

INTRODUCTION FOR THE READING OF THE SCRIPTURES

Did you ever wish you knew more about the Bible? I believe that most people would like to know more about God's word. Even many non-Christians have expressed their desire to know more about the Bible.

If we are to be the people God intends us to be and fulfill His purposes for us, we must not only take seriously the word He speaks to us in Scripture, we must also allow it to permeate every aspect of our lives.

In our Lord's intercessory prayer He prayed in John 17:3, "***And this is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, (even) Jesus Christ.***" (ASV) The word "***know***" in this passage means infinitely more than an awareness of their existence, an admission of their character and attributes, or an acknowledgment of their deity. Reverence, devotion, love, obedience, honor, gratitude and unswerving loyalty are all embraced in the word.

To know God then, one must know His word. This requires personal study. However, this is something many are unwilling to do on their own. The problem is not new. Hundreds of years before the coming of Christ, Hosea, God's chosen prophet to Israel, said: "***My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I also will forget thy children.***" Hosea 4:6 (ASV). You may ask, "*How could this happen to God's people?*" It happened because they didn't obey Jehovah's command to study His Word. Listen to God in Deut 6:4-15:

"Hear, O Israel: Jehovah our God is one Jehovah: and thou shalt love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thy hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the door-posts of thy house, and upon thy gates. And it shall be, when Jehovah thy God shall bring thee into the land which he swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee, great and goodly cities, which thou buildest not, and houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and cisterns hewn out, which thou hewedst not, vineyards and olive-trees, which thou plantedst not, and thou shalt eat and be full; then beware lest thou forget Jehovah, who brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt fear Jehovah thy God; and him shalt thou serve, and shalt swear by his name. Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the peoples that are round about you; for Jehovah thy God in the midst of thee is a jealous God; lest the anger of Jehovah thy God be kindled against thee, and he destroy thee from off the face of the earth." (ASV)

I believe that our generation is faced with the same problem: destruction because of a lack of knowledge. Knowledge of the Bible is essential for the following reasons:

1. **Beliefs** – Our beliefs are to be determined by the message of the Bible. We are like everyone else in that we do not always see that some of the things we believe to be biblical are in fact not true to Scripture. We must be honest enough to revise our thinking in the light of Scripture just as we expect others to do.

2. **Behavior** – Scripture must mold our behavior. The rights and wrongs of many things are quite clear, but there are areas that Christians have always debated. Particularly on those matters where the Bible is silent, careful thought is needed to arrive at the truth.
3. **Worship** – Our worship must be centered on Scripture. We must not allow human opinion to govern us in our worship. The avenues of worship used by first century Christians must be our avenues also because they were authorized by Jesus Christ and approved by the apostles.

BUT WHY IS THE BIBLE BEING NEGLECTED TODAY?

Several reasons appear on the surface to be causes for failure to study the Bible. Some of them are: very few are capable of understanding the Bible; people are too engrossed in material values and secular things; there is a lack of interest in the contents of the Bible; there are not enough hours in a day. These are **not** the real reasons why many do not study the Bible.

Are many not capable of understanding the Bible? The same quality of mental activity used in understanding any subject is required in understanding the Bible. Material values and secular things will take second place in one's life when one realizes that the Bible contains the only golden key to happiness, contentment, and peace of mind. When one realizes that man cannot "*live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*" (Matt. 4:4), and when one learns that the Bible is as up-to-date as today's newspaper, interest in it will rise. As for time to study – a person will find time for Bible study when he/she feels it is so important to his/her everyday well being that it deserves a place in his/her busy schedule.

The **real reason** why few study the Bible is the failure to **know how** to study the Bible. It is true that Bible Study is not easy. However, no worthwhile accomplishment in life comes without effort. Public schools require many hours of hard study to master courses offered. The same is true with work, sports and other activities. None of these activities produces the rich dividends that come to those who are willing to make the same kind of effort to study the Bible.

Consider some reasons for Bible study:

1. **The Bible reveals God.** Paul stated clearly in Rom 1:20, "*For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, (even) his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse:*" (ASV) However, it is in the Scriptures we learn of His will for man. Jesus Christ is the final word of God (John 1:1-14; Heb. 1:1ff). The only place in our time we have access to dependable knowledge about Jesus Christ and His Father is in Scripture. God's purposes to save man and reconcile him are accomplished through Christ, not through religion in general nor philosophies nor personal experience of religious giants. We must rid ourselves of the impression that God is equally knowable in all places and at all times. He is known best where He has chosen to reveal Himself: in Christ and in the word that comes from Christ.
2. **The Bible addresses man's needs.** The basic human questions and needs are discussed in the Bible. We wonder about whether there is a God behind all

the creation and if He is related to this world in which we live. The Bible addresses the question of the ultimate power or person in the creation. The question of guilt is handled in the Scriptures. Christianity deals with guilt in a way that is both realistic and helpful. We wonder about the problem of death and tragedy of life. The Bible confirms our suspicion that there is really evil at work in the world and points to the one who has overcome the evil and who is moving to help us to overcome. The work and effect of Jesus Christ are witnesses to God's power to defeat death and all other evils that assail mankind.

