

LESSON 2 Approaches to Bible Study

In the first lesson you were given an overview of many of the topics that will be discussed in this course. You learned that the Bible is a *revealed* book. As the Word of God, it must be studied with more than ordinary diligence. Your whole Christian life and faith depend upon a clear understanding of the Bible.

In this lesson you will deal more particularly with the process of learning and the basic technique of asking effective questions. This is a skill you will want to use when you have an opportunity to lead a group Bible study.

As you move through these lessons you should keep in mind two main purposes for which you study God's Word: (1) for your own personal spiritual knowledge and growth, (2) to be able to share spiritual truths with others.

lesson outline

Personal Preparation
Need for Methodical Study
Basic Steps in Bible Study
Question and Answer Technique

lesson objectives

When you finish this lesson you should be able to:

1. Describe the spiritual and mental attitudes necessary for effective Bible study.
2. List basic tools needed for effective Bible study.
3. Identify the characteristics of methodical Bible study.
4. List the six basic steps in Bible study.
5. Recognize correct examples of activities associated with each step.
6. Identify four kinds of fact questions and relate them to the basic steps in Bible study.
7. Identify three kinds of thought questions and relate them to the basic steps in Bible study.

learning activities

1. Read the opening section, outline, and objectives.
2. Look over the key words. If any are not familiar to you, look up their meanings in the glossary.
3. Work through the lesson development, writing your responses to the study questions and checking your answers.
4. Get a notebook. You will need to start using it with the last section of this lesson. You may want to make other notations of your own in it from time to time.
5. Take the self-test at the end of the lesson.

key words

apply	implicational	rational
correlation	interpret	summarize
definitive	methodical	technique
evaluate	observe	
focus	qualification	

lesson development

PERSONAL PREPARATION

Objective 1. *Describe the spiritual and mental attitudes necessary for effective Bible study.*

Objective 2. *List basic tools needed for effective Bible study.*

The first qualification for Bible study is *spiritual understanding*. You discovered this in 1 Corinthians 2:14 when you examined it in Lesson 1. God's Word is not a dead book but a living book. Our God is alive today! The same Holy Spirit who gave the message hundreds of years ago speaks through His Word *today*. Jesus Christ gives the Holy Spirit to each one who accepts Him as Savior and Lord.

The second qualification for Bible study is *spiritual character*. The spiritual person lives in obedience to God, in close fellowship with his living Lord. This kind of living is marked by deep reverence, sensitivity to the Spirit of God, meekness, humility, patience, and faith. Prompt confession of sin keeps you in fellowship with Jesus Christ. Disobedience to spiritual light will result in taking away the light and replacing it with darkness. Jesus said His friends are those who obey His Word (John 15:14).


Study of facts requires an *alert mind*, a willingness to concentrate. You must have a *zeal*, a passionate desire to study the Word of God. Study is time consuming. It is work. Unless you *set your mind* to think deeply about these things, the Holy Spirit will not be able to reveal His truth to you.

In Lesson 1 we discussed the importance of extracting truth from a passage of Scripture, rather than bringing preconceived notions to it. Study of the Bible requires *honesty*. It requires an *open mind*. You will want to let the Bible speak for itself.

Application

- 1** Read Mark 4:24-25. Especially note verse 25. What kind of a man will be given more (from God)? The man who has
 - a)** little.
 - b)** something.
 - c)** nothing.
- 2** Think of this Scripture (Mark 4:24-25) in connection with the Holy Spirit's enlightening His Word. The man who has something is the man who has
 - a)** knowledge.
 - b)** possessions.
 - c)** the Holy Spirit.
- 3** List at least five qualities discussed above that are found in a spiritual person.

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- 4** Concerning preparation for Bible study, words such as *alertness, concentration, desire, and honesty* emphasize
 - a)** mental attitude more than spiritual attitude.
 - b)** spiritual attitude more than mental attitude.
 - c)** neither mental attitude nor spiritual attitude.



The basic tools for Bible study are very simple. Pencil, paper, your Bible, your eyes, and time are all that you need. It is important to have time that is free from distraction. If possible, you should be alone with the Holy Spirit and the Word when you study.

