

1. Introduction to Bible Study

Introduction

We are about to embark on one of the most exciting journeys anyone can experience! No, I'm not talking about a trip up the Highlands Highway into the mountainous interior of Papua New Guinea (*though that, too, is exciting ... trust me!*), but a trip into the **heart** and **mind** of God as we learn to **explore His Word!** But, as in all journeys, before we begin our adventure, we must first make necessary preparations. These include the following:

Having The Right Heart Attitude

1. A New Heart ~ *In order to truly understand the Bible*, a book of Spiritual Truths written by the **Spirit of God**, the Bible student must possess the **Author (the Holy Spirit)** in his heart to be his **Guide** and **Teacher!** He must be "**born again**" by God with a **New Heart!** (*1 Corinthians 2:13-14*)

2. A Hungry Heart ~ *The main requirement to studying God's Word is not a seminary degree*, but **an intense desire to know God's Will**. Studying God's Word is hard work! It requires patience and perseverance! Unless you really desire to know God's Will, you will find Bible Study laborious and, God forbid, boring! **When you passionately desire to discover God's Will in His Word, the discipline that it requires will come (super) naturally!**

3. An Obedient Heart ~ *Along with a strong desire to Know God's Will* is the passion to **Do God's Will**. It is fairly easy to gain academic knowledge of Biblical facts and events, but only a desire to do God's Will turns that **knowledge** into **wisdom (John 7:17)**. How badly do you want to do God's Will? That, more than most other things, will determine how much we will get out of God's Word!

4. A Humble Heart ~ *Discovering God's Truths requires humility*, with a **willingness to learn from others and to change our own thinking** should it be found in error. *Only God is infallible!*

Having The Right Conviction

1. The Bible is God's Word ~ *The Bible is Inspired by God, both in its message and in its very words*. By **Inspiration**, I mean more than that the authors themselves were inspired to write, but that **God Himself sovereignly worked through the various human authors and their unique personalities to record exactly what He wanted to communicate to mankind**. We can be assured that when we read the Bible, we are reading God's very Word to us! (*2 Timothy 3:16*)

2. The Bible Conveys God's Message ~ *The Bible consists of 66 books*, written by approximately **40 different human authors**, over a span of **1500 years** and in **varying places**. And yet, it clearly communicates a **single message** without contradiction: **God's Plan to Rescue Man from Sin and Transform Him into a Child of God!**

Study the information on the next page to gain a better understanding of the books in the Bible.

