

## LESSON 12

### THE STUDY AND APPLICATION OF THE BIBLE

#### Introduction

There is no easy way to master the Bible. The average Christian knows little about the Bible because he spends little time in studying it. Few study the Bible extensively unless they have a definite plan. Most Christians, however, know much more about the Bible than they put into practice. The purpose of this lesson is to explore methods and plans for a systematic study of the Bible and the daily application of its teachings.

#### Studying a Book of the Bible

The Bible is a library of books and cannot be mastered in a short time. The Bible student should begin with one book and learn its contents in detail before proceeding to another. Although there is a unity of thought binding the entire 66 books together, each book is a distinctive unit. It was written by an author for a particular purpose and to meet a particular need. Its message is related to the messages of other books in a general way, but it has distinctive features which are directed towards meeting the needs of those to whom it was addressed.

The message of the book can be discovered only when the book is studied as a whole. The details should be understood in relation to the primary message. The message of a particular verse is understood best in the context of the total book. Misinterpretation occurs when a verse is removed from its context and is applied arbitrarily to a situation.

#### Discovering the historical background

A biblical book must be read several times before its message is apprehended fully. Each reading should have a particular purpose. The reader must look for definite information as he reads.

In the first reading of a book, the student should attempt to understand the historical background. He needs to know by whom the book was written, to whom it was written, and for what purpose it was written. The book may identify its author as well as its recipients. Paul began a number of his epistles with the identifying words, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ." He next identified his readers. After his greeting, he gave the reason he was writing the letter. The name of the author does not always appear in the book; an introduction to the Old or the New Testament may need to be consulted to find this information. In 1 Peter, the author identified himself and addressed his recipients as the "strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Peter 1:1). Even though Peter addressed the Jews of the Diaspora, it is not certain that his message was directed primarily to the Jews of the area. A reputable New Testament introduction would give information concerning this question.

In addition to determining the authorship and recipients of the book during the first reading, the reader should seek to understand the situation of the intended readers and how the message of the book attempted to meet their various needs. The

What should a student of the Bible look for in the first reading of a book?

*h* \_\_\_\_\_ *b* \_\_\_\_\_,  
*a* \_\_\_\_\_, *r* \_\_\_\_\_,  
*p* \_\_\_\_\_.

(*historical background, author, recipients, purpose*)

The Bible student should attempt to understand the situation of the \_\_\_\_\_ readers and how the message of the book attempted to \_\_\_\_\_ their various \_\_\_\_\_.

(*intended, meet, needs*)

first reading of a book may be guided by the questions:

- To whom was the book written and what appears to have been their circumstances?
- Who wrote the book and what did he desire his readers to know?
- What are the main thoughts of the book?

After the student has answered these questions, he is prepared to examine the message in greater detail. He needs an over-all view of the book, however, before he attempts to interpret the various concepts in the book.

### Noting the major divisions of the book

Either during the first or second reading, the student should note the main divisions of the book. These divisions may be indicated by:

1. a geographical change in which the activities take place;
2. a biographical change in which the emphasis is on a different person;
3. a change of activity;
4. a change of subject in the teaching sections.

In a study of the Gospel of Mark, the general outline may be determined by geographical changes. It could be divided generally on the basis of the activities of Jesus in Judaea, in Galilee, and outside of Galilee. On the other hand, the divisions could be based on the kinds of activities alone. Jesus called His disciples, healed, taught, and performed various miracles. Underlying each activity is a theological purpose and teaching. As the activity is examined, effort should be made to identify the reason why Mark included that particular activity from the life of Jesus instead of some other activity.

The Book of Acts can also be divided on the basis of geographical locations or kinds of activities. Some interpreters divide Acts according to activities in Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth. The two general divisions are the activities of the Twelve and the activities of Paul. A change in content definitely occurs at the end of chapter 12.

The epistles generally begin with a greeting or introduction followed by the statement of a problem or problems and the suggested solution. The writer usually closes with a blessing. He may include also greetings from his companions.

