

How To Study The Bible

*A Thirteen lesson guide for
individual or class use.*

By

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BEFORE WE BEGIN . . .

The purpose of this booklet is to help people toward effective, independent Bible study. Thus it is intended primarily for the person who feels the need of help and is willing to believe that by proper methods and diligent work Bible study can be enjoyable and fruitful for him.

The lessons are arranged for a three-month course in adult or senior high school classes. They may also be used in private study. When used in a class, students should be expected to read the lesson and answer the "Test Yourself" questions before class meetings. The teacher may use the "For Further Study" suggestions as the basis for special individual reports to the class. When the lessons are used in private study, it is important to force yourself to do all the work you would do if in a class.

The methods suggested here are educationally sound. The principles are scriptural. Please give these methods a real trial and you will experience new power and pleasure in your study.

A word of appreciation should go to the Goodlettsville (Tennessee) church, the Grandview Heights church (Nashville), and the West Side church (Cleveland, Ohio) where these lessons have been taught. Thanks are due the Standard Publishing Company for permission to use the diagrams in Lessons 1 and 2.

"And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance."

INTRODUCTION

Many people study the Bible but very few know how to study it. Because of this, little is gained. The average person, filled with preconceived ideas and with an over dose of prejudice, either ends up being too confused to study or else merely searches to find some scriptures to support a doctrine or practice he has already accepted. Often times such references are taken out of context and have no direct bearing on the subject that they are applied to. All of this points us to the desperate need for Bible Study that is right and proper.

We therefore want to take this opportunity to encourage you to study the Bible. To make it more profitable and meaningful, this course has been designed to teach you how to study. If you will only read through the material, give sincere consideration to it, and follow its directions, we believe you will find a whole new world opened up to you. In this way you will enjoy your study of the Bible and you will understand many new truths that you never knew existed before.

Our plea has always been, and will always be, that if you or anyone else will only take the Bible as it is, study it, believe it and obey it then we have no fear of what you will be, because the Bible only will make Christians only and members of the church that you can read about in the Bible. We pray that you will study sincerely and then will humble yourself in obedience.

J.C. Choate
Church of Christ
131 Moulmein Road
Singapore 11

Oct. 18, 1978

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Lesson 1

INSPIRATION

The study of any volume should be proceeded by an inquiry as to its origin, for this information may affect profoundly the manner and spirit of study. Amid the vast multitude of books, the Bible alone is inspired. Where this fact is either denied or minimized, the Bible is no longer studied with care or quoted as authority. Christians should seek deepened conviction on this vital doctrine as a basis for their personal study of the Book.

What Is Inspiration?

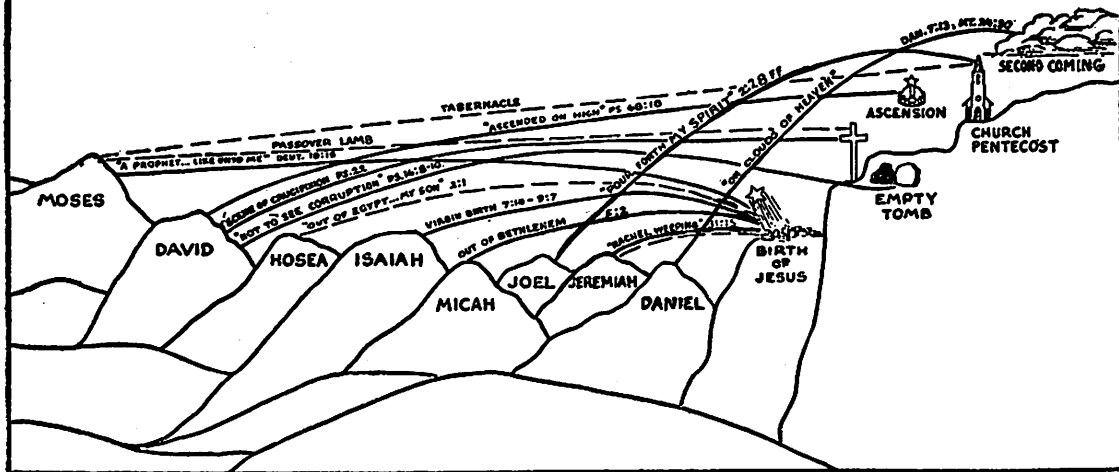
“Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable . . . that the man of God may be complete.” (2 Timothy 3:16) What does the expression “inspired of God” mean? The phrase comes from a Greek word, *theopneustos*. This is a compound word consisting of the elements *theo* (God) and *pneustos* (breathed), hence it refers to that which is “God-breathed.” Thus, whatever is inspired of God has its origin in the mouth of God; it is the very word of God. Inspiration refers to the process in which God uses a human being to convey His words to other men either by speaking or writing. God himself provides the words to be used by such men. (See Matthew 10:19, 20) A description of inspiration is found in 2 Peter 1:21. “Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” The result is an infallible, inerrant record of the words of God.

Inspiration may be distinct from revelation. The latter refers to the process by which God enlightens a

PROPHECY AS A PROOF OF INSPIRATION

THIS CHART SUGGESTS HOW THE DIVINELY INSPIRED PROPHETS LOOKED ACROSS THE CENTURIES TO THE COMING OF CHRIST. THREE TYPES OF PROPHECY ARE REPRESENTED: (1)-DIRECT PROPHECIES REFERRING TO CHRIST AND HIM ALONE (SOLID LINE —); (2)-DOUBLE PROPHECIES -THAT HAD TWO FULFILLMENTS- ONE IN THE O.T.; ONE IN THE N.T. (SPACE LINE —); (3)-COMMANDS, INSTITUTIONS AND EVENTS THAT WERE TYPES OR SYMBOLS (SPACE LINE —).

2



person concerning divine truth. Revelation does not necessarily carry with it Divine guidance to communicate the new truth to others. Pharaoh received a revelation from God in a dream, but he was not inspired. Cornelius (Acts 10) received certain revelations from God without being inspired.

On the other hand, inspiration does not always require a revelation. Luke in writing Acts of the Apostles often wrote of things he had experienced personally. Knowledge of these events was no revelation to him. Yet Luke was inspired in that God guided him to produce an infallible record.

Often, however, revelation accompanies inspiration. Both steps are mentioned in 1 Corinthians 2:6-13; verses 6-12 show that men cannot learn spiritual truth without God's aid, thus the need for revelation; verse 13 points to the Divine guidance by which the apostles told others of this revelation. "Which things we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth."

Proofs of Inspiration

1. *The Bible claims inspiration.* It is only fair to consider the claims of any book under examination. If the Bible does claim inspiration, this fact means it must either be accepted for what it claims to be, or else denounced as an evil book of errors. There is no middle ground.

The Old Testament repeatedly claims inspiration. The student should examine various Old Testament books to note the claims made. (For example, read the

first verse in each chapter of Jeremiah.) Jesus regarded the Old Testament as inspired judging by the place of authority he gave it. (See John 10:35 and Matthew 4:1-10; 5:17, 18) He was constantly concerned to do all things "as it is written." (See John 15:25 and Matthew 26:24) New Testament writers claimed inspiration for the Old Testament. (See 2 Timothy 3:16; 1 Peter 1:11, 12; 2 Peter 1:20, 21) They also pointed to specific writers as inspired. (See Acts 4:25; Acts 28:25; Matthew 22:43) Paul showed his belief in the infallibility of the Old Testament when he quoted it in Galatians 3:15-19 and made his argument depend on the fact that the word "seed" in the Old Testament quotation was singular rather than plural. Such an argument would hardly have been made if Paul considered the Old Testament to be a human production subject to various errors.

The New Testament also claims inspiration. Divine guidance was promised the apostles. (See John 14:25, 26; John 16:12, 13) Paul's writing was classed as Scripture. (See 2 Peter 3:15, 16) Paul acknowledged that his oral and written teaching was from God. (See 1 Thessalonians 2:13)

2. *Prophecy proves inspiration.* Bible prophecies and their fulfillments stand as indisputable facts of history. Only by the aid of Him who sees the end from the beginning can shortsighted man accurately foretell the future. (See John 14:29) The most glorious group of prophecies is that relating to the Messiah. Fulfillment has not been partial and approximate, but complete and exact. (See chart on opposite page.)

3. *Miracles prove inspiration.* Jesus promised miraculous power to the apostles for this very purpose. (See

Mark 16:14-20 and Hebrews 2:3, 4) The reasoning which leads from the miracle to a belief in inspiration is well expressed in John 3:2 and John 9:28-33.

4. *Internal evidence of inspiration.* This expression has reference to such matters as the style and content of inspired writings. Isaiah declared, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:9) A gospel preacher in Japan asked some Christians there what one thing most helped them to believe in Jesus and the Bible. Their answer was the Sermon on the Mount. They did not see how unaided man could give such wonderful teaching. Besides these exalted thoughts, the historical and geographic accuracy of the Bible give evidence of divine guidance.

The Bible is inspired. With what care it should be studied! With what reverence and perseverance it should be read!

Precious Bible, book divine!
Precious treasure, thou art mine.
Lamp to my feet and a light to my way,
To guide me safely home.

For Further Study

1. J.W. McGarvey, *McGarvey's Sermons* pp. 1-15. This Sermon on "Inspiration" gives a good discussion on internal evidences of inspiration.
2. George W. DeHoff, *Alleged Bible Contradictions Explained*. Chapter 1 discusses various views of inspiration.

3. George W. DeHoff, *Why We Believe the Bible*.
4. Edward J. Young, *Thy Word is Truth*. An excellent general discussion of inspiration.

Test Yourself

1. Distinguish between revelation and inspiration.
2. Give a Bible example of revelation without inspiration.
3. Give a Bible example of inspiration without revelation.
4. Outline the main proofs for the inspiration of the Bible.
5. What does the expression "private interpretation" in 2 Peter 1:20 mean?
6. What evidence can you give that the Bible was verbally (word-for-word) inspired?
7. The following statements are typical of many religious people in their attitude toward the Bible. How would you comment on them?

Statement A: "Certainly the Bible is inspired — but only in matters of religious doctrine, not in matters of science, geography or history. On these points it actually contains many errors."

Statement B: "All this emphasis on the Bible is wrong. We are to worship Christ, not a book. Christ is our authority, not the Bible. You are replacing Christianity

with a new form of idolatry – Bibliolatry.”

8. Inspiration is claimed for what specific writers in Matthew 22:43 and in Acts 28:25?

Lesson 2

HOW THE BIBLE CAME TO US

The Bible student needs a general knowledge of how the Bible has come to him. The way in which God's providence has worked together with man's ingenuity to give us God's word is a thrilling story.

The Question of Canon

Books of the Bible were written at somewhat widely scattered places and times, and alongside them arose other documents for which false claims of inspiration were made. Thus we are confronted with the question of canon — that is, which books were genuinely inspired. This is not a matter to be settled by official pronouncement, but like all other events, it demands historical inquiry to discover whether they were written by the persons and under the circumstances claimed.

With regard to the Old Testament, it is thought that Ezra about 457 B.C. arranged in order the books which the Jews accepted as authoritative (except Nehemiah and Malachi which were not then written). Old Testament canon was well established by the time of Jesus and although he never directly discussed the subject, he implied acceptance of the entire book as the Word of God is certainly sufficient for those who believe in his divinity.