Application

- 5** For Bible study you will need
- a)** many books and charts.
 - b)** to be in church.
 - c)** very simple tools.
-

NEED FOR METHODOICAL STUDY

Objective 3. *Identify the characteristics of methodical Bible study.*

The average Christian approaches the Bible in a haphazard manner. The most common things that people believe and share about God’s Word are things they have heard preached, things they have heard others say, or perhaps what they have read in books about the Bible. Study for most people—if they ever attempt it—is perhaps a little reading in the Word. Often the same passages are read over and over. People are timid about venturing away from familiar portions into new territory. Unfortunately, many Christians spend their whole life simply “locked in” to a small section of the Bible which they consider to be “easier” than the rest. They miss most of the treasures which the Holy Spirit would like to share with them. But things do not have to be this way. *Ordinary people can study the Bible methodically.*

A *method* is an orderly way of doing something. It is a procedure, followed step by step, that is calculated to lead to a conclusion. Method will not keep you from using your own ideas but will serve as a framework to guide your study. Studying methodically gives you a plan of action that focuses your efforts on your goal.

Can the Holy Spirit use methodical study? He certainly can and does. As you move into the synthetic method you will be learning terms and ideas that may seem new to you. You will be learning some steps to follow in your study. These are guides for extracting truth from the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit enlightens truth, not mistaken notions. The Holy Spirit’s

illumination of truth may be likened to the action of sun and rain that produces the farmer's crops from living seed. But just as the farmer's methodical work (planting, hoeing, reaping) will help the action of sun and rain to produce crops, so our methodical study will help us to receive truth through the Holy Spirit.

Application

- 6** Circle letters before items that describe *methodical* study.
- a)** An orderly way of study.
 - b)** Study that focuses your efforts toward your goal.
 - c)** Study of familiar passages only.
 - d)** Study in a haphazard way.
 - e)** A procedure that leads toward a conclusion.
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BASIC STEPS IN BIBLE STUDY

Objective 4. *List the six basic steps in Bible study.*

Objective 5. *Recognize correct examples of activities associated with each step.*

There are several basic steps in a Bible study that are basic to all learning. These steps will be useful in every method of study. They are: *observe, interpret, summarize, evaluate, apply, and correlate*. Read these steps over several times and then write them down to help you memorize them.

This section of the lesson will define these six basic steps for you. The next section, *Question and Answer Technique*, will explain them more in detail and show how they operate in actual study of Scripture. Of the six steps, the first two are crucial; that is, of greatest importance. If you get the first two steps (observing and interpreting) done well, the other steps will work themselves out very easily. For that reason, more emphasis will be placed on these two steps.

When you begin to apply these steps to Scripture, remember that there will be some overlapping. For example, *application* and *correlation* are closely related, and sometimes they are

combined into one step. But we will take them separately for the sake of clearer understanding.

Observation simply means asking yourself, “What does the Scripture say?” Rudyard Kipling wrote the following quatrain:

I have six faithful serving men
Who taught me all I know

Their names are What, and Where, and When,
And How, and Why, and Who.

Now if you will take these six questions to Scripture, you will get what you are looking for: facts! You need answers to what? where? when? how? why? who?

Miles Coverdale was a great Bible scholar and translator. He said of studying the Bible:

Not only will it greatly help you to understand scripture if thou mark [note] not only what is spoken or written, but also to whom, and with what words, at what time, where, to what intent, with what circumstances, concerning what goes before and what follows.

Now that’s simple *observation*! You are not interpreting when you are making these observations; *interpretation* is the second step in learning. The first time through the passage of Scripture, you must *observe* to see what the Scripture says. You will be asking the Bible “fact” questions (which will be discussed in the last section of this lesson). This is the groundwork of Bible study. You will be finding out details. Sometimes it is tedious. It takes discipline to simply observe and reserve judgment on interpreting until *you have all the facts in hand*! It may seem a bit tedious because you want to get to the interpretation.

Application

7 List the six basic steps in learning (in the order that we have mentioned them).

.....

.....

