

## BIBLE STUDY



Because the Bible claims to be something sacred, the approach to its study also should be sacred. A reverent attitude, an attitude of willingness to learn, is necessary for success. The text itself admonishes that:

1. “Without faith it is impossible to please God” and He rewards those who diligently seek Him. Hebrews 11:6
2. “The reverence of God is the beginning of wisdom.” Proverbs 9:10
3. “God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.” James 4:6

Many who have attempted the study of the Bible on a purely intellectual basis have made chaos of its teachings. We do not suggest, of course, that our best reasoning powers are to be ignored, but that reason must be accompanied by the dignity of humility.

It is best to approach the Bible by first accepting that it is what it claims to be, God’s Word. If it does not live up to its claim, the honest mind is free to reject it. Because it is a WRITTEN document, it is possible, over time, to corroborate its accuracy and to eliminate what some have claimed to be its contradictions.

Many emotional-based religions rely more on visions, dreams, revelations, etc.—all personal and all subject to the recipient’s interpretation. God HAS used such things to instruct His Old Testament prophets and New Testament Apostles, but He has given Christians, instead, a written record for instruction. II Timothy 3:15-17; II Peter 1:19; Acts 17:10, 11

## TRANSLATIONS

[Return to Doctrinal Kernels Index](#)

The Bible was written over a period of many centuries. It was written in Hebrew and Greek. To the best of our knowledge, NONE of the original manuscripts exists. We rely on copies. Translators rely on pieces of hundreds of old manuscripts. The Jews have preserved the old manuscripts (Old Testament) better than Christians have maintained their Greek Scriptures. Therefore it is important to know that we struggle constantly to learn EXACTLY what was originally written. Fortunately, today, we are blessed with an ever-increasing discovery of old manuscripts for the sake of comparison. As a result, some very accurate Greek texts now are being made available. Scholars thus are slowly and carefully attempting to give us more accurate translations in our own languages. But we must always remember: Translation is a difficult and an inexact art. Frequently, meanings are obscured because a translator is biased or does not understand the intent of the original writer. We must live with these problems. However, it is a blessing to be able to say that God's wonderful truths come through to the earnest Christian student despite any and all flaws in the text.

Some translations, of course, are better than others; but all have deficiencies which must be acknowledged by the careful student as he compares scripture with scripture.

## HELPS

It is not uncommon to hear someone say, "I don't want to read that. It's written by a man. I want to get my information straight from the Bible."

While this sounds noble, it is an uninformed and foolish position. The Bible itself says, "How can I (understand) except some man should guide me?" (Acts 8:30-35) The Scriptures are replete with examples of how God raises up teachers to help those who are seeking Him.

In that spirit, it is appropriate that we all seek to benefit from what others have learned. Unfortunately, it is usually easier to find an ill-informed teacher than a good one. But, some men have written reference works which help us to check Biblical truths for ourselves so that we know if we are being misled by our teachers. Paramount among these works is STRONG'S EXHAUSTIVE CONCORDANCE OF THE BIBLE (based on the King James translation). This work has been available for over a century in libraries and, now inexpensively, from a number of publishers. The book not only contains every word in the Bible and where to find it, but it defines the Hebrew and Greek words, and lists the various ways they have been translated. Therefore, for instance, if someone says the Bible speaks of the "immortal soul," it is easy to consult Strong's Concordance and learn quickly that the Bible never mentions such a thing!

There are many "Bible Study Courses" which are the work of grossly misinformed men who do the Bible more harm than good. There also are, on the contrary, other such helps which basically are unbiased in their approaches. The New Albany-Louisville Bible Students can recommend only one such set of books for accuracy, reasonableness, and completeness. This set is available through this website. It is a

six-volume work called STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES which has been blessing Christians with insight and understanding for well over a century.

