

# Book Study

By Stephen Presley

## Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, students will take the following assignments.

### Assignment One

Read Romans 1:1–17; 15:14–33; 16:21–24; Acts 19:21–22; and Acts 20:1–4. Write everything you can find about the author of Romans, his companions, the audience of the letter, Paul's travel plans, and any other details about the historical context of the book. Prepare to share your answers to the following question: What do we know about the background of Romans from the Bible itself?

### Assignment Two

Read the entire book of Jonah in one sitting. Write the main idea of each chapter in one sentence and identify the key verse(s) in each chapter. Then try to shorten that sentence into one or two key words. Prepare to share your work with the group.

### Assignment Three

Read the entire book of Jonah. Identify two or three passages in the story that describe the single most important theme of the book as a whole. Prepare to explain why this is the main theme and what this theme teaches us about God and the way His people should relate to Him.

### Scripture to Memorize

*“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”* Romans 1:16

### Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will learn the basics of doing a book study and will be able to identify the historical context and main themes of biblical books.

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Before coming to Southwestern, he lived in Saint Andrews, Scotland, where he played a lot of golf and occasionally studied theology. Stephen is married to Haley, and they have four young children: Isla, Emma, Luke, and Drew, who keep them busy with lots of adventures. He has served in a variety of positions in the church and participated in many mission trips throughout the U.S., Central America, and Europe. Contact him at: [spresley@swbts.edu](mailto:spresley@swbts.edu).

## It's in the Book

30 minutes

### Real-Life Scenario

Have you ever sat next to a window on an airplane? What are some of the best sights you have seen from the air? On a clear day seeing for miles is easy. The topography comes alive in all its fullness and color. From the perspective of an airplane window seat, it's easy to take everything in at once. This perspective is similar to the concept of a book study, which is a process that investigates the background and the main idea in books of the Bible.

### What Is a Book Study?

A book study is a method that explains the context and themes of a biblical book. This type of study begins by asking some of the basic questions about the book including:

- Who wrote the book? What form of literature is it?
- Who is the audience? Why did the author write this book?

Most of these questions are found in the text itself, so that is the best place to start. The following illustrates how to begin such a study.

**Read** Romans 1:1–7; 16–17; and 15:19–25 out loud.

### Identifying the Historical Context

#### Studying the Passage, Romans 1:1–7, 16; and 15:19–25

**Verse 1. Paul.** Paul wrote this letter. **a bond-servant of Christ Jesus.** Paul was a Christian. He served Jesus, the Messiah. **called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.** Paul was set apart by God to deliver His message. **Verse 7. to all who are beloved of God in Rome.** Paul wrote this letter to the early Christian community in Rome.

**Verse 15:19. from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.** Prior to writing this letter, Paul traveled and preached over a long distance. That means the letter was written later in his ministry. **Verse 22. I have often been prevented from coming to you.** Paul hadn't visited the church in Rome, but he had heard of their faithfulness.

**Verse 25. I am going to Jerusalem.** As he wrote the letter, Paul was on his way back to Jerusalem. **serving the saints.** Paul was taking a monetary offering from other churches. **Verse 24. whenever I go to Spain—for I hope to see you in passing.** Paul planned to visit Rome on his way to minister in Spain.

All of these passages suggest that Paul probably wrote Romans from Corinth in AD 56–57 at the end of his third missionary journey. He would have been on his way back to Jerusalem, before he was arrested.

**Verse 1:16. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.** Paul wrote this letter to explain the gospel and prepare the people for his visit. Thus, this passage also serves as the main idea of the book.

If you have more questions after studying the text, consult a good Bible dictionary or encyclopedia. In some cases the human author is not known, such as the book of Hebrews. But this doesn't mean we should lose confidence in the text because all Scripture is from God (2 Timothy 3:16), so God is ultimately the author.

### Assignment One Feedback

The student who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now share answers to the following question: What do we know about the background of Romans from the Bible itself?

### Discussion Question

What difference does it make if we know the author and audience?

## Charting the Themes of a Book

Read Jonah 1:1–3; 2:1–2; 3:1–5; and 4:1–4 out loud.

Now we are going to learn to study the big idea of a book by making a chart. A book chart is like a map of the entire book on a single page. That chart allows the reader to navigate through all the verses and chapters. To chart a book, work through the following steps:

1. Read the book in one sitting.
2. Create a chart that corresponds to the number of chapters or sections in the book.
3. Write out the main idea of each chapter or section.
4. Identify the key verse(s) that correspond(s) with the main idea of each chapter or section.
5. Shorten the sentence into one or two words.
6. Summarize the main idea of the entire book and identify one verse for this main idea.
7. List several applications for the main idea.

### Studying the Passage, Jonah 1:3; 2:1; 3:3, 5; 4:2–3

**Verse 1:3. But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.** Jonah rebelled against God and foolishly boarded a ship. God sent a storm, and the sailors threw Jonah overboard. Jonah was swallowed by a big fish. **Verse 2:1. Then Jonah prayed.** Jonah turned to God, and He saved Jonah.

**Verse 3:3. Jonah arose and went to Nineveh.** This time Jonah preached. **Verse 5. believed in God.** The people of Nineveh repented and turned to God.

**Verse 4:3 O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life.** Jonah was not happy so he pouted. **Verse 4:2. You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness.** This is the main message of the book: the Lord is gracious and always responds to the cries of His people.

After working through the text, a book chart might look something like this:

Chapter	Jonah 1	Jonah 2	Jonah 3	Jonah 4
Theme	Rebelling	Praying	Preaching	Pouting
Key Text	Jonah 1:1–3	Jonah 2:1–2	Jonah 3:3–5	Jonah 4:3
Main Verse	Jonah 4:2—God is gracious and compassionate toward all people			

Charts like this help you memorize the basic content of any book. There is no one right way to create a chart. In fact, it's fun to be creative and make different kinds of charts. What other creative ways could you chart Jonah?

### **Assignment Two Feedback**

The student who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now share the main idea in each chapter of Jonah.

### **Assignment Three Feedback**

The student who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now share the main point of the story and the key verse(s).

### **On Your Own**

In the space below chart the book of Philemon. It is only one chapter, so organize the verses into sections.

### **Heart and Hands**

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven.

Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart (the real you) for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something in your life for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit says to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

### **Since Last Week**

5 minutes

### **Grace-Filled Accountability**

5 minutes

### **Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service**

5 minutes

### **Prayer**

7 minutes

## **At Home: Nail It Down**

A book study is a great way to get an overview of a biblical book. Doing a book study helps give you the context of the book and understand its main message. After this it is easier to study and understand the individual passages in each chapter.

A book study starts with identifying the historical setting and context. This includes identifying the author, audience, purpose, and any other aspect of the background of the book. Remember the best place to find this information is *in the book itself*. Be sure to read the first and last chapters closely. Read through the entire book and look for any specific reference to the location or situation of the author or audience. Pay attention to any other little details about the historical setting.

When you have questions about the historical context that don't seem to be addressed in a book, consult a good Bible dictionary or encyclopedia. These should provide additional information that will help shed light on the context.

Reading large chunks of Scripture is also important. Read entire books in one sitting. This is the best way to identify the main themes of a book. Practice the art of charting a book and identifying the key themes. There is no better way to visualize and remember the key ideas and passages in each chapter. Take time to memorize the chart and the key verses. Consider sharing the chart with a friend or even using the chart in an evangelistic context with someone who doesn't know much about the Bible.

Learning to do book studies is a great way to see the big picture of the Bible and grasp the great themes that are woven into every book.

### **Parent Question**

*What are the basic steps for doing a book study of the Bible?*

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