Romans differs from other epistles. It is a theological treatise which emphasizes doctrines, such as sin, salvation, the Christian life, God's plan for the Jews, and ethics for daily living.

Some of the books of the Old Testament are longer and more difficult to outline. Genesis has a natural division at the end of chapter 11. The first eleven chapters deal with origins, and the last 39 chapters deal with the Patriarchs. The main divisions of Genesis 12-50 are biographical: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. The historical books of Samuel and Kings also have biographical divisions. A king is compared with his predecessor. The interpreter should note the author's evaluation of the king's reign. The work of the prophets was usually related to some significant or critical event. The historical event needs to be discovered, the moral condition of the people evaluated, and the warnings and advice of the prophet noted.

In studying the Bible, it should be remembered that each book constitutes a unit embodying a central message. The primary message is broken down into divisions which are further divided into paragraphs and verses. Chapter and verse divisions were later additions to the Scripture and are not always accurate. It is better to base divisions of thoughts on paragraphs within a book rather than chapter divisions.

He needs an \_\_\_\_\_ view of the book he is studying before he \_\_\_\_\_ to interpret its teachings.

(over-all, attempts)

List four possible indications of the divisions of a book.

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(Compare your list with the text.)

The Gospel of Mark may be outlined according to \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_.

(geography, activities)

The Book of Acts may be divided according to \_\_\_\_\_ locations or kinds of \_\_\_\_\_.

(geographical, activities)

Give the three main points in the outline of most of the Epistles.

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(Compare your answer with the text.)

The main divisions of Genesis 12-50 are \_\_\_\_\_.

The historical books are divided according to \_\_\_\_\_.

The writings of the prophets usually relate to some significant or critical \_\_\_\_\_.

(biographical, biographies, event)

Each book of the Bible constitutes a unit embodying a central \_\_\_\_\_.

The original writings indicated \_\_\_\_\_; whereas, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ divisions were added later and are not always accurate.

(message, paragraphs, chapter, verse)

Help in determining the major theme of a book can be found in most introductions to the Bible. The outline in an introductory textbook gives primarily the direction of the message but not the richness of content. Commentaries give additional help on the content, but there is no substitute for reading the Bible itself and discovering what it says. Courses on biblical introduction and biblical background give important general information concerning geography, archaeology, history, social conditions, and the summary of the message of a book, but they do not take the place of a thorough study of the Scripture text.

### Recording accumulated information

Information and effort will be lost if a permanent record is not made and properly filed. The biblical student who follows a particular form in making notes on each book will be able to collect and organize valuable material which he can use at a later time. In the beginning of the study of any book, notes should be made on the information gleaned from the historical background. The interpreter should write down the information about the author, the recipients, the date, and the purpose or central theme. He should make rough notes concerning the major divisions of the book to use for reference when he does a more detailed study of the book. The student is prepared then to examine in greater detail the content of each paragraph.

### Interpreting a paragraph

Three important questions may be asked concerning each paragraph.

Why was this paragraph included in the book?

How does it relate to the central message?

What is the primary concept or thought of this paragraph?

Each paragraph has a central idea or topic sentence, and the other sentences add to the understanding of that idea. The underlining of the key sentence or verse is helpful. This key sentence or thought becomes a sub-division of the general outline.

### Grammatical analysis

After the principal sentence of a paragraph has been discovered, the relationship of the other sentences and clauses should be determined. Each sentence has a main clause consisting of a subject and verb and may have a number of subordinate phrases and clauses. Unless attention is focused on the main clause, the rapid reader may mistakenly select a modifier or subordinate clause for the emphasis of the sentence. Vos has suggested that the Scripture text be rewritten, placing the main clause on one line and indenting the subordinates under it.<sup>1</sup> Often the modifying clauses and phrases answer the questions who, what, when, where, why, and how. Using Romans 8:1-3 as an example, the first sentence gives the *subject* of the paragraph: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. . . ." The second verse explains *why* the statement is true: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." The third verse gives a further explanation to the statement by saying that the sinfulness of human flesh made the law ineffective for salvation. The verse also explains what God has done to deliver man from condemnation: "God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." Succeeding sentences continue to give additional information concerning the topic sentence.