8 From the list at the right, choose the word that best completes each sentence.

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|--------------------|--|-------------------|
| ... a | means asking yourself, "What does the Scripture say?" | 1) Correlation |
| ... b | What? Where? When? How? Why? Who? are questions that will help you get the from Scripture. | 2) Interpretation |
| ... c | must be done right after the tedious work of observation is completed. | 3) Observation |
| | | 4) Facts |
| | | 5) Application |

Once you have observed carefully, you have a body of facts to work with. You have names, places, circumstances, reasons, and know *why* things are said or done. After you get through with your observing, you then ask: "Now what does this mean?" (And unless you learn to ask yourself this question, you are never going to answer it). *Interpretation* asks: "What does this mean?" It tries to discern what the author meant by what he said.

The next section, *Question and Answer Technique*, will deal more directly with asking interpretive questions. But "What does this mean?" is the basis for all these questions. The idea here is closely related to definition. I will just mention here that you should make every effort to understand the ordinary meanings of words in the Bible. If you have access

to a dictionary, it can be helpful. If you meet words you do not understand, make every effort to discover their meanings.

Application

- 9** Interpretation is concerned most with
- a)** getting the facts.
 - b)** finding out what the author meant.
 - c)** asking Where? When? and How?
-

To *summarize* means to “sum up.” In Bible study it is to present the main points and accompanying details in some brief concluding way. The value of the summary is that it focuses on the main principles of truth set forth in any given passage of Scripture. In the summary you see the whole set forth in condensed form. It is really the final step in the process of interpretation.

There are various ways of showing the summary. Sometimes charts or diagrams are used. Once the findings from your observations are written down, they can be organized in any convenient form. The arrangement should show the main points and details. This course is necessarily limited in length, so your summaries will be done in simple outline form. These summaries could at some time be shown as charts or diagrams.

Application

- 10** Circle letters before true statements concerning the summary.
- a)** It should always be put in a chart.
 - b)** It should always show main points and accompanying details.
 - c)** It may be shown in a chart or diagram.
 - d)** It is the *whole* set forth in condensed form.
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Evaluation in the sense used here ISN'T saying whether you like something or not. When you are evaluating, you are trying to determine whether what you are reading is an *eternal principle* or a *local custom or rule* applicable only in the local Bible-time situation. You are saying to yourself, "Am I reading something that is an eternal principle, universally applicable to everybody? Or is this something that is just for this particular instance?"

Suppose you are in 1 Corinthians and you come to the part about the woman and her hair. Is it wrong for a woman to cut her hair? Everywhere? At all times? Or is this something that is culturally conditioned? That is, in the culture of Bible lands, in Bible days, was this a custom that does not necessarily apply universally? This is the kind of conclusion you must consider in your evaluation. Or, in another passage, if you come to the conclusion that idolatry is everywhere and always wrong, that is something that is universal and eternal. These conclusions are drawn on the basis of what you have found in your observation, interpretation, and summarization. If you have any other resources available to you, this would be the step where you could consult other sources such as books on Bible customs and Bible dictionaries or commentaries. If you do not have access to such materials, you will not be able to draw conclusions about marginal matters as firmly as you could with more information. Fortunately, you will be able to make basic judgments, all the necessary ones, on the basis of the Bible alone.

Even things which were meant for a specific local situation are likely to have an *eternal principle* behind them. For example, if in a study of 1 Corinthians 8 you conclude that *eating or not eating meat offered to idols* is a matter of cultural understanding and conscience in a given, local situation, it does not necessarily follow that you can eat anything you want. In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul's attitude toward others involved NOT eating meat offered to idols even though he said that as far as he was concerned it didn't matter. In this situation, the underlying eternal principle is consideration for others. In every culture, there are situations that involve *consideration for others*,

situations wherein doing something or refusing to do it is not an eternal principle but is a matter of offense in that cultural setting. So to obey the eternal principle of consideration for others, Christians modify their behavior to avoid offense to their believing brethren.

Application

- 11** In evaluation of Bible-time situations, local customs apply
- a)** less directly to our own lives than eternal principles.
 - b)** as directly to our own lives as eternal principles.
 - c)** more directly to our own lives than eternal principles.
-

Application is closely related to evaluation. After you have discovered an eternal principle in a given Scripture, you must consider its relationship to us by asking yourself the question, “How would we apply this principle to our own lives?” For an answer to your question you will have to rely on your best judgment and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit who most certainly will guide you as you seek the Lord for His will.

