scripture is to “ask it questions.” The Scripture then speaks for itself as the answers emerge. The secret is in knowing how to ask the right kinds of questions. Question-answer technique is a basic tool in all Bible study.

## Basic Principles of Interpretation

Lesson 1 has already given you an elementary understanding of interpretation of the Bible; Lesson 3 will deal with some of the basic principles or rules of interpretation in more detail. These basic principles have been discovered and used by serious, dedicated Bible scholars over centuries of study. Their concern has been to *rightly divide* or correctly teach the message of God’s truth. It is important to thoroughly understand the basic principles of interpretation so you will be able to apply them in all of the Bible study methods.

## Bible Study Methods

There are many Bible study methods, but this course will deal with only four. The focus of the course is on the *whole book method*, also known as the *synthetic method*. Because this method is basic to all Bible study, it will be treated in detail. You will study the book of Habakkuk using the synthetic or whole book method in Lessons 5, 6, and 7.

The last three lessons will each center on a different method of study. Lesson 8 will teach the *biographical method*, using the Book of Amos. Lesson 9 will use the *topical method* in Ephesians. Lesson 10 will apply the *devotional method* to Philippians.

The study techniques and methods presented here should become your tools for a lifelong interest in studying the Scriptures.

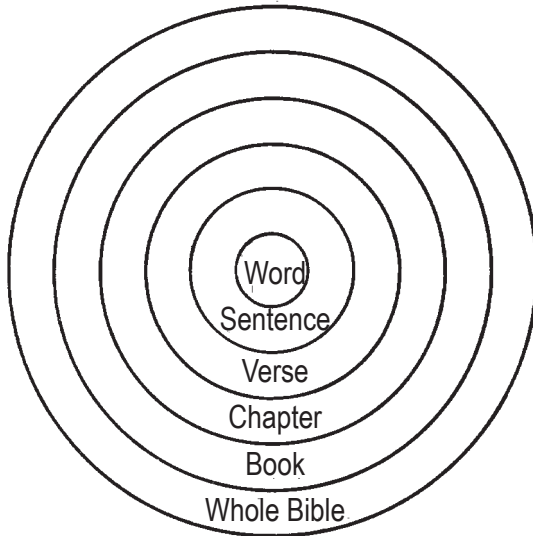


**Application**

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**13** Match each description (left) to the topic (right) that it best describes.

- |                                                                |                                       |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| ... <b>a</b> Rules that help to understand the Bible.          | 1) Question and Answer Technique      |
| ... <b>b</b> Synthetic, biographical, topical, and devotional. | 2) Basic Principles of Interpretation |
| ... <b>c</b> Response of Scripture speaking for itself.        | 3) Bible Study Methods                |
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**The Context**

***self-test***

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After you have reviewed this lesson, take the self-test. Then check your answers with those given in your student report. Review any questions you answered incorrectly.

- 1** When in your reading you apply your mind diligently and you carefully examine the facts, you will be
  - a)** reading casually.
  - b)** studying in a disciplined way.
  - c)** working with very difficult books only.
  
- 2** Study of the Bible is important
  - a)** for living, faith, and service.
  - b)** only if you plan to be a minister.
  - c)** only when a person gets old.
  - d)** for intellectual betterment only.
  
- 3** What is the meaning of revelation as applied to Scripture?
  - a)** God's making known what was formerly unknowable.
  - b)** Man's discovery of God in nature.
  - c)** Man's understanding of God through his senses.
  
- 4** Which one of the following words does NOT describe a qualification that makes the approach to the Bible different from the approach to other books?
  - a)** Revelational
  - b)** Supernatural
  - c)** Natural
  - d)** Spiritual

5 Complete each sentence (left) by inserting the correct number of the term from the list (right).

- ... a Literal meaning of language refers to the ..... meaning of its words.
  - 1) commentary
  - 2) progressive revelation
- ... b The Bible can be understood because of the Holy Spirit's work in the .....
  - 3) ordinary
  - 4) believer
  - 5) accommodated
  - 6) harmony
- ... c Since human language has limited ability to transmit divine truth, God has ..... Himself to man through illustrations in figurative language.
- ... d The Redeemer God is seen more clearly in the New Testament than in the Old Testament because of .....
- ... e Scripture is its own best .....
- ... f The whole Bible has a basic .....

6 List the three main topics of study that will be presented in this course.

.....

.....

## ***answers to study questions***

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These answers have been mixed so that you will not accidentally see the answer to the next question before you write your own response. Please do not look ahead, but write your own answer to each question before comparing it with the one we have given. This will help you to remember what you have studied.

- 7**   **a** 2) Spiritual approach.  
      **b** 1) Supernatural approach.  
      **c** 3) Revelational approach.
- 1**   **a** Teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living.  
      **b** To qualify a person to do good deeds, and to equip him to do them.
- 8**   **a** Literal.  
      **b** Figurative.  
      **c** Infinite.
- 2**   **b**) Studying takes more effort than mere reading because it means that you must examine the facts and think deeply about them.  
      **c**) The Bible should be studied to discover God's will for living, for faith, and for service to Him.
- 9**   **b**) The human mind has limited ability to understand divine truth.  
      **d**) God has total, unlimited sight.  
      **e**) Throughout Bible history God has revealed more and more of Himself to man.  
      **3**   **c**) Their value can be judged only on a spiritual basis.
- 10** Because progressive revelation has made Him more clearly seen in the New Testament.
- 4**   **b**) As nonsense.
- 11** Immediate context refers to all the words around a passage, and total context refers to the whole Bible.

- 5 b)** Miracles in the Bible are to be taken as sober, historical facts.
- c)** God is the Creator of all things, and all things are subject to His power, even things outside the natural realm.
- 12 a)** There is one system of truth presented throughout Scripture.
- c)** Jesus taught that the Old Testament contained truth about Himself.
- d)** You should get meaning from a passage of Scripture rather than bring your own meaning to it.
- f)** Scripture will never contradict itself.
- 6 b)** ordinary words with enriched meanings.
- 13 a)** 2) Basic Principles of Interpretation
- b)** 3) Bible Study Methods
- c)** 1) Question and Answer Technique

