

LEARNING
FROM
GOD'S
WORD

LEARNING FROM GOD'S WORD

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Dedication
to
Anna Wilson
and
Barbara Gardner

Our
*faithful encouragers
and helpers*

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PREFACE

*"Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."
(Psa. 119:105)*

When we do not have God's Word we are in the dark, not knowing who we are or where we are going. What a tragedy that so many live on earth without the light of God's revealed truth. They are without the promises of His grace and without the new life conveyed by His Spirit through His Word.

When we have the Bible and know it is a message from God but do not learn from it we also walk in darkness. This is a greater tragedy.

The people of Israel had good news preached to them in the time of the Exodus, but they did not learn from God's Word. They could not enter the promised land because they did not believe and obey God's Word (Heb. 3:19). What a fatal blunder.

We have God's letters of love and offer of infinite grace, wisdom, power and goodness to provide for us all that we need for us to be victorious in this life and to be gloriously His in all eternity.

Brothers and sisters, let us read the Bible for all it's worth. Learn to understand its truth and receive its blessings, which are far beyond what we can imagine!

God has given all this to us in written human language intended for us to read and understand. We need to continue to give heed to it and follow its clear message to us.

With all our hearts we appeal to you. Use all the help you can find. Study the principles, guidelines and methods discussed in this book. Apply them in your practice as you read and study your Bible. They will become more meaningful to see them in

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practice. "Give diligence to present yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, using properly the word of God" (II Tim. 2:15).

Our prayer is that your life will be enriched as you *learn from God's Word*.

Seth Wilson and Lynn Gardner

WHY STUDY THE BIBLE?

Seth Wilson

We have some things that we know how to do, but we are not doing them because we do not know why. We do not see enough reasons to be concerned and to make an effort. Is Bible study one of those things about which you have not cared enough to try — and keep on trying?

Consider these important reasons for Bible study. Get your Bible and read the passages referred to in this chapter.

1. To receive the light of truth that God has given and escape the darkness of ignorance which engulfs the unbelieving mass of humanity (Eph. 4:17-24; Rom. 10:1-3).

2. To obtain the life that God gives us in Christ. He alone is the giver of life, and the Bible is His living Word that generates new life in us (Heb. 4:12; James 1:18; John 20:30,31; 17:3; I John 5:9-13).

3. To be renewed and transformed in our minds and hearts.

We are cleansed by the words of Christ (John 15:3; Eph. 5:26,27; 4:22-24; Rom. 12:2).

4. To be filled with the wisdom and understanding which comes from God, which is true to our nature as God made us, and is valid and valuable for all eternity as well as for earthly relationships and responsibilities (Phil. 1:9-11; 4:8,9; Col. 2:3-10; 3:1-4,16,17; 4:5).

5. To be able to practice the will of God, that we may please Him and glorify Him to whom we owe all love and service; also that we may be in blessed fellowship with our loving and perfect Heavenly Father (Col. 1:9-13; I John 1:5-9). To walk in the light as He is in the light we must know His will and avoid sin (Psa. 119:11; Matt. 4:1-11).

6. To strengthen our faith. The whole Christian life is believing the Lord and acting upon that faith (Rom. 10:17; Eph. 3:17; I John 5:4; I Tim. 1:3-19; Heb. 10:38,39; 11:1-12:2).

7. To be able to give an answer to everyone that asks a reason for the hope that is in us (I Pet. 3:15; II Pet. 1:16-21).

8. To be admonished and encouraged by the examples of men who lived before us (I Cor. 10:1-12; Rom. 15:4; Heb. 11).

9. To be real disciples of Jesus. The word translated *disciple* means a learner. Can we maintain our standing as His disciples without being learners of His Word? (See Matt. 28:19; II Pet. 1:3-19; 3:15,18; James 1:19-22).

10. To avoid false teachings and snares of Satan the deceiver (I Tim. 4:1-7; II Cor. 11:3,13-15; I Cor. 3:18; 6:9,10; 14:37; 15:33,34; Rom. 16:17,18; Col. 2:8; Titus 1:10; 3:9-11; I Thess. 2:3-10; II Tim. 2:14-18,23-26; 3:1-5,13).

11. To continue in His Word by which we know the truth and are made free (John 8:31,32; I John 5:20; II John 9).

12. To let His Word abide in us by which He promises great privileges of prayer (John 15:7), and by which we receive the power to bear fruit and to have the full joy of abiding in His love (John 15:3-15). This was spoken to the twelve at the Last Supper, but similar promises are given to anyone who loves Jesus

and keeps His Word (John 14:23).

*WHAT DO WE NEED TO
KNOW MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE?*

To know God and Christ is eternal life (John 17:3). But the Lord comes from Heaven in flaming fire to deal out retribution to those who know not God and obey not the gospel (II Thess. 1:6-9).

His divine power gives to us everything that pertains to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who has called us by His own glory and excellence. We must be diligent to add to our faith knowledge (along with the practice of faith), to continue in the forgiveness of our sins, and to enter into the eternal kingdom of our Lord (II Pet. 1:3-11).

Paul counted all else as loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ, and he suffered the loss of all things that he might be in Christ and might know Him and know the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings (Phil. 3:7-11).

Bible study is profitable — for now and for ever (II Tim. 3:16; I Tim. 4:8). It is precious (II Pet. 1:1,4). It is our treasure and our opportunity. It gives us understanding and courage, determination, and help which are necessary to life itself (Psa. 19:7-14). By these words anyone can receive help that is more valuable than a gold mine. By these words one can give to others the most valuable help which they can possibly receive in this world.

God communicates to us His love and His truth, for our minds to be awakened and directed, to be cleansed and renewed, to be set straight and made strong — by His message to us in the Bible (John 15:3; 17:17; Eph. 5:26).

As God gave to each of us a stomach and digestive system and gave also food to nurture our physical bodies, so He gave to each person a mind and He gives His Word to feed our minds and to form the thoughts that lead to life instead of death and condemnation.

Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread [food] alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). In fact, He said that was found in the written Word of God. Our notation system marks it as Deuteronomy 8:3. In the barren wilderness, weak and starving from lack of food for forty days, Jesus could answer decisively the deceptive suggestions of Satan, because He knew the Scriptures and relied upon the truth given in them.

We need guidance and we need understanding. We need to know who we are, where we are going and what to do. Without the revelation from God we are like one whose whole memory is gone and his identity is so wiped out that he must ask strangers, "Does anybody know who I am?" Without the knowledge of God's Word, you and I are lost waifs in a wicked world, being used and exploited by the enemy of our divine family connections, who keeps us deceived no matter how smart we think we are.

The mind of the flesh is death, enmity against God, not subject to the law of God. They that mind earthly things glory in their shame, serve their own belly as a god, and become enemies of the cross of Christ (Phil. 3:18,19). Read Romans 8:5-11. We need our minds made over (Eph. 4:17-24).

"If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth. . . . Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Col. 3:1,2,16).

The way to know what God gives to us and what God wants from us is to give attention to His Book of promises and instructions in which He has made a covenant with us (II Pet. 1:3-11; Acts 20:32; Rom. 1:16,17; I Pet. 1:19-25; 2:2).

It is a matter of real concern that some brothers and sisters in Christ are being deprived by preachers whose sermons are not Bible studies, and by their congregations which neither provide good study opportunities nor urge them to fill their minds with the

WHY STUDY THE BIBLE?

powerful, cleansing, enlightening and life-giving Word of God. Everyone needs the light and the motivating power of God's Word. If some cannot read, somebody needs to read it to them. If it is not in their language, someone needs to translate it for them.

The work of the church is done just where the Word of God is planted in the hearts of people to take root and take control of their lives.

Study Questions

1. List four reasons for Bible study which are most convincing to you.
2. What do you need to know more than anything else?
3. What responsibility do we have in the use of the mind God gave us?
4. What kind of sermons is needed to help the church accomplish its work?

Project

The following scriptures show that God expects His followers to read, understand and obey His word. Read the scriptures and summarize on a paper what each text teaches we are to do with the Word of God.

Your paper should look like this:

Exodus 24:3,4 — Moses taught the people the words of the Lord and the people agreed to do them.

Deuteronomy 6:6-9 — Teach the commandments of God to your children daily.

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Deuteronomy 11:22; 27:1-10; 29:29; 31:9-13

Joshua 1:8; 8:34,35; 22:3-5; 23:6,14-16

Judges 2:1-3

I Samuel 12:14,15; 13:13; 15:19-24

I Kings 2:3

I Chronicles 10:13; 29:19

Psalms 1:1,2; 19:7-11; 119:9-11,34-105

Proverbs 1:2-5; 8:33; 19:20

Ezra 7:10

Nehemiah 8:1-10

Isaiah 34:16

Matthew 7:24; 13:19,23; 22:29; 24:15

Luke 1:4; 11:28; 16:29-31

John 5:39,40; 14:15; 15:10; 17:17; 20:31

Acts 17:11; 20:32

Romans 1:16; 15:4

I Corinthians 10:11; 15:1-4

II Corinthians 2:17; 4:2

Ephesians 3:3-6,9; 5:17

Colossians 3:16

I Timothy 4:13

II Timothy 2:15; 3:14-17

James 1:21

Revelation 1:3

In the light of this evidence who could doubt that God expects us to read, understand and obey His word?

BELIEVING AND UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD

Seth Wilson

When God speaks, how should man listen? If a book claims to be an inspired revelation from God — the very words of Him who cannot lie or be deceived — what is the correct and appropriate use of reason in dealing with it?

THE PROPER USE OF HUMAN INTELLIGENCE IN RECEIVING AND USING A DIVINE REVELATION

First: *We must use reason and intelligence to decide whether it is from God.* If God presents to us a message to be regarded as having absolute authority, to enlighten and to rule our lives, He obviously appeals to our judgment to discriminate between this and other messages. In fact, both in the Bible and in the manner of its origin God gives us reasonable evidences and testimonies

that enable men to decide intelligently concerning its authority.

The basis of our faith in the Bible is not a matter of proving all Bible statements to be true, but a matter of recognizing the divine mind from which they come. Miracles, prophecies, claims, scope, unity amid diversity, candor of judgment and unique character of the Bible all plainly indicate that it is from God and not from man unaided. We need to study more and to preach more of these sure foundations of the faith. We need to produce in our hearers the conviction that the Bible is indeed a message from God; hence its precepts are binding, its histories are true, its judgments are inexorable, and its doctrines are powerful to transform the hearts and lives of men.

Second: *We must use our intelligence to understand what God said.* It is certainly reasonable, as well as respectful toward God, for us to make every effort to determine what His words were intended to signify. God has spoken to the minds of men in the language of men calling upon men to hear and to heed the plain import of His words.

His word is given to unbelievers to bring them to faith. (Rom. 10:17; John 20:30,31), and to believers to direct their obedience and "to build [them] up and give [them] the inheritance among all them that are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). All men owe it to God and owe it to themselves to understand and to use God's Word as He intended.

Third: *We must accept it and follow it with all confidence and submission.* When God reveals, by special enlightenment through His Spirit, things which eye has not seen, ear has not heard, which never entered into the heart of men (I Cor. 2:6-16), it is folly and irreverence to try to prove whether God told the truth. It is unreasonable to expect the scope of human experience and reason to provide the proof of things reaching so far beyond both reason and experience. No method of science or of philosophy can prove some statements which are of central importance in the Bible: for example, that the death of Christ atones for my sin; or that Jesus will come again and receive us unto

Himself; or that the baptism of a penitent believer in Christ secures the forgiveness of the believer's sins.

These and others must be accepted upon the authority or reliability of the One who says it is so. It would be thoroughly irreverent and unbelieving for us to question the truth of the message after we have assurance that it is from God.

The demand that all Bible statements must be discovered by scientific method, proved by rational processes, or confirmed by results in practice, before they can be regarded as authoritative or established truth, is simply a demand that God must not be greater than man and must not reveal anything man could not find out for himself with his own closely limited, earth-bound senses.

If a message is really from God we may be sure that it is unfailingly true in the sense that He meant it. It will give us knowledge that sends a shaft of light into the dark, unknown future, and will show up most fully at all times life's highest possibilities and responsibilities. A revelation of authoritative and infallible truth gives us a degree and kind of certainty which could never be approached by the incomplete inductions and the fallacy-ridden experimentation of scientific methods. The fact that such a revelation has been made is established by the best combination of many independent evidences, including sure facts of experience and sound reasonings.

CHRIST ASSURED US THAT GOD HAS SPOKEN

When we accept Christ as Savior and Lord we commit ourselves to believe and obey His Word, the Bible. Jesus was the author of Scripture and He assured us that the Bible is the Word of the Living God.

The Spirit of Christ was in the prophets, including all the Old Testament writers (I Pet. 1:10,11). Jesus spoke His approval of the Old Testament history; He testified of its divine authorship;

He affirmed its inerrancy (Matt. 22:31,32; 4:4; 12:40-42; 19:4-6; Mark 12:36; Luke 16:17; 24:44; John 10:35). Jesus fulfilled so many prophecies and typical patterns of the Old Testament that His life and work furnish a demonstration of the divine origin of the Old Testament.

Jesus gave the apostles and prophets of the New Testament their message (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-15; Gal. 1:11,12; Eph. 3:2-6; 4:18-11; I Cor. 2:6-13; I Thess. 2:13). Our New Testament scriptures fulfilled Jesus' promise that the Holy Spirit would guide the apostles into all truth.

Therefore, the whole Bible has authority — that is, the right to speak for God and be believed, the right to command and be obeyed. Christ wants His followers to know and understand His word. Whatever it says is to be taken as true in the sense that it was intended. Whatever command it gives is binding upon all to whom that command was given. Whatever it promises can be relied upon by all to whom the promise was given.

The whole Bible is a revelation of things divine, supernatural, even yet to come; and its message is to be accepted, not because it agrees with our experience, but because God has revealed it. Its message must be understood from the language used, even if we cannot see how it is true in our own experience or reasoning.

The Bible is a covenant from God for us to receive and to live by, for us to reply upon for our future inheritance.

ORIGIN AND NATURE OF THE PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

Hermeneutics is the study of the principles of correct interpretation. The rules and principles of the science of hermeneutics are not arbitrary laws decreed by popes or councils, enacted by congresses, or even invented by scholars. They are truly scientific in that they are descriptive, discovered, inductive, and without any authority, except the accuracy with which they fit further ex-

perience. They are carefully stated descriptions of the way men regularly think and read when they get the meaning intended in any writing. They were not invented, but discovered by observation of many experiences and derived from analysis of many instances until a general statement could be made of what was regularly or always observed in cases of correct interpretation.

A rule or principle comes into being in the attempt to express what is found uniformly in some phase of the thinking habits and reading experiences of normal people. They are accepted widely, not because of any authority from which they come, but because they appeal to the common sense and fit the experiences of most people. When many rules, descriptive of many particular factors of successful reading, are analytically compared and related to each other, the science of hermeneutics arises out of the compilation of them into an orderly whole.

One can interpret well without formal study of any set of rules, but cannot interpret accurately at all without following (perhaps unconsciously) those principles which are based upon the nature of the mind and of truth, and are inherent in the very structure and function of language. When the effect of emotional bias, or the influence of bad examples, or the fog of superstition, or other circumstance interferes with our normal thought processes or hinders our usual intellectual honesty, then we need to give heed to principles and methods which have been universally found to lead to true interpretations, that we may be guided by them back to sanity.

Sometimes rules are made and urged by ax-grinders with the intent to support certain doctrines or doubtful kinds of exegesis; therefore all rules should be logically analyzed and tested by use in matter as free from bias as possible. Such rules, of course, have no authority. No one is bound to accept any rule of hermeneutics unless it is found to be true to facts and productive of correct results. Always remember that no result of reading is correct except discovery of the thought the author intended to express.

Some may think as follows: If all people naturally practice in-

terpretation with fair success much of the time, why do we need to be concerned with teaching and studying Biblical Hermeneutics? Others will say: If true interpretation is so accessible to all readers, then why do we have so many different ideas of what the Bible teaches? The second question helps answer the first; and both questions need some of the same answers. It is unpleasant to say it, but it seems obviously true, that people are not as sensible and honest in reading the Bible as in other matters. Our minds are not as free from preconceptions and desire as to what it must mean. Reading any other book we are more ready to let it say anything it wants to say.

Moreover, a great many express opinions about Bible teaching when they have heard, or decide in their own minds what ought to be true. Too often even teachers and preachers are uninformed and misinformed about what the Bible says, about the meaning of Bible words, about important related historical facts. They follow and depend upon false authorities or faulty sources of information. We too often and too easily are swayed by bias, or bound by tradition, or misled by what we hear about the Bible.

For better Bible interpretation we do not need to make new rules of language or new ways of thinking. That very thing has caused much of the present confusion of misinterpretations. We do need to apply the intelligence God gave us according to the old universal principles of all language and thought. We need to become thoroughly acquainted with the facts of the language and historical circumstances which were familiar to those to whom it was originally written, so that its words will bring to our minds the ideas they were intended to suggest to the original readers.

A good method of interpretation is one which lets the book or passage speak for itself — one which enables us to perceive and accept the significance of the words and grammar used by the author. A method is bad which gets a meaning anywhere else and brings it in to foist it upon the passage.

Because man is made in the image of God, man is capable of

receiving whatever revelation of truth God wants to give to man. It is important for us to understand the truth God has revealed to us. It is important that we do not waste time in idle speculation about the things God did not reveal to us (Deut. 29:29).

God did not choose to inform us about many topics about which we may be curious, for example how Jesus entertained himself as a teenager. Discussion on such issues is human speculation and is not a study of God's revealed word. Each Christian should seek to understand God's revealed word but he should not make matters of human opinion a matter of priority nor a test of faith.

Study Questions

1. What are three ways a person should use his reason in receiving and using a divine revelation?
2. Can all statements in the Bible be proved true by experience? Explain.
3. Show how trust in Jesus leads to trust in the Bible as the inspired word of God.
4. Why should we accept the message of the Bible?
5. How did rules of hermeneutics come into being?
6. Why do some readers of a text of scripture not understand the true meaning?
7. Why are human beings capable of receiving a revelation from God?
8. What kind of questions should remain unanswered?

9. What kind of interpretation is good interpretation of the Bible? And what kind of "interpretation" is bad?

Project

Take a survey of five people asking the following questions:

1. Do you believe the Bible is a book revealed from God to man?
2. Why or why not do you believe this?
3. What is your highest authority in religion?
4. Do you believe everyone can understand the Bible?
5. What does this statement in the Bible mean, "Lay hands suddenly on no man" (I Tim. 5:22)?

After your survey summarize the answers you received. What observations can you make after this research? Discuss your results with others. Did your observations agree with theirs?

BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD PART I

Seth Wilson

Christians generally agree that God has spoken through the Bible, but differences of interpretation have sharply divided the followers of Christ. There is much disagreement on what the Bible means and how to use it. Particular interpretations of the Lord's Supper, baptism, the millennium and other doctrines have become the key identifying marks of various religious groups.

Misunderstandings of the Bible have caused undue harm to the kingdom of God. It is not surprising that the Bible is often misunderstood when its obvious message is against selfish human desires and many previous misconceptions. Some misunderstanding is occasioned by the gap between the culture of today and that of Bible times.

Even though it takes some effort every Christian should be a Bible student. It is important that each Christian faces certain

basic questions as he or she earnestly seeks to understand God's Word.

BASIC ISSUES

Is there an authoritative interpretation? Some people claim the Bible is too deep and mysterious for common people to understand. Many, including Roman Catholics of the old type, demand authoritative interpretation. Various denominations and cults also rely upon authoritative interpreters: Judge Rutherford, Ellen G. White, Joseph Smith and other Mormon prophets, etc.

Why should we not rely on authoritative interpretation? God did not give anyone this power. How would we know if He did? We would have to interpret their interpretations. It has been difficult to know the correct interpretation of the Supreme Court decision on prayer and Bible reading in school. Why would the words of an authoritative interpreter be better understood than the words of Scripture? The official interpretation would replace the Bible as the final authority.

Relying on authoritative interpretation by church officials results in ruinous consequences. The Bible is taken away from the people. Christians are deprived of liberty and the means of spiritual growth. Traditional views go unquestioned. Falsehood can be enshrined and be undisturbed.

The teachings of men become so important they set aside the commandments of God (Matt: 15:1-20). People seek to obey and please religious leaders instead of God. Confusion and division result. When an authoritative interpretation is proven wrong, God is blamed.

When any human interpreter is considered infallible it leaves his followers with no objective standard of truth. It leads to a dependence on human leaders which results in spiritual stagnation and immaturity. They are denied the enlightenment and transformation which the Lord promised by His Word (John

6:63; 17:17; Acts 20:32; Eph. 5:26; II Tim. 3:15).

The Bible as we have it is God's authoritative interpretation. We do not need another; we have one. God was able to say what He wants us to hear. If God gave additional books to interpret the Bible we would have a greater amount of material to misunderstand, as we try to go beyond what is given and explain what God did not reveal. Authoritative interpreters must not be allowed to deny God the right to express Himself to the readers through His authoritative Word.

Can anyone understand the Bible who will properly study it? The Bible states that the Word of God can be understood and should be. Read Ephesians 3:2-6, II Corinthians 1:13 and II Timothy 3:14,15. God's word is intended to change lives and make men grow in the likeness of Christ. This involves understanding it. Read Acts 20:32, James 1:18-22 and II Peter 1:3-10. It warns us to watch out for those who teach contrary to God's teaching. Read Galatians 1:8,9, I Timothy 6:3-5, II Peter 3:5-9 and II Thessalonians 3:6.

The Bible addresses its message to all sorts of people: unbelievers, John 20:30,31; all that are called to be saints, Romans 1:7; I Corinthians 1:2; the brethren, Galatians 4:12-20; to wives, Ephesians 5:22; to husbands, Ephesians 5:25; to children, Ephesians 6:1; to servants, Ephesians 6:5; to the rich, James 5:1-6. Those who did not understand it are said to be responsible for that fact because of reasons in themselves that hindered their understanding. Read John 5:39,40, II Corinthians 4:4, II Peter 3:14-16 and Hebrews 5:11-14.

Does the Holy Spirit reveal the correct interpretation to each Christian? Do we need the Holy Spirit to enable us to understand the Bible? Some think that I Corinthians 2:14-16 and II Peter 1:20 state that we cannot read and understand without direct aid of the Holy Spirit. But these passages are speaking more of the writing of it than they are of reading it. John 16:13 was also spoken to the apostles about their ability to speak and write the Word of God for the conviction of the world. Jesus said that the

world could not receive the Holy Spirit (John 14:17).

If we have to depend on the Holy Spirit for interpretation of the Bible, there is no way of correcting or checking on interpretations. How can one know which of his ideas come from the Holy Spirit? Would this not mean that there is no objective standard? If you have to get the meaning miraculously, what is the purpose of the written revelation? Those who heard Peter preach (Acts 2) heard and understood before the Holy Spirit was promised to them. Is it respectful to ask God for further revelations after He has given us His message already in the Bible? The implication that He would not clearly say what He meant in the written word is a reflection upon His wisdom.

Yet the Holy Spirit dwelling in us does help us to understand and to receive the spiritual message of God. We need to share the purpose and viewpoint of any author in order to understand him the best and always. The Spirit of Christ in us, making us to share in His purposes and concepts, gives us a psychological affinity with the divine author, even as the daily experiences of a Christian in work similar to the apostles could give us affinity with the human authors.

PRELIMINARY TRUTHS

Attention needs to be given to the basic principles by which we can understand the divine message which we have in the Bible. Some first principles need to be stated and remembered which are evident enough scarcely to need defense, but which are too often disregarded in the practice of Bible "interpretation."