Correlation is simply asking, “How does this fit in with the total body of Scripture?” You learned in Lesson 1 that there is a basic harmony in the whole of Scripture. You must consider the whole system of truth to correctly interpret any part of it. The amazing evidence of revelation is that the writings of so many people, so widely separated from each other by time and space, are all in accord with one another. Correlation is the step in study where this basic fact must be used.

Faith says that everything in Scripture fits together. Now if everything else in Scripture says a certain thing, and an idea presents itself to you which seems to say *something else*, something must be wrong. You will have to rethink the matter, restudy it, and ask the Lord for more specific light on it. The step of *correlation* tries to fit everything into the complete biblical picture by asking such questions as, “How does Galatians correlate with Romans?” and “How do Galatians and Romans correlate with James?”

Application

12 Choose the correct answer for each question from the column at the right (You may use the answers more than once).

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|--------------|---|------------------|
| ... a | What step is closely related to evaluation? | 1) Correlation |
| ... b | What step tries to fit everything into the complete biblical picture? | 2) Summarization |
| ... c | What step insists that an idea which seems contrary to the body of Scripture must be restudied? | 3) Application |
| ... d | What step considers the relationship of a given eternal principle to us today? | |

QUESTION AND ANSWER TECHNIQUE

Objective 6. *Identify four kinds of fact questions and relate them to the basic steps in Bible study.*

Objective 7. *Identify three kinds of thought questions and relate them to the basic steps in Bible study.*

Jesus used questions with masterful skill. You can find an example in Mark 3. Before Jesus healed the man with the paralyzed hand, He spoke to the people who were watching. He knew there were those there who were watching Him, waiting for a chance to accuse Him of breaking the Sabbath. "What does our Law allow us to do on the Sabbath?" He asked. "To help or to harm? To save a man's life or to destroy it?"

His questions did two things. First, they showed how the Jews had corrupted the original intent of the Law by forbidding help to be given on the Sabbath. Second, His questions pointed out an eternal principle: *It is always good to help rather than to harm, to save a man's life rather than to destroy it.* The people were too angry to answer Jesus. He had made His point through the use of questions.

Good questions call for particular answers. A question that can be answered with “yes” or “no” is not very effective for learning. “What does our Law allow us to do on the Sabbath?” was a question that brought to the people’s minds the hundreds of trifling rules they had made up over many years. The rules had been made to seem like God’s rules, but they were really the traditions of men and had nothing to do with God’s rules. One good question used by the Lord was as effective as a whole sermon.

You will be shown seven basic kinds of questions (four fact questions and three thought questions) which cover the basic steps in *Bible study*. Their names may be new to you, but you will see they are closely related to the principles you have learned earlier.

As we begin this section on questioning and apply it to Scripture, you will need to set up a notebook page with divisions as follows:

Question and Answer Techniques			
Kind of Question	Reference	Question	Answer

In each of the next seven exercises you will be given a definition of one of the seven kinds of questions, a sample reference for each question, a question (or questions) on this reference, and an answer for each question. You will fill in your notebook page using these samples as a guide. It is very important to write in your answers before looking up my suggested answers.

The *fact questions* are: (1) identifying, (2) modal, (3) temporal and (4) locale. They ask WHO or WHAT, HOW, WHEN, and WHERE.

(1) *Identifying questions* ask WHO and WHAT. These are questions of *observation*, you will remember, questions that get at the facts. There are variations on each of these questions that will be given according to the passage you are working

with. For example, WHO can be: “Who is speaking?” “Who is listening?” “Who is being spoken about?” “Who will be affected by what is said?” The same can be said for WHAT. It can be: “What is being said?” “What is being done?” “What is being accomplished?” “What terms are being used?”

WHO questions in Scripture are not always identical and, likewise, WHAT questions. Questions are tools for getting at the facts. When you work with tools you use the ones that are appropriate for the job. For example, if you have fruit to be sliced, you use a small knife. If you want to chop branches off a tree, you use something else. The *fact questions* are tools that are available to you, but you won’t necessarily be using every one in every instance. For example, if no place is named, you might not use the *locale question*. You will use what is appropriate. Our sample reference for the model notebook page is Philippians 1:12-14. This portion of Scripture is used because it has possibilities for at least one example of each type of question.

Application

13 Under KIND OF QUESTION on your notebook page, write *Identifying—Who?* and *What?* In the REFERENCE column write *Philippians 1:12*. In the QUESTION column write these two questions: *Who is being addressed? What does the writer want them to know?* Now, read Philippians 1:12 and place your answers in the ANSWER column.