Book	Author	Date	Summary
Old Testament			
Genesis	Moses	1450-1410 BC	The Beginning of the World , Man's Fall, Israel's origin.
Exodus	Moses	1450-1410 BC	God Rescues His People from Slavery in Egypt thru Moses.
Leviticus	Moses	1450-1410 BC	God's Laws for Israel.
Numbers	Moses	1450-1410 BC	Israel's 40 years of Wandering in the Sinai.
Deuteronomy	Moses	1410 BC	Moses' Last Words to Israel.
Joshua	Joshua	1400-1370 BC	The Israelites' Conquest of Canaan Led by Joshua.
Judges	Uncertain	1050-1000 BC	Heroes of Israel: Post Conquest & Pre- Kingdom.
Ruth	Uncertain	1000 BC	Story of Ruth, a Moabite and Member of David's Line.
1 Samuel	Samuel	930 BC	The First Two Kings of Israel: Saul and David.
2 Samuel	Samuel	930 BC	Reign of King David.
1 Kings	Jeremiah	550 BC	Reign of King Solomon and the Divided Kingdom.
2 Kings	Jeremiah	550 BC	Elijah, Elisha, Assyrian and Babylonian Conquest, and Exile.
1 Chronicles	Ezra	450-425 BC	Reign of Kings Saul and David.
2 Chronicles	Ezra	450-425 BC	Reign of King Solomon, Divided Kingdom and Exile to Babylon.
Ezra	Ezra	456-444 BC	Israelites Return to Jerusalem to Rebuild Temple.
Nehemiah	Nehemiah	445-425 BC	Israelites Return to Rebuilds walls of Jerusalem .
Esther	Uncertain	465 BC	Esther, a Jewess, Becomes Queen of Persia.
Job	Uncertain	Uncertain	Job, a Righteous Man, Undergoes Extreme Tribulation.
Psalms	Various	Various	A Collection of 150 Psalms and Prayers.
Proverbs	Solomon & Others	950-700 BC	A Collection of Wise Sayings of King Solomon and Others.
Ecclesiastes	Solomon	935 BC	King Solomon Answers the Question of Meaning in Life.
Song of Solomon	Solomon	965 BC	Songs that Express the Love Between a Man and His Bride.
Isaiah	Isaiah	740-680 BC	Prophecies of God's Judgment and Redemption of Israel.
Jeremiah	Jeremiah	627-585 BC	Prophecies of God's Judgment of Israel.
Lamentations	Jeremiah	586-585 BC	Expressions of Anguish Over Jerusalem's Destruction.
Ezekiel	Ezekiel	592-570 BC	Prophecies of Ezekiel During Exile in Babylon.
Daniel	Daniel	537 BC	Story of King Nebuchadnezzar & Prophecies of Daniel.
Hosea	Hosea	710 BC	Hosea's Broken Marriage a Picture of Israel's Betrayal of God.
Joel	Joel	835 BC	Prophecy of God's Coming Judgment.
Amos	Amos	755 BC	Amos Speaks Out Against Social Injustice.
Obadiah	Obadiah	840/586 BC	Obadiah's Prophecy Against the Edomites.
Jonah	Jonah	760 BC	Jonah's Reluctance to Prophecy Lands Him in a Fish.
Micah	Micah	700 BC	Micah Prophecies for Social Justice and True Worship.
Nahum	Nahum	663-612 BC	Fall of Assyria and God's Sovereignty.
Habakkuk	Habakkuk	607 BC	"Why Do Evil People Prosper?"
Zephaniah	Zephaniah	625 BC	Zephaniah Prophecies Doom for Jerusalem.
Haggai	Haggai	520 BC	Haggai Encourages Israel to Rebuild the Temple.
Zechariah	Zechariah	520-518 BC	Zechariah's Prophecies Concerning the Coming Messiah.
Malachi	Malachi	450-400 BC	Malachi Confronts Israel with Her Sins Against God.
New Testament			
Matthew	Matthew	60's AD	The Life of Christ Written for a Jewish Audience.
Mark	Mark	50's AD	The Earliest Account of the Life of Christ.
Luke	Luke	60 AD	Account of Christ's Life Written for a Non-Jewish Audience.
John	John	85-90 AD	Unique Account of Christ's Life Emphasizing His Deity.
Acts	Luke	61 AD	Account of the Origin and Growth of the Christian church.
Romans	Paul	58 AD	Paul's Explanation of the Gospel.
1 Corinthians	Paul	56 AD	Paul's Response to Problems of Division & Immorality.
2 Corinthians	Paul	57 AD	Paul's Follow-up letter to the Corinthian Church.
Galatians	Paul	49/55 AD	Paul's Response to Legalism in the Church.
Ephesians	Paul	61 AD	Paul's Teaching on the Church and Unity Among Christians.
Philippians	Paul	61 AD	Paul's Letter of Encouragement to the Philippian church.
Colossians	Paul	61 AD	Paul Writes About the Supremacy of Christ.
1 Thessalonians	Paul	51 AD	Paul's Letter of Encouragement and Christ's Return.
2 Thessalonians	Paul	51 AD	Paul Explains More About Christ's Return.
1 Timothy	Paul	63 AD	Paul Encourages Timothy as a Church Leader.
2 Timothy	Paul	66 AD	Paul Encourages Timothy in his Final Letter..
Titus	Paul	65 AD	Paul's Letter of Encouragement to Titus, a Church Leader.
Philemon	Paul	61 AD	Paul Asks Philemon to Forgive Onesimus, his runaway slave.
Hebrews	Uncertain	64-68 AD	Jesus Completes What the Old Testament Began.
James	James	45-50 AD	The <i>Proverbs</i> of the New Testament.
1 Peter	Peter	63 AD	Enduring Persecution and Suffering.
2 Peter	Peter	66 AD	False Teachers and the Return of Christ.
1 John	John	90 AD	Walking in the Light, Loving One Another and Assurance.
2 John	John	90 AD	John Encourages Love One for Another.
3 John	John	90 AD	John's Warning to Gaius to Beware of a Dictatorial Leader.
Jude	Jude	70-80 AD	Jude, Jesus' Brother, Warns Against False, Divisive Teachers.
Revelation	John	90's AD	The End of the World and the Return of the King!