1. *The true interpretation is what the author intended to say.* Interpreting the Bible is merely reading it so as to grasp fully and accurately what the author thought he expressed. The reason for his saying it, or all the implications of it, may not be understood; but if we by reading get as much thought from the author's mind as he intended to convey by his words, we have read well.

Exegesis is the application of the principles of interpretation to a particular text so that one understands the author's intended meaning when he wrote that text. *Exposition* means taking the author's intended meaning learned through exegesis and restating that truth in words understandable to people today.

Christians need to understand that the Bible writers had a meaning in mind, which we need to find. Everyone has a right to find the author's intended meaning, but no one has a right to give it a meaning that was not intended by the author. To seek for other meanings is not interpretation of the text, but is exploration of the subject on our own. To go beyond this in exposition it is necessary to know (or to assume to know) more than the writer knew, or at least more than he said at that time.

This principle is applicable whether the author is human or divine, and even when both are involved and the concept of the one is something less than the full meaning of the other. We cannot tell that God had any meaning or purpose beyond that in the mind of the human writer unless we have further revelation about it elsewhere, or unless perhaps the future course of events indicates that the statement had prophetic intent which its human author did not see.

Christians need to understand that the meaning of the Bible does not change. Men's understanding of some words or sentences may change; but the intended meaning of any Bible passage must always be just what the author of it had in mind and intended to express when he wrote it.

If the words of an English translation of the Bible change in their meaning, we must choose other words to use in our explanations of the text which will preserve the original meaning of God's revelation.

2. *God's word has one intended meaning, not many conflicting ones.* If we understand the Bible we must understand it alike, except for the difference in the degree of our conception. If there is much difference even in this we are not really understanding it.

The desire on the part of some to give a new and unusual

meaning to a verse is not interpretation. It is imaginative misinterpretation.

3. *God is able to say what He wants to say, and He knew to whom He was speaking.* Surely we should assume that God gave a message that is meaningful and comprehensible. Therefore, men who know the language in which it is given and any facts presupposed to be familiar to the readers should expect to be able to understand it with the same abilities by which they ordinarily understand written messages.

4. *The language of the Bible is the language of men, even when it is used to express divine truth; and it is to be interpreted by the same methods and principles as are appropriate for any other message of similar literary nature.* God has addressed the human mind in its natural state, in its own language with its own terminology and rhetorical forms.

First Corinthians 2:14 and II Peter 1:20 are often considered to teach something contrary to what we have just said; but a careful study of them in their contexts will show that they do not. First Corinthians 2:14 is speaking of the need of inspiration by apostles in their receiving the divine word to deliver to others; it is not speaking of reading it after it has been delivered in written form. This view is shown by the context both before and after the verse, and it is in harmony with all the scriptures which call upon men, women, children, masters and slaves to read the scriptures for themselves without any reference to special spiritual qualifications. In fact, it is the same message, whether spoken or written, which is the instrument of the Spirit in convicting the world and converting the carnal mind. Peter is also speaking of the *origin* of prophecies, of the writing, not the reading of them. His parallel expression in the next verse plainly shows this, and the Greek of II Peter 1:20 is best understood to mean: "No prophecy of scripture is of the prophet's own releasing (prompting, or impulse)" (personal translation).

Therefore, interpretation is not an esoteric art, known only to experts or mystics who have been initiated into its mysteries. In

fact, the use of language of words to convey meaning and to receive ideas is one of the most universal of all human practices. The principles of hermeneutics have been in use since Adam and Eve first received the power of speech and listened to the voice of God and to each other. Correct methods and good practices in interpretation are natural to the human mind and are used by everyone when we really want to find just what someone was trying to communicate in a piece of writing, and when we do not have any desire to make it mean one thing more than another. We can and do understand if we have a knowledge of the language used and the information supposed to be known to the reader.

The Bible has been considered so different in authority and purpose that methods of interpretation have been devised for it which no one would ever use for understanding a plain message in human language. Such methods could not be expected to yield right results because they are not governed by and limited to the actual forms of language used to express the author's ideas; but they draw upon the imagination of the interpreter (or other outside source of ideas) to supply meanings that the author's words themselves do not clearly signify. On the other extreme, but for similar reasons, many people do not expect to understand the Bible. They never undertake to read it as they ordinarily would any other book to find what it actually means. Their only contact with it is extremely irregular and unsystematic, limited mostly to picking a phrase here or a sentence there to use in any way that suits their fancy without any regard to its author's purpose, or any realization that each verse was actually intended to say one thing and nothing else.

5. *When any Bible passage is used for any other meaning than what the author intended to express by it, it is not what the inspired writer had in mind; therefore such meaning read into it does not have the authority of scripture.* It is the idea of a false interpreter instead of the idea of an inspired writer of truth. Such a use of any Bible passage is not only misrepresenting the most im-

portant body of truth in the world but it is also stealing the words of divine prestige to convey the ideas of human scalawags who, knowingly or unknowingly, are guilty of GRAND LARCENY!

Study Questions

1. Why is it not surprising that we misunderstand the Bible?
2. Why should we not rely on authoritative interpretations?
3. What is the one valid authoritative interpretation?
4. Can anyone understand the Bible?
5. How does the Holy Spirit help us understand the Bible?
6. What is the true interpretation of a sentence?
7. Show that I Corinthians 2:14 and II Peter 1:20 do not teach that we cannot understand the Bible.
8. Are the principles for understanding the Bible the same as the principles for understanding other literature?
9. Why is it wrong to give a Bible statement a meaning other than the meaning the author intended?

Project

Discuss the following questions:

Why do people often think they cannot understand the Bible?

Why do some people think it is wrong to use their mind to

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD, PART I

understand the Bible when it is right to use their minds to understand a letter written to them?

Do people read their Bible more when they believe they can understand it?

Do you like it when someone makes your words mean something other than what you intended?

How must God feel when men twist and distort the meaning of His words?

BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD, PART II

Seth Wilson

FIVE MAJOR AREAS OF UNDERSTANDING

The general principles of right interpretation can be summarized here under five headings: words, grammar, context, historical circumstances, and harmony of all truth. The study of these five master guides to understanding is *grammatical-historical interpretation*.

Words

First, we must recognize the meaning of the words. Words are the basic symbols of ideas. A word is accepted by a group of people as the sign of some thought or experience which they have in common, and which they are able to suggest to one another by it.

1. A word means whatever it is used to mean; and we must learn its meaning from its uses. It may be used for various meanings, by different people and in different areas or departments of knowledge. A good reader needs a broad and accurate knowledge of words that he may recognize any of their meanings. For this we need most accurate and complete dictionaries, and must supplement them by continual observation of the various uses of Bible words.

2. Investigation of word meaning must be made from the point of view of the author we are interpreting, giving attention to his special uses and to all uses nearest him in time, in territory, and in subject matter.

3. A writer's own explanation of his expressions is sufficient and final. We must not depart from what the author tells us he meant.

4. Words of the writer's original expression in his own language are always surer evidence of his meaning than words of any translation.

5. Etymologies of translation words must not be substituted for etymologies of those translated. The etymology of a word is the study of the root meaning of each of its component parts. For example: analyzing the root meanings of *repentance* does not properly explain the Greek word *metanoia*.

6. Words in any language are likely to change in meaning and to depart considerably from etymology: i.e. from the import of words from which they were derived.

7. Not only the kind of meaning, but also the extent of meaning or degree of force a word has is greatly affected by a) the connection it has with other words, b) the purpose of the author at the time, and c) the opposite which its user has in mind for it in each instance.

8. Words may be used either literally (with their usual meaning) or figuratively (to designate something quite different from what they usually name, but suggesting some vivid association or comparison between the two).

9. Figurative meaning, or any new meaning, should not be assumed by the reader if ordinary well-established meanings fit the passage being read.

Sentences

Second, we must interpret the grammatical structure of the sentences. Understanding grammar is an important part of interpreting the words in any sentence. Words are the bricks and boards of which a house of meaning is built; grammar is the design by which they are put together to make it a house instead of a heap. What the author thinks about the things designated by his words is shown by the grammar he uses; also the way he feels about them is indicated in the syntax. Even people who think they know no grammar do grasp the meaning of the most usual and simple grammatical constructions or they would not be able to read.

Most people who have studied a foreign language can remember instances of students' being able to give a meaning for every word in a sentence to be translated, yet being unable to translate it, to make meaning out of it. What was lacking was ability to perceive the relation of the words to each other and the meaning indicated by those relations: that is grammar, or syntax. There is meaning in syntax that is not found in any single word. There is meaning, meaning that must be perceived by the reader, in every different voice, mood, tense, number, person of the verb, also in every other inflection (different spelling to indicate the kind of grammatical connection) of any part of speech. One who cannot see the sentence construction and grasp its meaning cannot read what the author was thinking when he wrote it.

Anyone who has not had the experience of analyzing Bible sentences, and perhaps diagraming the analysis, ought to try it and see how it can clarify and determine definitely the interpretation.

There are many things to look for in grammar, such as: whether the sentence is a statement, question, or command; what the subject is; what noun a pronoun refers to; what the modifier modifies; whether the expression is singular or plural; and whether the clause expresses a purpose or a result; whether a modifying word or phrase is restricting and designating the noun it modifies or simply adding description without limiting its use in this sentence.

In English, word order and punctuation are often the main indication of grammatical connections. We must observe the punctuation marks and determine what they were used to indicate.

Context

Third, we must read in the light of the context and abide by its guidance. By means of careful attention to the paragraph, section, chapter, or book in which any expression occurs, we should: (1) perceive the subject of which the author is speaking and not apply his words to something far from his thought; (2) follow his course of thought or plan of presentation; (3) find his purpose for each word or phrase; (4) feel his own places and matters for emphasis, with the degree thereof; (5) see his mental or explicit antitheses so that the exact sense of his words is seen by the way they fit what he has in mind as the opposite of what he is saying. Of course, (6) for the context to be used properly it must be determined of what it really consists.

Some isolated passages, like many proverbs, may not have any context on the same subject. Some contexts are quite limited, others are extended, even to the full length of a book, or related books by the same author. A helpful context may be remote from the focus of attention, especially in the case of intervening digressions. The full context will usually supply some of the facts to be discussed under the next heading.

The very best method for learning to interpret by the context

(letting the author lead your mind in his line of thought) is to practice making a true outline of each book, section, or passage. Chapters are often convenient portions, but important sections may continue through more than one chapter or not end where the chapter does. Outlining is simply comprehension of the contents in their parts and the relation of each part with the rest. We should develop the habit of seeing the outline (contents and connections) of everything that we read.

Another good practice is to write a paraphrase stating briefly the main ideas of the passage you are studying. Then write longer paraphrases until you include all the content and indicate the intended connection of each of its parts. This does not need to be difficult to do, and it can be enjoyable. It will surely help you see each part in its context.

Historical Circumstances

Fourth, we must take into account all relevant historical circumstances. The meaning may be indicated, limited, or affected otherwise by any or all of the following particulars: Who wrote this? About what? In what form? To whom? When? Under what covenant? Under what personal circumstances? With what helps? For what purpose? What knowledge of the subject and of the readers did he have? What related facts did he suppose to be familiar to his readers?

Archaeology furnishes the answers to some of these questions. It also gives valuable help toward our understanding of the customs, times, and peoples referred to in the Bible.

Special questions of historical circumstances relate to ancient books like the Bible. Have they come down to us unchanged? Has the text suffered some alteration or loss? Is it an accurate and effective translation of the original? Is it the most accurate and clear translation that can be made?

Four key words label the four necessary parts of the study of

Biblical Introduction: *integrity*, the wholeness of the text as it was originally written; *genuineness*, the reality of its authorship; *authenticity*, the historical truthfulness or reliability of its contents; and *inspiration*, the divine origin of the message and guidance of the writer.

In the interpretation of predictive prophecy the surest guide is found by knowing the event that clearly fulfilled the prediction (e.g. Isa. 7;14; 53:1-12; Psalms 22).

Harmony of All Truth

Fifth, we must interpret in harmony with parallel passages and in the light of all Bible teaching on the same subject.

1. Any true statement must be consistent with all related inspired statements and established truths. An intelligent man will not knowingly contradict himself, although some may fail in this regard and make inconsistent statements. Inspired writings, if accurately preserved and correctly understood, will never conflict.

2. Hence, passages which are obscure or capable of more than one meaning must be interpreted to agree with those which are clear and definite in meaning.

3. Those which are general or incomplete in expression must be considered to include or make room for all specific statements on the same subject.

4. Every verse must be allowed to stand and speak its part and never be completely overshadowed or denied by another.

There is some danger in interpreting by means of parallels too exclusively, especially when an alleged parallel passage is practically pasted over one that is not allowed to say what it has to say.

5. Every passage must be read as fully as possible in its own context and by its own wording, or we cannot even tell whether another is parallel with it.

6. One cannot be a guide to or limitation on the meaning of

the other unless they treat of the same subject. The same words may be prominent in two passages and still not be on the same specific subject. Observe the meaning of *faith* in Romans 10:17 and 14:23.

7. A real knowledge of any Bible subject is formed by observing and comparing all the statements relating to that subject. There needs to be a true inductive investigation of all the truth.

INFERENCES AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE SCRIPTURE

Inference is the action of the mind which derives (deduces) from given statements what must be true if they are true. Often errors are committed, not in the simple reading of the Bible, but in the use made of it in constructing conclusions or systems of doctrine. Many devout persons seem able to put two and two together and get seven, when they devoutly feel that seven is more perfect religiously. Others look too much at the surface of things and they put two and two together and get twenty-two.

A favorite indoor sport is jumping to conclusions. One man's interesting speculation may be picked up by another and made a doctrine important in proportion to the respect he feels for the first man. We may be inclined to believe what a passage only suggests to our minds but does not prove in any sure way.

In order to comprehend and apply the full teaching of the Bible it is often necessary to draw some inferences or see the implications which are clearly associated with its words. In fact, we often intend to convey somewhat more thought than we formally express because we expect the hearer or reader to draw the necessary inferences. One clear statement, when understood and fully accepted, establishes in the mind all the immediate and necessary inferences such as the converse and obverse of the same, and refutes all which actually contradict it.

In a broad and practical sense we fully interpret a passage only when we can safely and accurately draw the immediate in-

ferences. In drawing even the simplest inferences our accuracy depends upon the correctness of our understanding of the original statement, not as it appears we may use it, but exactly as its author intended it.

On the one hand, it is not fair to dodge the clear, immediate inference of a God-given truth or command. On the other hand, although such inferences are binding on the conscience of the person who sees them, they must be regarded as human statements liable to human error. They may be taught as our conclusions and have some importance; but they must not be bound upon others as the actual words of scripture, or be made a test of fellowship excluding those who cannot see them as the real meaning of divine utterances.

Think through the following *principles* and try them out for truth:

1. No Bible verse can honestly be used as authority for anything except the one meaning it was intended to convey.
2. No statement denies anything except that to which it is essentially opposed.
3. A passage of scripture actually supports only that conclusion which must be true if it is true — only necessary inferences from its intended meaning — not merely possible or probable implications.
4. Analogies may clarify an affirmation, or indicate its probability, but they furnish no positive proof of any inferential conclusion.
5. There cannot be proof for more in the conclusion than is actually contained in the premises, or evidence from which the conclusion is drawn. (A *premise* is a statement of evidence from which a conclusion is drawn.)

If these were carefully observed, many faulty conclusions now common would be avoided.

Study Questions

1. List the five headings for the general principles of right interpretation.
2. What is the correct meaning of a word?
3. Distinguish between the literal and figurative meaning of a word.
4. What does it mean to analyze the grammar in a sentence?
5. What kind of things should one look for in grammar?
6. What is the context of a statement?
7. List six things to look for in establishing the context.
8. Why is it helpful to outline a passage, chapter or a book?
9. What basic questions help us establish the historical circumstances of a passage?
10. List and briefly define four words in the study of Biblical introduction.
11. A true statement will agree with all other true statements. Do you agree?
12. What is an inference?
13. What meaning of any Bible verse is the only authoritative one?

Project

List three or four rules under each of the five master guides to understanding. State them clearly in your own words. Type them on one sheet of paper or make a flip chart with a separate poster for each heading or make an overhead transparency for each heading.

Your arrangement should look like this:

I. WORDS

1. A word means what it is used to mean.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

II. SENTENCES

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

etc.

RESOURCES FOR BIBLE STUDY

Lynn Gardner

God communicated with man in human language. He expects us to read and understand His Word. Bible study is not just for professionals. Bible study is for all who want to know God and His will for their lives.

Religious leaders cannot perform our godliness for us. God created each person with a mind as a gift from Him. God's message of salvation is offered and addressed to all men. Our salvation is conditioned upon our individual response. Because of the importance of our relationship with God it is imperative that we seek to read with understanding His Word so we can obey His will.

Every person who can read basic literature can profitably read the Bible. Reading any book written in a culture and language different from one's own presents some difficulties. Readable, reliable translations of the Bible help us cross the language gap.

Valuable reference books are available to help us cross the historical and cultural gap in understanding the background of the Biblical events.

A contractor or carpenter has many specialized tools that the ordinary person will not own. But every household handyman needs some basic tools (such as, a hammer, saw and pliers). Preachers and Bible teachers should have an extensive library containing many helps for Bible study. But every Christian needs some basic resources for Bible study.

STUDY BIBLE

Every serious Bible student needs a standard, fairly literal translation of the Bible. When studying the Bible the reader wants to know as exactly as possible what God said through the original writers. One should select a version that accurately reflects the original meaning of the Hebrew and Greek texts. Accuracy and clarity are the most important standards in the translation chosen for a study Bible.

It is helpful to have a Bible which has the prose sections printed in paragraphs and the poetry printed in poetic form. The type size should be large enough for ease in reading. The lifetime of a Bible depends on the original quality of the cover, paper and binding, on frequency and carefulness in handling, and on exposure to sunlight and dampness. The most durable covers, genuine morocco or top grain cowhide, are more expensive but are worth it if one expects long use of a Bible.

A translation by a committee is usually to be preferred over a translation by an individual. A one-man translation is more likely to reflect his theological and cultural peculiarities. Of course a committee may share prejudices as well. The theological bias of the translators is often in translations, for example the Calvinism in the *King James Version*, liberalism in places in the *Revised Standard Version* (especially the Old Testament), and the

Jehovah Witness doctrines in the *New World Translation*.

A study Bible usually includes center references, an introduction to each book, a concordance, maps and sometimes a Bible dictionary. Study Bibles are available with minimal helps or extensive helps. More helps do not necessarily make the best study Bible. Choose the one with the helps you will use. One should avoid Bibles with notes offering doctrinal comments on the text. Some readers think the notes are inspired in the same way the Biblical text is inspired. Study Bibles with doctrinal notes often advocate their author's particular theology, for example the *Scofield Reference Bible* teaches dispensational premillennialism. A study Bible developed by several editors representing a broad range of backgrounds is usually a better choice.

The *New American Standard Bible (Reference Edition)* (Foundation Press; Collins-World; several publishers) provides a good choice. The center references, notes on word meanings and the brief concordance increase its usefulness. *The Master Study Bible* (Holman) adds many extra helps to the reference edition. The *New American Standard Bible* rates high in accuracy because it attempts to preserve the meaning of each word and phrase in the original. At times its readability suffers because of being overly literal. Continuity of thought is hindered by the fact that it is usually printed with each verse as a separate paragraph.

The *Revised Standard Version* is available in the *Harper Study Bible* (Zondervan). Harold Lindsell, former editor of *Christianity Today*, wrote the notes in this study Bible. This readable translation is weakened in a limited number of places especially in the Old Testament because of the liberal bias of the translators but it is one of the better choices for New Testament study.

Perhaps the most extensive study Bible using the *King James Version* is *The Thompson Chain Reference Bible* (Kirkbride Bible Co.). The *Dixon Analytic Bible* has the *King James Version* with the *American Standard Version* in brackets accompanied with many helps. The *New King James Bible* (Nelson) is available in a

reference edition. This updating of the KJV replaces obsolete words with words in current use.

The *New International Version Study Bible* (Zondervan) has the basic study Bible helps with notes, some doctrinal in nature, as well. *The NIV Thompson Chain Reference* is also available. The *New International Version* uses contemporary language with a high degree of readability, but in some places it sacrifices literal accuracy.

In addition to one's primary study Bible it is helpful to have another translation of the Bible. If a study Bible is chosen from the *New American Standard Bible*, the *Revised Standard Version*, or the *King James Version*, then the *New International Version* would be a good choice for a second version. Comparison with another version often enables one to have a better understanding of a passage.

A paraphrase, such as the *Living Bible* or the *Good News Bible* (TEV), is useful for a general grasp of a book or passage. But such paraphrases are not accurate enough to be recommended for a study Bible because so much of the translator's opinion is expressed in such an expanded translation.

In 1987 Moody Press published *The Discovery Bible: New Testament*. It uses the text of the *New American Standard Bible* and has a system of helps which enables the English reader to gain insight from the Greek original. One can learn what word or words conveys emphasis in the Greek. The mode of action expressed by Greek tenses can be learned. One can learn which Greek synonym underlies the English word.

BIBLE DICTIONARY

The *New International Dictionary of the Bible, Pictorial Edition*, edited by Merrill C. Tenney with J.D. Douglas as revising editor, has concise, conservative articles about Bible people, places, things and topics. For those wanting a more extensive

reference set, the five-volume *Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, edited by Merrill C. Tenney or *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Eerdmans) recently revised, would be good choices. A Bible encyclopedia is not limited to Bible words. It deals with any topic the editor feels is relevant to Bible study.

Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Revell, MacDonald) gives to the person who does not know the Greek language the most help in understanding New Testament words. Many Bible students testify that this is one of their most used and appreciated Bible study aids.

CONCORDANCE

Since there are about 31,000 verses in the Bible it is difficult at times to locate a verse. A concordance is a valuable study aid. A concordance has an alphabetical listing of the words used in the Bible and gives each reference where the word is used. A concordance serves two basic functions: locating the reference in the Bible where the statement is made and listing the references for each usage of the word in the Bible, a definite benefit in word and topic studies. Young's (Eerdmans) and Strong's (Abingdon) are the two standard exhaustive concordances. They list every time a word is used in the *King James Bible*. Thomas' *New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance* (Holman) is arranged in the same way as Strong's. Exhaustive concordances are available on other versions. See Chapter 10 for more information on the use of concordances and dictionaries.

BIBLE HANDBOOK

Halley's Bible Handbook has served as an invaluable tool for years and is still worthy as a reference work which gives

background, introduction, and survey of each Bible book. *The Eerdmans' Handbook to the Bible*, edited by David and Pat Alexander, provides much background information and is beautifully illustrated with color pictures. One limitation is its acceptance of some questionable positions (e.g., the late date for the exodus).

BIBLE SURVEY

Surveys give a brief discussion of the author, occasion and an overview of the contents of each Bible book. William S. Deal has given us a concise and reliable survey in his *Baker's Pictorial Introduction to the Bible*. For more detailed studies of this type I have found Samuel Schultz's *Old Testament Speaks* (Harper) and Merrill C. Tenney's *New Testament Survey* (Eerdmans) to be useful. For a survey of the historical section of the Old Testament, William Smith's *Old Testament History* (College Press) as rewritten and updated by Wilbur Fields is excellent.

BIBLE INTRODUCTION

Bible introduction concerns the origin, transmission of the text and authority of the Bible. The best up-to-date general book in this area is *A General Introduction to the Bible* by Norman Geisler and William Nix (Moody). (This material is condensed in *From God to Us*.) The following books are good, nontechnical works addressed to the general reader: Neil Lightfoot, *How We Got the Bible* (Abilene Christian University Press); William Kimball, *The Book of Books* (College Press); Paul Little, *Know Why You Believe* (InterVarsity; Scripture Press); and Lewis Foster, *Selecting a Translation* (Standard).