3. **The Bible offers guidance.** We cannot overlook man's deep need for direction in life. The Bible explains how man is made, to whom we are responsible, and what God expects of us. Such knowledge offers guidance for facing a confusing and difficult world. It is both a foundation to help us build our lives and a challenge to become what we are not yet.

There are many good reasons why we should study the Scriptures, but they will not suffice without the right disposition of the student. There are a few qualities of a good student that are necessary before one will study the Bible with real benefit. One must possess:

1. **A student's attitude.** This means in order to appreciate the Bible, the student needs to see that he/she is not the master who gives of his/her wisdom to the assembled pupils, but the one who comes to learn. The attitude is that of one who does not know and realizes it.
2. **A love for truth.** There must be a real thirst for the truth that is contained in Scripture (Matt. 5:6). Some insist that whatever they learn from the Bible must agree with what they already know and accept. Some place reputation above the search for truth. Some people have a certain reputation for their Bible knowledge and their ability to analyze the teachings in it. Others may place certain traditions above the truth. Nothing must be allowed to come between us and a sincere desire to know truth (John 8:32).
3. **A desire to explore.** We need to have the active desire of an explorer who enjoys the challenge of a new terrain. Like the truth that only practice can lead to experience and skill in Bible study, it is also true that only the habit of exploring the Bible for fresh truth and insights can produce the desire to explore. As someone said, "*The Bible is so deep that philosophers can drown therein, and yet children can wade therein.*"
4. **A desire to learn with others.** There is value in private Bible study and private prayer as we are encouraging you to do, but both of these must also be done in our assemblies. The current interest in group dynamics and group study is based on sound psychological principles and educational theory. Group study of the Bible adds encouragement to each participant. When we study by ourselves and the study becomes difficult, we may feel inadequate to the task and give up. But when we also study with others, we may gain encouragement to continue.

5. **A willingness to obey.** Since part of Bible study is the willingness to put into practice what is revealed, we cannot overlook the requirement to obey (Heb. 5:9). The word is only real to us when we live out its implications, as we are able to discern them in the sphere where we are. As one man wrote, “*We learn God’s will only as we seek to do it. We possess the word of Christ only by striving to conform our minds to it.*” As the Lord said, “***If any man’s will is to do His (God’s) will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority***” (John 7:17).

6. **Belief in the authority of the Bible.** While some people study the Bible for various reasons like it is good literature, or for its historical importance, these are inadequate because these do not allow them to see in the Bible the purpose it claims for itself. The Bible claims to be God’s authority to govern man today and in every generation until Christ appears. The Bible is authoritative when it functions—when it is brought to bear on the actual faith and life of the student.

SOME INTERESTING COMMENTS REGARDING THE READING OF THE BIBLE

Through the years men have recognized the uniqueness of the Bible. The following statements give evidence of this:

1. “Men cannot be well educated without the Bible.” E. Nott

2. “Believe me, sir, never a night goes by, be I ever so tired, but I read the word of God before I go to bed.” Gen. Douglas McArthur

3. “I am profitably engaged in reading the Bible. Take all of this book upon reason that you can, and the balance by faith, and you will live and die a better man.” Abraham Lincoln

4. “It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible.” George Washington

5. “The New Testament is the very best book known to the world.” Charles Dickson

6. “I have known ninety-five great men of the world in my time and of these eighty-seven were followers of the Bible.” William Ewart Gladstone

7. “That book, sir, is the book on which our republic stands.” Andrew Jackson

8. “It was for the love of the truths of this great and good Book that our fathers abandoned their native shore for the wilderness.” Zachary Taylor

9. “There is no book on which we can rest in a dying moment but the Bible.” Selden

10. “The morality of the Bible is, after all, the safety of society.” F. C. Monfort

AN INTERESTING REMARK BY AN ATHEIST

An atheist said, “*There is one thing that mars all the pleasures of my life.*” “Indeed!” replied his friend, “*what is that?*” He answered, “*I am afraid the Bible is true. If I could know for certain that death was an eternal sleep, I should be happy; my joy would be complete! But here is the thorn that stings me. This is the sword that pierces my very soul – if the Bible is true, I am lost forever.*”

The Bible declares, “*The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God....*” Psa. 14:1. How foolish for a man to reject all the evidence for the truthfulness of the Bible, so that he might live in sin for a season. The Book of books is **TRUE!**

OUR PURPOSE IN THIS MATERIAL

Our purpose in this material is to give you some guidelines to help you in studying the Bible. As a student of the Scriptures you should become familiar with some basic guidelines for studying. These will give you direction as you get into the text of the Bible. Study carefully some common sense rules that will help to lead you on a successful journey through the Bible.