The first formal pronouncement regarding the New Testament was by the Council of Carthage in 397 A.D. when a list duplicating our present list was published. This council could only recognize in a formal way the

books which Christians for three centuries had already accepted as inspired. The churches and individuals to whom apostolic writings were originally sent supplied the first evidence. Christians of the first and second centuries have left the necessary evidence in the form of lists, quotations from the various books, commentaries, harmonies and translations. Tertullian, a second century writer, implied that the original letters were still in the hands of the churches to which they had been sent. Five men (Barnabas, Clement, Hermas, Polycarp, Ignatius) who were contemporary with the apostles have left religious writings which quote from practically every book of the New Testament, using them with the same authority we do today. Some books were naturally copied and circulated more than others and these became more widely accepted than others, but in time all the purely human writings were separated from genuinely inspired books — resulting in our New Testament with its 27 books.

The Problem of Textual Integrity

The original manuscripts of the Bible have all perished. Parchment was known to Paul (2 Timothy 4:13) and John used papyrus (2 John 12). These materials were fragile and constant use soon made replacements necessary. Copies also were needed so the letters could be circulated to other churches. Paul encouraged such exchanging of letters (Colossians 4:16). Until the invention of printing in 1450 A.D. all copying was done by hand and the copies thus made are called manuscripts.

We do not know for certain that we possess even copies made directly from the original manuscripts. The oldest known manuscript is a tiny fragment of papyrus

discovered in Egypt in 1920. It has parts of five verses from John chapter 18 on it and is thought to be part of a manuscript numbering 130 pages dating to within 30 or 40 years of apostolic times. Most of the manuscripts now available for study date back no earlier than the 4th Century, A.D. when more permanent parchment and vellum largely replaced papyrus as a writing material. There are four major manuscripts plus thousands of less important ones. The Vatican Manuscript has been in the Vatican Library since at least 1481. The Sinaitic Manuscript, now in the British Museum, was first found in an orthodox monastery at Mount Sinai. The Alexandrian Manuscript was made in Alexandria, Egypt, and has been in the British Museum since 1627. The Ephraem Manuscript, now in Paris, is especially interesting because it was once an entire Bible but was washed so that the expensive vellum could be used for another book. Modern scientific treatment has made possible the restoration of the original writing.

Respect for the word of God caused the copyists to work with exacting care. Jewish scribes systematically numbered the verses, words and letters of each book and section so that the addition or omission of even a letter or word could be detected. Sometimes scribes worked alone or sometimes in a "scriptorium" where one person would read aloud while several men wrote from dictation. Despite care, errors occasionally crept into the text. Unintentional errors would occur due to momentary inattention, to concentrating on the subject matter rather than on the exact words, to mispronunciation by the reader. Intentional errors might arise from the copyist's desire to correct a supposed mistake, or to his desire to make the meaning clearer by adding one or two explanatory words. In many instances these mis-

takes were copied again. Occasionally errors were discovered, but the most exhaustive efforts to eliminate errors were not made until the invention of printing made it possible to produce an unlimited number of copies without error.

Do we now have an accurate record of God's word as originally given? The mention of errors may have been disturbing, but imperfect and conflicting as the manuscripts are, they contain the evidence by which the perfect original may be restored. By comparing copies which were made independently of each other, many errors cancel each other out. Ancient writers quoted abundantly from the New Testament as they had it and these quotations help eliminate errors from later copies. The nature of differences between various manuscripts gives no cause for alarm. Most of the differences are in the form of words not affecting the essential meaning, in slight changes of word order, or in the use of one synonym for another. As an example, in Matthew 2 one manuscript has "The king Herod" while another has "Herod the king". Thus it can be said that "if comparative trivialities, such as changes of order, the insertion or omission of the article with proper names, and the like, are set aside, the words in our opinion still subject to doubt can hardly amount to more than a thousandth part of the whole New Testament." (Appendix, *Greek New Testament* by Westcott and Hort.)

The Need for Translation

The spread of Christianity over the world naturally created the need for the inspired books to be translated into various languages. The first translation (or version) of any part of the Bible was that of the Old Testament

from the original Hebrew into Greek. Done in the 3rd Century, B.C., it was called the "Septuagint Version and was the version from which Jesus quoted. During the 2nd Century, A.D. there existed translations of the New Testament in Latin, Syrian, and Egyptian besides copies of the original Greek.

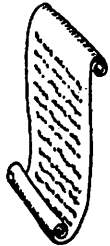
Of greatest interest to us are the English versions. The first was made in 1382 by Wycliff. Incidentally, early translations were often made from other translations rather than from the original language so that some errors were made. Wycliff's version was made from the Vulgate (Latin) version made in 400 A.D. by Jerome. The Douay version, most widely used among Catholics, was made in 1582 from the Vulgate. Other early English versions were the Geneva Bible of 1560, Coverdale's version of 1535 and that of Tyndale in 1525. The latter was the first English version to make use of ancient Greek manuscripts rather than a translation. In 1611 the "Authorized Version" was published by a group of scholars gathered by King James of England who desired a version which would be widely used and would make for more uniformity in church services.

As scholars have gained better understanding of the original languages and as new manuscript discoveries have made a purer text possible, other versions have been made. Gradual changes in the English language have also demanded versions which would once again put the Bible in the language of the common people. In 1885 the Church of England published the English Version. A group of American scholars had kept in close contact with those working on the English revision published the American Standard Version in 1901. It is one of the best versions available today. Still more recently, the

NEW
TESTAMENT
50-100 A.D.

LIKE STRANDS OF A MIGHTY CABLE THE QUOTATIONS
IN ALL THE WRITERS OF THESE CENTURIES UNITE TO BIND
OUR TEXT TO THAT OF THE FIRST CENTURY

NEW
TESTAMENT
350 A.D.

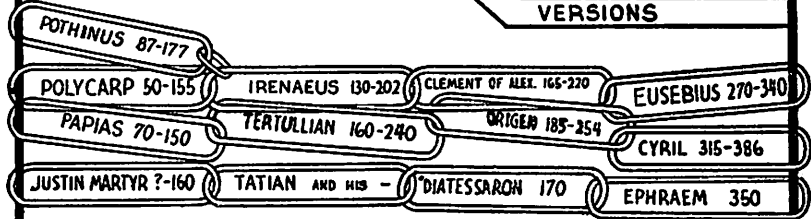


AUTOGRAPH
COPIES



DIRECT LINE OF COPIES OF N.T. BOOKS

VERSIONS



CHAINS OF LIVES , INTERLOCKING, TESTIFY OF THE AUTHORSHIP AND
RECEIVED AUTHORITY OF THE VARIOUS BOOKS



OLDEST
EXTANT
MANUSCRIPTS

Σ
B
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C
W

International Council of Religious Education asked a group of scholars to prepare another translation which would recall some of the beauty of the King James Version but which would be more accurate than any. The result was the Revised Standard Version of 1952.

Since anyone with the necessary knowledge can make a translation, various individuals have published versions in addition to those prepared by groups of scholars. Some of the more interesting versions have been prepared by Edgar Goodspeed, James Moffat and J.B. Phillips. These translations all have value, but frequently an individual translator yields to the temptation to paraphrase rather than translate. For regular use, the versions made by the larger groups of scholars are safest.

Probably each new translation has been met by its share of objections but since translation is merely a human activity, each one may be improved and we may thank God for the labors of many scholars who help us to read the message of God in our language.

For Further Study

1. Look up information on papyrus, parchment, vellum and other ancient writing materials.
2. The copy of Isaiah in the Dead Sea Scrolls strengthens our faith in the integrity of the Bible text. Find out something about the Dead Sea Scrolls.
3. J.W. McGarvey, *Evidences of Christianity*, should not be overlooked as a source of detailed information relating to this lesson.

4. Reports to a class on the work of such men as Tyndale and Coverdale will be interesting for the opposition and persecution they met.
5. Prepare a chart for display showing the relationship between the various versions that have been made.

Test Yourself

1. What does canon mean? (use a dictionary)
2. What determines ultimately whether a book belongs in the Bible or not?
3. Describe the kinds of material on which manuscripts were written.
4. What factors determine the accuracy of a translation?
5. What do we mean by saying that the Biblical languages are "dead languages"? Is this an advantage or disadvantage in making accurate translations?
6. Name and give dates for the most important English versions.
7. A person long accustomed to the King James' version refused to use a new translation by saying: "I don't believe in changing the Bible. I want the words of the apostles just as they spoke them." How could you help this person?

Lesson 3

HELPS FOR BIBLE STUDY

Profitable Bible study requires using the full resources of the mind. Thus Peter encouraged Christians to “gird up the lions of your mind.” (1 Peter 1:13) God does not reward laziness or ignorance. We should therefore use every possible aid in our study of the Bible. To learn what these are and how they may best be used in the purpose of this lesson.

Various Versions

You will recall from our last lesson that version is simply a translation. A translation is, of course, essential for all who are unable to read Hebrew or Greek. It will probably be best for you to use one version for regular study and for memorizing scripture, while you consult others as the occasion arises. Conservative students of the Bible would perhaps recommend using the American Revised Version (1901).

Comparing versions as you study is a helpful practice especially with “difficult” passages. Different versions have their own particular merits. The Revised Standard Version (1952) is noteworthy for its simple common language. Williams’ Translation expresses especially well in English the shades of meaning implied by the tenses of Greek verbs but often unexpressed in the more popular translations. The student should seek to be aware of the tendency by some translators to produce what is more a commentary to paraphrase than an accurate translation.

Concordances

A concordance lists key words in the Bible along with the places where those words occur. A complete concordance may list every word in the Bible and every place where it is found. With such help, you often need only one or two words of a verse in order to find it. A concordance may therefore save you the embarrassment of being unable to find a verse which you know is in the Bible somewhere. It can also help you study all that the Bible says on a given subject by referring you to each place in the Bible where that subject is mentioned. Although many Bibles include a concordance in the back, these are often too brief to be of much help. For regular study, you should secure a separate concordance. Also you should be certain to select a concordance that is adapted to the version you will use, since there are different concordances for each of the major English versions.

Dictionaries

One of the most frequently given reasons for difficulty in Bible study is the failure to know word meanings. There is little excuse for this to stand in the way of anyone who really wants to understand the Bible. A partial solution to the problem may lie in changing to a newer version, but no version will completely do away with the need for a dictionary.

The serious student will want both a Bible dictionary and an ordinary English dictionary. The former will give meanings of words, names, places that are peculiar to the Bible. The latter will help with words that are not strictly Biblical.

Bible Background

Bible lands and customs are strange to most of us. This unfamiliarity hinders understanding and often makes the Bible seem unreal. There are books on *Bible geography* that will help you understand references to cities, mountains, rivers, lakes and countries. Books on the *custom of Bible times* help us know something of the home, life, political situation, occupations, dress and education of the people. Books on *ancient history* provide information about the peoples and nations around Bible peoples.

Commentaries

A commentary is an explanation by one or more persons of the meaning of the Bible or some portion of it. Commentaries on the Bible date back to the very earliest times and their use is quite proper although we must recognize that their reliability depends altogether on the person who did the writing. Human weakness means that any commentary should be studied with constant awareness of the possibility of error. It would be well to acquaint yourself with the religious viewpoint of the author before reading his comments.