Of technical introductions, Gleason Archer's *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Moody) and Donald Guthrie's *New Testament Introduction* (InterVarsity) are recommended.

BIBLE STUDY METHODS

J. Ridley Stroop's *Why People Do Not See the Bible Alike* (20th Century Christian) is a fine Biblical study stressing that the spirit of the Bible student must be one of humility, open-mindedness and honesty in seeking to learn what God has had to say in His word. Robert Palmer's *How to Understand the Bible* (College Press) gives an excellent survey of the basic principles of interpretation. T. Norton Sterrett in *Understanding and Applying the Bible* (Moody) clearly states good principles, but in a few places he adopts doctrinally questionable positions. Knofel Staton's *How to Understand the Bible* (Standard) is good on motivation and method.

BIBLE COMMENTARIES

One should not be a slave of any Bible teacher or commentary. What is said or written must be evaluated in the light of facts and common sense. The reference books listed in this chapter will greatly aid you in coming to the understanding of the meaning of Bible passages through your own study.

Some Christian leaders, who consider their own opinions as infallible, teach against the use of commentaries. How could it be proper to hear oral explanations of the meaning of a Bible text but then it becomes wrong to read written explanations in a commentary? It is good to consult commentaries and learn what others have thought about the meaning of a passage. Just as it is unwise to reject all commentaries as unnecessary, it is also unwise to unthinkingly accept everything a commentary says. It is dangerous to always let others do our thinking for us. Do not be content to be spoon-fed the Bible.

A commentary can suffer from certain flaws. It can be too long so that the direct meaning of the text is lost in the many words used to explain it. Often commentators practice *grasshop-*

per exegesis. They explain the obvious and jump over difficulties without a word of help. A good commentary must avoid the extremes of being shallow and superficial or of being excessively technical. Watch for doctrinal bias in commentaries.

A good commentary will help the student see how the Biblical author has developed his subject and how each section relates to the overall plan and purpose of the book. The commentator should study the meaning of words and sentences in the light of the historical setting. He should explain words and customs that are unfamiliar to the general reader. Other scriptures should be used to throw light on the text being explained. The reader should be informed of false teachings that are mistakenly based on the text. The reader should be helped to see the true doctrine taught in the text and how its truth applies to us today.

As one advances in Bible study he or she will want to purchase some commentaries. Sets of commentaries are often uneven in quality so one may choose to select the best commentary available on the Bible book currently being studied. Choose quality rather than quantity. It is better to have one or two good commentaries on a Bible book rather than to have three or four poor ones. If possible before buying, read enough in the book to know you are going to find it of value to you. Make sure the author is Bible-believing and competent in his explanation of the meaning of the scriptures. If you have not studied the original languages don't buy a technical commentary even if a preacher or teacher raves about it.

Use a commentary as a tool to help you better understand the Biblical author's intended meaning. No commentary is infallible or has final authority. Use commentaries as aids to assist you as you use your own mind and common sense to intelligently read and understand God's Word. (See the booklist, pp. 143-159.)

FIVE BASIC BOOKS

The following five books would be a good beginning of

resources for rewarding Bible study; *New American Standard Bible (Reference Edition)*; *The New International Dictionary of the Bible*; *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*; *Halley's Bible Handbook*; and Robert Palmer's *How to Understand the Bible*. Many would not spend money for Bible study resources yet they would spend the same amount on a trip to Six Flags or to a major league baseball game. It's a matter of priorities.

Visit and browse in a Bible book store. Question those who have used the books. Make a list of those books you would like to have in your library. Make the list available and drop hints for birthday and Christmas.

The Bible is an inexhaustible gold mine of God's precious promises and wonderful truths. Some people only know of these treasures secondhand. Do not settle for second best. Secure the tools and dig into the mine for yourself.

Study Questions

1. Why is it important that we learn to study the Bible for ourselves?
2. What should one look for in a study Bible?
3. Why is a translation made by a committee to be preferred over that made by an individual?
4. What is the danger of doctrinal notes in a study Bible?
5. What four translations are listed as the text for a study Bible?
6. Why is a paraphrase not a good choice for a study Bible?
7. What dictionary is helpful for the Bible student to understand New Testament words?

8. What is a concordance and what are its uses?
9. What Bible handbook has been a standby for years?
10. What topics are studied in Bible introduction?
11. What should be one's attitude toward Bible commentaries?
12. List some flaws in poor commentaries and strong qualities of good commentaries.
13. What guidelines are given to be considered in purchasing a commentary?
14. What five books are recommended as a beginning Bible study library?

Project

Make a list of twelve books you would like to have in your Bible study library. Talk with your preacher or a Bible teacher. Visit a Bible book store. Learn the name of the author or editor, the title of the book, the publisher and the price.

Choose one book for each of these categories: study Bible; other translation; Bible dictionary; concordance; Bible handbook; Bible survey; Bible introduction; Bible study methods.

Choose four commentaries that you believe would be a help to you in your study.

Itemize your information in this fashion:

| | Author | Title | Publisher | Price |
|-------------------|--------|-------|-----------|-------|
| Study Bible | | | | |
| Other Translation | | | | |
| etc. | | | | |

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

Seth Wilson

"How to" could refer to programs, methods and helps, or to principles and skills and practices by which it is done right. Various methods are available. But the goal remains the same: to understand what God offers us and teaches us, and to use it to please Him and to glorify Him. In this chapter we will not deal so much with methods as with principles and practices which lead to correct interpretation and use of the Bible.

However, principles and rules will not do the work for you. They do help to guide our efforts. They are guidelines which keep us from wandering away from the paths in which true communication is made in the form of human language.

METHODS WITH WHICH TO START

1. *Set a time for study;* put it into your schedule where less

important things cannot continually crowd it out.

2. *Prepare a place.* It helps to have favorable conditions and a place where your habits of study grow.

3. *Get some tools. A Bible you can read.* Constantly comparing different translations can be of much value. Alternate wordings help to bring the right idea to mind. Their agreements indicate what is clear and sure in the text. *Get a Bible printed in paragraphs.* Avoid ones printed with each verse indented and capitalized as if it were a paragraph. If you use one like this, be very diligent to note where real paragraphs begin. Do not read each verse as a separate unit of thought. Read whole sentences, and read them in their connections with one another in the continuing line of the author's thought. You will discover that many wrong ideas have become common by the practice of trying to amplify and apply one verse without seeing the author's line of thought in which that one verse is only a limited part of his expression. (The American Bible Society has Bibles in the King James Version in paragraphs. The Holman Bible Company has New American Standard Bibles paragraphed, in at least one edition, a high quality paperback at a reasonable price.)

Bible dictionaries can help, and occasionally they mislead. Human reference books are not infallible. Bible handbooks usually give helpful information about each book of the Bible, which can add significantly to a reader's interest and understanding.

4. *Work on a plan;* and set some goals. Make these flexible.

5. *Make notes.* Provide notebooks or files for making, keeping, and using notes on your studies.

6. *Give adequate attention.* Be diligent and persistent.

7. *Review and use what you have learned.*

8. *Find and correct your mistakes as you learn more.*

9. *Study together.* It is helpful to study the Bible with other Christians. We actually understand it better when we try to help others see in the language what the author was saying. Interest in helping each other furnishes a good Christian motivation for effort and encouragement when the work might seem dull or get

neglected. God intended for us to learn and practice His teachings in fellowship with one another.

RIGHT ATTITUDES FOR BIBLE STUDY

1. *Desire to know what the Bible teaches.*

2. *Expect to find something understandable.* Expect to learn and to use what God gives to us. Use your intelligence to see each truth. Then put together in your mind all the ideas and facts with expectation of building up an increasing comprehension.

3. *Be willing to let it be what it is and say what it actually was meant to say.* You may wisely investigate the evidence that the Bible is the Word of God, but we should not read it with the attitude that we can judge the truth of God's Word, rejecting what we do not like and refusing to learn from it what we did not know before. We cannot tell God when He is right or wrong. He must tell us.

4. *Have a humility and honesty* that is not willing to dictate to the Bible what it should say, or to distort its intended meaning. We should actually distrust our own thinking more than we distrust any clear message from the Bible.

5. *Find the facts before you form your views.* Do not form a view and then look only for the words and phrases which seem to support your view.

6. *Seek answers to questions from the Bible itself, honestly read.* Be not satisfied with human traditions, especially when they seem to be poorly supported by the texts attached to them.

7. *Have confidence that it is true,* that it is consistent and harmonious, that it was meant to be understood, so that we patiently keep on reading in hope of understanding and getting it together.

8. *Recognize that it is a covenant from God* for us to receive and to live by, for us to rely upon for our future inheritance and for victories in this present life.

9. *Realize that the Bible writers had a meaning in mind,*

which we need to find; that anyone has a right to find the author's intended meaning, but no one has a right to give it a meaning that is different. The original meaning does not change, although our understanding of it may improve, or the current usage of its words and sentences may be different. If the words by which we have translated the Bible (or expressed its meaning) change in meaning among people to whom we speak, then we must choose other words to use in our expositions which will preserve the original meaning of God's revelation.

THE RIGHT INTERPRETATION

The right interpretation is what the author intended to say. Our goal is to read the thinking expressed for us by one who had a meaning in mind. At least at first, we should be thinking not of our desires or what the word does to us, but of making good use of the author's language in which he is giving us truth and understanding. Interpreting is not elaborating and explaining (certainly not revising) what the author said; it is getting the message given to us. Further investigation of the subject of the message may be desirable after we have read it, even may help us to be sure how well we read it. But the interpretation, strictly speaking, is simply reading well what he wrote.

Much that has been called "interpretation" of the Bible has been based on the assumption that it could not be taken at face value, that it did not express directly and plainly what is true or what we ought to believe about it. Men have tried to find behind its words a "meaning" different from that which was expressed. Some of these men reject its claim to be a supernatural revelation from God. They "interpret" a statement of fact as not a report of what happened but as a clever fable, the real meaning of which must be decided on the basis of our philosophy of reality, not in accord with the sober statements of the Biblical writers. This kind of "interpretation" begins with rejection of the account and

its obvious meaning, then tries to make it into something it was never intended to be.

There are others who believe the Bible has supernatural origin, but with special hidden meanings beyond what is openly expressed by its language. Any interpretation is unreliable which takes a meaning from somewhere outside the passage and drags it into the passage instead of finding the author's message in his words.

IDENTIFYING THE AUTHOR'S INTENDED MEANING

He expressed it for us in his words, in the form of his sentences (the way the words are put together in relation to each other) — which is his syntax, and in the line of thought followed in the context or the course of his writing. We can improve our concept of his ideas by knowing the circumstances of his situation and finding his purposes or aims for writing. We can test the accuracy of our ideas by comparison of parallel passages, other statements on the same subject by equal authority.

The true interpretation is the one that *fits* the author, the readers intended, the situation addressed, the words as used, the grammar of his sentences, the course of thought, the antitheses which he expressed or implied, the rest of the Scripture. When we find a meaning which fits so well and seems so surely the only one which can fit in all ways, we get the feeling that this interpretation is necessary, the only one which we must believe to be true. Any interpretation which is not at all necessary is highly doubtful.

Interpretation by strictly reading the author's sentences is rather like playing a mental game of "follow the leader." If we follow exactly the path he takes, we share his experiences in it. If we go off the path of thought which he marks out for us, we break the rules of the game, because by doing this we do not share his experiences. We tend to become another leader instead of a

faithful follower. When we take off on our own line of thought instead of following his, we are writing our own script in competition with him. Using his words for our ideas instead of his meaning is not fair, not skillful, not intelligent, not honest. Try hard not to step out of his tracks. The better you know the leader and the ground he is covering, the better you can follow.

HELPFUL PRACTICES

1. *Make a preliminary study of the book.* Find out as well as you can who wrote it? To whom? When? For what purpose? To fit what situation? Under what covenant or dispensation of divine grace?

2. *Read in quick survey,* an airplane view of the whole book, to find the subjects dealt with, the general plan of coverage, the main emphasis and central idea of the whole, and indications of the author's purpose.

3. *Make an outline* of the main sections and line of development.

4. *Read a section to find the question being dealt with,* and look for all the answers you can find.

5. *Note any words, phrases, or ideas that are difficult to understand,* so that you may look them up in reference books and watch for them in further reading, or discuss them with other students.

6. *Observe the punctuation and follow the grammatical structure of the sentences.* Not words, but sentences are the real units of meaning. The meaning and force of a word is greatly affected by the connection which it has with other words, by the purpose of the author at the time, and by the opposite which he has in mind for it in each instance. Words are the bricks and boards of which a house of meaning is built; grammar is the design by which they are put together to make a house instead of a heap. What the author thinks about things designated by his words is

shown by the grammar he uses. His sentence structure also show how he feels about the things of which he is speaking.

7. *Look for the author's line of thinking*, the particular area of thought which he has in view. Keep your thoughts within the frame of the window he is opening for you with his sentences and line of thought.

8. *One of the best practices for studying any book or section is to make outlines of it and write a shortened paraphrase of what it is trying most to say.* Then keep improving the outline and keep expanding the paraphrase to say all that he said with the same purpose and emphasis in mind.

9. *Let the Bible interpret the Bible.* Improve your understanding of a word by observing all its uses and meanings in the Bible, noting the differences in separate passages, and not expecting a word to mean the same thing every time. Add to your concept of one passage what another passage says on the same subject; but be careful not to use one passage to cover up another and keep it from saying what it was intended to say. Let each passage say what it has to say and thus fill out our understanding of the subject with which they deal.

Keep on practicing, growing and accumulating a true knowledge and understanding of God's Word.

Study Questions

1. List nine steps suggested for an approach to a method of study.
2. What nine attitudes will help one be a better interpreter?
3. How does one's expectation influence what he or she learns from personal study?
4. What should we distrust before we distrust the message of the Bible?

5. "Anyone has a right to find the author's intended meaning, but no one has a right to give it a meaning that is different." What does this statement mean?
6. What is the right interpretation?
7. Show how some use the word *interpretation* to mean finding a meaning other than what the author intended.
8. The true interpretation is the one that fits what eight things?
9. How is interpretation like "follow the leader"?
10. What nine practices are helpful as one conducts a study of a Bible book?
11. How should one let the Bible interpret the Bible?

Project

Write a brief description of your current method of Bible study.

List ten methods, attitudes or practices discussed in this chapter which you intend to use in your personal Bible study.

LEARNING FROM BIBLE BOOKS

Lynn Gardner

When a man moves to a new job with a new company he has to learn about that job. He will learn in several ways. He may be taken on a survey of the whole company where he will meet the people, get acquainted with the physical plant and see the whole operation. Next, he may learn more thoroughly the procedures and personnel in his department. Another level of learning will be detailed instruction on how to run the four-color press he will operate.

Each method of investigation was from a different vantage point. Learning about his job from these three approaches would give him a better understanding of it.

Our understanding of the Bible can be enriched by using various methods of Bible study. Studying books as a whole helps one see the total message of the book. Detailed study of a passage helps to carefully understand and apply what the author

is saying in a given text. Word and topic studies enable the reader to begin to acquire a more in-depth knowledge of the basic concepts God has revealed to us in Scripture.

The Bible is the Word of God. James says "receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21). The inspired Word of God provides what is necessary that "the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (I Tim. 3:17). The psalmist emphasized the necessity of knowing God's Word:

How can a young man keep his way pure?
By guarding it according to thy word.
With my whole heart I seek thee;
let me not wander from thy commandments!
I have laid up thy word in my heart,
that I might not sin against thee (Psa. 119:9-11).

Learning from your Bible is essential to your spiritual growth.

Every Christian can be a Bible student. There are no Bible scholars who have mastered the Bible — just some Bible students who have been studying longer or more effectively than others. Chapters seven through ten will present three methods or approaches to Bible study that will help you learn from your Bible.

God has revealed Himself and His will for man in the Bible. God has appointed no special official interpretation of the Bible. He designated no college, publishing house, or book as having the authoritative interpretation of the Bible. Each Christian should bring a desire to learn God's truth, the spirit of an honest investigator, the willingness to work, and a heart that wants to understand and obey.

INDUCTIVE STUDY

One has read correctly when he has understood the author's intended meaning. Readers must let the facts give them the ideas.

Let the words themselves supply the meaning. This approach to study is sometimes called inductive because it does not assume a meaning and then go to the text and try to make it say that. As Bible students it is not our job to create or originate truth, rather it is our responsibility to discover and understand the truth that is already in the text.

In reading the Bible we must not start with conclusions and then search for scriptures to prove our point. Of course we usually approach a subject with some thoughts already formed about the matter. It is best when we realize what our starting opinions are, then openly and honestly look at the evidence to clarify and correct our thinking on the subject in the light of the facts.

A Bible student should not start with an official statement of what the text means. Rather he should look at all the data in the text and seek to understand what it means. "Just as a detective studies the scene of a crime to gather clues as to what has actually happened, so the individual student examines all the relevant material that he has to seek to uncover the truth of the passage" (William C. Lincoln, *Personal Bible Study*. Bethany Fellowship, 1975, p. 21).

Common sense demands that we look at all the relevant facts and then from them draw our understanding as to meaning. Learning from your Bible by practicing this approach to searching the scriptures will result in "rightly handling the word of truth" (II Tim. 2:15).

INDUCTIVE BOOK STUDY

Gaining an understanding of a Bible book as a whole is important because originally it was written to real people in a specific historical situation. Studying the whole book forces the reader to see each part of the book in the light of the context of the historical setting and the overall theme of the book.

It is common to study a book verse-by-verse. While this is a

valuable and important method it can result in losing sight of the forest because of attention to a few tree branches. Some of the following methods of book study could be used as a good introduction to verse-by-verse study.

In an inductive study of a Bible book one reads the entire book in each study session looking for specific things. The desired data are recorded on paper as the book is read. The book will be read several times looking for different information each time. Shorter books work well with this type of study because they can be read quickly.

Inductive study of Bible books is profitable for individual personal study. Group study can be exciting following this approach. The leader makes the assignment of what to look for in the reading of the book. The class period consists of students sharing the fruits of their research. The leader does not lecture on the book, rather he guides the discussion as the students share what they have found from their reading of the book.

In this chapter five methods of learning from a Bible book are described and then illustrated from the book of Galatians. Choose a short Bible book. After the description of each method is read, study the chosen book according to that method.

SEEING THE WHOLE

It is best to begin a book study by reading through the book several times. The first reading should be rapid reading seeking to learn the main thrust or central theme of the book. The book should be seen as a whole without worrying about details.

A second and third reading will help one clarify the main theme, see the basic outline of the book and perhaps find a key verse. It helps to record these findings on paper. With each reading the overall picture grows clearer.

Reading the book of Galatians in this fashion yielded the following information:

The theme for the book of Galatians might be Christian Liberty, or Justification by Faith, or Walking by the Spirit. Possible key verses might be Galatians 5:1 or 2:20. The book falls into three divisions with two chapters in each:

Defense of apostolic authority — 1 & 2;

Explanation of justification by faith — 3 & 4;

Practical application of Christian freedom — 5 & 6.

It is important not to rely on anyone else's theme or outline. Each student should read the book himself. He must decide what he believes is the theme, key verse and basic outline. In this way each person learns far more.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BOOK

Learning about the historical background of a book enhances one's understanding of it. The entire book should be read again looking for answers within the book to the following questions: Who is the author? To whom is it addressed? Where was it written? When was it written? What type of literature is the book? Why was the book written?

Other scriptures may shed light on the historical background of a book. Center column references may guide the reader to related passages. A Bible dictionary provides information on a book's historical, geographical and cultural background.

From the book of Galatians we know the churches of Galatia were addressed by Paul the author. We learn of the changeableness of the people in Galatians 1:6; 3:1,10. The study of Galatians in the light of Acts 13-18 helps one in investigating the time and place of writing. The book deals with the problem of certain Jewish false teachers who opposed Paul's gospel and insisted that one must be circumcised and keep the law in order to be saved. Paul combats this false teaching by defending his

authority, by explaining justification by faith, and by showing that Christian liberty is neither legalism nor license.

PERSONS IN THE BOOK

Biographical material is important spiritual food. God filled the Bible with history of the lives of people. Personal examples can lead us to recognize our sins and motivate us to repent. They can help us avoid pitfalls. They can inspire and challenge us to walk the high road of holy living. Principles can be learned by observing persons.

In a biographical study of a book one should read through the book noting facts about every person or group of persons mentioned. All the biographical information should be gleaned from the book and itemized under each name. Lessons can be drawn from these personal examples.

The book of Galatians contains much biographical information about Paul. In the first two chapters he makes an autobiographical defense of the authority of his message. Almost every verse of chapter one throws some light on Paul as a person. Paul refused to be a men-pleaser, but stood boldly for the truth. He was concerned for the poor. Many other lessons can be learned from Paul's life as revealed in the book of Galatians.

Note the following verses for other biographical information: the Galatian people (Gal. 1:6; 3:1; 4:10,12-15; 4:17; 5:7; 5:10,12; 6:12); Barnabas (2:1,9,13); Titus (2:1,4); Peter (2:7,9,11-16); James (2:9,12); John (2:9).

TOPICS IN THE BOOK

In the course of a book certain topics and subjects recur. In topical study of a book one should select three or four doctrinal topics in the book, these topics should be listed as headings on

sheets of paper. As the book is read one can itemize under each heading all the information in the book under each heading. Statements should be read in context. The goal of topical study is to reconstruct the unified teaching of the book on each topic.

The Galatian letter deals with doctrinal issues. Much can be learned by researching for what is taught about God, Christ, Holy Spirit and salvation by faith and not works of law.

In a topical study of Philippians, joy would be a natural choice for a topic. The topic of joy could be subdivided in this way: characteristics of joy; things for which Paul rejoiced; and circumstances in which one should rejoice.

Collecting the teaching of a book on a topic is only a means to the end of understanding what God says on that subject. Meditation and understanding of the truth leads us to accept his truth in our hearts and to decide to practice this truth in daily life.

PRACTICAL LESSONS FROM THE BOOK

In practical and devotional study the reader looks for lessons, principles and guidelines. One should make two headings: 1. Lessons for living with our fellowman; 2. Lessons for walking closer with God. These practical and devotional truths overlap with material studied in the other methods and reinforce them in the reader's mind.

The first two chapters of Galatians have insights on fellowship, remembering the poor, receiving a preacher, answering false charges, and dealing with false teachers and those falsely taught. Chapters five and six have many lessons on how not to treat one another as well as the right attitude and actions in our dealings with our fellowman.

Wonderful instruction for godly living is found in verses such as these: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself

for me" (Gal. 2:20). "Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another" (5:13). "Walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh" (5:16). "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted" (6:1).

Studying Bible books in the manner suggested in this chapter is exciting and edifying. With each rereading new truth is discovered which was overlooked before. As one reads looking for specific information his eyes are opened to what the book says on each topic much more than in casual reading. Give this method a try, it will add variety and depth to your Bible study.

Study Questions

1. How can one be enriched by several methods of Bible study?
2. What does this chapter say is essential to salvation and spiritual growth?
3. What percentage of Christians should be Bible students? What percentage of Christians are Bible students? Why?
4. Describe inductive study.
5. Compare inductive study with the work of a detective.
6. What is the value in studying a Bible book as a whole?
7. How can one make an inductive study of a Bible book?
8. List and briefly describe each of the five methods of studying a Bible book.
9. What is the value of biographical study?

10. Why should one reread a book several times while he or she is studying it?

Project

Choose a short Bible book and teach it to a small group Bible study, a Bible class or one's family. Follow the approach described in this chapter. You may want to select a very short book like Titus or Philemon.

Be sure you clearly tell the class members what to look for in each reading of the book. Let each participant express to the whole group what he or she has discovered from reading the book. Motivating everyone to participate is the key to the success of this kind of study. Help each person learn the joy of discovery. In the class discussion it is profitable to learn from what others have observed that which you may have missed in your reading.