## INGREDIENTS FOR GOOD STUDY

There are five primary ingredients for good Bible study. The first of these is STUDY BY TOPIC. By looking into one topic at a time, it is possible to see what the entire Bible, Genesis through Revelation, says regarding a subject. For example, a topical study on *hell* reveals that there is only one Old Testament word for it, but that that word not only is translated hell, but also *grave* and *pit*. The study also reveals that the New Testament uses three Greek words to translate hell (King James Version). One of these, *hades*, is the equivalent of the Old Testament word, but the other two are not, and it is misleading to translate them the same way. It also is revealing to see that the first mention of the word is in the lifetime of Jacob, more than 2,000 years after Adam! In the end, the traditional meaning of hell as a place of fire and torment proves untenable. The word consistently refers to the state of the unconscious oblivion of death.

The second ingredient for good Bible Study is the consideration of TIME FRAME. Not all scriptures apply to all times. Realizing this will erase what might otherwise seem contradictory. For instance, John 12:47 says that those who do not believe are not judged now. But Acts 3:23 says that those who do not hear will be cut off. There is no contradiction. The John text applies now, in the Christian Age; the Acts text applies later, in the Millennial Age, in the Kingdom of Christ after his second advent assumes total control of things in the earth.

A third ingredient for good Bible study is CONTEXT. New Testament epistles (letters) are written to the saints, not to the world in general, nor even to the worldly Christian churches. To apply these words to those to whom they were not written is to cause much confusion and heartache. Good contextual study asks: (1) To whom is this written? (2) When does it apply? (3) How does the sentence or verse relate to the paragraph or chapter, or to the subject being discussed? (4) Does it apply to those to whom it is written, or is it about someone else, or about some other time?

The fourth consideration in study is SYMBOLISM. Some claim the entire Bible is LITERAL, not symbolic. This is absurd. Daniel says he saw a beast devour the whole earth. (Daniel 7:23) Does this mean the world is in the beast's stomach? The Bible is TRUE, but it is not all literal. Much of it is symbolic. Realizing this will again do away with seeming controversy. An example can be shown by comparing Ecclesiastes 1:4 with II Peter 3:10. One states that the earth is eternal; the other states it will be burned up. By careful TOPICAL study we learn that "earth" is used SYMBOLICALLY at times to represent the social order. At other times it is used LITERALLY to represent the planet. Careful comparison and reasoning will show which is which. [We have found a helpful guide in this comparative process: "The symbolic must always bend in interpretation to the plainer, more literal statements, as soon as their symbolic character is recognized. Whenever a literal interpretation

[Return to Doctrinal Kernels Index](#)

would do violence to reason, and also place the passage in direct antagonism to **plain statements** of Scripture, such passage should be considered figurative, and its interpretation as a symbol should be sought in harmony with obviously plain and literal passages, and with the general character and object of the revealed plan. By recognizing and thus interpreting the symbols...the beautiful harmony of all the statements is manifest.” Pages 144 paragraph 2 → 145, from THE TIME IS AT HAND, available from this website.]

Another approach to study, the fifth in this list, is the study of TYPES. In the Bible many actual events which literally happened, are important more for their meaning prophetically than for the actual historical occurrence. One example is the Passover Lamb. God asked the Jews to slay a lamb. Its death would protect their firstborn from death the night before Israel’s deliverance from slavery in Egypt and would guarantee Israel’s deliverance the next morning. This all happened. But the apostles explain that these events were TYPICAL of things to come. Thus, John the Baptist refers to Jesus as the LAMB of God, and the Apostle Paul says, “Christ our Passover is slain for us.” Thus, we are taught by TYPE that the church (the “firstborn”) are saved before the rest of the world (Israel) during the night (the Christian Age). The world (Israel) is delivered from slavery to sin and death the next morning (the Millennial Age)—all because of the blood of Jesus.

Successful Bible study is a complex and time-consuming thing, but well worth it. It is successful only with God’s help, but then it is so successful that it brings into perspective the past, the strange events of the present, and the glories of the near future.