

Free Trial Session

First Century Methods I:

Recovering Ancient Methods of Bible Study

Session 1. Comparing Greek and Hebrew Thought

Taught by:

Dr. Anne Davis



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BibleInteract, Inc.

5600 McLeod Rd NE, Suite N

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<http://bibleinteract.tv>

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Introduction

Getting Started and Suggestions for Group Leaders

Are you ready for a startling statistic? There are approximately 41,000 Christian denominations and organizations in the world.¹ Many of them profess a creed, which is a statement of belief to which members must adhere in order to belong and participate. “Why,” we ask, “are Christians unable to agree on what the Bible says?”

All of us are born with a curious nature. We know that small children constantly demand “What is this? What is that? Why...? How...?” Yet the world (through our history and culture) has done a remarkable job of driving this curiosity out of us. You are probably no longer asking, “What is this? What is that? Why and how?” I have found that the field of religion is especially adept at replacing natural curiosity with acceptance and belief. So, Christians tend to join the church that makes them most comfortable.

As an adult, I am still naturally curious. I sometimes picture myself as Curious George, the adorable little monkey of childhood memory whose curiosity stimulates learning even though his actions are perceived by the world as mischief. I have concluded that my curiosity is a blessing, and I am reassured by a wonderful verse in the Gospel of Matthew. “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted [changed] and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mat 18:3).

My training has been in New Testament theology, but I never stopped questioning what I was being taught, especially if it made no sense to me. My natural curiosity led me to examine and compare modern methods of Bible study with the way people at the time of Yeshua perceived the Holy Writings and the manner in which they searched for answers to questions about their lives and their God. There is an ample amount of literature, both Jewish and Christian, from this period of time, which became the focus of my investigation. This work led me to recover ancient methods of searching the Scriptures, which turned out to be very different from our modern methods of Bible study.

Required Resources

- You will, of course, need a Bible. Dr. Davis will be reading from the New American Standard Bible (NASB), but you can use another Bible version if you wish.
- You will also need a Bible atlas that includes information about both geography and history of ancient Israel. If you do not already have a Bible atlas, we suggest *Holman Bible Atlas* by Thomas V. Brisco.
- One other required resource is a good book on the customs and manners of ancient Israel. If you do not already have such a book, we recommend *Manners & Customs in the Bible* by Victor H. Matthews.

¹ This statistic was published in a 2010 study conducted by the Center for the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC) at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Although there is some overlapping due to cultural distinctions in different countries, their conclusion demands thoughtful attention.

Video Lectures

There are twelve video lectures on three DVD discs that accompany this workbook, one lecture for each chapter. Each lecture is approximately 28-1/2 minutes long. In the first half of the program (Chapters 1-6) you will be working exclusively in the Hebrew Scriptures. In Chapters 7-8 the focus will be on the New Testament. However, the New Testament often cites and refers to the Hebrew Scriptures, so in the second half of the program the two testaments will come together as one unified message.

Required Memorization of the Hebrew and Greek Alphabets

For the first six chapters you will need to learn the Hebrew alphabet because you will be working with original words in the Hebrew Scriptures. The purpose of the program is not to teach the biblical language. Instead, you will only be working with individual words. For Chapters 7-12 you will need to learn the biblical Greek alphabet so you can work with Greek New Testament Words. You will find instruction for learning these alphabets on the BibleInteract website.

Note to Group Leaders

You will undoubtedly find this course filled with new information that will be challenging and provocative. As a teacher or group leader, you will need to review the entire program first, both the lectures and the workbook. Your role will then become one of guiding and facilitating. You will begin by selecting which exercises are appropriate for your group. We have tried to include activities that are for beginning, intermediate and advanced levels. Do not feel obligated to do everything in the workbook but be selective. You will then be promoting lively discussion, stimulating incisive questions, and encouraging a search in the Scriptures for meaningful answers. If your group has a question, don't let them depend on you for the answer. Guide them to discover their own answer.