LEARNING FROM BIBLE PASSAGES PART I

Lynn Gardner

What a delight to enjoy a good meal! A delicious and nutritious meal takes planning and effort. Someone must acquire the skill, gather the ingredients, do the planning, and prepare and serve the meal.

What a delight to enjoy a good meal from a paragraph of scripture! What a blessing is a sermon or lesson that leads the hearers to understand and apply the author's intended meaning in a passage of Scripture.

Every Christian can follow basic steps and guidelines and come to an understanding of a Bible passage through his own study.

The writers of the Bible did not divide their books into chapters and verses. The modern chapter and verse divisions were introduced over a thousand years after the writing of the last book in the Bible. Therefore in studying a section of Scripture it is

best to ignore chapter and verse divisions and seek to see the natural paragraph divisions.

Careful, inductive study of a passage or a paragraph is important in personal study and in preparing for a lesson, a sermon or a devotion. Even in verse-by-verse study each verse should be read in the context of its paragraph or section.

The purpose of this chapter is set forth ten steps in the study of a Bible passage. The goal of our Bible study is understanding the truth the author intended to communicate and obeying that truth in our daily lives.

In order to gain the most benefit from this chapter choose a Bible passage to use as your laboratory experiment. As one best learns swimming by swimming, not reading about it, one best learns how to do Bible study by doing it. Select an important passage consisting of three to five verses. After each section in this article is read then do that step in the study of your chosen passage. It will take time but it is worth it. By doing a careful, thorough study of a passage you will develop a method of study which will be a valuable skill for you in all your Bible study.

OBSERVATION

In the study of a text we must first look, look, look. The reader must give his mind credit for being able to learn the meaning. One should not begin by going to his preacher or a commentary. He should determine to learn everything he can from the passage.

The passage should be read several times with the object of learning exactly what is said. What is observed should then be itemized on paper. Writing it down forces you to be more exact in your thoughts and aids the memory. The passage should be approached as if it were seen for the first time. As the passage is read each piece of information should be recorded as it unfolds.

Making observations does not mean simply rewriting,

paraphrasing or summarizing the text. It is not just writing what one has heard from others. One should write down only what he sees stated or implied in the text. Key words and connecting words such as *if*, *but* and *therefore* should be noted. Attention should be given to any unusual or significant grammatical structures. Note the type of literature.

The passage should be reread many times. Each reading may yield new information overlooked in previous readings. One may set the project aside and return to reading it again. Look. Concentrate. Think. It is amazing how much more can be seen in a passage when one keeps looking.

QUESTION

In this step factual questions should be asked about what has been observed. Such questions can be the bridge leading from what is stated to the goal of understanding what is meant by what is said.

One should ask all the "who" questions he can. Who are the persons named in the text? Who is speaking? To whom? About whom? To whom do the pronouns such as *he* and *they* refer? Is a promise or command limited to a certain people or time?

Next, ask "when" did the event occur? Is there any mention of time — day, week or year? Does any statement such as "eight days later" relate the incident in time to other events?

"Where" did the event occur? What is said in the text about the city or area and the lay of the land? Seek to learn any information about direction, distance and relationship with named landmarks.

"What" questions may deal with the meaning of words and with the grammatical relationships between words. Single out key words and answer these questions. What does each one mean? What do the tenses convey? What word is modified by what? What type of literature is the passage — history, doctrine or

poetry?

"Why" questions probe for reasons and purpose. Why did the author write this paragraph? Why did he write in the manner he did? Why did he place it in this position in his book?

Ask your passage all the questions you can. Don't try to answer all these questions at this point in your study. Some answers will be obvious. Some will be found in further study. The answers to some of our questions may not be found in this life. But asking good questions as you read helps your mind to focus on intended meaning.

WORDS

In this step one should try to learn the meaning of each word in the passage. One does not have to be a Greek scholar before he can do competent Bible study.

Other translations can function as a dictionary in defining and clarifying words which may be obscured in one's own translation. A good exercise is to list the main words in the text down the left hand side of a paper. Then list how several other versions translate each word.

In the chart on page 77 other translations help one understand the words used in Ephesians 4:19, King James Version.

A person who does not know Greek can still learn the meaning of the Greek words by using the *New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance*, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* or *Young's Analytical Concordance* and *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*.

Several questions need to be asked about each key word. Is it literal or figurative? Is it limited or unlimited in meaning? Does it have its usual meaning or is it used with an unusual or technical meaning?

A word means what it is used to mean. From the usage in the passage one should try to understand what the author used the word to mean.

LEARNING FROM BIBLE PASSAGES, PART I

| King James Version | Revised Standard Version | New American Standard Bible | New International Version | New English Bible | Good News Bible |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| "Who being <i>past feeling</i> | callous | callous | having lost all sensitivity | dead to all feeling | lost all feeling of shame |
| have given themselves over unto <i>lasciviousness</i> | licentiousness | sensuality | sensuality | abandoned themselves to vice | give themselves over to vice |
| to work all <i>uncleanness</i> | uncleanness | impurity | impurity | stop at nothing to satisfy | do all sorts of indecent things |
| with <i>greediness.</i> " (Eph. 4:19) | greedy | greediness | continued lust for more | their foul desires | without restraint |

A concordance, or center references in a study Bible can direct one to other Bible uses of a given word. More information on word study will be given in Chapter 10.

SENTENCES

Thoughts are expressed in words. Words are the basic units or building blocks of thoughts. Words are arranged into sentences in order to convey the thought intended. To correctly understand the meaning of a sentence we need to understand how words are related to each other.

Each sentence should be read carefully. What is the subject of the sentence? What is asserted about the subject? Is something suggested about the time or manner of the action? Try to see what function each word has in the sentence.

Determine if the sentence is a statement of fact, a question, a command or an exclamation. Identify the persons, places or things referred to by pronouns such as *he*, *they* and *it*. If possible diagram the sentence to see more exactly what the sentence is really saying.

The grammar of the sentence in an English translation may not perfectly reflect the grammar of the original language. However, the standard translations generally do an adequate job of faithfully restating in our language what the original language conveyed. Comparing translations will often help when the arrangement of the sentence or the wording in one's own translation is unclear.

Each statement of fact should be read understanding its logical force. Hasty generalization and other illogical conclusions must be avoided. For example, we should not infer from "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:30) that repentance and baptism are not required for salvation. It is also wrong to conclude from "God is love" (I John 4:8) that love is God. Let each verse say what it says and logically implies, not more, not less.

CONTEXT

The immediate context of a word or sentence is made up of the words or statements surrounding it. A word means what an author in a given statement uses it to mean. Merely going to a dictionary to find the definition of a word does not establish what it means in a given passage.

The word *cross* can mean many things. The usage in a sentence determines meaning in each case. Notice how the surrounding words made clear its meaning in each sentence. "Jesus died on a cross." "Do not cross the street." "Why is he so cross this morning?" "Don't cross her, she is in a bad mood." "Her necklace has a gold cross." "Joe's blindness was a cross he had to bear."

The whole book is a context in a larger sense. To interpret in the light of context, the whole book should be read which contains the passage under study. The reader should look for the overall theme and basic outline of the book. Seek to learn how

this passage fits in with the purpose and plan of the book.

Determine the subject under discussion in the section of the book where your passage appears. How does the passage fit into the development of this subject? Is the text a parenthetical expression or does it express the main thought of the section? Does it build upon what is stated before? For example, the Sermon on the Bread of Life in John 6 builds on the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 (John 6).

One must make sure his understanding of the passage fits with what the author is saying in his book. A correct understanding grows out of the passage. Meaning forced onto a text is illegitimate and unreliable.

HISTORICAL SETTING

Information concerning historical setting can be gained from these sources: the book containing the passage; other Bible books; a Bible dictionary and a Bible handbook.

One should try to learn everything he can about the historical setting and the origin of the book. Who wrote the book? To whom did he write? What problem or situation occasioned the book? What is the purpose of the book? What kind of literature is the book — history, doctrine or poetry? Where was the author when he wrote? What do we know about the location of those addressed in the book? When was the book written? Was the book written during the Mosaic or Christian dispensation?

Next, investigate the historical setting of the events in your text. A knowledge of the geographical setting and social customs can bring a passage to life and help one to appreciate the historical reality of the events.

Note in the text who is speaking and to whom they are speaking. The Bible records what the devil says, but what he says is not God's truth on the subject. Do not quote Job's friends as giving God's final truth because in the book of Job God condemns what

the friends said as wrong. The reaction of the person or persons addressed at times can give a clue to the meaning of a question or a statement.

From the text itself learn everything you can about the location where the event occurred. Then search for other Biblical information and consult a Bible dictionary. The Bible talks about going up to Jerusalem even when the person was heading south because Jerusalem is built on mountains.

As one studies the Bible it is helpful to learn about the rulers and the political situation and the social customs, such as in betrothal and marriage, and the economic practices, such as the nomadic shepherd in Abraham's day and the Roman slavery system in the first century.

One should vividly reconstruct in his mind the events of the passage. Knowing about fish nets, ovens and leaven, etc., can greatly aid one's enjoyment and understanding of Jesus' teaching. Bible history can come to life when you realize the people really lived in actual places.

OTHER SCRIPTURES

All truth ultimately harmonizes. Most of the time God did not locate, in one passage, all His revealed truth on a subject. Most study Bibles have center references or cross references. They will direct the reader to other passages that relate to a given text. The choice of the center references was made by the editor of the study Bible, not by the inspired author. At times these choices reflect bad judgment but usually they are helpful.

Strictly speaking, parallel passages must deal with the same event or subject. Not every passage is a parallel passage that uses the same word. In one passage the word may be used with a different meaning. Do not impose a meaning upon the passage because of an idea you are importing from a supposed parallel.

One should carefully read all other passages that relate to his

text. Center references, a concordance and some commentaries will direct one to these scriptures. Let these other scriptures throw as much light as possible on the meaning of the text.

Allow passages which give more exact information to explain those which are brief or general. Use the ones which are literal to explain the figurative ones. We can better understand the statements about Christ being lifted up in John 3:14, 15 and 8:28 in light of John 12:32-34 where this is explained as indicating the manner of death He would die.

EXPLANATION

In this step of the study the student should write his own comments on the passage. All previous study of his text has prepared him to write an accurate explanation of each phrase. In explaining the meaning of the text he can draw upon the insights gained from word study, grammatical analysis, context, historical setting and other scriptures.

PARAPHRASE

When the reader has understood in his mind the exact thought intended by the author then he has interpreted correctly. In this step one tries to restate as clearly and accurately as possible what he has understood the author to say in the text. Restate the author's intended meaning in terms used and understood by our generation.

APPLICATION

True learning does not end with understanding but moves to application. We must ask how the passage applies to our lives.

Not "every promise in the Book is mine." God promised Abraham and Sarah a child in their old age. God did not promise that to couples living in the twentieth century. Yet that promise has relevance to us because the promised son, Isaac, was an ancestor of Jesus who is our Lord and Savior. The fulfillment of that promise shows us that God keeps His Word and such fulfillment strengthens our faith.

One should reread his passage seeking answers to these questions. What lesson do I need to learn from this text? Any promise I can claim? A command to obey or an example to follow? A warning to be heeded or an error to be avoided? What in my life needs to be changed because of the truth in this passage? What insight and inspiration have I gained from this passage?

Jesus said the good hearer of the Word of God hears, understands, accepts, holds it fast and bears fruit (Matt. 13:23; Mark 4:20; Luke 8:15).

When you carefully and prayerfully prepare and partake of a meal from a Bible passage as outlined in the above ten steps you will learn from your Bible. We can be like the Chinese student who said, "I am now reading the Bible and behaving it."

Study Questions

1. How is a good Bible lesson or sermon like a good meal?
2. Why is it best to ignore chapter and verse divisions?
3. List and briefly define the ten steps given for the study of a Bible passage.
4. Why is it helpful to write down what one observes in a Bible passage?
5. How does asking good questions help one read a passage with the right understanding?

6. What questions should be asked about each key word?
7. How does it help to determine if a sentence is a statement of fact, a question, a command, or an exclamation?
8. Show how the other words in the sentence give us the meaning of the word *cross* in the several sentences given.
9. How does learning about the political history, social culture and customs, and geography of Bible times help us better understand the Bible?
10. What is a parallel passage, and how can a parallel passage help in interpretation?
11. What are some questions that can aid one in applying a Bible passage?

Project

Choose a Bible text (a short paragraph, for example Philip-
pians 1:3-6 or I Thessalonians 5:16-21 or even a single verse, for
example Hebrews 11:6 or Matthew 16:24). Study your passage,
following the first five steps given in this chapter. Record on paper
your research on each step. The project for Chapter 9 will be to
complete the last five steps of study on your passage.

LEARNING FROM BIBLE PASSAGES PART II

Lynn Gardner

The last chapter listed and explained ten steps one can follow in studying a Bible passage. In order to help the reader to master these steps, Galatians 5:16 will be studied following these ten steps.

The goal of our investigation will be to understand the author's intended meaning in Galatians 5:16: "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh."

OBSERVATION

The following lists initial observations made when starting this study.

But suggests a contrast with what is stated previously.

I say suggests an emphasis.

Walk means more than the literal act of walking. It refers to behavior. The walking is to be with the help of the Spirit.

Flesh does not mean literal meat on one's bones.

And connects clauses.

The verse is a part of a larger discussion on living by the Spirit contrasted with living according to the flesh.

The statement in the sentence commands a positive action and forbids an opposing behavior.

More observations could be made but this indicates what is meant by making observations.

QUESTIONS

These are some of the who, what, why, when, where and how questions that can be formulated from Galatians 5:16.

Who wrote this verse? To whom was it written? Who is expected to obey this statement?

When was this written? Does it apply to Christians today?

Where was the author when he wrote this?

With what previous thought is this verse contrasted? What do these words mean: *walk*, *spirit*, *gratify*, *desires*, *flesh*? What type of literature is the book of Galatians?

Why did Paul write Galatians?

How does verse 16 fit into the line of thinking presented in Galatians 5? How does one walk by the Spirit? How does one gratify the desires of the flesh?

WORDS

The chart on page 87 indicates how other translations shed light on the meaning of the words in the Revised Standard Version of Galatians 5:16.

LEARNING FROM BIBLE PASSAGES, PART II

| Revised Standard Version | New American Standard Bible | American Standard Version | King James Version | New International Version |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <i>But I say</i> | But I say | But I say | This I say then | So I say |
| <i>Walk</i> | Walk | Walk | Walk | Live |
| <i>By</i> | by | by | In | by |
| <i>the Spirit</i> | the Spirit | the Spirit | the Spirit | the Spirit |
| <i>Do not</i> | You will not | Ye shall not | Ye shall not | You will not |
| <i>Gratify</i> | Carry out | Fulfil | Fulfil | Gratify |
| <i>Desires</i> | Desire | Lust | Lusts | Desires |
| <i>the Flesh</i> | the flesh | the flesh | the flesh | your sinful nature. |

Two words in the RSV are used figuratively. *Walk* does not refer to the physical act of walking, but rather to the activities of life. *Flesh* does not designate the meat on our bones but rather the person who lives by his selfish desires, ignoring the will of God in his life. The more literal translations, RSV, NASB, ASV and KJV have *walk* and *flesh*. The New International Version gives an interpretation instead of translating literally. *Live* is used instead of *walk*, and *sinful nature* instead of *flesh*.

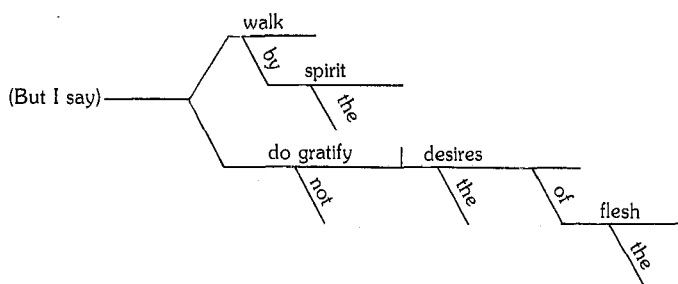
A concordance can guide the student to see how the word is used in other places in the Bible. For example, *flesh* may mean the substance of the body, the human body, mankind, or man's selfish nature.

SENTENCES

The word *but* is a connecting word which suggests a contrast to a way of life that bites and devours one another (Gal. 5:14,15). "I say" adds emphasis to the imperatives stated in the verse.

In the RSV the verbs *walk* and *do not gratify* have no expressed subject, but *you* is the subject understood. The above chart shows other versions read *you will not* or *ye shall not*. From these translations we can see the second clause may express a promise in terms of strong denial instead of an imperative command as in the RSV. This explains the reasons for the variant translations. Paul is not merely giving a feeble suggestion. He is giving a clear command for all Christians that they live not by the flesh. (The second clause in Paul's Greek sentence includes an extra negative that makes either a very emphatic command or an emphatic promise of the results of obeying his first command.)

The sentence may be diagrammed as follows:



CONTEXT

Justification by Faith, Christian Freedom and Walking by the Spirit are themes that have been suggested for the book of Galatians. In the first two chapters Paul defends the divine authority of his message as an apostle. In chapters three and four, justification by faith rather than by works of law is explained. In the last two chapters (5 and 6) Paul shows the freedom in Christ to walk by the Spirit in loving concern and helpfulness to one another.

In chapter five Paul shows that a Christian should be free from legalism (5:1-12). He next warns against turning liberty into license which indulges the flesh (5:13). Love is emphasized.

What really counts is "faith working through love" (5:6). Paul instructs them to "through love serve one another" (5:13). The whole law is fulfilled in "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (5:14).

Galatians 5:16 introduces a paragraph which contrasts walking by the Spirit with life according to the flesh. It is obvious from the context that these two lifestyles are in direct opposition.

The following listing identifies the context and throws light on the meaning of our verse:

| | | |
|--------------------------|-------------|---|
| Walk by the Spirit | (v. 16) | Do not gratify the desires of the flesh. |
| Spirit against the flesh | (v. 17) | Flesh sets its desire against the Spirit. |
| Led by the Spirit | (v. 18) | You are not under the law. |
| | (vv. 19-21) | Works of the flesh. |
| Fruit of the Spirit | (vv. 22-23) | |
| Belong to Christ | (v. 24) | Have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. |
| Walk by the Spirit | (v. 25) | |

HISTORICAL SETTING

Paul wrote this letter to Galatian Christians. They were confused by certain Jewish teachers who said, "Unless you are circumcised according to the customs of Moses, you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). Because of the challenge of false teachers Paul had to defend his apostolic authority and explain justification

by faith. He needed to show the nature of true spiritual living in contrast with legalism and license.

Galatians is a doctrinal and practical letter. From a study of the introduction to the book I have concluded that Paul wrote Galatians about 56 or 57 A.D. from Corinth or Ephesus to the churches in southern Galatia.

OTHER SCRIPTURES

Carefully read each of these verses because they throw additional light on verse 16: Gal. 5:24; 6:8; Rom. 8:1-17; 13:14; Eph. 2:3; 4:17-5:21; Col. 3:1-17; Titus 3:3-8; I Pet. 2:11; II Pet. 2:10. From these verses one learns the direct opposition between walking by the Spirit and gratifying the desires of the flesh and learns more about the nature of each of these lifestyles.

EXPLANATION

But I say. But is a connecting word indicating a contrast from what is described in earlier verses with what is stated in verse 16. The selfishness of legalism and license causes people to misuse others. Paul emphasizes his imperatives stated in this verse.

Walk by the Spirit. This is not a mild suggestion but rather an imperative. *Walk* is used figuratively of live. Attitudes, actions, thoughts, words, and one's whole lifestyle are included. This behavior must be according to the teaching and standards of the Spirit of God and with the power supplied by the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit will be developed in one's life. *The Spirit* refers to the Holy Spirit.

And do not gratify the desires of the flesh. This is a strong prohibition against the lifestyle that seeks merely to satisfy one's selfish desires. *Flesh* means man apart from God and living by his own desires. The person who lives only for self will eventually

manifest the works of the flesh in his behavior (Gal. 5:19-21).

PARAPHRASE

In contrast with the selfishness of legalism and license you must live by the standards and power of the Spirit of God. Every aspect of your life should be in harmony with the mind of Christ. You must absolutely reject the lifestyle that is devoted to satisfying one's selfish desires. Live for Christ instead of for self.

APPLICATION

Am I walking by the Spirit? Can I say with Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20)? Am I growing in exercising the fruit of the Spirit in my character and conduct (Gal. 5:22,23)? Is my top priority to do the will of Christ in all things?

Do I have selfish desires and ambitions that I pet and indulge which are not in harmony with the Spirit of Christ? Are any of the works of the flesh manifested in my life (Gal. 5:19-21)? What entertainment or reading habits, what places or people lead you to gratify the desires of the flesh?

What decisions about thoughts and behavior do I need to make in order to obey this verse?

Let us hear and heed Paul's instruction: "Walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16).

Study Questions

1. What other observations can you make about Galatians 5:16 in addition to those given?

2. Show what translations are more literal to the Greek words and what one is more interpretative in translating *walk* and *flesh*.
3. How does a diagram help in understanding a sentence?
4. How does the context throw light on Galatians 5:16?
5. Show what false teachings Paul is opposing in dealing with the Galatians.
6. Give your own paraphrase of Galatians 5:16.
7. In our personal lives how can we walk by the Spirit?
8. What steps must be taken in our sinful age not to gratify the desires of the flesh?

Project

Complete the last five steps of study in your passage started in the project on chapter eight. Learn as exactly as you can what the author intended to teach in the passage and take that truth to heart in your personal life.

LEARNING FROM BIBLE WORDS

Lynn Gardner

Learning about words can be fascinating. Words get married. Over the years they may grow or decrease in meaning. Learning the history of some words is very interesting.

To be a good reader or thinker, one must give attention to words. If we care about truth we must care about words, because truth is expressed in words. If we care about persons we must care about words, because most communication between persons is expressed in words.

God has revealed His great love in words. Understanding the Word of God begins with understanding the words arranged into sentences written by the inspired writers.

Word study is not the exclusive right of scholars. Every Christian with a few basic Bible study helps can learn the meaning of Bible words.

No one authority has the final say on the meaning of a word in a given text except the author of that text. The true meaning of the word in that text is what the author used it to mean. As students in the twentieth century seeking to learn the meaning of a Bible word, we need to seek out all pertinent evidence concerning the meaning of that word. The purpose of this chapter is to describe five steps of study that can help one in learning the meaning of a Bible word.

STUDY THE WORD IN CONTEXT

Very few words have an unvarying meaning irrespective of context. In each given use a word means what it is used to mean.

The same word may mean several different things depending on the context. Notice the word *faith* in the various uses: "But without faith it is impossible to please him [God]" (Heb. 11:6). "Contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 1:3). "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). "But the fruit of the spirit is . . . *faith*, meekness and temperance" (Gal. 5:22,23). In the first text *faith* means trust. In the second it indicates the gospel, the body of doctrine. In Romans 14:23 *faith* is used in the sense of good faith or good conscience. Faithfulness seems to be the meaning in the fruit of the Spirit.

A word may have widely differing meanings in different contexts. The word *leaven* in "Purge out therefore the old leaven" (I Cor. 5:7) carries the idea of negative influence. But in Jesus' parable "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven . . ." (Matt. 13:33) the thought is of a good influence spreading throughout the world.

Frequently the best help in understanding the meaning of a word is an intelligent reading of the context and understanding the word in the light of context. In most cases the best technical reference books can only list possible meanings. The usage in the sentence in context decides which meaning the word has in that verse.

COMPARE TRANSLATIONS

Even if one does not possess Bible reference works he can find help in understanding word meanings in other translations. The older translations use some obsolete words that may be unclear to the reader. To learn the meaning of these words one can read the same verse in a more recent translation which often will clarify the meaning of the unclear words. In this way one can use other translations as a dictionary to help define the words not understood in one's own translation.