1. Whether you are reading a book, or some text in a book of the Bible, ask first, **WHO WROTE THIS?** Sometimes the answer is usually found in the book. For example, Peter opens his first epistle with these words, “*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ...*” (1 Pet. 1:1). However, the book of Hebrews doesn’t contain the name of the writer. Therefore, you may need to do some research to determine the writer. In any case, the book is inspired of God.
2. Next ask: **WHEN WAS IT WRITTEN?** Because the library of 66 books, which we call the Bible, is bound in a single volume, one may fail to realize that it was written over a period of several centuries. This time element has implications for a proper understanding of the Bible as a whole, and of individual books in particular. As far as the New Testament books are concerned, this is relatively simple to answer, because it was penned during the first century. But the books were written at different times during the first century. For example, Paul’s earliest correspondence—the letters to the Thessalonians—were written during the 40s, but the Revelation letter, by John, was written toward the close of the first century.
3. **WHERE WAS IT DELIVERED OR SPOKEN?** Paul wrote some letters from a Roman prison for preaching the gospel and that is why he described himself as a “prisoner of Jesus Christ.” When you learn that Corinth was the Hong Kong of the ancient world, where cultures, religions, and trade mixed in a giant city, you are better able to understand the unbelievable problems that Paul addresses in his letters to that church.
4. **WHY WAS IT WRITTEN?** Each of the writers wrote for a specific reason. Some were written to make converts (the gospel of John), some to correct churches who were close to the writer and were having problems (Galatians, Corinthians, etc.), or to

introduce the writer to Christians he had not met (Romans). The “why” of a book will keep the Bible student from wrong interpretations and wrong ways of reading the scripture. When we realize that John wrote the Revelation to encourage the faith of Christians in their belief in the ultimate victory of God, we will not expect to find a figure for the Antichrist in our time.

5. **TO WHOM WAS IT WRITTEN?** As with the question “*who wrote the book,*” this question is not concerned only with the name of the recipients. It also asks what is the character, the composition of the audience for whom the writing was intended. James’ letter “to the twelve tribes of the dispersion” is written for Jewish Christians who live beyond Palestine, and that knowledge helps us to understand his interest in the faith of Abraham (James 2:21-24).
6. **HOW DOES THE BOOK STAND IN RELATION TO OTHER BOOKS IN THE BIBLE?** For example, Second Peter and John are both dealing with false teachers. Colossians and First John both deal with Gnosticism. James, I Peter, and Revelation deal with persecution of the saints – James with Jewish; Peter with Neroian; and Revelation with severe persecution by Rome.

GUIDELINES FOR TEXTUAL STUDY

1. **Always remember that you are approaching the study of God’s word,** II Tim. 3:16-17. To wrest the Scriptures is to bring destruction upon you, II Pet. 3:16; to falsely teach them is to bring the anathema of God upon you, Gal. 1:8-9. Reverence and respect must be maintained at all times while studying the Bible.
2. **Pray for wisdom and an open mind as you begin your study,** James 1:5. The Bereans are good examples of people who had open minds while searching the Scriptures, Acts 17:11.
3. **As you read a passage remember that there is only one correct interpretation of the verse.** Your challenge is to find that single meaning. While there is only one correct interpretation of a verse, there may be several applications of it. When Jesus said, “*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved...*” (Mark 16:16), there is only one correct interpretation of this passage, one must be baptized for the remission of sins. On the other hand there are applications that may be made of this verse like one may choose to be immersed at any time or in any place where there is enough water to “dip him under.” Correct interpretation is one thing; correct application is another.
4. **Don’t strain for a forced interpretation of a verse or a word in the text.** The Bible was written to be understood by the “common” man. Educational scholars tell us that Jesus taught on the second to fifth grade level. Let the Bible state its message in its own words.
5. **Remember there is a drastic difference in what a verse says, and what a person says about the verse.** This is why false teachers lead people astray. Men are fallible; God is infallible. There is a difference.
6. **Never interpret one verse of Scripture so as to contradict another plain verse of Scripture.** Take for example the subject of salvation. Some use John 3:16 as the

only verse necessary for salvation. They teach that all a person has to do is believe. Another may take Romans 8:24 and say that all you have to do is have hope. This is wrong. To learn the truth relative to salvation, or any other subject, ALL the verses that deal with it must be brought together and accepted as the truth.