Despite the value of a commentary, its place is always secondary. *Always begin with a study of the Bible alone.* It is always easy to find in the Bible an idea which has first been planted in our minds. Therefore we need to approach the Bible as far as possible with an open mind. It is unfortunate that some people do their Bible study and even Bible teaching almost solely from a commentary. This is both a lazy and highly dangerous practice.

Reference Works

Libraries usually have Bible encyclopedias which provide helpful articles on Bible topics and are much more exhaustive than a Bible dictionary. Entire books on special subjects are available and as you advance in your study, you may wish to make use of them. Religious magazines also contain articles that will shed light on your study of the Bible and it would be well for you to have at least one coming into your home.

Miscellaneous

Some Bibles have *center references* which are intended to help the reader locate similar ideas in other scripture passages. These can at times be misleading since verses may be artificially tied together in such a way as to leave the wrong impression. Some Bibles have *footnotes*, which are not a part of the Bible text. In certain editions of the Bible, these footnotes are specifically designed to lead the reader into a doctrine which he would not obtain by reading the Scripture alone and are especially dangerous since they are written in the Bible itself and may be mistaken by some people for inspired teaching.

Eventually, many Bible students desire to come into contact with the original Greek words of the Bible. Greek New Testaments are available as well as interlinears which have the corresponding English words written underneath the Greek terms. A Greek English lexicon defines Greek words. Some students seek to make use of these without knowing Greek but such use is safe and most rewarding only after a fairly thorough study of the Greek language.

Regardless of the value of these various helps, we

must remember that they are all secondary and must not displace your own personal diligent, prayerful contact with **The Book**.

For Further Study

1. Prepare a collection of as many different versions as possible and share them with the class. Read the same passages from several versions to illustrate the nature of each.
2. Compile a list of all commentaries written by members of the church. Take note of which parts of the Bible seem to be most adequately covered and which have not been covered at all.
3. Compile a list of as many commentaries as you can find written by those not members of the church. Tell something of the religious viewpoint of the author or authors in each case. (Some suggestions: Clarke's Commentary, Barne's Notes, McKnight's commentary, The Interpreter's Bible.)
4. Report to the class on the methods by which the concordance for the Revised Standard Version was prepared.
5. Present to the class a list of as many religious magazines as you can find that are published by members of the church.

Test Yourself

1. What version do you generally use in your study?

2. The following exercise will help you understand the advantage of comparing versions. Start with a King James Version. Turn to each of the passages listed and locate the words that are enclosed in quotation marks. Read the verse and try to decide what those words mean. *After* doing this, turn to the same passage in some other version and check the meaning you got from the King James Version. If you still are uncertain, use a dictionary.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| a. "do you to wit" 2 Cor. 8:1 | f. "scrip" Matt. 10:10 |
| b. "prevent" 1 Thess. 4:15 | g. "feeble-minded" 1 Thess. 5:14 |
| c. "Conversation" 1 Peter 2:12 | h. "canker" 2 Tim. 2:17 |
| d. "bowels" Phil. 1:8 | i. "study" 2 Tim. 2:15 |
| e. "debate" Romans 1:29 | j. "careful" Phil. 4:6 |

3. Look up the word "baptism" in an ordinary dictionary. Does it agree with the Bible?
4. What are the dangers and advantages of using a commentary?
5. Out of the list of helps discussed in this lesson, there are probably some which one should use so frequently in study that he ought to have them close at hand. Others would not be used so frequently and probably could be used in or borrowed from a library. Which ones are most essential and which most Bible students should have in their own home?

Useful Books

Note: Many students want suggestions about books to help in Bible study. This list is intended to answer those requests. Religious book stores can make more detailed suggestions as can preachers and teachers of the Bible.

1. Versions of the Bible.

| | |
|---------------------------|-----------------|
| King James Version | Living Oracles |
| American Standard Version | J.B. Phillips |
| Revised Standard Version | Edgar Goodspeed |

2. Concordances.

Cruden's Complete Concordance
Hazard's Concordance to the American Standard Bible
Nelson's Complete Concordance to the Revised Standard Bible
Strong's Exhaustive Concordance
Young's Analytical Concordance

3. Dictionaries

English dictionary – *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*
Bible dictionaries –
Westminster Dictionary of the Bible
Peloubet's Bible Dictionary

4. Bible Background

Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible
Merrill C. Tenney, *The New Testament: An Historical and Analytical Survey*
Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*
Joseph P. Free, *Archaeology and Bible History*
J.W. McGarvey, *Lands of the Bible*

Fred H. Wright, *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands*

5. Commentaries

Gospel Advocate Commentaries on the New Testament

The Restoration Commentaries on New Testament Books

Barnes' Notes

Clarke's Commentary

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, Commentary on the Whole Bible

6. Reference works

International Standard Bible Encyclopedia

Lesson 4

LEARNING TO LEARN

“I read the Bible but don’t get anything out of it.” This common complaint is often explained by saying we “have too many things on the mind” or that the Bible is “hard” to study. The real difficulty is probably that we do not know how to learn effectively. We may have expected learning to happen automatically as our eyes run down a page. The Bible is not as hard to study as we let ourselves think. And we all have greater mental powers than we use. We can study the Bible better by improving the learning process.

Of the many important factors in learning, we shall concentrate attention on six. Their value is amply proved by experiments. By being aware of them you may see ways in which your own Bible study habits can be improved.

Motivation

This simply means a desire to do something. When the Bible is read only from a sense of duty and without expecting to learn anything, the motivation is very poor and little will be learned. Ezra understood the importance of motivation for he “prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord.” (Ezra 7:10) David expressed his love for God’s law in Psalm 119. Read the entire Psalm. The dreadful effect of lacking love for God’s word is described in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12. See also John 7:17.

Helpful motivation may not only come from your love for God’s word, but also from the desire to solve

some problem with light from God's word. It is difficult to study in a vacuum where you can see no possible use for what you are studying. Trying to convert someone will help you study because you will be seeking answers to his questions. Greater awareness of our need for God's guidance and confidence that the Bible holds the answer for many daily problems will help us study with better motivation. Faith that God's will is the best way of life is a help. This leads one to approach God's word saying, "Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth."

Reaction

Perhaps you have had the experience of reading and then suddenly realizing that you did not know what it was about. The same thing may happen when listening to a speaker. If we could soak up knowledge merely by letting it pass through the mind, such experiences would never happen. But our minds must be *active* as we study. This is the principle of reaction. Many who sleep during a sermon do so because they have not trained the mind to be active while listening. The active mind will be constantly engaged in asking questions, connecting what is being read or heard with something learned earlier, making application of what is heard, agreeing or taking issue. All this may be going on while listening or reading. You cannot learn without reacting. To learn better you must force your mind to engage in these activities.

Concentration

All of us notice many things that we never remember simply because we do not turn the attention of the mind to those things. Many people are discouraged in Bible study because they forget so quickly what they

have read. Probably a big factor is the lack of total concentration. Either they do not know *how* to concentrate or do not *intend* to concentrate.

There are circumstances in which even a mental genius would have difficulty concentrating. Proper motivation will help concentration. One's physical arrangements for study must be considered also. Effective study is difficult in competition with radio or television. Perhaps with family cooperation, a 30-minute quiet period can be arranged. It is easier to concentrate when sitting at a desk or table than in a comfortable living room chair. Even the kind of book you use may have an effect. A Bible about the size of an ordinary book, with good print, and without too many distracting notes, references or pictures will prove most helpful. Establishing definite habits in regard to study enables you to concentrate better than if your study is hit or miss. You would do well to study at about the same time and place each day. The time of day may have a bearing on your physical condition and therefore on your ability to concentrate. Avoid a time when physical fatigue makes study almost impossible. It will help to set a definite length of time and make it short enough that you don't find yourself watching the clock to see how much longer you must study. An adult can maintain peak concentration on a book for about 30 minutes. Concentration is also aided by having a definite plan and program of study from day to day.

Organization

Perhaps you remember how difficult it is to put together a jigsaw puzzle if you have never seen the entire picture. Similarly in study, it is a help to get a general

idea about what you are studying. There are various ways to do this. Topical summaries at the top of the page or at the beginning of a chapter may be helpful. You may need to develop the ability to scan, that is, to look hastily over reading matter and pick up the main points. As you listen to sermons, you may find it helpful to listen for the outline or main points of the sermon just as you do in reading. Learning is always easier if you can organize the material in some way rather than putting it in your mind as a mass of disorganized items.

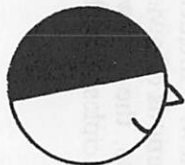
Comprehension

This is what takes place when you “get the idea” in what you read or hear. Frequently people deceive themselves about what they have learned when they say, “I understand it but I can’t tell anyone else.” One test of your comprehension of a thing is your ability to put it in other words. As you study, take time to ask yourself about what you have been studying. It will help, too, if you develop the habit of writing as you study – either make notes, or an outline, or write a summary of what you have studied. Discussing what you have studied with some other person may help.

Repetition

Most of us have observed that children learn only by having a thing repeated again and again. But all of us learn that same way. Few indeed are the impressions that last a lifetime with one exposure. Provision must be made in your study habits for review. Incidentally, experiments show that several short periods of review are better than a few long ones. Of course, the review must take into consideration the five principles already discussed.

THE VALUE OF REVIEW



Study 30 Minutes

Then If: 1 Day Later: 15 min. Review 1 Week Later: 10 min. Review 1 Month Later: 5 min. Review

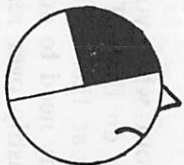


Total Study Time:
1 Hour



Study 1 Hour

Then If: No more study or review for a month



Total Study Time:
1 Hour

Which Plan Makes The Best Use of Time?

These principles of learning will help you only if you are conscious of them and devise ways to practice them. Merely reading over this lesson will be of little benefit. In future lessons, we shall present specific methods of study. They are planned to include each of these principles. You have probably noticed that these principles emphasize *thinking* even more than the act of *reading*. This is not time lost. At least half of your study time should be devoted to thinking about what you have read — either in pre-viewing, in outlining, in reviewing, or in trying to restate and apply what you have read. If you find yourself confining your study time almost entirely to reading, you should rearrange it to give more time to the principles in this lesson that call for thinking.

For Further Study

1. Find and share in class a college or high school “How To Study” manual. Compare its suggestions with those made in this lesson. If you cannot find either of these, perhaps you can find a library book on psychology that has a chapter about learning.
2. To gain increased awareness of the principle of organization, let each member of the class outline a sermon that all will hear, then compare outlines.
3. It might be interesting to survey the congregation, or part of it, to determine what study habits are used. Without revealing names, it would be interesting to learn whether most members study the Bible daily, how long they study, what time of day they use, what method of study is used. You can think of other items to be included in a brief questionnaire.

Test Yourself

- 1. What specifically can a person do to improve his motivation for Bible study?**
- 2. The following passages refer to certain motives or attitudes which hinder learning God's will. Read each carefully and then describe what hindering factor is discussed.**

Luke 8:11-15

2 Timothy 4:3, 4

John 5:44

Matthew 13:14, 15

2 Corinthians 4:3, 4

1 Corinthians 3:1-4

1 Corinthians 2:14

- 3. What is meant by "concentration"? What suggestions can you make to help a person concentrate?**
- 4. How can you test yourself on "comprehension"?**
- 5. State the six principles of learning – in your own words.**
- 6. Can you identify at least one of these principles in which your study is particularly deficient?**

Lesson 5

HOW TO STUDY THE OLD TESTAMENT (1)

Having taken a general view of the Bible and how it came to us, and having reviewed some principles of learning, we are now ready to learn specific methods for studying the Bible. Different parts of the Bible require different methods of study. In this lesson and the next, we shall concentrate on methods for studying the Old Testament.