As suggested in Chapter 8 making a chart itemizing how each key word is translated in three or four other versions can be a good approach.

A translation that is too loose and not a literal translation of the original language is less useful for this purpose. A paraphrase such as the *Living Bible* is not as reliable a guide to word meaning of the original Hebrew or Greek word as is a standard literal translation such as the *New American Standard Bible*.

USE A CONCORDANCE

Since a word means what it is used to mean it is desirable to study all of the word's usages in the Bible. An exhaustive concordance is an alphabetical listing of all the words in the Bible indicating each book, chapter and verse where each word is used. A concordance is a valuable tool in doing a word study.

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible and *Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible* have been the best choices for the King James Version and are published by several companies. They can be used profitably by one who does not know the Hebrew and Greek languages.

Strong's lists a number with each usage of each word. One can find this number in the Hebrew or Greek dictionary in the back to find a transliteration of the Hebrew or Greek word and also a brief

definition of the word. To learn more about the word *worship* used in John 4:24 one would look up the number 4352 in the Greek dictionary in the back. *Strong's* as a rule has better definitions than *Young's* but *Young's* has a better arrangement.

Young's lists all the occurrences of each English word. They are listed in groups according to the Hebrew and Greek words from which they are translated. A brief definition and transliteration is given with each Hebrew and Greek word. In *Young's* fifteen Hebrew and Greek words are listed under *worship*. One can learn which Hebrew or Greek word was translated *worship* in a given text. An appendix lists all English words used in the King James Version for each Hebrew and each Greek word. It states how many times it is translated each way.

Those who use the *New American Standard Bible* will use the *New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Holman, 1981), which follows the basic format of *Strong's* and has all its advantages. Westminster Press has published *An Analytical Concordance to the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament* (1979). It is organized in the same manner as *Young's*. Zondervan carries *The NIV Complete Concordance* (1981), which does not identify the word in the original language or give definitions of the words. The King James Version can be used as an index so students with other versions can still use *Strong's* and *Young's*.

After using a concordance to find the uses of a word it is important to read the sentence in context in each use. Study the other uses by the author of the text under study. The other uses should be studied in the rest of the testament whether old or new. The uses which are closest in time or in subject matter should be given greater weight in understanding word meaning than more remote usages.

should be studied in the rest of the Old or New Testament, in which the passage is located. The uses which are closest in time or in subject matter should be given greater weight in understanding word meaning than more remote usages.

USE A DICTIONARY

An English dictionary may not help much in learning the meaning of a word in the Bible. It lists current usage of the English word. *Webster's Dictionary* defines *perfect* as "being entirely without fault or defect: flawless." Is that what Jesus required when He calls for us to be perfect in Matthew 5:48? *Strong's* and *Young's* define the word as complete not flawless. We must base our study of word meaning on the word in the original language, not on the English word.

For many Christians *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, available from several publishers, is the best tool to learn the meaning of Greek words used in the New Testament. One does not need to know Greek in order to use this book. This book lists English words (in English alphabetical order) and beneath each word lists the various Greek words translated by that English word. The meaning of the Greek word is discussed with attention given to some of the texts where it is used.

One needs more help than the too brief, and at times misleading, definitions in an exhaustive concordance. For example, *Vine's* makes it clear that the meaning of the New Testament word *mystery* is not mysterious in the popular sense but it is truth unknown by human means that has been revealed to man by God. The concordance may identify the word used in the original language but *Vine's* can give one a much more adequate understanding of the meaning of the word.

An excellent companion volume to *Vine's* is *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980). This work discusses the meaning of about 500 Old Testament terms for readers not familiar with the Hebrew language. This work helps the reader learn the range of meanings of the Hebrew word so he can try to see which meaning best fits the text under study.

Help in word study can be found in Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias. Good judgment must be exercised in reading such

articles because at times they are colored by theological bias.

USE GOOD COMMENTARIES

One should consult commentaries toward the end of doing a word study rather than at the beginning. Some commentaries give excellent explanation and background information on words. Yet some commentaries are published which do not reflect careful research. Not every commentary or sermon is accurate in what they assert the Greek or Hebrew really means.

An intelligent student of the Bible must weigh the evidence and the reasons given for conclusions in reference books. A good commentary should reflect careful research and logical conclusions from the evidence presented. Further study can help one to make better judgments about the credibility of commentaries and other study aids.

AN EXAMPLE OF A WORD STUDY

A student in Bible college told his roommate that Christian leaders should read widely in books and current magazines because Paul told Timothy, "Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (I Tim. 4:13). What did Paul mean by the term *reading*?

The context in I Timothy 4 shows Paul giving directions to Timothy for his personal life and his leadership ministry. Paul tells him what he is to teach (4:11). Timothy is not to let people despise his youth, but he is to set a good example in his life (4:12). Until Paul comes he is to concentrate on three things: reading, exhortation, doctrine or teaching (4:13). He is not to neglect the gift given to him by prophecy (4:14). The context for verse thirteen seems to concern public leading rather than personal habits.

Four other versions (RSV, NASB, NIV, TEV) translate as follows: "the public reading of scripture."

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance indicates two other places where the Greek noun translated *reading* is used. In Acts 13:15 the synagogue officials in Pisidian Antioch read publicly from the law and the prophets then called on Paul for a word of exhortation. In II Corinthians 3:14 Paul says the Jews have a veil over their minds at "the reading of the Old Testament." He probably means the public reading of scripture in the synagogue. However, the affirmation he made was true of their private reading as well.

A careful student will learn that the verb translated *read* in the New Testament is very similar to the noun translated *reading*. The verb appears 33 times in the New Testament. Each time in the King James Version it is translated *read*. In at least thirteen cases public reading is indicated: Old Testament Scriptures (Luke 4:16; Acts 8:28,30 [twice] 32; 13:27; 15:21,31; II Cor. 3:15) and Paul's Letters (Col. 4:16 [3 times]; I Thess. 5:27).

Young's Analytical Concordance defines the Greek noun used in I Timothy 4:13 as "a reading, knowing again." *Strong's* also defines it as *reading*.

Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words gives more light:

in non-Biblical Greek denoted recognition or a survey (the latter found in the papyri); then, reading; in the N.T. the public reading of scripture, Acts 13:15; 2 Cor. 3:14; I Tim. 4:13, where the context makes clear that the reference is to the care required in reading the Scriptures to a company, a duty ever requiring the exhortation "take heed" (Revell, 1940, p. 250).

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, in an article on reading, cites the three New Testament usages and a usage of the word *reading* in Nehemiah 3:8, observing that in each case the reference is to the public reading of the Divine Law, (Eerdmans, 1939, Vol. IV, p. 2534).

Don DeWelt makes the following observations in his commentary on I Timothy 4:13:

The general consensus of opinion among commentators is that the public reading of the Scriptures, the public exhortation, and the public teaching from the preacher, is referred to here. . . . We are reminded of the order of service in the synagogues. In the synagogue, after reading a portion of Scripture from the Old Testament, its application to life was pointed out; following this, the finer points of meaning from an exegetical viewpoint were given. It is quite possible, such was also the order in the congregation of Christians in Ephesus. Timothy was to carefully supervise each portion of the service in each congregation. Compare Luke 4:16 and Acts 13:15 for examples of the services in the Jewish assemblies (*Paul's Letters to Timothy and Titus*, College Press, 1961, p. 87).

From all the evidence presented above one could agree with A.T. Robertson on the meaning of the word translated *reading* in our text. He says it designates "probably in particular the public reading of the Scriptures (Acts 13:15), though surely private reading is not to be excluded" (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Harper, 1931, Vol. IV, p. 581).

Learning the meaning of Bible words is basic to all Bible study whether we are studying books, passages or topics. Word study should be distinguished from the study of a Bible topic or doctrine. For example, the word *inspiration* is used only once in the King James Bible in reference to the origin of scripture (II Tim. 3:16). But a study of the topic or subject of the inspiration of the Bible would be a much more extensive study than studying the word *inspiration*. Looking up all verses that use the word *holy* or *coming* does not exhaust the Bible's teaching on holiness or the second coming.

Merely learning a definition of all the key words in a text or scripture is not sufficient. Defining each word in the phrase "Christ in you the hope of glory" is not our final goal. It is a means to the goal of understanding and appropriating the thought God

intended to convey to our minds through that phrase.

Word study is a valuable step in understanding the thoughts of God revealed in the Bible. Our goal in Bible study is not to study words but to learn the mind of God and to respond to His truth in joyful obedience. Our ultimate purpose is to know God and to share His favor forever.

Study Questions

1. Why is it important to understand the meaning of words?
2. What is the true meaning of a word?
3. List the five steps given for studying the meaning of a Bible word.
4. Show the various meanings of the word *faith* in several Bible verses.
5. Does a Bible word always have the same meaning? Use *leaven* as an example.
6. How does comparing translations aid one in learning the meaning of Bible words?
7. What tool can help a Bible student find other uses of a word and also learn the meaning of the original Greek or Hebrew word?
8. Why is an English dictionary not always helpful in learning the meaning of a Bible word?
9. For those who do not know the Greek language, what book is helpful in learning the original meaning of New Testament words?

10. What conclusion is reached on the meaning of the word *reading* in I Timothy 4:13?

Projects

In the King James Version we read that Jesus promised His apostles that He would send the Comforter (John 15:26). Do a study on the meaning of the word *Comforter* by following the five steps given in this chapter.

Have class members bring several copies of exhaustive concordances and *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* to class. Have each person on their own use the concordance to find the location in the Bible of this verse: "Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh." Then use the concordance and *Vine's Dictionary* to learn the meaning of the Greek words which are translated *blessed*, *weep* and *laugh*. Have a person prepared to show how to use these helpful tools.

LEARNING FROM BIBLE PARABLES

Lynn Gardner

Jesus was a master of the art of storytelling. His illustrations from everyday life captured the attention of the common people. The parables of Jesus constitute more than one-third of our Lord's recorded teaching. It is imperative that we understand what Jesus meant to teach through His parables.

WHAT IS A PARABLE?

The word *parable* literally means something thrown along side of something else. This is done for the purpose of comparison. A parable is a true-to-life illustration used as a comparison to teach a spiritual or moral lesson.

The child's definition is true. "A parable is an earthly story

with a heavenly meaning." It is something drawn from nature or from everyday experience to illustrate a spiritual truth.

It usually is a narrative based on true history or fictitious true-to-life experience. Jesus' parables have a natural freshness and reality because they were drawn from everyday life. A parable differs from a fable because in a fable living qualities are given to things and human qualities are given to animals.

In English literature the parable as a figure of speech is limited to stories as a literary form. However, some figures of speech in the Bible which are called parables are not stories. The command in Luke 4:23 "Physician, heal yourself" is called a parable in the original language. In our literary classifications this would be called a proverb. Some parables were in the form of simple statements, "The laborer deserves his wages" (Luke 10:7). See also Matthew 5:14; 15:14 and Mark 7:15-17. Others were expressed through questions, "You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles?" (Matt. 7:16). Mark 9:50 is another use of question. Mark 2:21 is a statement and an explanation, "No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; if he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made." Sometimes Jesus introduced a parable by the typical rabbinic opening "To what shall I liken this . . ." (Matt. 11:16; Luke 13:18-21).

Most of Jesus' parables are found in Matthew and Luke's Gospels. John does not use the word *parable*. We have recorded about thirty of Jesus' story-parables. Including other figures of speech called parables the number in Jesus' teaching would be about sixty.

WHY DID JESUS TEACH IN PARABLES?

1. *To Attract Interest.* People enjoy listening to a story or an illustration. This is especially true when the subject or object is familiar to their experience. "The common people heard him

gladly" (Mark 12:37) because He spoke about things common in their experience: fish nets, sower, dough, housecleaning, mustard seeds, darnels in the wheat, wandering sheep and faithful shepherds, weather signs in the clouds and the direction of the wind, budding fig trees, plowmen with eyes fixed straight ahead, laborers harvesting, and wayward sons.

A college speech professor affirmed that the most important rule for successful public speaking was to have one good illustration for every main point. Messages or lessons without illustrations are like rooms without windows — they do not let in much light. Jesus used deft illustrations to make truth interesting and exciting. We must follow His example if we want to be good communicators.

2. *To Reveal Truth.* Statements involving abstract reasoning are not easily grasped. A good story or example can make the same truth clear and understandable. In order to teach a truth one must compare the unknown with the known. A parable provides a bridge from the island of experience to the unknown truth. As an eggshell carries the yoke and egg white so a story can be the vehicle of communication to carry a thought or idea from the mind of the speaker to the mind of the listener.

Jesus taught in parables to communicate basic spiritual truths. A poet has said:

Where truth in closest words shall fail,
When truth embodied in a tale
May enter in at lowly doors.

Difficult concepts can be expressed clearly through good illustrations.

3. *To Conceal Truth.* A British writer, P.G. Wodehouse, has been quoted as saying, "A parable is one of those stories in the Bible which sounds at first like a pleasant yarn but keeps something up its sleeve which pops out and leaves you flat" (A.M. Hunter, *Interpreting Parables*, Westminster, 1976, p. 14).

A parable can present a truth to the mind and secure assent to that truth before the point is applied. A parable can be a precious gem of tactful reproof. This can be seen in the parable Nathan told to David after he had committed adultery with Uriah's wife. A rich man stole the only lamb his poor neighbor owned and served it to a visiting traveler. David indignantly decided that the thief should die. Nathan drove home his point, "You are the man!" (II Sam. 12:7).

William Barclay observed that a parable "conceals truth from those who are either too lazy to think or too blind by prejudice to see The parable *reveals* truth to him who desires truth; it *conceals* truth from him who does not wish to see the truth" (*The Gospel of Matthew*, Vol. II, Westminster, 1958, p. 62). Whether a parable reveals or conceals truth depends upon the state of the mind and heart of the hearer. William Taylor observed,

The man who saw in the story nothing but a story, would turn away from it as trifling and unimportant . . . the parables served to sift and purge the throng of Christ's hearers. They tested character, while they symbolized truth" (*The Parables of Our Savior*, Hodder & Stoughton, pp. 11-14).

4. *To Make Truth Memorable.* It is almost always the illustrations from a sermon that people remember. Jesus took advantage of people's interest in stories. He made the point of the parable so clear that just to remember the story would recall the truth taught. His parables are among the most widely known of Jesus' teachings. William Barclay observed that a parable "enables and compels a man to discover truth for himself The parable, by compelling a man to draw his own conclusions and to do his own thinking, at one and the same time makes truth real to him and fixes it in his memory It made truth flash upon a man as the lightning suddenly illumines a pitch-dark night" (*The Gospel of Matthew*, Vol. II, pp. 62-63). Parables were spoken and were meant more to be heard than

read. They had an immediate impact.

5. *To Persuade to Action.* A story touches the motives and emotions. This is essential to bring about an active response from the hearer. Jesus' parables often stab the conscience and call for a decision of the will.

UNDERSTANDING PARABLES

Some glibly talk about the parables being clear and simple in the truth they express. In some cases this is true but several of the parables are difficult to understand. The parables of Jesus have suffered much misinterpretation through the centuries.

The parables were not idle stories but were designed to challenge the basic values of the hearers. They went against the grain of the traditional religious thinking of the day. Many of the parables are baffling because they go against common expectations. Sinners are commended: the publican, the prodigal and the unjust steward. Good people are reproved: the Pharisee and the elder brother. Common notions of who should be first and last, who should be rewarded are contradicted in the Wedding Feast, the Great Judgment and the Rich Man and Lazarus. Since they challenge the common notions on how God should act it is not surprising that Bible students often fail to see the truth Jesus intended to teach.

Because of a misunderstanding of Mark 4:10-12 some hold that only the inner circle of disciples could understand Jesus' parables. Jesus did expect His hearers to understand. In three cases Luke mentions that Jesus told parables to people (15:3; 18:9; 19:11) with the implication they were meant to be understood. The scholar of the law to whom Jesus told the Parable of the Good Samaritan understood that parable (Luke 10:25-37). The chief priests and the Pharisees got the point in the Parable of the Tenants (Matt. 21:45). Jesus expected those to understand his parables who were willing to believe and to obey.

Our task is to hear and understand as Jesus expected them to be understood.

The following guidelines are given to aid in understanding the parables. Since the parables are not all one kind it is difficult to lay down rules applicable to each one. The following guidelines cover the story parables, but most of them will apply to the other types as well.

1. *Interpret as a Comparison Considering the Context.* The parable is a figure of comparison. Something in the earthly story is used to illustrate a spiritual truth. In an account of an historical fact each detail is true and may be significant in understanding the meaning of the event. But in a parable not every detail has significance.

One teacher said the Parable of the Sower taught that of those who heard the gospel only 25% would go to heaven. The parable illustrates the various responses people make to the gospel but it does not teach the percentage of hearers who will be saved. Some have explained the branches of the tree in the Parable of the Mustard Seed as denominations. This merely is part of the "scenery" of the parable illustrating that the kingdom grew from something small into something great (Matt. 13:31,32).

Allegorical interpretation attempts to make every detail have meaning. Augustine explained the Parable of the Good Samaritan in this way. The man beaten was Adam. Jerusalem was the heavenly city. Jericho signifies Adam's mortality. The thieves were the devil and his angels. They stripped Adam of his immortality and "beat him" forcing him to sin. The priest and the Levite were the Old Testament priesthood. The Samaritan was Christ. Christ restrained the man from sinning. Other identifications were: oil — comfort or good hope; wine — exhortation; beast — the flesh of Christ's incarnation; inn — the church; the morrow — after the resurrection; two pence — promise of this life and the life to come; innkeeper — Paul. This method of interpretation shows the cleverness of the interpreter but certainly

does not understand the parable as Jesus intended it to be understood.

A few of Jesus' teachings are more like allegories rather than parables, for example The Vine of John 15 and the Good Shepherd of John 10. An allegory is a collection of related metaphors. A metaphor is a figure of speech in which one thing is called by the name of another thing to suggest a resemblance. As an extended metaphor several points of comparison are intended in an allegory. However, a general rule for the study of parables is, "Look for the point of comparison that illustrates the one primary truth."

In seeking to understand a parable the reader should read the parable several times, seeking to hear the story as the original hearers heard it. Read the material before and after the parable to pick up clues as to its central meaning. Learning about the customs reflected in the parables can help one bridge the cultural gap and better grasp the point of the parable.

2. *Identify the Main Point of the Parable.* The historical occasion that gave rise to the parable may help the reader to identify the central point of emphasis. Jesus was invited to a Pharisee's home for dinner. Simon, the Pharisee, did not grant Jesus the common courtesies. A sinful woman washed Jesus' feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. Simon objected that if Jesus were a prophet He would have known what sort of woman she was. Jesus told Simon a story about two debtors. One was forgiven a small debt, and the other was forgiven ten times as much. Jesus asked Simon which would love the creditor more. Simon answered the one he forgave more. Jesus then pointed out Simon's lack of kindness to Him in contrast to the woman's open appreciation. Jesus then said that because she had been forgiven much she loved much, but he who is forgiven little loves little (Luke 7:36-50). This Parable of the Two Debtors means so much more when it is understood in the light of its setting. Carefully study parables in the light of the situation in which it was given, and the subject it was meant to clarify or emphasize.

Look for any introductory comments that help one learn the central point. Luke 15:1-3 introduces the parables of the Lost Coin, the Lost Sheep and the Prodigal Son with these words: "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.' So he told them this parable." The Parable of the Invitation to the Marriage Feast is introduced, "Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he marked how they chose the places of honor" (Luke 14:7). See also Luke 18:1 and 18:9.

Concluding comments often underscore and apply the main lesson of the parable. After the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, Jesus said, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:14). The Parable of the Unjust Steward is difficult to interpret but the best clue to the central lesson is in the application in Luke 16:8, "The master commended the dishonest steward for his shrewdness, for the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light." Jesus did not praise him for his dishonesty. He was commended for using his present resources to plan for his future. Jesus applied the Parable of the Ten Virgins with this statement: "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour" (Matt. 25:13), emphasizing the need for constant readiness for our Lord's return.

Sometimes clues to the central meaning can be found in the response of the hearers. In each parable be sure to look for the subject under discussion, when it was spoken and what event or teaching accompanies the parable.

3. *Observe and Use Whatever Explanation the Bible Gives.* Jesus did not always explain His parables. But when Jesus or an inspired writer explains or applies a parable, that is sufficient and final for a Bible student to understand the true meaning.

4. *Interpret in the Light of Other Scriptures.* Parallel parables often throw light on the meaning of a parable. By reading the

parallel explanations of the Parable of the Sower we gain a more complete list of the thorns that choke out the word in the heart of some hearers: "the cares of the world and the delight in riches" (Matt. 13:22); Mark adds "the desire for other things" (Mark 4:19); and Luke adds "pleasures of life" (Luke 8:14).

A parable should be studied in the light of other parables on the same subject. Often two or three parables are given to illustrate or enforce the same lesson. Luke 15 has three stories illustrating God's interest in the lost and his joy when the lost is found. The parables of the Hidden Treasure and of the Pearl of Great Price illustrate the same point (Matt. 13:44-46). So also the parables of the Mustard Seed and of the Leaven in the Meal help to interpret each other (Matt. 13:31-33). In studying the subject of the kingdom one should study the whole series of parables found in Matthew 13, Mark 4 and Luke 8.

Parables must be interpreted in the light of all the Bible's teaching on the subject. The Parable of the Tares (Matt. 13:24-30) in which the good and the bad are allowed to grow together until the end must not be used to negate the teaching on church discipline in Matthew 18:15-18 and I Corinthians 5. In the Parable of the Tares Jesus said the field is the world (Matt. 13:38), not the church. In this parable Jesus taught that both good and bad people are in the world and the final accounts will be settled in the judgment.

Beware of any doctrine based solely on a parable. Parables illustrate and illumine truth. They do not originate doctrine. Often people treat a parable as a predictive prophecy, when there is no reason to regard it as anything other than an illustrative picture.

One should not construct his whole doctrine of prayer from the Parable of the Unjust Judge (Luke 18:1-8). The parable does not teach God's reluctance to answer our prayers. Rather it teaches us to be persistent in prayer and not quit praying.

Some of Jesus' parables qualify as among the world's most charming stories. Learning from Jesus' parables is a study well worth the effort.

Study Questions

1. What is a parable?
2. What forms of language other than stories are called parables in the New Testament (Matt. 15:15; Mark 17:17; Luke 4:23; 6:39; John 10:6)?
3. List five reasons why Jesus taught in parables.
4. List ten things common to His hearers' experience that Jesus mentioned in His parables.
5. Explain how parables conceal truth from some and reveal it to others.
6. Why do stories motivate people to action?
7. Give Biblical evidence that Jesus meant for His parables to be understood.
8. List three guidelines for understanding parables.
9. Give an example of an allegorical misinterpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan.
10. Give several suggestions for finding the central point of a parable.
11. Discuss the relationship between parables and other teaching in Scripture.

Project

Study the Parable of the Two Builders (Luke 6:46-49) by

LEARNING FROM BIBLE PARABLES

following the guidelines given in this lesson. State in one sentence the central truth in the parable. Then show how this truth applies to our lives. Prepare a lesson or devotion based on this parable.

LEARNING FROM BIBLE POETRY

Lynn Gardner

After a concentrated study of the Psalms a man said, "This study has helped me know God."

A professor in a state college has his students read the book of Job when they discuss the problem of evil.

Some people each day read five Psalms to help them live with God and one chapter of Proverbs to help them live with their fellow man.

Some of the world's most beautiful literature is found in the Bible poetry. Many people turn to the Psalms for inspiration and comfort. What a blessing awaits the person who reads with understanding the poetry of the Bible!