Let me make a comment on the name of God's son. I have used the name Yeshua because the focus is to encourage you to think with a first century Hebraic mind. However, you should use the name that is most comfortable to your group. If they prefer the name Jesus, then that is the name that you should use.

The Workbook

Each chapter of the Workbook contains seven parts.

1. First, before watching the video lecture, you should carefully consider the brief Summary, which will give you a focus on what to expect in the lecture.
2. Next you will be watching the video lecture. The workbook includes an outline of this lecture, and we encourage you to take notes as you listen. The purpose of the outline is to encourage organized thought that will facilitate later discussion.

3. After listening to the lecture, there are Words to be Defined, which should not take much time to complete unless part of the lecture needs further explanation.
4. Questions for Comprehension will assess how well you understood the lecture, and will reinforce what you have just heard.
5. Next comes the heart of the program, which is called Building Skills. This section is an essential element and should never be skipped, although the leader may decide to tackle only one exercise for a group activity. Learning how to use first century methods, which uncover a depth of meaning, is a skill, and all skills require practice.
6. Questions for Discussion is another important part of the program. The group leader will guide participants away from a tendency to look for a black-and-white answer. Therefore, the workbook asks questions, the group leader should pose questions, and members of the group should learn to ask their own questions. Then the group should explore together how to find answers to these questions. Feel free to create and add your own Questions for Discussion. In fact, the leader might ask members of the group to compose one or more of their own questions before coming together in discussion.
7. Application Questions encourage practical use of what you have learned. Again, feel free to create your own application questions.

Challenge Yourself!

Throughout the workbook, you will see these “Challenge Yourself” sections. These questions are more advanced and are not required for beginner- or intermediate-level students, but don’t be afraid to try to answer them anyway.

Leading a Discussion

By presenting a new perspective on approaching and studying the Scriptures, I have chosen to intentionally encourage questions that lead not to definitive answers from the group leader but to provocative discussion in the group. Participants should eventually feel comfortable disputing the interpretive suggestions in the lecture, and even of the group leader and other students. However, a discussion leader should guide members of the group to follow two important requirements.

First, you should clearly and briefly state your main idea, which must then be followed by supporting evidence. Second, the discussion leader should encourage participants to speak in a compassionate manner. The modern literary term for this rhetorical skill is “couching,” which evokes a visual image of a psychiatrist speaking compassionately to a patient on the couch. The good doctor wishes his or her patient to confront

some aspect of thinking that might best be changed to a more advantageous perspective. The group should likewise avoid direct confrontation, and should avoid being judgmental. Instead, mimic the psychiatrist who gently employs couching terms.

- “Have you ever considered...?”
- “Perhaps there might be another possibility...”
- “For the sake of discussion, let us look at...”
- “I used to think that too, but now...”
- “There might be another way of approaching this verse...”

Sample Schedule

There are twelve chapters, and we recommend you allocate two hours for each chapter. You may decide to spend more time if you wish, but two hours per chapter is the norm.

If your group meets one hour each week, we suggest you show the video in the first half hour followed by the second half hour of discussion. You will then need another hour in the following week to complete the work for that chapter. Of course, if your group meets for more than one hour each week, you will likely complete one chapter each week.

As an alternative, you may wish to have members watch the video at home before coming together for the group discussion. This approach allows participants to watch the video more than once. Certain exercises can also be completed at home such as Words to be Defined and Questions for Comprehension. However, the remaining sections of the workbook, Building Skills, Questions for Discussion and Application Questions, are best accomplished through group discussion.

SAMPLE SCHEDULE

Session	Dates	Topic
Learn the Hebrew Alphabet		
1	Weeks 1 & 2	Comparing Hebrew and Greek Thought
2	Weeks 3 & 4	Importance of History, Geography and Culture
3	Weeks 5 & 6	Mysterious Artistry of Biblical Poetry
4	Weeks 7 & 8	Context and Key Words
5	Weeks 9 & 10	Imagery, Symbolism and Metaphors
6	Weeks 11 & 12	Symbolism of Names and Numbers
Learn the Greek Alphabet		
7	Weeks 13 & 14	Echoes and Commentary
8	Weeks 15 & 16	Word Study and Patterns
9	Weeks 17 & 18	Penetrating a Chiastic Construction
10	Weeks 19 & 20	What to do with a Citation
11	Weeks 21 & 22	Connecting the Two Testaments
12	Weeks 23 & 24	Stewards of the Mysteries of God