Old Testament study is often neglected. This may be due to the feeling that since Christians are not under that law, it is therefore unprofitable. Many regard the Old Testament as "hard." If studied properly, the Old Testament can be fascinating and profitable.

Perhaps it would be well to know what specific benefits we can obtain from Old Testament study. First, the Old Testament helps establish and strengthen faith in Jesus as the Son of God. The prophecies of the Old Testament provide a major proof of Jesus' divinity. Of the Old Testament, Jesus said: "These are they which testify of me." (John 5:39) Second, the Old Testament helps us understand the Christian religion by illustrating some of its basic provisions. As a "shadow of good things to come" (Heb. 10:1) it helps us understand Jesus as the "lamb of God," the work of Jesus as our High Priest, and our own work as priests of God. Third, the Old Testament gives us valuable moral lessons. It does this in part by displaying the character of God and teaching us some of the general principles of his government. It helps us

understand our own weaknesses and strength through the stories of various characters who inspire us with their accomplishments and warn us with their mistakes. Truly, “whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning.” (Romans 15:4).

First Step

The first step in studying the Old Testament is to learn thoroughly the basic Old Testament history. This is in harmony with the principle of “organization” in our last lesson. The thirty-nine books of the Old Testament cover God’s dealing with people from Creation to about 400 B.C. The main thread of events over this vast sweep of time can be gotten by reading less than one-third of the Old Testament, or about 283 chapters out of the total 929 chapters. A list of these books and a brief summary of each is given below.

Main Thread of Old Testament History

1. Genesis – Creation, early civilization, the chosen family from Abraham to Jacob, Joseph in Egypt. (50 chapters)

2. Exodus – Escape from Egypt, journey to Sinai, law of Moses given and a system of worship set up. (40 chapters)

3. Numbers – Departure from Sinai and journey toward Canaan, the forty year delay due to unbelief, final preparations to enter Canaan. (36 chapters)

4. Deuteronomy – Chapter 34 only – Death of Moses and succession of Joshua as leader of Israel.

5. Joshua – Conquest and settlement of Canaan. (24 chapters)

6. Judges – The rule of 13 judges during 450 years after Joshua. (21 chapters)

7. I Samuel – Tenure of the last two judges and the region of Saul, the first king. (31 chapters)

8. 2 Samuel – The reign of David. (24 chapters)

9. 1 Kings – The reign of Solomon, the division of the kingdom and early history of the two rival kingdoms. (21 chapters)

10. 2 Kings – The two rival kingdoms down to their end as independent governments. (25 chapters)

11. Ezra – First efforts to rebuild Jerusalem after 70 years of foreign domination and captivity. (10 chapters)

Study Suggestions

To master the basic thread of Old Testament history, study these books as quickly and as thoroughly as possible. Provide yourself with a special notebook for making and keeping notes on all your Bible study. An inexpensive shorthand notebook, a loose leaf notebook are all satisfactory and are to be preferred to loose papers which may be easily lost or disarranged. Set aside at least 20 minutes each day for study, and distribute the time according to the following schedule.

Suggested Study Schedule

| <i>TIME</i> | <i>ACTIVITY</i> |
|-------------|--|
| — | PRAYER. Briefly, humbly ask God's help as you study. James 1:5 |
| 5 minutes | PREVIEW-REVIEW. Look back over previous notes or reading matter, then |

thumb ahead about as far as you expect to read so as to take note of the general subject matter to be studied.

- 15 minutes **RAPID READING.** Read ahead into the new material as rapidly as you can. Read with a pencil in hand to mark words whose meaning you do not know and to which you will want to return. As far as possible, let this be an unbroken reading period.
- 10 minutes **TAKING STOCK.** Summarize what you have read in some kind of *written notes*. Look up unfamiliar words. Reread parts that were not clear. Think of the significance of what you have read and how it relates to other Bible facts.

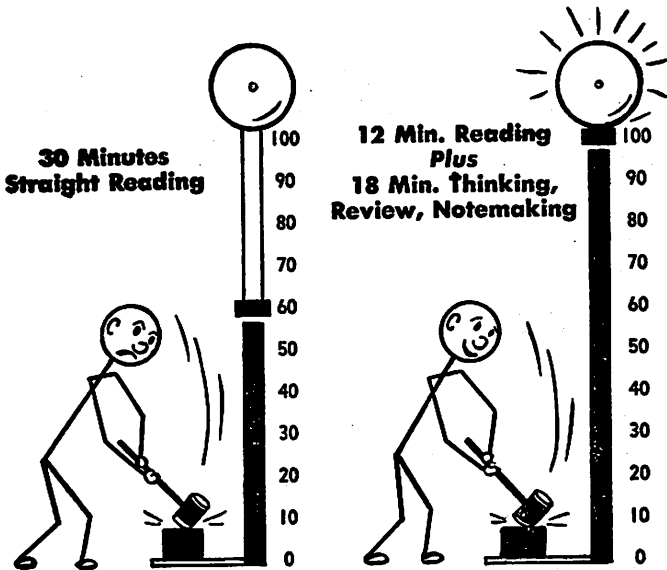
Written Notes

It is important as you go along to make some kind of written notes. Almost any kind will be better than none as an aid to study. Your notes might take the form of a "Chapter summary" in which you write a brief summary in your own words of each chapter's contents. Another form could be a "List of Major events" in which, ignoring chapter divisions, you list the major events in each day's study and note the chapter and verse where each was found. Your ingenuity may devise some other form of written aid. Someone with a flair for writing might write a first person account as if it were the diary of some character in the story; another might write an imaginary newspaper account covering the events studied; another might retell the story in a form suitable for children if the story is adaptable to children. Some kind of written

notes is vital, however, and is not only an immediate aid in study, but will be a valuable reference later.

A Final Word

Do not try to take shortcuts in the methods suggested here unless you have already developed such strong and efficient study habits that you cannot and do not wish to change. The time spent in the Preview-Review and in the Taking Stock steps is not time wasted. The time used for note taking is not lost. Your first impulse will be to "cover more ground" by eliminating these steps and doing more reading. It is quite true that you will cover the ground faster, but you will not understand or remember nearly as much and in the long run, it will actually take you longer to learn the same amount.



HOW TO RING THE BELL IN YOUR STUDY

For Further Study

1. Joseph M. Gettys, *How to enjoy Studying the Bible* (John Knox Press, Richmond, Virginia, 1945) has some good suggestions as to note making. If someone can obtain this pamphlet, these ideas might help the class.
2. If you can locate a college or high school "How To Study" guide, report to the class on its suggestions as to taking notes.

Test Yourself

1. What specific benefits are to be gotten from Old Testament Study?
2. The following passages of scripture refer to various benefits of knowing the Old Testament. Read each one and connect it with one of the three benefits of Old Testament study discussed in this lesson.
2 Peter 1:19
1 Corinthians 10:11
Hebrews 8:1-6
James 5:11
Acts 3:24
Romans 11:22
3. Why is it suggested that a study of The Old Testament begin with reading only about one-third of the books rather than reading straight through the entire volume?
4. Describe the routine steps suggested for each day's study.

5. After one has already gone through these books once and wishes to go back over them for a more detailed study, what changes in procedure might be good?
6. In lesson 4, five principles of learning were discussed. How many of them can you find provided for somewhere in the suggestions made in this lesson for studying the Old Testament?

Lesson 6

HOW TO STUDY THE OLD TESTAMENT (2)

Once you have gotten in mind the main thread of Old Testament history, you are prepared to study the remaining books. These should be studied individually rather than consecutively and should also be studied in close connection with the events to which they relate. For example, as you study Psalms you could profitably review the life of David (1, 2 Samuel), with Ecclesiastes you would review the life of Solomon (1 Kings) and with the books of prophecy you would recall the social, political and religious conditions at the time they live (Kings and Chronicles).

It is common to divide Old Testament books into the following three divisions: (1) Books of History and Law (2) Books of poetry and Wisdom (3) Books of Prophecy. The books discussed in the preceding lesson all belong in the first group. The remaining books will be listed according to group and some study suggestions made.

Books of History and Law

Leviticus: Instructions for priests in the system of worship already described in Exodus. Rather than studying the books of law separately, you might gather and study similar laws such as laws governing annual feasts, the worship, the priesthood, etc.

Deuteronomy: Speeches by Moses recalling the events in Jewish history already related in Exodus and

Numbers. He repeats the law as he urges the people to obey God.

Ruth: The principal characters of this book lived during the time of Judges but the story may be studied without particular reference to that book.

1, 2 Chronicles: Repetition (with some additions) of events found in 1, 2 Kings. To avoid two sets of notes covering the same events, you might add notes on Chronicles to those already made on Kings.

Nehemiah: The work of Nehemiah in rebuilding Jerusalem. Review Ezra.

Esther: Incidents while the Jews were in Babylonian captivity. Review that part of Jewish history in 2 Kings and Chronicles.

Books of Poetry and Wisdom

Job: This book has no connection with other Old Testament books. It tells the story of Job's misfortunes and his search for the reason behind human suffering. It is in the form of a conversation between Job and some friends and your notes might well outline these speeches.

Psalms: Many Psalms relate to David's experiences so that a review of his life in 1, 2 Samuel is valuable. Since the chapters are not connected with each other, they may be studied independently. It will probably be best to mingle the Psalms occasionally into your other study rather than trying to read the book from beginning to end. Fullest appreciation of the Psalms requires rereading many times and also meditation. Try reading them

aloud to gain increased appreciation of them.

Proverbs: A collection of Solomon's wise sayings. The book has little internal unity so that each proverb may be studied individually rather than by chapters. Proverbs use comparisons to make the point more vivid so your study should be directed toward (1) understanding the essence of the comparison, and (2) expressing plainly the truth illustrated by the comparison. Organize your notes in this way.

Ecclesiastes: An account of Solomon's search for the meaning and chief duty of life. As you study, please keep in mind that several tentative conclusions are considered and rejected before the final conclusion is reached at the close of the book. Try to see the book as a whole rather than broken up into chapters.

Song of Solomon: The purpose of this book is not completely clear. Perhaps the safest view is to look at it as presenting an exalted view of the beauties of marriage. Being in poetical form, it has no direct historical connection but you may find some clues to its meaning in a review of Solomon's life.

Books of Prophecy

Isaiah: Study after reviewing the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah.

Jeremiah: Review events from the time of Josiah to the Babylonian captivity.

Lamentations: Jeremiah's grief over the destruction of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel: Grew up under Jeremiah's preaching and became an active preacher during the Babylonian captivity.

Daniel: Lived and prophesied in Babylon as a highly favoured captive.

Hosea: Lived during the reign of Jeroboam II and his immediate successors.

Joel: Date uncertain but possibly during Uzziah's reign.

Amos: Preached in the days of Uzziah and Jotham.

Obadiah: Lived about the beginning of the Babylonian captivity.

Jonah: Jonah was not a prophet to the Jews as were the others, but was sent to Assyria during the reign of Jeroboam II.

Micah: Lived during the reign of kings from Jotham to Hezekiah.