Poetry is literary expression with rhythm. Clinton Lockhart lists the following descriptions of poetry: concrete in thought; artistic in form; imaginative in substance; emotional in spirit; rhythmical in movement (*Principles of Interpretation*, 1901, pp.

191-192). We have grown up being acquainted with poetry, but it is difficult to define the exact limits between poetry and prose.

Good poetry has a certain amount of dignity. It has rhythm and usually a certain pattern. It deals with deep feelings expressed in highly imaginative and figurative language. Poetry that endures has integrity, truth, energy, strength and deals with basic values and important issues.

FACTS ABOUT BIBLE POETRY

Poetry may be divided into several types. *Lyric* poems are songs suitable to be sung to the lyre. Most of the poetry in the Bible is lyrical. Many of the Psalms are lyric poems. The Hebrews classified them according to the spirit of the subject matter as the hymn of praise, the lament or dirge, the love song, the wise saying and the riddle. *Gnomic* poetry consists of terse wise sayings about life. The books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are examples of gnomic poetry. *Dramatic* poetry stresses action, for example the book of Job. The book of Lamentations is an example of the *lament* or *elegy*.

Poetry deals with life as it is lived in the every-day world. Bible poetry deals with the home dwelling (Prov. 3,31); the sick room (Job 2; Psa. 18:1-6); the bedroom (Psa. 4:3,4); the wedding (Psa. 45; Song of Sol.); the business world (Prov. 1:11-15; 6:1-5). It is concerned with the mouth (Psa. 1:1-3; 8:1-4); the heart (Psa. 19:4; Prov. 4:23); the feet (Prov. 1:16); hands (Psa. 22:4); the eyes (Psa. 19:8; Prov. 6:17).

Most of the poetry of the Bible is found in the Old Testament. The following books are mostly poetic in form: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Lamentations and Job. Much of Isaiah and Jeremiah is poetry. Many other Old Testament books have parts that are poetry. At least one-third of the Old Testament was written in poetic form. Various other passages in the New Testament are also poetic. Most recent translations print the

poetry of the Bible in poetic form.

The Hebrew language and Hebrew poetry is essentially religious. The verb is prominent. When studying Bible poetry, pay special attention to the verbs. The Hebrews thought in pictures. Relatively free from abstractions, Hebrew poetry is expressed in concrete terms. Instead of saying God is omniscient, as the Greeks would have done, the Hebrew poet said, "For his eyes are upon the ways of a man, and he sees all his steps" (Job 34:21). The poetry of the Bible has some characteristics of form which are visible in the Hebrew language but are not seen in translation: alliteration, acrostic stanzas, alphabetic poems and puns.

Poetry with imaginative imagery and deep emotional quality is characterized by figurative language. Truth is effectively expressed through poetic imagery. The wonderfully expressive and highly imaginative figures of speech are able to be translated so as to retain much of their original freshness and power.

Through poetry, prophets and psalmists opened their hearts and expressed their anguish and sorrows, their joys and victories, the concerns of their hearts, their concerns for others, their experiences and expectations from God, and their awareness of the qualities of God, and their worship of God.

Poetry plumbs the depths of human experience and expression. The Bible poets were face-to-face with reality, especially with God.

PARALLELISM IN BIBLE POETRY

Hebrew poetry resembles our blank verse. It does not have a rhyme of words but rather a rhythm of thought. Instead of a balance of sound, it has a balance of thought. Parallelism is one of the main features of Hebrew poetry. In parallelism a line repeats, contrasts, completes or develops a previous line.

It is this rhythm of thought that makes Bible poetry universal

poetry. Since it does not depend on rhythm of sounds it can be translated into other languages without losing its effectiveness. The translator needs only to be literal and retain as far as possible the original order of the words to make the poetry of the Hebrews the poetry of any language.

Recognition of parallelism in Bible poetry will prevent one from the mistake of thinking the author is making two separate statements when in reality the pair of lines repeats the same thought in different words. A line of poetry must not be read in isolation but lines must be read together, seeking to see how they relate to each other. Understanding parallelism assists one in learning the meaning of obscure terms and concepts.

Poetic parallelism has several varieties or patterns. In *synonymous parallelism* a pair of lines express the same thought in different but equivalent terms. It utilizes repetition.

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin! (Psa. 51:2).

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork (Psa. 19:1).

Hear this, all peoples!
Give ear, all inhabitants of the world (Psa. 49:1).

In *antithetic parallelism* lines express contrasting or opposing thoughts. Often the second line begins with "but." This form appears frequently in the Proverbs.

A wise son makes a glad father;
but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother (Prov. 10:1).

A soft answer turns away wrath;
but a harsh word stirs up anger (Prov. 15:1).

For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish (Psa. 1:6).

In *synthetic parallelism* the second line builds upon or develops the idea of the first line. This form utilizes the concept of addition.

But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night (Psa. 1:2).

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil,
for thou art with me;
thy rod and thy staff,
they comfort me (Psa. 23:4).

Answer not a fool according to his folly,
lest you be like him yourself (Prov. 26:4).

In *climactic parallelism* the second line completes the thought started in the first line in an ascending rhythm of thought. Expansion of thought is involved as the second line repeats part of the first but also adds something new.

Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength (Psa. 29:1).

I sought the Lord and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears (Psa. 34:4).

In *emblematic parallelism* one line expresses figuratively what another line expresses literally. The first line is often introduced by "as" and the second line by "so." Since it involves comparison it is also called comparative parallelism.

As a hart longs for flowing streams,
so longs my soul for thee, O God (Psa. 42:1).

Like a gold ring in a swine's snout
is a beautiful woman without discretion (Prov. 11:22).

UNDERSTANDING BIBLE POETRY

1. *Read and reread passages attempting to visualize, understand and feel what the author experienced and expressed.* Preoccupation with the mechanics of poetry can destroy its wonderful communicative power.

2. *Understand the nature and types of parallelism in Bible poetry.* Realize that in synonymous parallelism both lines express the same thought. Establish the meaning of an obscure word or expression by the clear expression to which it stands parallel. Understanding the nature of parallelism adds to the enjoyment as well as comprehension of Bible poetry.

3. *Identify the Old Testament poetry that predicts the coming Messiah.* Jesus said, "Everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44). Many messianic predictions are found in the Psalms (Psa. 16, 22, 69) and in the poetry of the prophets (Isa. 53).

4. *Interpret in the light of context and historical setting.* Some take pessimistic statements in Ecclesiastes as God's final truth. The pessimistic statements would be true "under the sun" (if there were no God). But because God is real the author of Ecclesiastes concludes that the greatest good in a man's life is to fear God and keep His commandments (Eccl. 12:13).

Carefully study poetry in the light of the immediate context as well as the larger context of the book and in the light of the historical setting of the poetry. The statements of Job's friends must not be accepted as divine truth because God declared that they were wrong and Job was right in their debate, even though they said some good and true things. David's prayer of repentance in Psalm 51 is a powerful statement when seen as his expression of true penitence when he realized his sin with Bethsheba.

5. *Many statements in poetry were intended by the author to be understood in a figurative sense rather than in a literal sense.* Not everything in the Old Testament which sounds unconditional

and universal is to be understood in that sense. The Hebrews did not use the word *all* in the absolute sense that we use the word. To them it meant the bigger part. See Psalm 18:22; 26:7; 27:4; 34:1,17. *Forever* in the Old Testament usually does not mean without end. Rather it meant for the age, or for that period of time, or for one's lifetime (Psa. 37:29; Eccl. 1:4; Job 41:4). (See also Exod. 27:21; 28:43; 30:21; Lev. 6:22; 16:29,34; 17:7; 23:14,21,41; especially Deut. 23:3,6; 4:40; Jer. 7:7.)

Overstatement or hyperbole appears often in poetry. Extravagant language is often employed when strong feelings are expressed. Extreme sadness was expressed (Psa. 69:7-20; 88:3-9) as well as extreme gladness (Psa. 23:5,6; 98; 133).

We see Job used the overstatement, "The speech of a despairing man is wind" (Job 6:26). Because of chapters one and two we do not interpret literally Job's statement, "I was at ease, and he [God] broke me asunder; he seized me by the neck and dashed me to pieces . . . he slashes open my kidneys" (Job 16:12,13).

Imprecatory psalms are psalms which call for God to bring drastic judgment upon His enemies. Some sensitive souls wonder why such awful and harsh statements should be in the Bible. How can they be harmonized with God's mercy for the sinner? Benefit can be gained from what appears to be a serious problem. A careful study of these psalms can help us learn to "be angry but not to sin" (Psa. 4:4). Primary examples of these are Psalms 58:6-11; 59:5,13; 69:22,23; 109:6-15; 137:8,9; 139:19-22; 143:12.

Are these harsh statements just the sinful, human expressions of the psalmist? This view seems to conflict with the high view of the complete inspiration of the Bible writers.

The imprecatory psalms are better understood as expressions of righteous anger because God is being mistreated. Intense feeling burns into violent language. Statements like "dashing them [little ones] against the rock" are to be understood as figurative and not literal. The psalmist does not seek personal revenge. He

said, "Do I not hate them that hate these, O Lord?" (Psa. 139:21). See Matthew 18:5,6; I Corinthians 16:22; Galatians 1:8,9; Revelation 6:10; 18:20,21.

Psalm 137 is a lament for the suffering Israel had endured through the fall of Jerusalem and in captivity in Babylon.

Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites
the day of Jerusalem,
how they said, "Raze it, raze it!
Down to its foundations!"
O daughter of Babylon, you devastator!
Happy shall he be who requites you
with what you have done to us!
Happy shall he be who takes your little ones
and dashes them against the rock! (Psa. 137:7-9).

The psalmist asks God to fulfill his promise, "It is mine to avenge, I will repay" (Deut. 32:35, NIV). In God's covenant with Israel He included curses on wicked nations that defied God (Deut. 32:23-25; 28:53-57). The psalmist addressed to God his angry feelings and asked God to take care of the injustice of these enemies of God.

In Hebrew poetry the word "hate" does not always mean what we use hate to mean. The psalmist's statement, "I have nothing but hatred for them" (Psa. 139:22, NIV), was no more sin than God's statement "Esau I have hated" (Mal. 1:3; Rom. 9:13). The Hebrew word may mean despise but it also may mean reject or be unwilling to put up with.

God loves beauty. He created much beauty in the world. He gave men the creative ability to make beautiful things. The poetry of the Bible is beautiful and great literature.

The poetry of the Bible speaks to our hearts as sinful men and women who live before the living God. The Biblical poets help us know ourselves — in our guilt, in our sadness, in our joys and in our praise to God. The poetry of the Bible helps us know ourselves because it helps us know and speak with our God.

Study Questions

1. What is poetry?
2. List and briefly define three types of poetry.
3. Where can poetry be found in the Bible?
4. Why does poetry usually have more figurative language than prose?
5. What is parallelism in poetry?
6. List and briefly define five patterns of parallelism. Give one example of each.
7. List five guidelines for understanding Bible poetry.
8. What are imprecatory psalms? What problem do they present? How may they be understood?

Project

Study Psalm 8. Reread it at least ten times. Identify any parallelism. Outline the pattern of the psalm. See how the New Testament quotes and uses this psalm. What does this psalm teach about God? What does it teach about man?

Using an exhaustive concordance identify all the Proverbs on the subject of words or tongue. Read each one and itemize on a sheet of paper the lesson taught in each verse.

LEARNING FROM BIBLE PROPHECY

Lynn Gardner

A dynamic preacher electrified his audience with these words:

The Bible says that in the last days Israel will become a nation one generation before Jesus returns again. Israel became a nation in 1948. The true church will be raptured seven years before the second coming — in 1981. Then Jesus will come again in 1988.

For obvious reasons this particular interpretation has fallen out of favor.

Many people avoid studying Bible prophecy because they are confused by the conflicting views. Some have been repulsed by the shallowness and wrongness of many of the interpretations of the sensationalists. We must avoid the extreme of being preoccupied with the study of unfulfilled prophecy and the other ex-

treme of refusing the study of Bible prophecy altogether.

God has spoken to man through his inspired spokesmen. Prophecy makes up a large part of our Bible. Bible students must give attention to learning from Bible prophecy.

NATURE OF PROPHECY

God revealed messages to prophets and guided them by inspiration of His Holy Spirit to declare His truth through spoken or written communication. "God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets" (Acts 3:21). In the Bible true prophets were those who were divinely inspired spokesmen for God. To call present-day preachers prophets is to use the word in an unbiblical manner. God, not man, is the source of prophecy. No prophecy originated in the prophet's own mind. "No prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (II Pet. 1:21).

God spoke to His people through his servants, the prophets. They received and declared messages from God. They were men of God. They were called by God, directed by him to bear messages. Their messages were often authenticated by supernatural signs. They were divine spokesmen announcing judgment, calling people to repentance. Bible prophecy included teaching, command, admonition, warning and prediction.

The prophets opposed the false religions of their day. Elijah contended with the prophets of Baal in the ninth century (I Kgs. 18:20-36). Amos confronted the priest of the golden calves at Bethel (Amos 7:13). Isaiah declared the land is "full of idols" (Isa. 2:8) and condemned the drunken prophets and priests (28:7).

The prophets stressed righteousness and denounced sin. Amos castigated the rich who grind down the poor. Jeremiah complained of those who "were well-fed lusty stallions, each neighing for his neighbor's wife" (Jer. 5:8).

Prophecy was not limited to prediction but certainly included

predictions of future events. In predictive prophecy future events were announced before they occurred with exactness that could not be mere human guesswork. Persons were named and described before birth. Kingdoms were sketched before their existence. Predictive prophecy is found in all parts of the Bible and requires special attention in interpretation.

BENEFITS OF STUDYING PROPHECY

Learning from Bible prophecy is of great value to the Christian.

Fulfilled prophecy is a strong evidence that the Bible is the word of God. God made it plain through Moses that predictive prophecy was one way to verify that one was a true prophet with a valid revelation from God (Deut. 18:20-22). Isaiah also stated that fulfilled prophecy demonstrated that God had spoken (Isa. 41:20-23; 44:6-8).

Fulfillment of Messianic prophecy demonstrates the deity of Jesus. During the last supper Jesus made some predictions to His apostles. He added, "I tell you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he" (John 13:19). Matthew identifies many events in Jesus' life which are direct fulfillments of Old Testament prophecies, thus certifying His Messiahship. Not only in the Gospels but also in the preaching of Acts the faith-building evidence of fulfilled prophecy is marshalled.

The study of Bible prophecy helps one understand that God is in control of this world and human history. A person who knows only current events and knows little about history lacks a balanced perspective on the present because of an ignorance of the past. One who knows history only from man's point of view lives in a flatland of two dimensions but no depth of meaning and purpose to it all. What a blessing it is to have in divine prophecy God's perspective and interpretation of the world and human

history.

Reading or listening to current news headlines one may question if God is really in control of things. A study of the prophets will teach one that nations rise and fall, individuals have their successes and failures, evil at times seems to prevail, but through it all "God is the ruler yet."

Fainthearted souls made fearful by the threat of nuclear destruction and the doom and gloom of modern voices need to study Bible prophecy. Reassurance, confidence and inner strength come from knowing that God is still in charge of this universe. If we are faithful unto death, we shall receive the crown of life (Rev. 2:10). Ultimate victory is promised to the overcomers (Rev. 17:14). Hearts grow spiritually strong from studying Bible prophecy.

Spiritual blessings come to those who read God's prophetic word. In the revelation of Jesus Christ to the apostle John we read, "Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written therein; for the time is near" (Rev. 1:3). Bible prophecy, as a part of scripture, is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (II Tim. 3:16).

The ignorance about the true meaning of Bible prophecy on the part of the religious teachers of Jesus' day bore tragic fruit as they rejected Jesus. God's people suffered dire consequences when they did not hear and heed God's warnings. Peter said,

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which *he has granted to us his precious and very great promises*, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature (II Pet. 1:3,4, emphasis added).

A great benefit of learning from Bible prophecy is that we can be partakers of God's nature as we lay hold of His promises.

APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF PROPHECY

Some Bible students and teachers are preoccupied with the study of Bible prophecy, usually unfulfilled prophecy. Other Christians are totally fed up with prophecy, not wanting to hear another word about the Anti-Christ or Armageddon. Still others are uninterested in Bible prophecy, preferring more practical things. None of these represents the best approach.

Several inadequate approaches must be avoided. One is the mistaken view that Bible experts alone can understand Bible prophecy. It takes effort but every Christian can profit from a study of prophecy.

Another inadequate approach is the view that every prophecy must be fulfilled literally. A popular teacher expressed it this way, "Every single prophesied event fulfilled in the past has been literally fulfilled." Sensationalists have sold many books popularizing this view as the only Bible-believing position.

It is true that some prophecies were fulfilled literally. Christ was born in the literal city of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:6). Christ entered Jerusalem riding on a literal donkey (Zech. 9:9; Matt. 21:5). A virgin gave birth to a son (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:22,23). Soldiers literally divided Christ's garments and cast lots (Psa. 22:18; John 19:23,24).

However, the view that all prophecy must be fulfilled literally does not square with Biblical facts. Some prophecies were meant to be figurative, not literal. John the Baptist did not literally fill every valley and level every mountain and hill (Isa. 40:4; Luke 3:5). Christ was not a literal stone rejected by builders (Psa. 118:22; Acts 4:11; I Pet. 2:7).

In several of Jesus' own prophecies a figurative not literal meaning is intended. He did not mean He would rebuild the literal temple in three days (John 2:19-21). In promising living water He did not mean physical water or physical thirst (John 4:14). Peter says what happened in Acts 2 is a fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32. There was no blood, smoke, darkened sun or moon turned to

blood. It was a real fulfillment of a figurative prophecy.

The liberal approach to prophecy must also be rejected. Unbelieving Biblical criticism rejects supernatural revelation and miracles, preferring natural explanations. Liberal interpreters are skeptical about many Biblical events and often deny predictive prophecy. They suppose that accounts had to be written after the events plainly referred to, because foretelling them was not possible.

The Bible stands true as the infallible Word of God in spite of the efforts of the critics to make it merely a human book.

The right approach is to study the text of a prophecy in the light of its grammatical meaning and its historical context, and to seek to understand the author's intended meaning. The Bible student must ask questions such as: Was the statement (or statements) intended to be understood figuratively or literally? Was the message intended for the Jews, the church or for another limited audience? Several special principles of interpretation pertain primarily to prophecy; however, all interpretation of Bible prophecy must find its basis in the historical-grammatical method of study.

PROBLEMS IN UNDERSTANDING BIBLE PROPHECY

The study of prophecy is more difficult than most of the rest of the Bible. However, the wonderful truths in Bible prophecy are not out of the reach of any Bible student. Before considering guidelines for understanding Bible prophecy attention will be given to special difficulties encountered in the study of prophecy.

Many predictions are not clear or are not given in a complete form. Different prophecies are given with different degrees of fullness and clarity, according to the different purposes for which they are intended and the degree to which the Lord wishes to

make the future clear at the time of the utterance. Predictions tend to be fragmentary, paradoxical and veiled in meaning. The future is to be only partially revealed and, as the circumstances accompanying the fulfillment are in the unknown realm of the future, mistaken concepts of it are to be expected. Prophecy is naturally partial and pictorial.

Often predictions were far different from what would be normally expected. God's thoughts are not as man's thoughts (Isa. 55:1-8). It is not surprising that finite minds have difficulty grasping the whole picture in the mind of the infinite God. Great extremes, such as the eternal rule of the Messiah and His sufferings and death, are difficult to grasp and harmonize. The language of a people has no established words or expressions to describe concepts and events outside of their experience. The prophets had to use familiar words and expressions in a figurative sense to represent the things prophesied. The spiritual kingdom of Christ was necessarily predicted in the words and pictures familiar to the Israelites.

Prophecy is often characterized by unusual use of language. Much that is to happen in the future is told in present or past tense (Joel 2:27,28; Hosea 11:1). Isaiah 53:1-10a uses past tense and Isaiah 53:10b-12 uses future tense, yet both predict the future. Present tense is used of a future prediction in Zechariah 9:9.

Events widely separated in time may be stated in the same passage without any time indicators. In the Lord's prophetic address about the destruction of Jerusalem and His second coming it is difficult to determine which statements refer to which event (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). In Mark 8:38-9:1 the second coming and the establishment of the church seem to be predicted without any reference to time. Several hundred years of history are jumped between Joel 2:27 to 2:28. This can be seen in Genesis 3:15 and Isaiah 61:1-3.

Prophecy is often expressed in highly figurative and symbolic language. "God spoke by the prophets in many parts and in many ways" (Heb. 11:1, original translation). God meant what

He said and said what He meant, but He often used a figurative word or a symbolic thing, person, or event to express what He wanted to say at that time. Such picture language was often easier to remember than it was to interpret fully until later revelations or events made sure what was meant.

Many figures of speech appear in prophecy, for example in Isaiah 55 mountains and hills sang and trees clapped their hands. Proverbs, parables, fables, hyperbole and idioms were used by the prophets. Much prophecy was expressed in poetic form with the characteristic of Hebrew parallelism and the usual extravagant imagery or exaggerations common in poetry. Vivid, dramatic imagery was employed, for example, Ezekiel's valley of dry bones (37:1-6), Daniel's vision of four beasts (7:1-28), Isaiah's exalted vision of God (6:1-13), Amos' plumbline (7:7-9), and the laments of Jeremiah (Lam. 1-4).

Symbols and types were also used in prophecy. A symbol is something used to represent something else. The "arm" of the Lord was used to represent the strength of the Lord (Isa. 53:1). Names (Babylon, I Pet. 5:13), numbers (seven, Rev. 4:5), colors (pale, Rev. 6:8), things (bowls of incense, Rev. 5:8), and animals (lamb, Rev. 5:6,9,12) are used symbolically.

Care must be exercised in understanding symbols because a thing may be used to represent more than one thing. Sheep represent man's waywardness in Isaiah 53:6 but a lamb is used to represent Jesus as sacrificial savior in John 1:29.

A type is a divinely planned predictive symbol. It is an actual person, place or thing used to represent and prefigure a person, place or thing in the future. Elijah was a type of John the Baptist. Malachi announced God's promise to send "Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD" (4:5, NASB). John denied that he was literally Elijah (John 1:21). But Jesus said, "He is Elijah who is to come" (Matt. 11:14, see 17:11,12). The angel, Gabriel, announcing John's birth said, "He will go before him [Christ] in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17).

Speculative interpretation that multiplies types imaginatively must be avoided. The identification and interpretation of types must be guided by New Testament use and explanation. Adam was a type of Christ (Rom. 5:14; I Cor. 15:22). Moses was a type of Christ (Deut. 18:14; Acts 3:22-26). The Sabbath was a type of eternal rest (Heb. 4:4-7; Col. 2:16,17). The brass serpent was a type of Christ's death on the cross (Num. 21:8,9; John 3:14,15).

The prophets were preachers who used everyday language. The blessings of the coming kingdom were stated in agricultural terms. They spoke in times of crisis often using arresting, emotional language in an effort to get the people's attention. They were trying to motivate to repentance. They painted vivid pictures. For example, Nahum graphically describes the siege, conquest and destruction of Nineveh (2:1-13). Some rebukes were blunt and harsh. Isaiah called the watchmen "dumb dogs" (Isa. 56:10).

Messages were sometimes conveyed by symbolic actions. Ezekiel shaved his head and beard. He divided the hair into three equal parts. He burned one third, cut one third into small pieces with a sword, and scattered the other third in the wind. This showed God's judgment on Jerusalem in which one third of its population would die of pestilence, one third would fall by the sword, and one third would be scattered to the wind (Ezek. 5:1-17).