(2) *Modal questions* ask HOW?: “How is this accomplished?” “What mode was used?”

Application

14 Under KIND OF QUESTION on your notebook page, write *Modal—How?* In the REFERENCE column you need not write *Philippians* each time after you have written it at the top of the unit. From now until another passage is being examined, use only the chapter and verse notation. So, write only 1:12-14. In the QUESTION column write these questions: *How (by what means) has the gospel progressed? How is this evident?* Now, examine Philippians 1:12-14, and place your answers in the ANSWER column.

(3) *Temporal questions* ask *WHEN?*: “When was this accomplished?” “When did this take place?” *WHEN* does not always have to be answered by a specific date. Sometimes it is helpful just to know whether it is past, recent past, future, near future, or if this event came before or after another event.

Application

15 Under KIND OF QUESTION on your notebook page, write *Temporal—When?* In the REFERENCE column write 1:12-14. In the QUESTION column write *When did this happen?* Read the verses indicated. You will notice that there is no date given, but there is a clue as to whether this has happened in the distant past or recent past. In the ANSWER column write which you think it is, and what clues indicate the answer.

(4) *Locale questions* ask *WHERE?* This is the question of *place*. Place can include the country, the community, someone’s home, a geographical location such as mountains, desert, etc.

Question and Answer Techniques			
Kind of Question	Reference	Question	Answer
Identifying - Who? What?	Philippians 1:12	Who is being addressed? What does the writer want them to know?	

Application

16 Under KIND OF QUESTION on your notebook page, write *Locale—Where?* In the REFERENCE column write 1:13-14. In the QUESTION column write *Where did this happen?* In the ANSWER column write where you think it may have happened and why you think so.

Thought Questions have to do with the interpretation of the facts, once you have raised the facts to your level of consciousness. There are three basic kinds of thought questions: (1) *definitive*, having to do with definition; (2) *rational*, having to do with the reason why; and (3) *implicational*, having to do with application to life today, with finding out what is suggested beyond what is stated and correlating it with the Bible as a whole. You see that these questions are really part of the basic steps of Bible study discussed earlier.

(1) *Definitive questions* ask, “What does this mean?” You have observed that something is said. The next question after you get through with your observing is, “Now I see what has been said, but what does it mean?” A *definitive question* calls for an explanatory answer. It can be applied to words or terms, to statements, to grammar, to literary forms, or to the tone or the general atmosphere of the writing.

Application

17 Under KIND OF QUESTION on your notebook page, write *Definitive—Meaning?* In the REFERENCE column write *1:13*. In the QUESTION column write *What is the meaning of the phrase, palace guard?* Now read verse 13 and think about what it probably means. Write your answer in the ANSWER column.

(2) *Rational questions* ask WHY?: “Why is this said?” Further, “Why is this said here?” You have defined the term and found its meaning, but why is it used here? What position does it occupy in the narrative? To answer this properly, you will usually have to read longer portions, such as the chapter or the book, to get a better perspective.

Application

18 Under KIND OF QUESTION on your notebook page, write *Rational—Reason why?* In the REFERENCE column write *1:12-14*. In the QUESTION column write *Why is Paul telling them this?* Read verses 12-14. Answer the question from these verses; write it in the ANSWER column.

Be sure to compare your answers with the suggested ones. Yours do not have to be exactly the same, but they should be similar.

(3) *Implicational questions* ask “What does this imply?” Is there a principle here to be discovered? Is there an application that can be made? Notice again that these questions are definitely related to basic steps in Bible study: evaluation, application, and correlation. Implications are things not directly stated in the text but which can be seen in addition to what has been directly stated.

Application

19 Under KIND OF QUESTION on your notebook page, write *Implicational*—*what does this imply?* In the REFERENCE column write *1:12-14*. In the QUESTION column write *What two implications might be drawn from this reference?* Think about this passage and about some conclusions or implications which you might draw from it. Write them in the ANSWER column.