Support from BibleInteract

- If you would like additional workbooks or DVDs, you may contact BibleInteract.
- Students in a Degree or Certification program with The Bible Learning University, an online educational program operated by BibleInteract, will have an Advisor to whom they may turn for help.
- If you are the leader of a group that is using this material, you may register with BibleInteract, which will allow you to receive help as needed. BibleInteract will send the registered leader a Teacher's Manual.

BibleInteract, Inc., 5600 McLeod NE, Suite N, Albuquerque, NM 87109

info@bibleinteract.com ▪ (505) 709-0756

<http://bibleinteract.tv> ▪ <http://bibleinteract.com>

Chapter 1

Comparing Hebrew and Greek Thought

Summary

You will begin by identifying your Greek, western tradition of Bible study in order to compare it with the first century Hebraic approach. This chapter will give you four characteristics of the Hebraic approach with examples from Scripture.

Outline of Lecture

Below is an outline of the video lecture. We suggest that you take brief notes in the space provided as you watch the lecture. The purpose of the outline is to promote organization of thought.

- I. Introduction
 - A. Goals of the course
 - B. Bible versions
 - C. Memorize alphabets
 - D. Chapter 1 overview
- II. How do we study the Bible today
 - A. Hermeneutics
 - B. Theology
- III. Four Hebraic principles
 - A. Stretch for the truth
 1. Compare Greek and Hebrew
 2. Ask questions, discuss and dialogue, search the Scriptures
 3. Example: Mat 19:3-8 (debating Dt 24:1-4 and the concept of divorce)
 - a. Ancient culture – Pharisees and Sadducees
 - b. “Have you not read....” - irony
 - c. Two citations – Gen 1:27; 2:24
 - d. Irony directed against the Pharisees about their hardness of heart

- e. Two citations – Deut 24:1-4; Jer 3:1, 12-14
 - f. Deeper meaning – in the beginning God was one with mankind, and man and his wife were also together as one.
- B. Be like the master
- 1. Living out the words he speaks
 - 2. Example – Mat 10:24-25
- C. Uncover mysteries
- 1. Greek
 - 1. Literal interpretation
 - 2. Figures of speech
 - 3. Theology – let others tell you what it means
 - 2. Hebraic
 - a. God is the author
 - b. *p'shat*
 - c. *midrash*
 - 3. Example: Mat 13:11
- D. Listen for anything unusual
- 1. Example – Gal 2:16
 - 1. Listen to the repetitions
 - 2. You will be learning how to understand the deeper meaning from the repetitions and other linguistic devices that the ancient ear would have heard

Words to be Defined

- 1. Hermeneutics _____

2. Theology_____

3. *P'shat*_____

4. *Midrash*_____

Questions for Comprehension

1. What are the four characteristics of thinking Hebraically? Explain each one. _____

2. What is the difference between a Greek teacher and a Hebrew teacher? _____

3. Compare the Greek way of perceiving truth in Scripture with the Hebraic way of perceiving truth in Scripture? _____

3. The members of your group are probably using different Bible versions. Consider the information in letters a-d below. Then compare your different translations of Psalm 4:2 and Hebrews 1:3.
1. The King James Version (KJV) translates closely to the original text. However, it uses archaic words like “thee” and “thou.”
 2. The New International Version (NIV) takes liberties with the translation in order to make it easier to understand. However, this process of translation leads to a tendency toward interpretation of the text.
 3. The New American Standard Bible (NASB), like the KJV, translates as closely to the original as possible while, at the same time, using more contemporary words.
 4. A Reference Bible has notes in the middle or bottom margins.