The language in Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah and the book of Revelation has many symbols that conveyed coded or secret meanings. Those who understood the symbols received instruction and encouragement, but to those who did not it was merely a confusing puzzle, until other teaching made it plain. In studying these books it is important to remember that they are highly symbolic and we need to give more diligent study to understand them in the author's intended meaning.

More effort is required to understand figurative language. A figure of speech is a word or expression that has a meaning

beyond its usual meaning. When Jesus said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19), the Jews took His expression as literally speaking of Herod's temple and responded, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you will raise it up in three days?" (John 2:20). John makes it clear that Jesus meant what He said to be a figurative expression of an actual reality, His resurrection, "But he spoke of the temple of his body" (John 2:21).

Figurative does not mean mythical or untrue. It is not liberal nor unbelieving to understand a figurative statement as having a meaning other than the usual meaning of its words. The believing attitude accepts the author's intended meaning. If he meant an expression to be literal, it must be understood as literal. If it was meant as figurative, it must be understood as figurative.

The Jews who looked for a temporal Messianic ruler rejected Jesus because they did not understand the figurative Messianic prophecies. Nicodemus was wrong when he spoke of the new birth only in a literal sense (John 3:3-5). Liberals are wrong who take the historical account of creation as only symbolic. They are also in error who take the second coming of Jesus as a figurative expression of Christ coming into our lives at baptism.

GUIDELINES FOR UNDERSTANDING PROPHECY

BACKGROUND:

1. *The general principles for understanding a passage in the light of its grammatical and historical meaning must be the basis for interpreting prophecy.* Much of prophecy can be understood in the light of the general rules for reading literature. However, special rules apply to the special expressions and constructions. Use the general rules as far as they will take you.

2. *Seek to establish the purpose and nature of the passage.* Is it teaching information or exhorting to action? Is it an historical report of the past, a description of the present conditions at the

time of the prophecy, or a prediction of things to come in the future? Is it poetry, prose, or symbolic vision?

3. *Determine the historical background of the prophet and of the prophecy.* It is difficult to understand the figurative meaning of an expression if we do not understand its literal or ordinary meaning. One needs to understand the use of a thing in the prophet's time, for example, Jeremiah's yoke, Amos' plumbline, and Paul's girdle used by Agabus, in order to learn the meaning intended by the prophet. A knowledge of the history, culture and geography of the time of the prophecy can be helpful in understanding that prophecy. One must not, however, force a prediction to say only what a man would know in the prophet's time or circumstances, thus eliminating the role of divine revelation.

INTERPRETATION:

4. *Give attention to the meaning of names of people, events, places and things.* A message is sometimes linked to the meaning of a name. A Bible dictionary can help here but make sure their explanations harmonize with Bible truth. Unfortunately, Bible dictionaries are not always reliable.

5. *First, consider the literal meaning of an expression.* "If the literal sense makes good sense seek no other sense" is one way to remember this guideline. The literal meaning of a word or expression is the usual meaning of that word or expression in a given area of usage.

We must take the passage in the most basic, ordinary meaning unless compelling reasons indicate otherwise. Since much prophecy is figurative we must recognize this possibility. The interpreter who finds more symbolic meanings than the original writer intended is merely an imaginative misinterpreter. Many prophecies were literally fulfilled, for example see page 129.

6. *Determine if the expression is figurative.* The following considerations help the reader recognize figurative language. It is figurative if the speaker or an author of Scripture says it is

figurative (Dan. 7:17; John 2:19). It is figurative when the context states or indicates it is figurative (John 7:39). A figurative meaning is intended when the literal sense involves an impossibility (Mark 10:40) or a contradiction with clear teaching. A figurative meaning may more clearly fit the context and purpose of the author. The figurative meaning is intended in the prediction when the Bible itself claims it is fulfilled in a figurative way (John 2:19-22).

7. *Determine if the prophecy has been fulfilled or not.* Certainty in interpreting predictive prophecy often cannot be attained without the light of its undoubted fulfillment (Amos 9:11,12; Acts 15:13-19). Unfulfilled prophecy is much less certain of meaning and requires more caution in interpreting it.

8. *Determine if the prophecy is conditional or not.* The doom announced by Jonah on Nineveh could be avoided upon condition of their repentance — which they promptly offered, much to Jonah's chagrin. Usually conditional predictions are general promises of blessings or judgment rather than predicting specific events. The context needs to be studied carefully looking for any stated conditions. Study the following passages: Deuteronomy 28; Jeremiah 18:8,10; 26:12,13; Ezekiel 18:30-32; 33:13-15.

BIBLICAL ASSISTANCE:

9. *Understand a prophecy in the light of the New Testament explanation of the prophecy.* Of course, the New Testament does not interpret every Old Testament prophecy for us. No prophecy should be understood in a way contrary to the New Testament interpretation of that prophecy. One method that employs this guideline is to read through the New Testament and every time the Old Testament is quoted go back to the text in the Old Testament and study it in the light of the use and explanation given to it in the New Testament.

Matthew said the birth of Jesus to a virgin was a fulfillment of Isaiah's predicted virgin conception and birth (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:22,23). "The stone which the builders rejected has become the

head of the corner" (Psa. 118:22) was applied by Jesus (Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:11). See also Acts 4:11; Ephesians 2:20; I Peter 2:7. The Lord promised to "make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah (Jer. 31:31). The Hebrews writer quoted Jeremiah 31:31-34 and applied this prophecy directly to the covenant of Christ with all nations (Heb. 8:8-13).

Use the New Testament interpretations of the Old Testament prophecies as a guide and example for methods of interpretation of the passages that are not interpreted in the New Testament. Fulfilled prophecy is the key to understanding unfulfilled prophecy. The study of New Testament handling of prophecies will give more insight into the understanding of all prophecies.

10. *Any explanation by the author or any inspired writer must be accepted as the true interpretation.* Jesus said, "He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.' " The Gospel writer John explained, "Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive" (John 7:38,39).

Because of New Testament explanation we know at least some of the promises to "the seed of Abraham" are not to those who are blood descendants from Abraham but to those believers in the gospel who are children of Abraham by faith. See Galatians 3:26-29; Romans 4:12; Hebrews 2:16. Paul plainly said, "For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, but not all are children of Abraham because they are his descendants; but 'Through Isaac shall your descendants be named.' This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are reckoned as descendants" (Rom. 9:6-8). Believers in Christ have become "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16). We best understand what God predicted in the Old Testament about his new people, new covenant, and new kingdom when we study the New Testament explanation of these promises.

11. *Parallel prophecies or other prophecies on the same sub-*

ject may explain an expression. "The desolating sacrilege spoken of by the prophet Daniel" (Matt. 24:15) is explained in Luke's account. "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near" (Luke 21:20).

God intended to create a new people by giving them His Spirit. The following scriptures help one to understand this topic: Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:25-27; 37:14,26-28; Luke 24:49; John 3:3-5; Acts 1:3-5,8; 2:4,38; Titus 2:11-14; 3:3-7; Heb. 2:1-4; 8:8-13.

Consider other passages which use the same or similar wording or imagery. One must realize at the same time that the same symbol or figure may be used in quite different ways at different times.

CAUTIONS:

12. *Hold interpretations of prophecy with humility, not dogmatism, especially those unfulfilled or uncertain.* Remember the Jewish interpreters of Jesus' day were sure they were right in their understanding of Messianic prophecy — but they were wrong. We must study diligently and form honest opinions but we must not consider such views as infallible.

Concerning the date of the second coming, we cannot be more certain than our Lord, who said, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only" (Matt. 24:36). When Daniel asked for an explanation of his vision of the beasts he was told they represented four kings or kingdoms (Dan. 7:15-23). But he was not given detailed information about these kingdoms. Even the prophets themselves could not interpret unfulfilled prophecy with certainty (Matt. 22:2,3; I Pet. 1:10-12).

Those who have dogmatically detailed future events have brought disrepute on the faith when such strongly held views have been proven false. Agreement on the exact fulfillment of unfulfilled prophecy must not be made a test of fellowship.

13. *Beware of arbitrary systems of prophetic interpretation of*

future events. They often force a meaning on texts that violates the context. Prophecies were often given without any system, chronological or otherwise. Different aspects of the same event are foretold by various prophets. Predictions of widely separated events may be stated together and appear to be scheduled to occur more closely together than they actually will be when fulfilled (Matt. 16:27,28). It may be that no current system of interpreting prophecy is right in every detail. What is important is that we believe every word spoken by the Lord and that we walk in trust obeying what He has asked of us.

14. *Concentrate on the central truths and important lessons from Scripture.* We need to learn to be faithful unto death (Rev. 2:10), to be confident that God is supreme in the universe (Rev. 4 and 5), and to be overcomers who will be victorious (Rev. 17:14), more than we need to know the exact meaning of the symbolic 666 (Rev. 13:18).

Learning from Bible prophecy is not always easy. But, because learning from Bible prophecy will strengthen our faith, deepen our understanding and encourage a warmhearted and spiritual devotion to our God, we neglect it to our own loss (II Pet. 3:1-18).

Study Questions

1. Why do some avoid studying prophecy?
2. Define a true prophet according to the Bible.
3. State four benefits of studying prophecy.
4. What inadequate approaches to the study of prophecy must be avoided?
5. What method of study is recommended in this chapter?

6. List problems that one encounters in studying Bible prophecy.
7. Give examples of figurative and symbolic language used in Bible prophecy.
8. Define symbol and type. How are they different?
9. Define the meaning of a figure of speech.
10. List fourteen guidelines for understanding prophecy.
11. How can one determine when an expression is to be understood figuratively?
12. What should be one's attitude toward his view of the meaning of unfulfilled prophecy?

Project

Read the Old Testament Messianic prediction and the New Testament fulfillment. Identify what is fulfilled literally and what is fulfilled figuratively.

| O.T. | N.T. | LITERAL | FIGURATIVE |
|--------------|-------------|---------|------------|
| 1. Isa. 7:14 | Matt. 1:23 | | |
| 2. Micah 5:2 | Matt. 2:6 | | |
| 3. Mal. 3:1 | Matt. 11:10 | | |
| 4. Isa. 42:3 | Matt. 12:20 | | |

LEARNING FROM BIBLE PROPHECY

5. Zech. 11:12 Matt. 27:9
6. Psa. 22:18 Matt. 27:43
7. Isa. 42:6;
 49:6 Luke 2:32
8. Psa. 118:22 Luke 20:17
9. Psa. 41:9 John 13:18
10. Psa. 16:10 Acts 2:27

BOOKLIST FOR BIBLE STUDENTS

(Prepared by Lynn Gardner)

Inclusion in this list does not mean endorsement of all views expressed. At points some of the authors express doctrinal and critical views which must be rejected. The books are listed because they can make a contribution toward an understanding of the Biblical text.

Bible Concordances

Goodrick, E.W. and Kohlenberger, J.R. *The NIV Complete Concordance*. Zondervan, 1981.

Basic concordance. Does not identify the word in the original language or give definition of words.

Morrison, Clinton. *Analytical Concordance to the RSV of the New Testament*. Westminster Press, 1929.

Similar format to Young's.

Nelson's Complete Concordance of the Revised Standard Version. Nelson. 1957.

Strong, James. *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, rev. ed. Abingdon, 1980. (Reprint of 1890 ed.)

Widely used, standard work. Uses a numbering system to identify the original Hebrew or Greek word and its meaning. Has better definitions than Young's.

Thomas, Robert L. *New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Holman, 1981.

Follows the format of Strong's. Includes Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek dictionaries. Excellent tool.

Young, Robert. *Analytical Concordance to the Bible*. Eerdmans, 1955, reprint of 1881 ed.

Lists occurrences of the English word in groups according to the Hebrew or Greek words from which they are translated. Better arranged than Strong's.

Bible Dictionaries

Bromiley, G.W. ed. *International Standard Bible Dictionary*, rev. ed., 4 volumes. Eerdmans, 1979, 1982, 1986.

Produced by American evangelicals.

Brown, Colin, ed. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3 vols. Zondervan, 1975-78.

Major reference work on word studies for the advanced student. An index volume is now available.

Douglas, J.D., ed. *New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd ed. Tyndale House Publishers, 1982.

Interacts with current scholarship. Produced by international team of evangelical scholars.

Douglas, J.D., revising editor, and Tenney, Merrill C., general editor. *The New International Dictionary of the Bible, Pictorial Edition*. Zondervan, 1987.

Conservative, basic information on people, places, event, subjects in the Bible.

- Elwell, Walter A., ed. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Baker, 1984.
Bible-believing and comprehensive.
- Ferguson, Sinclair B.; Wright, David F.; and Packer, J.I. *New Dictionary of Theology*. InterVarsity, 1988.
Evangelical work with over 630 articles covering topics of interest to both the general reader and the advanced Bible student.
- Harris, R. Laird; Archer, Gleason L.; and Waltke, Bruce K., eds. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 volumes. Moody Press, 1980.
Good general work on the meaning of Hebrew words. For those who do not know Hebrew the words can be identified by the numbers in Strong's or Thomas' concordances.
- Richards, Lawrence O. *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*. Zondervan, 1985. Seeks to help the reader understand the original meaning of Bible words as defined by the Scripture.
- Tenney, Merrill, ed. *Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 5 vols. Zondervan, 1975.
Excellent reference work.
- Unger, Merrill F. & William White, Jr., eds. *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Nelson, 1980.
Defines over 500 Hebrew words arranged alphabetically by their English translation.
- Vine, W.E. *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Revell, 1940.
Valuable reference work. Non-technical guide to the meaning of Greek words.

Bible Atlases

- Beitzel, Barry J. *The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands*. Moody, 1985.
Up-to-date. Uses scholarly vocabulary. Commentary on more than ninety maps of Palestine, Mediterranean area, Near East, the Sinai and Turkey.
- Frank, Harry Thomas, ed. *Hammonds Atlas of the Bible Lands*. Hammond Incorporated, 1984.
Inexpensive collection of Bible maps. Occasional liberal views.
- May, Herbert G., ed. *Oxford Atlas*, 3rd, ed. Oxford University Press, 1984.
Very clear maps. Well researched. Presented in concise fashion. Available in paperback.
- Pfeiffer, Charles F. *Baker's Bible Atlas*. Baker, 1961.
Follows the Biblical historical narrative from Genesis to Revelation. Emphasizes factual data.

Bible Handbooks

- Alexander, David and Pat, eds. *Eerdman's Handbook to the Bible*, rev. ed. Eerdmans, 1983.
A comprehensive, fully illustrated reference book helping the reader understand the Bible in its historical context.
- Halley, Henry H. *Halley's Bible Handbook*, 24th edition. Zondervan, 1965.

BOOKLIST FOR BIBLE STUDENTS

Has stood the test of time and is still valuable. Brief introduction and survey of each Bible book with much other helpful information.

Richards, Lawrence O. *The Word Bible Handbook*. Word, 1982.

Much helpful information. More than usual attention to application and practice of the Bible's teaching and to the importance of Bible facts.

Bible Surveys

Deal, William S. *Baker's Pictorial Introduction to the Bible*. Baker, 1967.

Concise and reliable overview of each book in the Bible.

Dunnett, Walter M. *New Testament Survey*. Evangelical Teacher Training Association, 1963.

Brief, non-technical survey.

Schultz, Samuel. *Old Testament Speaks*, 3rd, ed. Harper, 1980.

Excellent survey of the content of each Old Testament book.

Smith, William. *Old Testament History*, as revised and updated by Wilbur Fields. College Press, 1983.

Excellent survey of the history of God's people from the creation to the end of the Old Testament.

Tenney, Merrill C. *New Testament Survey*, revised by Walter Dunnett. Eerdmans, 1985.

Deals with the historical setting of the New Testament and gives a basic survey of the content of each New Testament book. Valuable study aid.

Bible Introduction

Archer, Gleason L. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. Moody Press, 1976.

Conservative, scholarly work, dealing with the critical questions about each book in the Old Testament.

Bruce, F.F. *The Books and the Parchments*, 4th ed. Revell, 1984.

Tells the story of how we got the Bible.

Geisler, Norman and William Nix. *A General Introduction to the Bible*, rev. ed. Moody, 1986.

Comprehensive work on the writing, copying, inspiration and translation of the Bible. The material is also published in a condensed form in *From God to Us*, (Moody, 1974).

Greenlee, J. Harold. *Scribes, Scrolls and Scripture: A Student's Guide to New Testament Textual Criticism*. Eerdmans, 1985.

A basic introduction to the writing of ancient books, the history of the Biblical text and how we know the New Testament has been copied correctly through the centuries.

Guthrie, Donald. *New Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. InterVarsity Press, 1981.

Conservative, cautious and thorough work which discusses the date, authorship, historical reliability, purpose and content of each New Testament book.

Harris, R. Laird. *Your Bible*. Evangelical Teacher Training Association, 1978.

Non-technical introduction to the Bible.

Harrison, R.K. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*. Eerdmans, 1969.

A comprehensive introduction to the history of Old Testament criticism and critical questions in the study of each Old Testament book.

Hiebert, D. Edmond. *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 3 volumes. Moody Press, 1975-1977.

Conservative work which provides background information and an outline for each book.

Lightfoot, Neil. *How We Got the Bible*. Abilene Christian University Press, 1987.

Excellent basic information about the writing, inspiration and translation of the Bible.

Young, Edward J. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*. Eerdmans, 1958.

Older, but still valuable conservative work.

Concerning Commentaries:

1. Do not begin your study with a commentary. Begin with your own study of the Biblical text. Then consult a commentary or commentaries to find answers to questions which have arisen in your mind.
2. Choose commentaries carefully. It is better to have one or two good commentaries on a Bible book rather than to have three or four poor ones.
3. Choose the commentary which best helps you understand the author's original meaning in the text. If possible read a few pages before purchasing a book. Read how it handles certain difficult verses. Generally a person who does not know the original language will not choose a commentary on the Greek or Hebrew text.
4. Use a commentary as a resource tool to help you better understand the Biblical author's intended meaning. No commentary is infallible or has final authority. Use commentaries as aids to assist you as you use your own mind and common sense to intelligently read and understand God's word.

OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES

Old Testament History

Smith, William. *Old Testament History*, revised and updated by Wilbur Fields. College Press, 1983.

Factual study of the history of God's people from the creation through the end of the Old Testament era. Extensive study questions.

Davis, John D. and John C. Whitcomb. *A History of Israel from Conquest to Exile*. Baker, 1980.

A concise survey of the history of Israel as recorded in Joshua through II Chronicles.

Wood Leon. *A Survey of Israel's History*, revised ed. Zondervan, 1986.

Relates Israel's history to its cultural setting.

BOOKLIST FOR BIBLE STUDENTS

Edersheim, Alfred. *Old Testament Bible History*. Eerdmans, 1876-1887 edition.

Classic work on relating the Old Testament to its historical context.

Genesis

Davis, John J. *Paradise to Prison: Studies in Genesis*. Baker, 1975.

Reliable commentary and study guide. Gives archaeological background of Bible history.

H.D. Leupold. *Exposition of Genesis*, 2 volumes. Baker, 1942.

Careful grammatical and historical comment. Author's own translation.

Helpful explanations of the deeper meanings of Genesis.

Exodus

Wilbur Fields. *Exploring Exodus* (BST). College Press, 1976.

Commentary is enhanced by archaeological and devotional insights. Attention is given to the date of the Exodus, authorship of the book, the route of the Exodus.

John J. Davis. *Moses and the Gods of Egypt*, 2nd ed. Baker, 1986.

The book of Exodus becomes more meaningful in the light of the Egyptian religious culture of Moses' day.

Leviticus

DeWalt, Don. *Leviticus* (BST). College Press, 1975.

Comments are in four categories: critical, devotional, expository and homiletical. Practical, readable, many thought and fact questions.

Wenham, Gordon. *The Book of Leviticus* (NIC). Eerdmans, 1979.

Includes both technical information as well as devotional insights; thorough, understandable. Has a section at the end of each chapter on the relationship of that chapter to the New Testament.

Numbers

Doty, Brant L. *Numbers* (BST). College Press, 1973.

Basic comments with attention given to chronology, names, places and special words.

Wenham, Gordon. *Numbers* (TOTC). InterVarsity, 1981.

Introduction to the book and a passage-by-passage analysis.

Deuteronomy

Oberst, Bruce. *Deuteronomy* (BST). College Press, 1968.

Basic commentary with special studies.

Schultz, Samuel J. *Deuteronomy*. Moody Press, 1971.

Brief book emphasizing the love of God.

Schneider, Bernard N. *Deuteronomy: A Favored Book of Jesus*. Baker, 1970.

Brief, practical. Stresses the truthfulness and significance of the book.

Joshua-Judges-Ruth

Winter, Willard W. *Joshua-Judges-Ruth* (BST). College Press, 1969.

Commentary and teaching manual.

Davis, John J. *Conquest and Crisis: Studies in Joshua, Judges and Ruth*. Baker, 1969.

This book is included in the author's *A History of Israel from Conquest to Exile*.

Wood, Leon. *Distressing Days of the Judges*. Zondervan, 1975.

Well researched, reliable study.

Barber, Cyril J. *Ruth: An Expositional Commentary*. Moody Press, 1983.

Practical application.

I & II Samuel

Winter, Willard W. *I & II Samuel* (BST). College Press, 1967.

Includes good introduction to the books and includes an outline of each chapter.

Davis, John J. *The Birth of a Kingdom: Studies in I & II Samuel and I Kings 1-11*. Baker, 1970.

This book is included in the author's *A History of Israel from Conquest to Exile*.

I & II Kings

Smith, James E. *I & II Kings* (BST). College Press, 1975.

Careful explanation of the text is enhanced by the author's translation, complete introduction, charts and bibliography.

I & II Chronicles

Black, Robert E. *The Books of Chronicles* (BST). College Press, 1973.

Includes paraphrase, comments, review questions, drawings and maps.

Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther

Ratzlaff, Ruben M. and Paul Butler. *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* (BST). College Press, 1979.

Outlines and special studies add to the value of the commentary.

Job

Jensen, Irving L. *Job: A Self-Study Guide*. Moody Press, 1975.

Attempts to involve the reader in a firsthand study of the book.

Archer, Jr., Gleason. *The Book of Job*. Baker, 1983.

Brief, scholarly, practical. The lessons in this book come out of a painful experience with sickness and death.

Anderson, Frances I. *Job: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC). InterVarsity, 1976.

Deals with the problem of suffering as well as providing an introduction and

BOOKLIST FOR BIBLE STUDENTS

verse-by-verse comment.

Strauss, James D. *Job: The Shattering of Silence* (BST). College Press, 1976.
Special studies deal with problems encountered in the study of the book.

Psalms

Alden, Robert. *Psalms*, 3 volumes. Moody Press, 1974, 1975, 1976.

Popular level studies explain and apply the psalms.

Allen, Ronald B. *Lord of Song: The Messiah Revealed in the Psalms*. Multnomah Press, 1985.

Shows how the Psalms picture the loving devotion of the coming Messiah.

Leupold, H.D. *Exposition of the Psalms*. Baker, 1969.

Scholarly explanation of the grammatical and historical meaning of each of the Psalms.

Perowne, J.J.S. *The Book of Psalms*. Zondervan, 1969 reprint of 1878 ed.

Classic work. Exegetical studies by Anglican theologian.

Kidner, Derek. *The Psalms* (TOTC), 2 volumes. InterVarsity, 1973, 1975.

Verse-by-verse analysis.

Proverbs

Hunt, Donald. *Pondering the Proverbs* (BST). College Press, 1974.

Has subject groupings. Topical index and index to comparisons and contrasts in addition to the comment on the text.

Kidner, Derek. *The Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC). InterVarsity, 1964.

Comment on text and topical studies.

Bridges, Charles. *Proverbs*, 2 volumes. Banner of Truth, 1979.

Detailed study.