<sup>1</sup> Howard F. Vos, *Effective Bible Study* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1956), p. 34.

<p style="text-align: center;">/</p>
<p><i>The central idea of a paragraph can be determined by finding the _____ or key _____.</i></p>
<p><i>(topic, sentence)</i></p>
<p><i>Give the fourth step in outlining a book.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>1. Find the central theme.</i></li> <li><i>2. Find the main divisions.</i></li> <li><i>3. Select the topic or key sentence.</i></li> <li><i>4. Find sub-divisions by determining _____.</i></li> </ol>
<p><i>(the relationship of the other sentences and clauses to the key sentence)</i></p>

## Topical Studies

### Biography

An effective way to present history is to relate it to great personalities. Much of the Bible, especially the historical sections, relate divine truths to historical persons. One method of Bible study seeks to understand the divine revelation through the character of the individuals.

Howard Vos suggests two primary approaches for studying biography: the biographical narrative and character.<sup>2</sup> The study of minor biblical characters may be confined to one book, but the study of the great biblical characters will extend through several books.

A general outline which helps to organize information discovered about a person should include:

1. His birth and early life, noting especially the influence of parents, his early training, and any unusual circumstances concerning his birth;
2. The manner in which God made His will known to him;
3. The nature of his service for the Lord;
4. His good and bad characteristics;
5. His relationships with others;
6. The circumstances of his death and any comments about it made by the author;
7. His significance in God's salvation history.

The biographies of Abraham, Moses, David, and Paul are very extensive. A thorough study of each will lead to the examination of many passages in various books of the Old and New Testaments. If the student will assemble the material on each character, he will find several sermons can be developed from truths revealed in each life.

The following points may be considered in evaluating the character of an individual:

1. What was his major role in the religion of Israel?
2. What characteristics caused him to be chosen for the role?
3. What influences contributed to his strong characteristics?
4. What undesirable characteristics did he possess?
5. Were his undesirable characteristics acceptable according to the standards of his day?
6. Were his good or bad characteristics dominant in influencing others?
7. How did he react during times of crisis?
8. What good or bad characteristics did he seem to receive from his parents?
9. Did his relations with others help or hinder him in his life's work?
10. What development in character did this person undergo and what caused the growth?
11. How did his religious experiences affect his life?

In finding answers to the preceding questions, the student can discover points for sermons. Care should be taken to show that success did not come as the result of the individual's accomplishments but as a result of God's grace. The biblical doctrine of man's depraved nature does not leave room for man to succeed in his own strength and wisdom. The biblical writers point out that whatever happened in man's life was the result of God's power.

<sup>2</sup> *Effective Bible Study*, pp. 47ff.

List the facts one should look for in a biographical narrative.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Continue listing facts to look for in a biographical narrative.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

### Doctrinal themes

A selected word or doctrine may be followed through a book or several books, and the accumulated material organized into doctrinal statements. Vos suggests two methods for doctrinal study: analysing the basic doctrinal assumptions of a passage of Scripture and studying the explicit doctrinal teachings of a book.<sup>3</sup> The existence of God, the fact that God is interested in man, the power and personality of God, and the sinfulness of man are basic assumptions underlying many Scripture passages. After the assumptions are listed, the interpreter may show how they are related to the message of the passage.

With regard to explicit doctrinal teachings of a book, the student selects a doctrine and traces the related comments about it through a book or several books. The biblical doctrines of God, man, grace, and the Holy Spirit are derived by studying the relevant passages in both the Old and New Testaments. It is surprising to many students that the Old Testament gives little hope beyond death. Inter-testamental literature began to speak of a glorious life for God's children beyond the grave. The blessed hope beyond death is basically a New Testament doctrine which developed with the resurrection of Jesus.