<p>Psalm 4:2 (NASB)</p> <p>O sons of men, how long will my honor become a reproach? <i>How long</i> will you love what is worthless and aim at deception? Selah.</p>	<p>Psalm 4:2 (KJV)</p> <p>O ye sons of men, how long will ye turn my glory into shame? how long will ye love vanity, and seek after leasing? Selah.</p>	<p>Psalm 4:2 (NIV)</p> <p>How long will you people turn my glory into shame? How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?</p>
<p>Hebrews 1:3 (NASB)</p> <p>³And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,</p>	<p>Hebrews 1:3 (KJV)</p> <p>³Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high:</p>	<p>Hebrews 1:3 (NIV)</p> <p>³The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.</p>

How does each translation lead to an interpretive meaning?

Challenge Yourself!

In Matthew 19:3-11 Yeshua uses halachic midrash to respond to the Pharisees' accusing question about divorce. Halachic midrash finds two verses that are legally and conceptually similar and finds a relationship between them.

1. How were the Pharisees "testing" Yeshua? _____

2. How are the two verses below legally and conceptually similar? _____

CITATION IN CAPITAL LETTERS:

He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE.
(Mat 19:4 citing Gen 1:27)

CITATION IN CAPITAL LETTERS:

FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH '? (Mat 19:5 citing Gen 2:24)

3. How do these two verses lead to this conclusion: "*In the beginning there was no separation between God and mankind and also between husband and wife?*" _____

4. How are the next two verses below legally and conceptually similar? _____

CITATION IN CAPITAL LETTERS:

Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY? (Mat 19:7 citing Deut 24:1-4)

ALLUSION TO JEREMIAH:

Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. (Mat 19:8 alluding to Jer 3:1, 12-14)

5. How do these two verses lead this conclusion: "*God allows divorce, which is separation, because mankind is currently in a sinful condition. However, God is in the process of leading us back to the beginning when there was no separation.*" _____

6. What is irony, and how is the following verse ironic? _____

"Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way." Matthew 19:8

Chapter 1 Quiz

1. Hermeneutics is a method of Bible study based on rules of interpretation, whereas the Hebraic approach “listens” to the text for anything unusual that might act as a clue leading to deeper meaning.
 - a. True
 - b. False
2. The western approach elevates the Bible as the Word of God whereas the Hebraic approach elevates the teacher who has a knowledge of its meaning.
 - a. True
 - b. False
3. We must not question our teacher, but we must “believe” what we are being taught.
 - a. True
 - b. False
4. According to the Hebraic approach, the study of Scripture is best conducted in pairs or in small group discussion.
 - a. True
 - b. False
5. How did Yeshua conduct his discussion with the Pharisees about divorce in Matthew 18:3-11?
 - a. He used a figure of speech called irony.
 - b. He used a figure of speech called hyperbole.
 - c. He judged them as unholy.
 - d. He condemned them as unbelievers.
6. An outstanding master or teacher talks the walk.
 - a. True
 - b. False
7. People in first century Israel believed there were mysteries in Scripture.
 - a. True
 - b. False
8. If we work to uncover a depth of meaning from Scripture using Hebraic methods, the unfortunate result is that we can make Scripture mean anything we want it to mean.
 - a. True
 - b. False

9. Both Christianity and Judaism agree that Scripture contains spiritual truths. However, how do they differ in their approach to uncover those truths?
 - a. One has rules of interpretation and the other depends on the words of Yeshua.
 - b. One elevates the teacher and the other elevates the minister.
 - c. Christianity promotes listening with your heart whereas the Hebraic approach emphasizes reading the Torah.
 - d. The role of the teacher in Christianity is to be well instructed in the meaning of Scripture whereas the role of the teacher according to the Hebraic approach is to walk in the ways of God.

10. How do we know we are walking in righteousness?
 - a. We know the Word of God.
 - b. We bear fruit by walking in the ways of God.
 - c. We refrain from idleness.
 - d. We are blameless and without blemish.

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BibleInteract also offers an online version of this course through Canvas, which only requires a computer and an online connection. In this course, a video lesson begins each of the 12 sessions and includes exercises that help you practice the skills you are learning. For more information, visit our website at:
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