20 Now match the question on the left with the kind of question it represents (on the right).

- | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------|
| ... a How was it done? | 1) Identifying |
| ... b Why is it said? | 2) Modal |
| ... c Is there a principle? | 3) Temporal |
| ... d Who is involved? | 4) Locale |
| ... e What is the meaning? | 5) Definitive |
| ... f When did it happen? | 6) Rational |
| ... g Where did it happen? | 7) Implicational |



self-test

- 1** What is the first qualification for effective Bible study?
- Knowledge
 - Spiritual understanding
 - Great intelligence
- 2** What are the two kinds of personal preparation necessary for effective Bible study?
- Spiritual and mental
 - Physical and mental
 - Social and spiritual
- 3** Which one of these items does NOT express a spiritual qualification that is necessary for effective Bible study?
- Deep reverence for God
 - Obedience to God's Word
 - Perfect freedom from sin
 - Prompt confession of sin
- 4** Match each quality (left) with the attitude (right) which best describes it.
- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------|
| ... a Meekness | 1) Mental |
| ... b Alertness | 2) Spiritual |
| ... c Faith | |
| ... d Concentration | |
| ... e Reverence | |
- 5** Your eyes and time are two of the five tools we mentioned in this lesson for effective Bible study. What are the other three?
-
- 6** Methodical Bible study consists of an orderly procedure that
- eliminates all other methods.
 - leads to an understanding of Scripture.
 - cannot be used by ordinary people.

7 Which one of the following items contains some of the basic steps in Bible study?

- a)** Mental, spiritual, and physical
- b)** Procedure, method, focus, and goal
- c)** Observe, interpret, summarize, and evaluate

8 Observation asks:

- a)** “What does this say?”
- b)** “Is there an eternal principle here?”
- c)** “What does this mean?”

9 Interpretation asks:

- a)** “What does this say?”
- b)** “Is there an eternal principle here?”
- c)** “What does this mean?”

10 Match each class of questions (right) to its kinds of questions (left) by writing the correct number in each blank.

- | | | |
|--------------|---|---|
| ... a | Definitive, rational,
implicational | 1) Fact questions
2) Thought questions |
| ... b | Identifying, modal, temporal,
locale | |

answers to the study questions

- 10 b)** It should always show main points and accompanying details.
- c)** It may be shown in a chart or diagram.
- d)** It is the *whole* set forth in condensed form.
- 1 b)** something.
- 11 a)** less directly to our own lives than eternal principles.
- 20 a)** 2) Modal
- b)** 6) Rational
- c)** 7) Implicational
- d)** 1) Identifying
- e)** 5) Definitive
- f)** 3) Temporal
- g)** 4) Locale
- 2 c)** the Holy Spirit.
- 12 a)** 3) Application
- b)** 1) Correlation
- c)** 1) Correlation
- d)** 3) Application
- 3** Any five of the following: **reverence**, sensitivity to the Spirit, meekness, humility, patience, faith, confession of sin, obedience to God.
- 13** Paul's brothers; that the things which have happened to him have really helped the progress of the gospel. (Wording may differ.)
- 4 a)** mental attitude more than spiritual attitude.
- 14** Through Paul's being in prison; through the brothers' increased boldness to preach the gospel message.
- 5 c)** very simple tools.
- 15** Recent past; because one of the "things that have happened" of which Paul is speaking is evidently his being in prison, and he is still in prison.

- 6**
 - a)** An orderly way of study.
 - b)** Study that focuses your efforts toward your goal.
 - e)** A procedure that leads toward a conclusion.

- 16** In prison in Rome. Paul's being in prison is directly stated. At Rome is suggested here because of the mention of the palace guard (This conclusion is confirmed in 4:22).

- 7** Observe, interpret, summarize, evaluate, apply, correlate.

- 17** Paul states that he is in prison. A prison requires guards. These guards are evidently connected with the palace security force and, therefore, know of Paul's imprisonment at the palace.

- 8**
 - a** 3) Observation
 - b** 4) Facts
 - c** 2) Interpretation

- 18** So that they will be encouraged at the way the gospel is progressing. So they can rejoice over the fact that Paul's testimony in prison is encouraging the believers where he is.

- 9**
 - b)** finding out what the author meant.

- 19** Paul has been witnessing about Jesus Christ to his guards. Jesus Christ can be glorified in any situation. The gospel can be spread in difficult circumstances. Paul's ill fortune was actually the will of God at that moment. (Others may be found but these are significant.)