Nahum: Lived during the reign of Josiah.

Habakkuk: Preached at the time of Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem.

Zephaniah: Preached during the reign of Josiah.

Haggai: Preached after the Babylonian captivity; review Ezra and Nehemiah.

Zechariah: Preached immediately after Haggai.

Malachi: Preached about 100 years after Haggai and Zechariah.

The Nature of the Prophetic Books

Some comment on the prophetic books may be in order since certain misconceptions about them may hinder effective study. These books are often regarded as especially hard, but part of the difficulty lies in a failure to associate the prophet with the history of his times. Certainly some difficult passages exist in these books, yet they also contain much material that is richly rewarding if studied properly.

A prophet was simply a man who spoke for God. The main work of the prophets was to preach against the sins of their times. The books contain extracts from their oral sermons or summaries of such discourses. Thus the different parts of the book may have little connection with each other just as random extracts from a modern preacher's sermons might have little connection. Before studying one of these books, review thoroughly the circumstances under which the man lived so you can get the vital significance of what he said.

God did indeed use these men to predict the future, but this was usually in close connection with their preaching either by way of proving their divine mission, or of warning the wicked, or of raising the hopes of the discouraged. Since their predictions usually were concerned with certain major events, it will aid your study to keep them in mind. First, was *the coming punishment of God upon Israel for its sins*. For a time, this took the form of continual harassment by neighboring peoples but finally it came in the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. Second, the prophets often held out a ray of hope as they predicted *the eventual return of the Jews to Palestine*, a rebuilding of its cities, and a renewal of the

religious services. Third, looking beyond these temporal threats and blessings, the prophets also spoke of *the coming of Christ and the establishment of his everlasting kingdom*. These first two types of prophecy were fulfilled within the historical framework of the Old Testament since both the captivity and the restoration are described therein. The third, or Messianic group of prophecies had to await fulfillment until the coming of Christ nearly 400 years after Malachi. Since the prophets sometimes intermingled all three types of prophecy, you will need to be alert to discern them as you study.

The same general outline of study activities suggested in the preceding lesson should be followed. Your notes might well be in the form of chapter summaries or outlines of a book.

For Further Study

1. By using a commentary or from your own study try to locate some Psalms that relate pretty directly to some of David's experiences. Tell the story connected with it to the class, then read the Psalm in class to illustrate the value of connecting Old Testament books with historical events.
2. The book of Isaiah contains all three kinds of prophecy outlined in the lesson. Locate a sample of each and share it with the class.
3. Find Kyle M. Yates, *Preaching from the Prophets* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1942) and give a class report on the Introduction in this book.
4. Compile for the class a list of as many books as you

can find which would be of help in studying the prophecies.

Test Yourself

1. What do the following words mean? proverb, Ecclesiastes, psalm.
2. What does "prophet" mean? What was his work?
3. In this lesson, some books were mentioned which should be studied as a whole and by reading the book straight through, while other books should not be studied in this way at all. Name some books in each group.
4. What three kinds of things were most frequently mentioned by the prophets as they predicted future events?
5. Examples of the vigorous preaching of the prophets are found in the following passages: Amos 5:10-13, Micah 7:1-6, Malachi 1:6-14.
Read each and list the chief sins mentioned by the prophet.
6. What are the three divisions of Old Testament books? Name the books in each division.

Lesson 7

HOW TO STUDY THE NEW TESTAMENT (1)

Because of its nature and content, the New Testament will be studied with more frequency and intensity than the Old Testament. Though you will still use the general principles of learning and the suggested schedule of activities already discussed, the New Testament calls for somewhat special methods. The first five books of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts) are historical and because of this similarity will be discussed together.

The Gospels

We know practically nothing about Jesus except what is preserved in these four biographical books commonly called the four gospels. Scattered references to the life of Jesus are found in the rest of the New Testament. Secular historians mention him just enough for us to be certain that there actually was such a person as Jesus (a fact denied by some modernists). For example, the Roman historian Tacitus (A.D. 55-117) referred to the Christians and said: "The founder of that name, Christus, had been put to death by the procurator, Pontius Pilate, in the reign of Tiberias; but the deadly superstition, though repressed for a time, broke out again, not only through Judea where this evil had its origin, but also through the city (Rome)." Though the apostles preached much about Jesus as their sermons in Acts show, yet from the earliest times there were only four books about Jesus acknowledged as authoritative and inspired.

The gospels had one chief purpose as stated by John. "These things are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." (John 20:31). A similar statement of purpose is found in the opening verses of Luke. The writers had to be very selective because they could have prolonged endlessly the account of what Jesus did and said in his approximately thirty years on earth. This statement of purpose not only provides the key to the principle of selection used by the writers, but also indicates with what purpose the gospel should be studied. Of course, the gospels also reveal much about the manner of life of our ideal man whose footsteps we are to follow. (1 Peter 2:21). They contain Jesus' own teaching about the church, the mission and duty of Christians, and the life to come.

But why *four* gospels? Certainly one such book from God would have been sufficient, but God's wisdom has seen fit to give us four. It seems pretty clear that each gospel was designed for a somewhat different audience and therefore approached the subject in a different way. Thus the gospels supplement each other without contradictions. Matthew, an apostle and an eyewitness, emphasized the manner in which Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecies. This type of evidence would be most effective to Jewish minds. Mark, who probably not an eyewitness but who was associated with the apostles during the early days of the church, seems to have emphasized the great power of Jesus as exhibited in his miracles. Some have thought that Peter dictated Mark's gospel. If Mark wrote mainly for Roman Christians, as some think, it is understandable that a demonstration of Jesus' power would appeal to the nation that ruled the world. Luke was not an eyewitness but describes in Luke 1:1-4 his careful research before writing. The scholarly

care employed by Luke was probably designed to appeal to his fellow Greeks. John was, of course, an intimate friend and apostle of Jesus. He seems to have consciously tried to avoid duplicating what others had written. The first three gospels are so similar that they are called the "Synoptic Gospels" (from the Greek *synopsis* – "seen together"). John's gospel seems to emphasize the claims that Jesus made regarding himself, thus completing the basic proofs of Jesus' divinity.

If you have never studied the gospels, you should begin by reading one of them, (preferably Mark), in the same way it was suggested the Old Testament historical books be studied. If you have already read at least one gospel and are fairly familiar with the major events in the life of Christ, you should study the Synoptic gospels together. For this kind of study, you will need to get a "harmony" of the gospels – a book which arranges these books in parallel columns. (See Stevens and Burton, *A Harmony of the Gospels* or A.T. Robertson's work of the same title.) The gospel of John deserves separate study.

Because of the 400 year gap between the close of the Old Testament and the opening of the New Testament, there are certain religious and political situations which need to be understood as you read the Gospels and for which the Old Testament does not prepare you. Religiously, the various Jewish sects (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots) had developed during the inter-Testament period. The synagogue was a new development. Politically, Palestine was under Roman rule and the manner in which this was exercised needs to be understood so that one appreciates the role of the Herods, of Pilate, and of other rulers encountered in Acts. Unless a fairly good picture of these matters is obtained before-

hand or unless one is careful to learn about them along with a study of the Gospels, he will find much of what he reads meaningless and confusing.

The gospels also require a fairly detailed geographical knowledge of Palestine. One should have a good map at his side to which constant reference may be made.

Acts of Apostles

The story of the beginning and spread of the church is found in Acts. It is evident from the opening verses of Acts that its author also wrote the gospel of Luke. Acts may be studied in the same manner as the Old Testament historical books. A good map of lands surrounding the Mediterranean Sea will be needed. Especial care in making written notes on Acts will be rewarding when you study the other books of the New Testament and need to review Acts for background information.

Acts is commonly called the "book of conversions" because it contains accounts of so many people obeying the gospel. In your first time to study Acts, you would probably do well to emphasize this aspect of the book, especially if you are searching the answer to the question "What must I do to be saved?" Acts however, will bear repeated studying from other points of view. It is a missionary book and may be studied to learn the New Testament pattern for evangelizing the world. It is a book which pictures the problems of the Jerusalem church and may profitably be studied by church leaders to see how that congregation solved problems similar to those faced today. Thus, it is a book which may be studied again and again, and each time with profit.

For Further Study

1. Using a Bible dictionary, Bible encyclopedia or other suitable work, find out in detail the special peculiarities and purposes of each gospel. Present this to class along with supporting evidence from within the books themselves where possible.
2. The similarity of the first three gospels has raised the question as to whether they are really three independent accounts. This is the so-called "Synoptic Problem." Report on this to the class by using some work such as the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*.
3. Report on "The Sects of the Jews" in R.C. Foster, *An Introduction To the Life of Christ*.
4. At a time when distrust in the accuracy of the Bible is popular, it would be worthwhile to reaffirm its trustworthiness. Obtain the book *The Supernaturalness of Christ* by Wilbur M. Smith. Read the report on Chapter 2, "The Historical Trustworthiness of the Gospel Records."

Test Yourself

1. Identify each gospel writer and give something about his life.
2. What was the main purpose of the gospels?
3. Approximately how long a period of time is covered by the gospels? How do you know?

CHRONOLOGY OF NEW TESTAMENT EVENTS

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Roman Ruler</i> | <i>Palestine Ruler</i> | <i>N.T. Books</i> | <i>N.T. Events</i> |
|-------------|--------------------|------------------------|----------------------|--|
| 4 B.C. | Caesar Augustus | Herod the Great | Birth of Jesus | Birth of John the Baptist |
| 26 A.D. | Tiberius | | | Ministry of John |
| 30 A.D. | Tiberius | Pontius Pilate | | Beginning of Jesus' Work Crucifixion, Resurrection. Ascension of Jesus |
| 31-33 A.D. | | | | Events of Acts 1, 2 Church persecution; death of Stephen (Acts 7) |
| 37 A.D. | | | | Conversion of Saul (Acts 9) |
| 40 A.D. | | | | Conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10) Paul at Ephesus (Acts 11) |
| 45-48 A.D. | Claudius | Herod Agrippa | | Paul's first missionary Tour (Asia Minor) |
| 50 A.D. | | | | Jerusalem conference (Acts 15) |
| 50-53 A.D. | | Felix | 1 Thess. 2 Thess. | Paul's 2nd Missionary Tour (Asia Minor Greece) |

| | | | |
|------------|-------------------------------|--|--|
| 54-57 A.D. | | Matthew Mark Corinthians (Spring, 57 A.D.) 2 Corinthians Galatians Romans (Winter, 57 A.D.) | Paul's 3rd Missionary Tour (Asia Minor, Greece) |
| 58-60 A.D. | Felix Festus | Luke James | Paul in prison at Caesarea. (Acts 23-26) Paul's trip to Rome (Acts 27, 28) Paul in Prison at Rome |
| 60-61 A.D. | | Acts Ephesians, Philip- pians, Colossians, Philemon, Hebrews | Paul in Prison at Rome |
| 61-63 A.D. | | 1 Timothy Titus | Paul at liberty |
| 64-67 A.D. | Nero | 2 Timothy 1, 2 Peter, Jude, John | Paul's second imprisonment Death of Paul Destruction of Jerusalem by Titus |
| 67 A.D. | | 1, 2, 3 John Revelation | Death of John |
| 68 A.D. | | | |
| 70 A.D. | | | |
| 90 A.D. | | | |

4. **Approximately how long a period of time is covered by Acts?**
5. **What three major proofs of Jesus' divinity are presented by the gospels?**
6. **State the particular purpose of each gospel as it differed from the others.**

Lesson 8

HOW TO STUDY THE NEW TESTAMENT (2)

The remaining books of the New Testament are called "epistles" because they take the form of letters directed either to churches, to individuals or to general groups. Even Revelation, most of which is prophetic, begins with seven short epistles. Because these books are the major source of information about the duties of the Christian life, about church worship, work and organization, they must be studied rather intensively. Each book should be studied separately. This type of study can best be carried out by following the three steps described below.