Ecclesiastes & Song of Solomon

Kidwell, R.J. and Don DeWalt. *Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon* (BST). College Press, 1977.

Provides devotional insights as well as being a study guide for these two books.

Goldberg, Louis. *Ecclesiastes*. Zondervan, 1983.

Brief, helpful. Faces hard questions honestly. Written from years of study, meditation and life.

Leupold, H.C. *An Exposition of Ecclesiastes*. Baker, 1966.

Grammatical analysis is helpful but adopts a doubtful view in regard to authorship.

Isaiah

Butler, Paul T. *Isaiah* (BST), 3 volumes. College Press, 1975, 1976, 1978.

Basic explanation with application of the prophet's message to today's needs.

Leupold, H.C. *Exposition of Isaiah*. Baker, 1977.

Interpretation of the text with attention to linguistic and historical evidence.
Deals with questions raised by the critics.

Young, Edward J. *The Book of Isaiah*, 3 volumes. Eerdmans, 1965, 1969, 1972.

Scholarly, conservative commentaries which deal with grammatical, historical and theological issues.

Jeremiah & Lamentations

Smith, James E. *Jeremiah and Lamentations* (BST). College Press, 1972.

Extensive, scholarly work. Contains author's own translation, special studies, sermons, and glossary.

Harrison, R.K. *Jeremiah and Lamentations: Introduction & Commentary* (TOTC). InterVarsity, 1973.

In addition to providing a verse-by-verse commentary, Harrison seeks to help the reader come to know Jeremiah the man.

Laetsch, Theodore. *Jeremiah*. Concordia, 1952.

Thorough work by Lutheran scholar.

Kaiser, Jr., Walter C. *A Biblical Approach to Personal Suffering*. Moody Press, 1982.

Practical application.

Ezekiel

Smith, James E. *Ezekiel* (BST). College Press, 1979.

Scholarly work which deals with the views of cultists, critics as well as the Zionists in verse-by-verse comment. Has several charts and maps.

Daniel

Butler, Paul T. *Daniel* (BST), rev. ed. College Press, 1976.

Verse-by-verse commentary with several sermons and special studies.

Young, Edward J. *The Prophecy of Daniel: A Commentary*. Eerdmans, 1949.

Exposition of the text and answers to the critical views.

Leupold, H.C. *Exposition of Daniel*. Baker, 1949. Deals with introductory issues as well as commentary.

Wood, Leon J. *A Commentary on Daniel*. Zondervan, 1973.

Readable commentary giving attention to the historical setting and fulfillment.

Minor Prophets

Lewis, Jack. *The Minor Prophets*. Baker, 1966.

Condenses much helpful material in a concise fashion.

Hailey, Homer. *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets*. Baker, 1972.

Reliable, concise comment.

Butler, Paul T. *Minor Prophets: Hosea to Jonah* (BST). College Press, 1968.

Explains and applies the message of the minor prophets to the issues of today.

BOOKLIST FOR BIBLE STUDENTS

- Kaiser, Jr., Walter C. *Malachi: God's Unchanging Love*. Baker, 1984.
Emphasis on the message of the book.
- Leupold, H.C. *An Exposition of Zechariah*. Baker, 1965.
Attention is given to historical and grammatical detail.
- Laetsch, Theodore F.K. *The Minor Prophets*. Concordia, 1956.
Gives attention to the doctrine of the prophets.

Biography

These are popular studies drawing lessons from the lives of the Old Testament characters.

- Getz, Gene A. *Abraham: Trials and Triumphs*. Regal Books, 1976.
- Getz, Gene A. *David: God's Man in Faith and Failure*. Regal Books, 1979.
- Getz, Gene A. *Joseph: From Prison to Palace*. Regal Book, 1983.
- Getz, Gene A. *Joshua: Defeat to Victory*. Regal Books, 1979.
- Getz, Gene A. *Moses: Moments of Glory . . . Feet of Clay*. Regal Books, 1976.
- Getz, Gene A. *Nehemiah: A Man of Prayer and Persistence*. Regal Books, 1981.

NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES

Under each Bible book the commentaries are listed from the basic and nontechnical to the scholarly and technical.

Matthew

- McGarvey, J.W. *Matthew and Mark*. Gospel Light, n.d.
Basic, brief, helpful.
- Carson, D.A. *God With Us: Themes from Matthew*. Regal Books, 1985.
Non-technical commentary emphasizing major themes.
- Stott, John R.W. *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*. InterVarsity, 1978.
Outstanding exposition and application of Sermon on the Mount.
- Lewis, Jack P. *The Gospel According to Matthew (LCW)*, Vol. I & II. Sweet Publishing, 1976.
Brief exegetical comment based on R.S.V.
- Gaebelein, Frank, ed. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, volume 8, *Matthew, Mark, Luke*. Zondervan, 1984.
D.A. Carson is the author of the excellent commentary on Matthew.
- Fowler, Harold. *The Gospel of Matthew (BST)*, Vol. I, II, III, IV. College Press, 1968, 1972, 1978, 1986.
Extensive exegetical comment with many topical studies.
- Hendriksen, William. *The Gospel of Matthew (NTC)*. Baker, 1973.
Exegetical and expository. Extensive. By conservative Calvinist.

Mark

- McGarvey, J.W. *Matthew and Mark*. Gospel Light, n.d.

Basic brief, helpful.

Hiebert, D. Edmond. *Mark: A Portrait of the Servant*. Moody Press, 1974.

Exegetical and devotional commentary by conservative Mennonite.

Hendriksen, W. *The Gospel of Mark* (NTC). Baker, 1974.

Exegetical and expository commentary by conservative Calvinist.

Lane, William. *Commentary on the Gospel of Mark* (NIC). Eerdmans, 1974.

Extensive work by evangelical. Deals with critical issues.

Cranfield, C.B. *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (CGTC), 3rd ed. Cambridge University Press, 1966.

On Greek text by British scholar. Moderately conservative in tone, rejecting more radical views.

Taylor, Vincent. *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 2nd ed. St. Martins, 1966.

On Greek text. Discusses all critical issues. Form critical approach but generally defends the historicity of Mark.

Luke

Foster, Lewis. *Luke*. Standard Publishing, 1986.

Non-technical commentary concentrating on the main ideas of each paragraph.

Morris, Leon. *The Gospel According to Luke* (TNTC). Eerdmans, 1974.

Outstanding. Concise, helpful comments.

Butler, Paul T. *The Gospel of Luke* (BST). College Press, 1981.

Basic commentary, includes several special studies.

Arndt, William. *Gospel According to St. Luke*. Concordia, 1956.

Thorough exposition by a conservative Lutheran.

Geldenhuys, Norval. *Commentary on Gospel of Luke* (NIC). Eerdmans, 1951.

Excellent introduction, comment and special studies. Reformed.

Hendriksen, William. *The Gospel of Luke* (NTC). Baker, 1978.

Helpful exegesis and exposition.

Plummer, Alfred. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel* (ICC), 10th ed. T & T Clark, 1914.

Valuable classic on the Greek text.

Marshall, I. Howard. *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC). Eerdmans, 1978.

Technical. By a conservative who is an advocate of source criticism.

John

Butler, Paul. *The Gospel of John* (BST). College Press, 1961, 1965.

Basic exposition.

Pack, Frank. *The Gospel According to John* (LWC), Vols. I & II. Sweet Publishing, 1975, 1977.

Reliable commentary.

Bruce, F.F. *The Gospel of John*. Eerdmans, 1983.

Solid exegetical commentary.

Hendriksen, William. *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*. Baker,

BOOKLIST FOR BIBLE STUDENTS

1953,

Thorough and helpful. By conservative Calvinist.

Westcott, B.F. *The Gospel According to St. John*. Eerdmans, 1971 reprint of 1881 ed.

Classic.

Morris, Leon. *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (NIC). Eerdmans, 1969.

Extensive work by an evangelical.

Barrett, C.K. *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2nd ed. Westminster, 1979.

Advanced work based on the Greek text by a moderate liberal.

Acts

Roberts, J.W. *Acts of Apostles*, Vols. I & II. R.B. Sweet, 1967.

Very helpful basic commentaries.

McGarvey, J.W. *New Commentary on Acts of the Apostles*. Standard and Gospel Light, reprint of 1982 edition.

One of the best available on Acts.

Reese, Gareth. *New Testament History: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Acts*. College Press, 1976.

Extensive comment on each phrase in the book of Acts.

Marshall, I.H. *The Acts of the Apostles* (TNTC). Eerdmans, 1980.

Exegetical commentary with good attention to context. By evangelical Methodist.

Bruce, F.F. *Commentary on the Book of Acts* (NIC), rev. ed. Eerdmans, 1988.

Careful exposition with valuable historical background, by noted evangelical.

Bruce, F.F. *The Acts of the Apostles*. Eerdmans, 1951.

Technical commentary based on the Greek text.

Romans

Smith, Sherwood. *Twenty-Six Lessons on Romans*, Part One and Part Two. College Press, 1979.

Good basic comment.

McGarvey, J.W. *Commentary on Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians, Romans*. Standard, 1913 ed.

One of the most helpful in grasping Paul's thought.

Bruce, F.F. *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (TNTC). Eerdmans, 1963.

Brief, non-technical. Insightful.

Batey, Richard A. *The Letter of Paul to the Romans* (LWC). Sweet Publishing, 1969.

Helpful exegesis.

Hendriksen, William. *Romans* (NTC). Baker, 1980, 1981.

Clear and useful, comprehensive comment by conservative Calvinist.

Morris, Leon. *The Epistle to the Romans*. Eerdmans, 1987.

Easy-to-read commentary that deals with scholarly issues in the footnotes.

Cranfield, C.E.B. *Romans: A Shorter Commentary*. Eerdmans, 1985.

An abridged edition of his two-volume scholarly work in the new ICC series (1975, 1979).

Sanday, William and Headlam, Arthur C. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (ICC). T. & T. Clark, 1895.

"Scholarly, balanced, technically sound" (Bruce Metzger). On Greek text. Classic work generally conservative, Arminian in theology.

Barrett, C.K. *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (HNTC). Harper & Row, 1957.

Helpful technical work by scholarly liberal.

I Corinthians

McGarvey, J.W. *Commentary on Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians, Romans*. Standard, n.d.

Helpful, basic comment.

Butler, Paul T. *First Corinthians* (BST). College Press, 1985.

Basic commentary with some topical studies.

Morris, Leon. *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (TNTC), rev. ed. Eerdmans, 1988.

Brief, but very helpful. Evangelical.

Robertson, Archibald and Plummer, Alfred. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (ICC), 2nd ed. T. & T. Clark, 1914.

Valuable work on the Greek text.

Barrett, C.K. *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (HNTC). Harper, 1968.

Competent scholarly exegesis. Liberal, for example disparages historical evidence for Christ's resurrection and calls Paul's picture of the end time "mythological."

II Corinthians

McGarvey, J.W. See I Corinthians.

Butler, Paul T. *Second Corinthians* (BST). College Press, 1988.

Interpretation and application of the text. Includes special studies.

Hughes, Phillip E. *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIC). Eerdmans, 1962.

Excellent work by an evangelical.

Plummer, Alfred. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (ICC). T. & T. Clark, 1915.

Based on the Greek text. Accepts II Corinthians as Pauline but holds that 10-13 is a separate letter.

Barrett, C.K. *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. Harper & Row, 1973.

Thorough, critical, in the light of contemporary research.

Galatians

Boles, Kenny. *Thirteen Lessons on Galatians*. College Press, 1978.

BOOKLIST FOR BIBLE STUDENTS

Brief, helpful explanation of the text.

McGarvey, J.W. *Commentary on Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians, Romans*. Standard, 1913 ed.

Helpful.

Stott, John R.W. *Only One Way: The Message of Galatians* (TBST). InterVarsity, 1968.

Practical expository messages on Galatians.

Guthrie, Donald. *Galatians* (NCB). Attic Press, 1969.

Brief. Good on introduction and grammatical interpretation.

Lightfoot, J.B. *St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*. Zondervan, 1967 reprint of 1865 ed.

Classic. Outstanding commentary based on Greek. Valuable linguistic insights.

Bruce, F.F. *Commentary on Galatians* (NIGTC). Eerdmans, 1982.

Thorough study on the Greek text.

Ephesians

Boles, Kenny. *Thirteen Lessons on Ephesians*. College Press, 1978.

Basic grammatical explanation.

Fields, Wilbur. *The Glorious Church: A Study of Ephesians* (BST). College Press, 1960.

Basic, practical, helpful.

Stott, John R.W. *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians* (TBST). InterVarsity, 1979.

Helpful exposition.

Bruce, F.F. *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians* (NIC). Eerdmans, 1984.

Fine exegetical commentary.

Kent, Homer A. *Ephesians: The Glory of the Church*. Moody, 1971.

Evangelical commentary emphasizing nature and function of the church.

Hendriksen, William. *Exposition of Ephesians* (NTC). Baker, 1967.

Scholarly, practical. Calvinist.

Westcott, Brooke Foss. *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*. Eerdmans, 1958 reprint of 1906 ed.

Solid exegesis for Greek student.

Barth, Marcus. *Ephesians* (AB), 2 volumes. Doubleday, 1974.

Extensive, technical commentary for the advanced student. Liberal in places.

Philippians

Boles, Kenny. *Thirteen Lesson on Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*. College Press, 1979.

Concise, helpful.

Fields, Wilbur. *Philippians-Colossians-Philemon* (BST). College Press, 1969.

Practical, basic commentary.

- Bruce, F.F. *Philippians* (GNC). Harper & Row, 1983.
 Popular level based on TEV.
- Hendriksen, William. *Exposition of Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon* (NTC). Baker, 1979.
 Comprehensive and helpful.
- Hawthorne, Gerald. *Philippians* (WBC). Word Books, 1983.
 Comment on Greek text by an evangelical.
- Lightfoot, J.B. *St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*, 4th ed. Zondervan, 1953, reprint of 1878 ed.
 Classic on the Greek text. Good grammatical explanation.

Colossians and Philemon

- Boles, Kenny. *Thirteen Lessons on Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*. College Press, 1979.
 Good explanation of the text.
- Fields, Wilbur. *Philippians-Colossians-Philemon* (BST). College Press, 1969.
 Practical, basic commentary.
- Weed, Michael R. *The Letters of Paul to the Ephesians, the Colossians, and Philemon* (LWC). Sweet Publishing, 1971.
 Basic exegetical comment.
- Robertson, A.T. *Paul and the Intellectuals: The Epistle to the Colossians*. Revised and edited by W.C. Strickland. Broadman, 1959.
 Good exegetical studies with attention to historical setting. Insights from the Greek.
- Bruce, F.F. *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (NIC). Eerdmans, 1984.
 Fine exegetical commentary.
- Moule, C.F.D. *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon* (CGTC). Cambridge University Press, 1958.
 Exegetical treatment with good explanation of word meanings.
- Lightfoot, J.B. *St. Paul's Epistle to the Colossians and Philemon*, 3rd ed. Zondervan, 1959 reprint of 1879 ed.
 Comment on Greek text and special studies. Classic.

I & II Thessalonians

- Fields, Wilbur. *Thinking Through Thessalonians* (BST). College Press, 1963.
 Basic, practical.
- Hiebert, D. Edmond. *The Thessalonian Epistles*. Moody, 1971.
 Comprehensive exegesis. Premillennial, dispensational.
- Hendriksen, William. *Exposition of I & II Thessalonians* (NTC). Baker, 1955.
 Amillennial.
- Morris, Leon. *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (NIC). Eerdmans, 1959.
 Scholarly, reformed, amillennial.
- Marshall, I. Howard. *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (NCB). Eerdmans, 1983.

BOOKLIST FOR BIBLE STUDENTS

Scholarly.

Bruce, F.F. *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (WBC). Word Books, 1982.

Commentary on Greek text with a new translation of the text.

Milligan, George. *St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians*. Revell, reprint of 1905 ed.

Advanced critical study on the Greek text.

I & II Timothy and Titus

Roberts, J.W. *Letters to Timothy*. R.B. Sweet, 1954.

Roberts, J.W. *Titus, Philemon and James*. Sweet, 1963.

Both are brief, popular paperbacks with good comment.

Stott, John R.W. *Guard the Gospel: II Timothy* (BST). InterVarsity Press, 1973.

Practical exposition.

DeWelt, Don. *Paul's Letters to Timothy and Titus* (BST). College Press, 1961.

Practical, helpful.

Kent, Homer A., Jr. *The Pastoral Epistles: Studies in I & II Timothy and Titus*. Moody Press, 1958.

Solid commentary by evangelical.

Guthrie, Donald. *The Pastoral Epistles* (TNTC). Eerdmans, 1957.

Good comment. Not too technical nor too brief.

Kelley, J.N.D. *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (TC). Baker, 1981 reprint of 1963 ed.

Thorough, scholarly. From a liberal viewpoint.

Hebrews

Wartick, Wallace. *Twenty-Six Lessons on Hebrews*. College Press, 1979.

Basic, helpful comment.

Kent, Homer A., Jr. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. Baker, 1972.

Capable exegetical work.

Milligan, Robert. *Epistle to the Hebrews*. Gospel Advocate, 1954 reprint of 1884 ed.

Defends Pauline authorship. Basic commentary.

Lightfoot, Neil. *Jesus Christ Today: A Commentary on the Book of Hebrews*. Baker, 1976.

Solid work of exegetical comment.

Bruce, F.F. *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (NIC). Eerdmans, 1964.

Excellent, scholarly exegesis.

Hughes, Phillip E. *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Eerdmans, 1977.

Excellent, scholarly work.

Westcott, Brooke Foss. *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The Greek Text*, 3rd ed. Eerdmans, 1960.

Classic work. Very good special studies.

James

Roberts, J.W. *Titus, Philemon and James*. Abilene Christian University Press, 1963.

Brief, popular paperback.

Robertson, A.T. *Studies in the Epistle of James*. Revised and edited by Heber F. Peacock. Broadman, 1959.

Helpful, practical exposition.

Roberts, J.W. *The Letter of James* (LWC). Sweet Publishing, 1977.

One of the best works on James.

Tasker, R.V.G. *The General Epistle of James* (TNTC). Eerdmans, 1960.

Good verse-by-verse comment.

Hiebert, D. Edmond. *The Epistle of James*. Moody Press, 1979.

Good explanation and application for the general reader.

Adamson, James. *The Epistle of James* (NIC). Eerdmans, 1976.

In-depth, exegetical study. Alert to context and theological issues.

Mayor, J.B. *The Epistle of James*. Zondervan, 1959 reprint of 1897 ed.

Encyclopedic, critical work on the Greek text.

I & II Peter and Jude

Roberts, J.W. *I & II Peter and Jude*. Sweet, 1964.

Excellent, popular paperback commentary.

Oberst, Bruce. *I & II Peter*, rev. ed. (BST). College Press, 1987.

Good on explaining word meanings.

Stibbs, Alan. M. *The First Epistle General of Peter* (TNTC). Eerdmans, 1960.

Good introduction and commentary.

Green, E.M.B. *Second Epistle General of Peter and the General Epistle of Jude* (TNTC). Eerdmans, 1968.

Able defense of Peter's authorship of II Peter. Outstanding commentary.

Selwyn, Edward G. *The First Epistle of St. Peter* (TC). Baker, 1981 reprint of 1947 edition.

Advanced commentary on the Greek text. Extensive introduction. Some liberal views.

I, II & III John

Staton, Knofel. *Thirteen Lessons on First, Second, and Third John*. College Press, 1980.

Popular comment.

Bruce, F.F. *The Epistles of John: Introduction, Exposition and Notes*. Revell, 1970.

Non-technical work stressing practical teaching.

Roberts, J.W. *The Letters of John* (LNC). Sweet, 1968.

Excellent exegetical work.

Stott, John. *The Epistles of John* (TNTC), rev. ed. Eerdmans, 1964.

Useful commentary by outstanding expositor. Practical insights.

Marshall, I.H. *The Epistles of John* (NIC). Eerdmans, 1978. Recent. scholarly

BOOKLIST FOR BIBLE STUDENTS

work.

Findlay, G.G. *Fellowship in the Life Eternal: An Exposition of the Epistles of St. John*. Eerdmans, 1955 reprint of 1909 edition.

Law, Robert. *The Tests of Life: A Study in the First Epistle of St. John*, 3rd ed.

Baker, 1978 reprint of 1914 ed.

Theological emphases.

Westcott, Brooke F. *The Epistles of St. John*, 4th ed., edited with introd. by F.F. Bruce. Eerdmans, 1966 reprint of 1902 edition.

Thorough commentary on the Greek text.

Revelation

Butler, Paul T. *Twenty-Six Lessons on Revelation*, Part One and Part Two. College Press, 1982.

Good basic commentary.

Stott, John R.W. *What Christ Thinks of the Church*. Eerdmans, 1958.

Good exposition of Revelation 2 and 3.

Barclay, William. *Letters to the Seven Churches*. Westminster Press, 1957.

Excellent study of the historical setting of these seven churches (Revelation 2 and 3).

Tenney, Merrill C. *Interpreting Revelation*. Eerdmans, 1957.

Leads the reader into an inductive study of the book of Revelation. Futurist, Premillennial.

Hendriksen, William. *More Than Conquerors*. Baker, 1967.

Cyclical view. Amillennial.

Summer, Ray. *Worthy Is the Lamb*. Broadman, 1951.

Extensive introduction. Emphasizes the main message of the book.

McDowell, E.A. *The Meaning and Message of Revelation*. Broadman, 1951.

Emphasizes the great lessons in the book.

Roberts, J.W. *The Revelation of John (the Apocalypse)* (LWC). Sweet, 1974.

Careful, balanced comment. One of the best.

Morris, Leon. *Commentary on Revelation* (TNTC), rev. ed. Eerdmans, 1987.

Combines a philosophy of history view with the preterist. Good for average student.

Ladd, G.E. *Commentary on the Revelation of John*. Eerdmans, 1972.

Scholarly, premillennial, post-tribulation, futurist, not dispensationalist.

Walvoord, John F. *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*. Moody, 1966.

Literary interpretation. Futurist, premillennial, dispensationalist.

Mounce, Robert H. *The Book of Revelation* (NIC). Eerdmans, 1977.

Scholarly, balanced. One of the best from a premillennial viewpoint.

Beasley-Murray, G.R. *The Book of Revelation* (NCB). Attic Press, 1974.

Scholarly, Amillennial. Based on R.S.V.

Beckwith, I.T. *The Apocalypse of St. John*. Baker, 1979 reprint of 1919 ed.

Historical treatment. Extensive, critical and exegetical commentary on Greek text. Amillennial.

Charles, R.H. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St.*

LEARNING FROM GOD'S WORD

John (ICC). Two volumes. T. & T. Clark, 1920.

Excellent collection of information on the Greek text. Liberal. Amillennial.
Swete, Henry B. *Commentary on Revelation*, 3rd ed. Kregel, 1979 reprint of 1911 ed.

Classical work on Greek text. Amillennial.

Abbreviations for Commentary Sets

| | |
|-------|---|
| AB | Anchor Bible (Doubleday) |
| BST | Bible Study Textbook (College Press) |
| CGTC | Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary (Cambridge University Press) |
| HNTC | Harper's New Testament Commentaries (Harper and Row) |
| ICC | International Critical Commentary (T. & T. Clark) |
| LWC | Living Word Commentary (Sweet Publishing) |
| NCB | New Century Bible (Attic Press) |
| NIC | New International Commentary (Eerdmans) |
| NIGTC | The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Eerdmans) |
| NTC | New Testament Commentary (Baker) |
| TC | Thornapple Commentaries (Baker) |
| TNTC | The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Eerdmans) |
| TOTC | Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (InterVarsity) |
| TBST | The Bible Speaks Today (InterVarsity Press) |
| WBC | Word Biblical Commentary (Word Books) |