Having The Right Tools

1. A Good Bible Translation: *Few of us have the training and ability to read the Bible in its original languages (Hebrew and Aramaic in the Old Testament and Greek in the New Testament).* We must therefore depend on translators to bring the Bible into our own language. The question that is often raised is **“Which translation is the best?”** If you expect to receive an answer from me, you will be disappointed. ***I will not recommend nor endorse a specific translation,*** but it may help if you understand the various principles used in Bible translation work.

a. Literal ~ Translators using this principle seek to translate *each original word* into the *closest equivalent word in the reader’s language*. The *strength* of this method is that it is a word for word translation of the Bible giving the reader *a close rendering of the literal words of the original writings*. The *weakness* of this principle is that the translation can be stiff and difficult to read, and that words cannot always be found to translate the original words of the Biblical writings. For example, the one English word “love” is used to translate two Greek words in the New Testament. But unless you are acquainted with the Greek text, there is no way of telling which Greek word is being translated. ***This problem is seen in the conversation between Jesus and Simon Peter in John 21:15-17. (Examples include: The New American Standard Version, The King James Bible and the Revised Standard Version)***

b. Dynamic Equivalence ~ Translators using this principle seek to translate, not the literal words, but the *meaning* these words convey. The *strength* of this principle is that the translation is *more readable* in the reader’s language. The *weakness* of this principle is that the Bible student who cannot understand the original languages, is now further distanced from the original words. An example of this is the Greek word “sarx” which translates as “flesh” in English. It is used repeatedly by Paul in Romans chapter 8. However, the translators of the New International Version, using the principle of Dynamic Equivalence, express what they believe is Paul’s intended meaning with various English words and phrases such as **“sinful nature”** (verses 3, 5, 9, 12 & 13) and **“sinful man”** (verses 3 & 6). (Examples include: *The New International Version & Today’s English Version or Good News Bible*)

c. Paraphrase ~ Translators, taking the principle of Dynamic Equivalence further, seek to translate the original language into their *modern colloquial equivalent*. The *strength* of this principle is that the translation is *highly readable*. The *weakness* is that the Bible student is now further distanced from the original words by the translators’ interpretation of the original writings. (Example: *The Living Bible*)

So which type of Bible translation is the best for Bible Study? The answer is *all three!* You should ***use a Literal translation as your primary Study Bible,*** and ***other Bibles to compare Scripture*** to gain a better understanding. Ask your **Pastor** or **Bible Teacher** which Bible they would recommend. The **Christian Bookstores** can also provide help in choosing a good Study Bible.

2. A Notebook ~ Studies should always be written out to reinforce what is learned as well as **to keep a record for future reference.**

3. Reference Materials ~ There are many reference books that aid in a study of the Bible, including **Bible Dictionaries, Lexicons, Encyclopedias, Concordances and Commentaries.** These will be covered in subsequent lessons.

Having the Right Method

Finally, we come to the purpose of this Study. You may have attended at one time a Bible Study where a Scripture passage is read and then each person in the group is asked to share what that passage means to them. What often happens is that there are as many interpretations of the passage as there are people in the group. Each person brings their own personal experiences and therefore sees the passage in their own subjective and biased way.

But the question must be asked. **“Which interpretation is right?”** Why? Because **each Bible author had only one intended meaning** when he wrote the Scripture. Our task as Bible students is not to discover what **we** think the Scripture means, but to discover what the **original author** meant when he wrote that Scripture many centuries ago! We accomplish this by following a logical, methodical, careful and objective system of study. *Following a Method protects us from interpretations that are affected (or infected?) by our own biases and feelings, and allows us to share and compare our interpretations with others in an objective manner.*

The Three Steps of Bible Study:

1. Observation:

In this step we discover *What the Scripture SAYS*. This requires more than a casual reading of the passage. **The Truths of Scripture** are sometimes like *shells on a seashore* that can be easily seen and collected. But more often, they are like *precious gems* hidden beneath the surface, requiring careful excavation and a determined excavator. The extra effort yields valuable lessons and precious truths. **We will learn how to sift through the words of a passage in order to discover what the writer is saying.**

2. Interpretation:

Here, we will discover *What the Scripture MEANS*. It has been said, **“There is only one interpretation but many applications.”** Our task will be to discover that **one** interpretation, and our primary tool will be an inquisitive mind asking relevant questions. **It is imperative that we discover the correct interpretation, for if our interpretation is in error, so too will be our applications.**

3. Application:

Finally we will discover *What the Scripture MEANS TO US*. The Bible was not given to fulfill our curiosity, but to **transform** lives! God is in the business of changing lives, and He does it primarily through the ministry of His Spirit and His Word, transforming hearts, minds and wills, and conforming lives to the Living Word, Jesus Christ! **We will learn how to apply the Scripture in practical ways to our lives.**

With that said, let us begin our journey!