Book Method – Step I: Preliminary Survey

The object of this step is to obtain information as to (1) author, (2) persons addressed, and (3) the general subject matter of the book. The first two items can be obtained usually from the opening verses of the book. All references to these elsewhere in the Bible should be read. A Bible dictionary and other helps should be used to get a complete background. All this information should be summarized in your notebook in a special section reserved for the book under study. Finally, the book itself should be scanned to get an idea of its general subject matter. (This should be done in your original study of the book but may be omitted if you are making an advanced study.) This may be done by looking at chapter headings or by a rapid partial reading of the book. If the latter is done, do not stop over difficult passages, but simply read for a general impression.

Book Method – Step 2: Preparation of an Outline

Most New Testament books can be outlined fairly well if a little thought is given to it. The outline should be prepared only after several (at least two) rapid readings of the book. If possible, each reading should be done at one sitting. It is essential to read rapidly and ignore, for the moment, difficult passages. After two or three readings, the main ideas of the book should begin to stand out in your mind. These should then be set down in your notebook in order, along with approximate chapter and verse boundaries for each topic. Limit yourself to the main topics rather than listing detailed and minor ones. If you find it difficult to make an outline, you should borrow one somewhere (commentary or a book on New Testament Introduction) so you can proceed to the next step. It may be convenient to have your outline take the following general form:

- I. Introduction (Preliminary opening verses)
- II. BODY (Main portion of the book)
 - A.
 - B. (As many of these divisions as there are
 - C. topics in the book.)
- III. Conclusion (closing verses which are usually separate from the main subject of the book.)

Book Method – Step 3: Detailed Study

Each topic in the outline is now to be studied separately, using as much time as necessary to understand it thoroughly. Treat each topic as a separate unit; read it over as a whole several times; then attack it paragraph by paragraph or sentence by sentence. Look up every

word about which you are in doubt. Use the concordance to look up related scriptures. Perseverance and self-discipline are needed to help you stay with a topic until you have mastered it. After finishing one topic, proceed to the next one and give it the same detailed treatment until you have completed the book. Your notes may well take the form of an expanded outline, in which you summarize what you have learned in each section and in each paragraph under each topic. Be sure also to make note of passages you did not understand so you can return to them. After going through a book or perhaps one topic in this way, you may profitably read a commentary and compare your findings with those of the author. Since you will likely reread each epistle over a period of several years, you should save the notes so as to avoid having to go over the same ground again. Each subsequent study of the book should carry you further and deeper into its meaning rather than be a repeated skimming of the surface.

EXAMPLE OF BOOK OUTLINE

1 Corinthians

- I. Introduction. 1:1-9
- II. Body. 1:1-16:9
 - A. Plea for Unity. 1:10-17, continued. 3:1-4:21
 - B. God's Wisdom and Worldly Wisdom. 1:18-2:16
 - C. A case of immorality. 5:1-13
 - D. Lawsuits between brethren. 6:1-11
 - E. A plea for holiness. 6:12-20
 - F. Answers to Questions about Marriage. 7:1-40
 - G. Eating meat offered to idols. 8:1-13, continued. 10:15-33

- H. Paul's rights as an apostle. 9:1-27
- I. Some Old Testament Lessons. 10:1-14
- J. Head covering of men and women. 11:1-16
- K. The Lord's Supper. 11:17-34
- L. Spiritual Gifts. 12:1-14:40
- M. The Resurrection. 15:1-58
- N. The Contribution. 16:1-9

III. Conclusion. 16:10-24

The schedule of study activities suggested in an earlier lesson should still be followed in studying the epistles. The difference is that the epistles are approached in a way which permits the intensive study of each section of the book, whereas the historical Old Testament books are read straight through.

Revelation

Most people feel at so much of a loss with Revelation that they are reluctant to read it at all. This attitude is in striking contrast with the very title of the book which implies that something is being revealed, uncovered or unveiled. There is no implication at all that the writer expected the book to be mysterious and completely obscured to Christians. We must seek to change our outlook in this regard.

Many views are held regarding the purpose and message of Revelation. Some regard everything in the book as having already happened at the time the book was written. Others regard everything as future. Still others find in Rev. 1:19 evidence that the book refers to both past and future events. Some find detailed fulfillment of the book in certain historical events of world history but

those who attempt to name persons and events are remarkably disagreed. Protestants find the Roman Catholic church pictured therein. Roman Catholics find the Protestant Reformation described. Detailed descriptions of these various theories about Revelation can be gotten from commentaries.

It seems that the book may be approached from a much simpler basis which will permit it to be immediately edifying to the student. If the book has detailed historical fulfillment in specific persons and events, then it must be closed to the average Christians who will never have the command of history necessary to appreciate the book. The book may, however, be regarded as presenting — in highly symbolic form — the whole sweep of the Christian dispensation as a great, prolonged battle between forces of righteousness and forces of evil. The book is therefore designed to give Christians hope and courage in showing that beyond the present ebb and flow of battle lies a complete triumph for God and for righteousness. On this basis, the book may be studied with immediate profit, not by finding detailed historical correspondence to each symbol in the book, but by feeling the accumulated force of a remarkable series of symbols each pointing to the same conclusion.

Many students will nevertheless feel hesitant about approaching Revelation without some aid. Probably one of the most profitable guides to the book is *Revelation in 26 Lessons* by Frank L. Cox.

For Further Study

1. Although most New Testament epistles mention their author, Hebrews does not. Who is thought to be its author and how was this conclusion reached?
2. Look up in commentaries on Revelation some of the various theories as to its meaning. Usually an introductory chapter will set forth the author's point of view. Share some of these with the class.
3. I.B. Grubbs published a volume *New Commentary on Romans* which shows how every word and phrase of an epistle can be fitted into a detailed outline of the book. Obtain a copy and share it with the class.

Test Yourself

1. What does "epistle" mean?
2. By examining each epistle, name the men who wrote them.
3. Which epistles were written to individual congregations? Which to larger groups than a local church? Which to single individuals?
4. Describe briefly the three steps in the study of an epistle.
5. We shall use the book of James as a *sample* on which to practice Steps 1 and 2 described in this lesson. Use one sheet of paper for your notes on the Preliminary Survey and write on it all the information you can get as called for under that heading. On a second page, put your outline of James. Follow the sugges-

tions given for making the outline. Do not worry about polishing or refining your outline to perfection. Such original, rough outlines are usually revised during the Detailed Study step.

Lesson 9

THE SUBJECT METHOD

There are two principle methods of study for the average Bible student. One is the intensive study of a book according to the procedures already suggested. The other is the study of a subject or topic. This kind of study cuts across book divisions and may involve many books of the Bible.

Each method has its advantages. By following the book method, the student is certain to come into contact with everything that God has revealed for he will read every word of the Bible. Furthermore, this method helps the student avoid interpreting scripture out of context, thus giving verses a strained or forced meaning. On the other hand, the subject method gives a comprehensive view of a given topic which one might be very slow to acquire by the book method. In doing personal work, one often needs to be able to present all that the Bible teaches on a particular subject. Mastery of the subject method is also helpful in preparing to speak or to teach a class. Both methods should therefore be used. Probably the book method should be the basis of one's regular program of Bible study and supplemented by the subject method, class lessons, etc.

The subject method consists simply in gathering all the Bible teaches on a given topic, studying it carefully, and then organizing it. A Bible and a concordance are essential. If a concordance is impossible to obtain, a centre reference Bible is of some help.

Subject Method – Step 1: Select the subject.

Though this is an obvious step, it should not be passed over too hurriedly. It is important to understand and define clearly what you are to study. Vagueness at this point leads to waste of time. Many kinds of topics lend themselves to this method: persons (such as Moses, Solomon), commands (such as repentance), principles (such as inspiration), institutions (such as the church), offices (such as the eldership).

Subject Method – Step 2: Collect Bible References.

All possible scripture passages bearing on the subject are called with the aid of a concordance. Frequently references will be found under several words related to the main subject. These references may then be listed on paper with a space left beside each for brief notes. Since many references may contribute little to an understanding of the subject, you may wish to write down only those references which give really helpful information.

Subject Method – Step 3: Study the Bible References.

Read each reference, taking note of the context to avoid misinterpreting. Study each passage carefully to glean whatever it may have to contribute toward an understanding of the subject. Summarize the essence of each in brief notes. As you study, additional words may be suggested that are related to the subject and these may also be looked up in the concordance.

Subject Method – Step 4: Organize Your Findings

As you read the references, a general picture of the subject should begin to form in your mind. Certain main ideas may emerge just as the outline of a book emerged

after reading it several times. Often a seeming contradiction gives you a clue that further study is needed. The final result should be an outline of all Bible teaching on the subject, together with Bible references supporting each item in the outline. Successful completion of this step requires much thoughtfulness and skill and cannot be done hurriedly.

Subject Method — Step 5: Illustrate and Apply.

Bible study must not be purely theoretical. Constantly ask: "How does this apply to me and to others?" Collect Bible examples illustrative of what you have learned, or examples from everyday life. Your notebook will be much enriched by the addition of such materials. Perhaps you can think of some graphic way to represent what you have learned, either by a chart, diagram, etc.

After doing your best to learn all that the Bible teaches on a certain subject, you will probably wish to supplement your results with those from someone else's study. You may find books of sermons that contain a well prepared lesson on the very subject of your study. Books or pamphlets have been prepared on an endless variety of subjects and somewhere among them you will find help on your subject. Notes of ideas that are really helpful when added to your original notes will give you a valuable Bible notebook for review, for further study, and for teaching.

For Further Study

1. Certain religious errors have arisen from a failure to observe the principles in this lesson. Doctrines have

been based on one verse or a few verses while other Scripture teaching on that same subject is ignored. A class report would be helpful if it could illustrate this by discussing some religious error and showing how it could be corrected by following the principles suggested here. (For example, the doctrines of "faith only.")

2. Bring to class for display a concordance for the King James Version, the American Standard Version and the Revised Standard Version. Also display one of the "every word" concordances such as Young's Analytical Concordance or Strong's.

Test Yourself

1. What advantages do each of the two methods of study have?
2. Briefly describe how the "subject method" is carried out.
3. In order to illustrate the subject method, we shall use the topic "Repentance" in the New Testament. Carry out steps 1-4 in the above lesson using any concordance available. Organize the subject as you wish but be sure that before you are through you understand exactly what repentance is and that you have read carefully each New Testament passage on the subject.

Lesson 10

UNDERSTANDING WHAT WE STUDY (1)

The fact that a person is studying does not always guarantee that he is being profited. "Understandest thou what thou readest?" is still a proper question. Hermeneutics is the technical name for the science which is concerned with ways to understand and interpret the Scriptures. The aim of interpretation is to get into our minds the same idea that the author had and which he intended to express as he wrote. Thus the Scriptures have but one true meaning. It is frequently a temptation to be satisfied with an interpretation that *sounds* good but which is not what the writer intended. We must carefully distinguish between what a passage actually teaches as opposed to ideas which are true but not contained in the passage being considered.

