

Understanding a Whole Chapter

BACKGROUND THOUGHTS

Our key verse is 2Tim 3:16-17. We have our familiar chapters thanks to Bishop Stephen Langton who, in 1228, divided the Bible into 1,189 chapters – allegedly on horseback! The result means that our chapter divisions are *usually* helpful, but sometimes seem arbitrary. (Attempts at a verse numbering system came later, and the system we know today was only standardised in the 1560 Geneva Bible.)

- Modern translations are flexible on Langton's chapters (eg see the NIV at 1 Cor 11:1 & 12:31; Matt 5:1)
- Some modern translators mark paragraphs with sub-heads (which are NOT part of the Biblical text!)
- Chapters can be unexpectedly short/long (compare Jer 45 with Jer 51; Jn 2 with Jn 6; 1Cor13 with 1Cor15)
- All Psalms are a chapter (but look carefully at Ps 119 ... sometimes 'chapters' do a different job)
- Quiz: Which five books are only one chapter long?
- Fun fact: The shortest chapter in the Bible is also the middle chapter (ie 595th). It is Ps 117.

This method:

- is quick
- is easy to do
- is easy to learn
- is good for those unfamiliar with Bible
- needs no reference works

METHOD

- Read chapter 5 times (Preacher G Campbell Morgan said he read a passage 30-40x before preaching!)
- Use a Bible without commentary notes
- Read straight through; try to understand general argument and central message
- If meaning remains obscure, try some different translations
- If you find it hard to concentrate, read aloud

The 10 Cs

- 1) **Caption.** Write your own short, descriptive title, in 1-5 words. Use a key word you see in the text.
- 2) **Contents.** Write a summary of the main points in sections, as the text seems to break naturally to you.
- 3) **Chief people.** Who takes part? Who is referred to? Why are they there? What is their significance?
- 4) **Choice verse.** Which verse is the key to the chapter, would you say?
- 5) **Crucial word(s).** What are the main nouns / verbs / adjectives / adverbs that give the passage its meaning?
- 6) **Challenges.** Write out any problems with meaning / interpretation. What might you want to research later?
- 7) **Cross references.** See if any related verses and passages come to mind. (If you are new to Bible study, this won't take long at first ... but as you go on, you'll find more and more links popping up.)
- 8) **Christ?** What do you learn of Jesus's nature? (Yes, in the Old Testament too! See [Lk 24:27,44](#))
- 9) **Central lessons.** What are the major principals and insights in this chapter?
- 10) **Conclusion.** Write an application - see Bible Study I (personal, practical, possible, provable)

Samples

1 Cor 13, 1Jn 1, Jn 17, Luke (any chapter)

AN EXAMPLE

2 Timothy 2

1) Caption: Working To Please God

2) Contents:

vv 1-7	Timothy to be devoted to passing on Paul's teaching, and disciple others; examples are soldier, athlete, farmer.
vv 8-10	The price Paul pays for devotion to his gospel. He's imprisoned, and he's suffering.
vv 11-13	Faithfulness and endurance are encouraged. Could this be a worship song of the time?
vv 14-21	Good teaching methods – correct Bible exposition, words backed up by 'cleansed' character. Bad teaching – quarrelling, chatter, speculation, rumour. God knows his own.
vv 22-26	Things to avoid; 'evil desires', arguments, quarrels, resentment. Things to be: faith, love, peace, kind, gentle, good teacher and leader.

3) Chief People:

Paul (as example of good workman to encourage Tim)
Christ Jesus (example of endurance and focus of gospel)
Hymenaeus & Philetus (examples of bad workmen)

4) Choice verse: v 15 - Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

5) Crucial word(s):

Teach / entrust / instruct (2,24,25)
Teaching / gospel / saying (7,8,11,17)
Endure (3,10,12)
Work (6,15; eg soldier, athlete, farmer, articles, servant)

6) Challenges: in the "chorus", does v 13 contradict vv 11-12?

7) Cross references:

Acts 16:1-5 ("things you heard me say", v2), also Acts 19:8,22
2Cor 1:3-11, 4:7-12 (Paul's sufferings for the gospel, v9)
2Pet 2 (false teachers, v17)
Are the virtues in the last paragraph like the fruit of the Holy Spirit in Gal 5? Need to check that.

8) Christ?

v3 commanding officer, inspires devotion. Encourages endurance.
v8 "This is my gospel ... Jesus!" He's the focus of our effort
v10 only hope of salvation is in Jesus Christ
vv 11-13 Christ is the "he" ... alive, reigning, faithful, gracious

9) Central lessons:

Being a good workman will require endurance, hard work, a struggle against false teachers
Effort is required to correctly handle the truth. Avoid unprofitable controversies
* Sound doctrine (and a proper ability to teach it) go together with sound living (v21)

10) Conclusion:

I want to apply 2 Tim 2:2. What about a series on Bible study for others, focused on enabling them to pass on truths? I'll put it to the leadership, see if they will endorse it; and hold me accountable! Memorise 2Tim 2:15 (key verse for any Bible student)

NOW, YOUR TURN

This week, we're going to do a Chapter Study on 1John 2:3-37 (this is a chapter that breaks in an odd way at beginning and end). Use the print-out to highlight words and scribble notes. Then write out your responses, as shown in the example. (Feel free to write more if you find more to say at any point.) Bring your results along next week. We won't make you share personal things, but it will be encouraging to hear how it went! Try to use your "application" and let your group know if it was successful!

I John, Chapter 2, verses 3-27

The passage

Write some notes!

We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. Whoever says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.

Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.

I am writing to you, dear children,
because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.

I am writing to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.

I am writing to you, young men,
because you have overcome the evil one.

I write to you, dear children,
because you know the Father.

I write to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young men,
because you are strong,
and the word of God lives in you,
and you have overcome the evil one.

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of

the eyes, and the pride of life – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives for ever.

Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.

But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist – denying the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he promised us – eternal life.

I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit – just as it has taught you, remain in him.