7. **Don't twist the Scriptures to fit a preconceived idea.** This approach develops a belief and then goes to the Bible to find verses to prove it. The Scriptures must mold our ideas.
8. **Admit that there are some difficult passages in the Bible.** This is not saying, however, that you can't understand them. It just means that you will have to study some passages more than others.
9. **Read the text in several translations.** In most cases this is a good way to get the real meaning of a word or phrase, as each translation will probably bring out a different shade of meaning (not a different meaning). You must be careful in using the New English Bible, the Amplified Bible or the Living Bible, as they are more of a commentary than a translation.
10. **Continue to read the Scriptures daily and never give up your study of them.** You will find that every time you read the Scriptures you will learn something new or come away with a better understanding of some passage.
11. **Never take a text out of its context.** As one writer said, this becomes a pretext, or no text at all. Context is important because thought is usually expressed in a series of related ideas. You will find the meaning of any particular verse or word is controlled by what precedes and what follows. A context may transcend a chapter division, because verse and chapter divisions have been added to the Bible by men to aid us in finding verses.
12. **Determine if the language of the text is literal or figurative.** For example, Jesus said he was a door (John 10:9); a vine (John 15:1) etc. We know these are figures of speech. You should assume that a word is literal until you have reason to believe it isn't.
13. **Study the meaning of words as used by each writer of the Scriptures.** Martin Luther studied the Greek New Testament and learned that the word *metanoeo* (English is repent) meant, "Change your mind" rather than "do penance." The Catholic church put the emphasis upon self-imposed punishment as an act of penance. The meaning of words and how they are used are very important in learning the truth. You can come close by studying the words in different translations. Every person, through the use of Vine's **Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words**, can do basic word studies.
14. **Be careful to note if there is a word in italics in the text.** The translators to give clearer meaning to a sentence or portion of Scripture use the italics. This is needed because sometimes a literal translation from the Greek would not be easily understood. In some cases italics hinder the meaning of a section of Scripture. A case in point is I Corinthians 14:13, "*Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret.*" The word "*unknown*" is not in the

Greek text. Some, to teach so-called ecstatic utterances given by the Holy Spirit, have wrongly used it. In the context tongue refers to a language.

15. **Be careful to note the grammar of the sentence or text.** Grammar deals with the form of words and the relationship of words. Both affect the meaning of a word. A good example of how grammar will help along this line is in I Corinthians 11:27, where we read, *“Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of Christ.”* When it is asked what **unworthily** means, someone answers that it refers to whosoever (the person), someone else states that it refers to eat and drink. Many have thought that it refers to the person’s worthiness in partaking of the Lord’s Supper. Some feel unworthy (as a being) and do not partake. The word **unworthily** (in the English) is an adverb, and adverbs modify verbs, not nouns. Therefore, based on grammar, unworthily refers to the practice of eating and drinking, and not to the quality of the person. This is in harmony with the context that reveals that the conduct of some of the Corinthians was drunkenness.

Bible study is a lifelong endeavor, not simply a single course to be mastered and then left behind. Are you earnestly desirous of acquiring substantial knowledge of the Lord and His word? Are you willing to devote fifteen (15) minutes each day to the effort? Will you adopt and follow simple common sense rules as discussed in this article? If you are, you will have the knowledge you need to serve the Lord faithfully and develop the character God desires for you.

We would like for each person to read through the New Testament, the Psalms and Proverbs in the coming year. We intend to give you an outline of each of these books. You will also have a guide for showing you how to read one chapter per day until you get to the Psalms. Then you will need to read two Psalms per day until you are ready for Proverbs and then it is one chapter per day.

One of the greatest problems we all face is that of priorities. The Bible is quite specific about setting priorities. The Bible makes it crystal clear that we must put some things first in our lives, or they must be prior to other things before certain benefits will be experienced (Matt. 6:33). One of these priorities is being willing to hear God when He speaks to us through His word. Before we take our petitions to God in prayer, thinking He will hear us, we should first consider whether we are willing to hear Him. **Listening to God** precedes God being willing to hear us.

HELPFUL SUGGESTIONS

- **Make a commitment to follow this guide.**
- **Stay on track without falling behind or reading ahead. The goal in using this guide is to read the Bible by developing a daily reading habit. Both reading ahead to “build-up” and falling behind to later “catch-up” can ultimately undermine your goal.**

“...for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures everyday...” Acts 17:11 NIV

- **Realize that the power to discipline us into daily Bible reading is not self-**

derived but God-derived...

“For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. 2 Timothy 1:7 NIV

May God bless you in your study of His word and may you please Him in all that you do.

What if I say—

“The Bible is God’s Holy Word,
Complete, inspired, without a flaw—
But let its pages stay
Unread from day to day,
And fail to learn there from God’s law;

What if I go not there to seek

The truth of which I glibly speak,
For guidance on this earthly way—
Does it matter what I say?”

-----Maud Frazer Jackson