Interpretation would be no problem if each word had only one simple, clear-cut meaning in all instances. This is not true, however, as a glance at a dictionary will show. It is hardly facing the problem squarely, then, to pass off matters of interpretation by saying "It means what it says." Despite the difficulties of discovering what was in the mind of the author, God has chosen human language to communicate His will and has given us intelligence by which to understand it. Correct methods of interpretation will lead all people to the same interpretation of Scripture and that will be the correct interpretation.

Bible Under No Rules

It is important in interpreting the Scriptures to understand that the Author (God) was not bound by any rules regarding what could be put into the Bible. Therefore we must beware of setting up rules and requiring the Bible to conform to them. We must accept the Bible as it is. Some come to the Bible with the assumption (or rule) that miracles are impossible. Thus they "interpret" passages mentioning miracles in such a way as to explain them away. The story of Jesus stilling the storm merely symbolizes how Jesus brings peace to troubled hearts and lives. Others come to the Bible with the assumption (or rule) that God loves people too much ever to hurt anyone. They "interpret" the Bible according to this rule. The plagues of Egypt become myths and hell evaporates. As we approach the Scriptures we must remember that the Almighty is their author. He is under no constraint to make them according to our feeble judgment of what they should be. We must accept them as they are if we accept them at all.

We approach the Scriptures much as a scientist approaches an experiment. He does not even demand that Nature be "reasonable." To set up rules ahead of time "must" be the centre of the universe because man, the most important created being, was on the earth. Astronomical observations were interpreted in the most ridiculous fashion to make them fit the rule. Finally when the rule was abandoned, the truth became apparent.

Consider the Context

The word "context" comes from two words which literally mean "to weave together." Thus the "context"

of a scripture passage refers to all the ideas woven together in that place. We are in grave danger of misinterpreting scripture if we do not consider it in the light of the general subject matter and purpose of the verses surrounding it. Of course, the context of a passage varies in extent: sometimes it embraces the entire book, while at other times it may involve only a paragraph. Preachers are sometimes guilty of lifting a verse out of its context in their search for a "text" with which to introduce a lesson. Aside from the error which can be taught, this practice often leaves the impression on people that one can make a verse mean almost anything.

Attention to the context is not only vital to correct interpretation, but is also the best way to refute error. False teachers do make use of scripture. To meet these scriptures with other scriptures that seem to teach something else may leave the impression that the Bible is hopelessly contradictory, or that it actually teaches two equally good doctrines depending on which Scriptures you use. Most passages, however, contain right in the context, the necessary ideas for refusing any error which they may be used to teach.

Study the Grammar

Many of us have felt from school experiences that grammar was just a device to make things hard and complex. Actually the reverse is true. By using proper grammar we can express our ideas more precisely than otherwise and can also understand the communication of others better. At one time, it was thought to be blasphemy to apply rules of grammar to the problem of understanding the Bible. However, since God has chosen human language to convey His will, we must use the laws

of that language to understand it. Sometimes by diagramming a Bible sentence its meaning will immediately be clear. Some of Paul's long, involved sentences will hardly yield their meaning until they are carefully analyzed grammatically.

Meditation

Don't overlook the value of meditation in trying to understand the Scriptures. David pronounced a blessing upon the man who meditates on the law of the Lord "day and night." (Psalm 1:1, 2) As someone has said, "Time exposures rather than snapshots" should characterize our study. Many persons have had the experience of reading certain passages many times before feeling that they really understood them. The study program suggested earlier provides some line for meditation. Memorizing scriptures will help because the scriptures are available for meditation at times when it would be impossible to read from the Bible.

For Further Study

1. Obtain the book *Hermeneutics* by D. R. Dungan. Report to the class on the first section of the book.
2. The idea is very widely held that people simply cannot interpret the Bible alike. Perhaps by reading or by talking with people you can obtain the main reasons for this view and can present them to the class for discussion and evaluation. See also *Why People Do Not See the Bible Alike?* by J. Ridley Stroop.
3. Bring to class a copy of the Hardeman-Bogard debate

and show how N.B. Hardeman effectively used grammatical analysis of Mark 16:16 to deal with error.

4. The interpretation of so-called “contradictions” in the Bible troubles many people. Obtain a copy of *Thy Word Is Truth* by Edward J. Young and report to the class on the chapters “What is Inerrancy.”

Test Yourself

1. What is the aim of interpretation?
2. What does the term “context” mean?
3. By using the context of the following passages, show how the error often taught from them could be corrected.
 - 1 Cor. 1:14 (used to teach that baptism is not necessary)
 - 1 Cor. 3:15 (used to teach that once you are a Christian you will be saved regardless of what you do)
 - Revelation 1:4 (used to teach Biblical recognition of denominations)
 - Acts 16:31 (used to teach salvation by faith only)
4. Use a King James Version and mark off the first complete sentence in Hebrews chapter 1. Identify the simple subject and the simple predicate (verb). Identify the words or phrases that modify the subject. The predicate.

Lesson 11

UNDERSTANDING WHAT WE STUDY (2)

Since the Bible contains both figurative and literal language, one major problem of interpretation is that of recognizing figurative language and learning what it means. Figurative language is language in which the words have other meanings than their usual meaning but in which there is some similarity between the common meaning and the special meaning.

Why Figurative Language?

Figurative language was certainly not adopted by God to deceive people or to obscure the Truth. We may be sure that its purpose is to present God's will more plainly. Indeed some subjects cannot be presented at all without using figurative expressions. How else could God tell us anything about Himself except by using figurative (anthropomorphic) statements? (Anthropomorphic means applying human characteristics to God.) Thus, we are told of the words that come from the mouth of God (though He has no mouth), of his ears that hear our prayers (though he has no ears) and of his eyes that see all (though he has no eyes). Figurative language is used sometimes to express ideas more forcefully than could be done otherwise. How much stronger is Jesus' statement to the Laodicea church, "I will spue thee out of my mouth," than a drab literal statement of disgust. Figurative language adds beauty to language and prevents monotony. Figurative language assists the memory.

We remember the different kinds of soil mentioned in the parable of the sower much longer than we would a purely factual discussion of the various kinds of people who hear the gospel. Figurative language also invites further inquiry in order to learn its meaning and this means that the teaching will be longer remembered and better understood. Thus we can see that there are abundant good reasons for use of figurative language.

Recognizing Figurative Language

There are two extremes in the interpretation of Biblical language. One literalizes everything and the other spiritualizes everything. The former would demand that one literally cut off a hand because Jesus said, "If your right hand offend you, cut it off and throw it away." The latter would interpret "the walls of Jericho fell down" as meaning that the arguments supporting false religion were demolished. Thus there is the problem of recognizing which language is figurative and which is literal.

Ordinarily it is assumed that words are used in their normal, literal sense. Good evidence is required before we treat words as figurative. Many figures of speech are so labeled by the writer as being parables, allegories, fables or the like. Sometimes we recognize words as figurative because their literal meaning would involve an impossibility or a contradiction, or be contrary to known fact. Certain types of literature are more marked for figurative language than others. Thus we would naturally expect figures of speech to be more abundant in the Psalms (poetry) or in the prophetic books than in the historical books. Common sense, enlightened by a good general knowledge of the Bible and the context of the

passage, must be used.

Interpreting Figurative Language

Occasionally a person in a religious discussion will discard a passage by saying, "Oh, that is just figurative." Apparently some people think that declaring a passage to be figurative robs it of any real meaning. Such is far from the case. Figurative passages present fact and truth no less than literal passages do, and they have a solid core of literal meaning. The use of figurative words simply means that God felt the Truth could be presented best in that way.

The clue to the meaning of figurative passages is always to be found in some similarity between the literal meaning of the words and the idea to be conveyed by their figurative use. Thus, though God is not a literal shepherd, the key to understanding Psalm 23 is found in similarity between the work of a literal shepherd and what God does for his people. This is an obvious point, yet it needs emphasis so that we do not think figurative language can mean anything that the interpreter's fancy may suggest.

Furthermore, figurative language must be interpreted in the light of the context as has been emphasized before. It must never be made to conflict with literal passages. An inspired interpretation is always the correct one, as in the case of Jesus' own interpretation of his parables. A word of caution is needed against "over-interpretation", that is, making figurative language mean too much. Figurative language generally aims at presenting one or two main ideas and we are unjustified in trying to find significance in every minute detail.

Kinds of Figurative Language

The *parable* is probably one of the most common figures of speech in the Bible. It is a story by means of which something in real life is used to teach a spiritual lesson. The events in the story may not have actually happened, but are not impossible.

The *allegory* is similar to the parable, except that real facts of history are used to teach a lesson. See Galatians 4:21-5:1.

The *fable* has the same form as the parable, but involves events which could never happen, such as animals and trees talking to each other.

The *simile* is a simple statement of comparison rather than being given in story form. The words "like" or "as" are used and are the signs of a simile. It is important to remember that a simile means comparison in *some* points, but not *identity* in every point.

The *metaphor* is identical to the simile except that the words "like" or "as" are omitted. Because of the omission of these signal words, the metaphor is more likely to be mistaken for a literal statement.

Metonymy is a figure of speech in which one word is replaced by another which is closely related to it. In 1 Cor. 11:26 Paul speaks of the Lord's Supper in which we "drink this cup." Of course we drink the *contents* of the cup rather than the container itself.

Hyperbole is a figurative statement in which the actual facts are somewhat exaggerated or overstated for

the sake of emphasis. This is quite common and proper, as for example when we say, "Everybody's doing it." Luke 2:1 refers to a decree that "all the world" should be taxed. Since there were undoubtedly people living in North and South America and in Asia at that time who were not included, we must assume this to be hyperbolic.

In conclusion, we must realize that the magnificent variety of literary forms found in the Bible were selected by God himself because each one in the place where it occurs was the best way of presenting His will. In this confidence we approach the study of the Bible knowing that the God-given book is beautifully adapted to God-given intelligence and by the careful employment of both we can know the truth that makes us free.

For Further Study

1. Obtain the book *Organon of Scripture* by J.S. Lamar (Reprinted by Old Paths Book Club). Report on Chapter 5 to the class.
2. Matthew 26:26-28 contains the statement by Jesus which is the basis of the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. Learn what you can of this doctrine. How can you show that Jesus' statements are metaphors? See the book *Basic Errors of Catholicism* by Paul Matthews, pp. 82-86. (Published by Old Paths Book Club).
3. The book *Hermeneutics* by D.R. Dungan lists many kinds of figures of speech in the Bible. Bring to the attention of the class some which were not mentioned in this lesson.

Test Yourself

1. Why is figurative language sometimes used in the Bible?
2. Examine each of the passages listed here and decide whether the expression in quotation marks is figurative or literal (prove it) and then identify the figurative passages with one of the kinds described in the lesson.
Judges 9:7-16 "The trees went forth to anoint a king."
John 10:9 "I am the door."
Acts 9:4, 5 "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."
Luke 10:30-36 "A certain man was going down . . ."
Acts 22:16 "Wash away thy sins."
Colossians 1:23 "Preached to every creature which is under heaven"
1 Peter 1:24 "All flesh is as grass."
3. In 2 Samuel 12:1-10 a parable is used in a very clever manner. Probably none of the reasons for using figurative language that we have mentioned fit this case exactly. Study it carefully to discover what purpose Nathan had in mind by using it.
4. The parable, fable and allegory are all given in story form. What is the main difference between them?
5. Metonymy is the use of one word for another which is closely related to it. Interpretation of metonymy requires being able to decide what is represented by the words that are used. Try to do so on the following examples.

Luke 16:29 “They have *Moses and the prophets.*”

Rev. 3:4 “Thou hast a few *names.*”

Acts 10:43 “Everyone that *believeth.*”

Lesson 12

HOW THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHES

After having studied and understood what the New Testament *says*, there remains the problem of learning the *significance* of what we have read. What parts of the New Testament are we to obey now? How does the New Testament teach us?

Direct Commands

For three years, Jesus carefully taught the apostles and then told them to teach Christians "all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matt. 28:20) In addition, they were promised the inspired guidance of the Holy Spirit which would give them an infallible memory of what Christ had taught and would lead them into new truths. (John 14:26 and 16:13) Thus in our study of the New Testament, we will discover apostolic commands. These are binding on all who are in similar circumstances as the persons to whom those commands were addressed.

Principles

New Testament teaching is not confined to detailed commands, but rather abounds in principles which are just as binding as commands. The difference lies in the fact that the acts demanded by a principle are not immediately obvious. Jesus advised (Matthew 6:33) that we should seek his kingdom first above everything else. What does this mean in terms of everyday life? We are urged to "be not conformed to the world." How must this influence our speech, our amusements, our outlook

on life? It is in learning how to apply Christian principles that there is so much room for each Christian to grow and develop. The mere reading of the Bible does not disclose the full range of application of Bible principles. It is only by experience that the senses are exercised to discern good and evil. (Hebrews 5:14)

Examples

The New Testament teaches us by examples. Bible examples are not important because of infallibility on the part of early Christians in their actions. Examples deprive their importance first from the fact that Christians were under the immediate supervision of the apostles and generally acted under apostolic guidance. Examples are important also because God himself selected the ones to be included in the New Testament. This process of approval and selection of examples certainly suggests that they reflect the will of God.

Examples may serve to illustrate certain Bible commands for emphasis and clarity. Examples of baptism illustrate in a fine way the act of baptism itself as well as the purpose for which it was intended. The Great Commission is beautifully illustrated by the entire book of Acts. We do not fully understand any Bible command until we have searched the New Testament for whatever examples of that command it may contain.

Examples may illustrate Bible principles. We learn what it means to seek the kingdom first, to imitate Christ to be unworldly, by studying the life and thinking of early Christians.

Examples may reveal commands that are otherwise

unrecorded. Jesus did not give a specific command about when we should observe the Lord's Supper, yet an example shows what the apostles taught. (Acts 20:7) There is no specific command in the New Testament concerning a plurality of elders in every congregation, yet the uniformity of examples shows that the apostles taught it.

Care must be taken in using Bible examples, however. The example itself is not the law, but it rather reflects an apostolic command by implication or inference. No example can be followed in every detail — nor should it be. Every Bible example has some irrelevant features which we must separate from the essential. Suggestions for doing this will now be given.

First, we must recognize the incidental (chance or undesigned features of an example) as compared to the essential. (1) The personal judgment of an apostle is an incidental — not an authoritative — part of an example. Thus Paul's decision to support himself while preaching does not set a precedent binding on preachers today. (2) Any part of an example which is solely dependent upon the current state of technology is incidental. The absence of radio and TV preaching in the New Testament is merely incidental, then, and does not indicate that God disapproves it. (3) Variable features of apostolic examples reveal the incidentals, while the constant, unchanging elements are usually essential. Thus, since baptism took place in a variety of places we conclude that the location is incidental. In each case, however, the person was immersed in water and so we conclude that this is essential. (4) Whatever reflects purely local custom is incidental. Paul conformed to local custom wherever he was (1 Cor. 9:22) but recognized God's law as perma-

ment and universal.

Furthermore, we must distinguish the temporary from the permanent features of apostolic examples. Thus, the miraculous element in Bible examples was temporary. Although essential to the apostolic age, it was never indeed to be a permanent part of the gospel. Of course, the apostolic office itself was temporary.

Significance of Silence

The New Testament would be an endless and dull book if the apostles had attempted to list specifically all that God does *not* want us to do. The New Testament with its commands, principles and examples is largely a positive statement of what God's will is. Paul claimed that it would thoroughly furnish the man of God "unto every good work." (2 Tim. 3:16, 17) Peter spoke of it as embracing "all things that pertain to life and godliness." (2 Peter 1:3) Unless God has given us authority for a practice, the silence of the New Testament indicates that such is *not* God's will. This is called the "principle of exclusion."

One of the basic errors of denominationalism is the principle that we are free to practice whatever the Bible does not forbid. It is clear that on such a principle, there can never be religious unity but rather that more and more denominations will come into existence. Unity, as well as God's approval, can only come when religious activities are limited to the positive teaching of the New Testament – its examples, principles and commands.

The Bible affirms over and over the "significance of silence." God commanded Cain and Abel to make animal

sacrifices. He said nothing about vegetable offerings. Cain did not respect God's silence and was rejected. God's command to use gopher wood in the ark excluded all other kinds of wood even though God did not specifically forbid them. Paul warned the church "not to go beyond the things that are written." (1 Cor. 4:6) John declared that we do not have God's blessing when we "go onward" from Jesus' teaching. (2 John 9) As you study, please remember that what is *not* mentioned in the New Testament may be as significant as what is commanded.

Although all religious activities must first be authorized by New Testament examples, principles or commands, we must realize that God has wisely left certain details to human judgment.

Human judgment, however, functions only where God indicates that it may. It can never take over God's lawmaking right by creating new laws. Thus, human judgment cannot add other avenues or worship to the five (teaching, singing, praying, giving, communion) taught in the New Testament. Human judgment is restricted to such decisions as which songs to use, what order shall be followed, how the Lord's Supper shall be served, and similar matters. In our Bible study, it is important to distinguish between those activities forbidden by the principle of exclusion and those activities in which we are free to exercise judgment in working out the details.

For Further Study

1. Obtain J.W. Shepherd, *The Church, The Falling Away and the Restoration*. Study and report on the dif-

ferent principles of Bible interpretation used by Martin Luther (p. 115) and by Thomas Campbell (pp. 175-187).

2. The history of the instrumental music controversy illustrates confusion over things forbidden by the principle of exclusion and things allowed by human judgment. Read and report on this idea from chapters on the subject in Earl Irvin West's *Search For the Ancient Order* (2 vols.).

Test Yourself

1. In what ways does the New Testament teach?
2. What is the "principle of exclusion"?
3. Give examples of some religious practices which would come under the principle of exclusion.
4. Which kind or kinds of New Testament authority (specific commands, general principles, examples) do we have for the following practices?
 - a. taking a collection on Sunday.
 - b. mid-week prayer meeting
 - c. having elders and deacons
 - d. supporting a missionary
 - e. supporting a poor widow
 - f. a gospel meeting
5. How may the non-essential features of a Bible example be recognized? See if you can illustrate each with some Bible example.

Lesson 13

GETTING STARTED

If you do not have a systematic program of study, it is imperative at this point that you begin. The suggestions made in these lessons are not theoretical and can benefit you only by being used. This lesson is intended to encourage you to make an actual beginning.

Need For Study

Study is absolutely essential in order to please God. The only way one can become a disciple of Christ is by being "taught of God." (John 6:45) As a Christian, one's growth is dependent upon further study. (2 Peter 1:2, 3) (1 Peter 2:1, 2). The kind of faith which is most attractive to non-Christians and which is most likely to bring them to Christ is an intelligent faith based upon careful study. (1 Peter 3:15) The church critically needs capable leaders – teachers, preachers, elders, deacons. Entrance upon these avenues of service is not through political maneuvering but through personal development involving diligent study. Finally, any apostasy in the church usually requires an unthinking, unstudying group of people who will follow the teacher of error. The dreadful results of lack of knowledge were recorded in Hosea 4:6.

Personal Study

It is not sufficient to know sound doctrine as a result of having heard good preaching. This would mean that our faith rests on the study of someone else, whereas so far as possible our faith should be the result of our

own study. Emerson once commented that the attitude of the Israelites at Sinai was typical of most people. As you recall from Exodus chapter 20, God began to speak the law direct from Mount Sinai to the people. After He had spoken the Ten Commandments, the Israelites were so terrified that they asked Moses to go into the mountain and let God talk to him. They did not wish to hear God speak directly to themselves. Do we not today often fear to study God's word ourselves and depend on others telling us what it says?

The story of such men as Luther, Wycliffe, Tyndale, Coverdale and other translators of the Bible is a story of men who took persecution so that we could study the Bible for ourselves. Public education in the United States received its beginning from belief that all people needed to be able to read the Scriptures. Those who fail to maintain a personal study program would hardly wish to return to the times when only the clergy could read the Bible and it was forbidden to all others.

Where to start

The best place to begin will partly be determined by how much study you have already done. Unless you are thoroughly familiar with those books, you probably should start with Mark and then move to Acts. After these, you would probably benefit most by alternating Old Testament, read first those books that give the main thread of Old Testament history as outlined in Lesson 5. In the New Testament, read first the simpler books which emphasize practical Christianity such as James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians. Do not hesitate, however, to go right into the more difficult books when the time for them comes. After com-

pleting the main thread of Old Testament history, go right into the prophets and the other books in turn.

Prepare Your Tools

It will be easier to make a beginning if you get all tools ready. Obtain a notebook which can be devoted to Bible notes. Get a Bible which is convenient to use in study. If you have not read the Bible much and have difficulty understanding it, you should probably start out with one of the newer versions such as the Revised Standard Version or the American Standard Version. The two kinds of dictionaries mentioned in Lesson 3 are indispensable and should be on hand.

It is a mistake to collect too many aids before you need them. Many beginning students of the Bible become enthusiastic and collect more books than they need or know how to use. You can make a fine beginning with only a good version and your dictionaries. Add other helps as you really need them — concordance, Bible geography, commentaries — and you will usually get books that are more helpful.

Start

We can talk endlessly about getting ready, but eventually the start must be made. Decide on a time and let nothing interfere. Limit yourself to about 30 minutes at first. Keep this booklet with you and review appropriate sections as you study. Follow as closely as possible the suggestions in this booklet until you have thoroughly tested them and then you may make whatever modifications you feel are needed.

In the formation of a new habit — such as regular

Bible study – it is necessary to avoid at all costs breaking that habit until it becomes well established. It is necessary to launch the habit with real determination and the intention to succeed. Otherwise you will find yourself making an enthusiastic start but a month later it is all forgotten. It's up to you!

Study Is Not Enough

Finally, as you study remember that knowledge is not the end. Jesus himself said: "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them." (John 13:17) Very little, if anything, in the Bible is of solely theoretical value. It is all intended to change our lives in some way – in our public actions, in the thoughts of our hearts, in our dispositions, in our conversation, and in dozens of other ways. As we study, then, let us say –

**Have Thine own way, Lord!
Have Thine own way!
Thou are the Potter,
I am the clay.
Mould me and make me
After Thy will,
While I am waiting,
Yielded and still.**

“CHURCHES OF CHRIST SALUTE YOU” (Rom.16:16)

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