### Key words and concepts

Usually key-word studies are related to doctrinal studies; however, doctrinal studies are not limited to specific words.

The word flesh means much more in the Bible than in our common usage. It does refer to the human body, but it also is used to describe the non-material part of man. It refers to man as a natural or "carnal" being in contrast to a new man in Christ. The flesh struggles against the spirit.

One of the most significant words in the Old Testament is covenant. The concept of the Abrahamic Covenant began as a promise of God to Abraham in Genesis 12. A covenant can be between equals or between a stronger and a weaker party. The Covenant between Yahweh and Abraham was between unequal parties. God promised to bless Abraham and his descendants by providing for and protecting them. Abraham's responsibility was to worship only the one God. The Covenant was renewed with Isaac, Jacob, and his descendants. The responsibilities of Jacob's descendants were given in greater detail at Mount Sinai (Exod. 20ff.). When it became evident that man would continue to fail to keep his covenant responsibilities, Jeremiah spoke of the New Covenant which God would make with His people in the New Age. Jesus spoke of the cup of the Lord's Supper as "my blood of the covenant" (Mark 14:24). The New Testament is God's New Covenant.

Soul, grace, know, truth, baptize, meek, and love are other important words which should be studied. These are only a few of the many words which need special attention.

### Social institutions

The Word of God has many important teachings concerning man in relation to his family, community, and country. The basic relationship is within the family. Profitable Bible study could focus on the status of women, the role of the father in the family, the discipline of children, the purposes of marriage, and the support of the family.

The individual is also concerned with relating to the enlarged society, the community. The heart of religion is man's relation to his neighbour. He has a responsibility to the poor,

*Give two possible methods for doctrinal study.*

*(analysing the basic doctrinal assumptions, studying the explicit doctrinal teachings)*

*List three areas of man's relationships which would merit study.*

*(family, community, country)*

<sup>3</sup> *Effective Bible Study*, p. 75.

sick, disabled, and wayward. Beyond the community there is the government of his country. The Bible has important teachings concerning the individual's responsibilities to government officials and his respect for law. Other subjects relating to society include ownership of property, responsibilities of employees and employers, race and racism, religious education, and recreation.

### The Application of the Bible

Since man's culture and environment have changed, the divine truths of the Bible must be adapted to new forms of expression which apply to this generation. Some people are unable to distinguish between the essence of biblical truth and the form of its expression. Paul taught in 1 Corinthians that Christian women were not to give the appearance of immorality; therefore, they were not to appear in public without veils, and they were not to cut their hair (1 Cor. 11:6). According to Jewish law, a woman convicted of adultery was to have her hair cut short. The principle is that Christian women are to be virtuous. This principle was expressed in the day of Paul by wearing veils and by leaving the hair uncut. The task of interpretation is to discover the divine principle of truth. The task of application is to suggest forms of expression by which the principle might be expressed in today's society. Women who have their hair cut and who appear in public without veils are not identified as immoral today. However, certain styles of clothing and public action do suggest low moral standards.

The application of biblical teachings should not begin with the lives of others. The greatest need is for each Christian to read the Bible devotionally and to apply its teachings to his own life. The desire of every Christian should be to have a more victorious Christian life and thereby to present a more effective witness. This is possible only through a devotional study of the Bible and through prayer. This type of Bible study must begin with the attitude and motive of the person. The individual must desire for his spiritual life to improve, and he must discover in the Word the claims of God upon his life and the instructions for living the Christian life. Some subjects to study which will contribute to Christian growth are: the new life in Christ, walking in the Spirit, God's promises, and how to pray. A number of devotional books on these subjects are available in most religious book stores. Dr. G. Campbell Morgan has written a book, *Great Chapters of the Bible*, in which he discusses significant Scriptures for Christian growth.

The devotional study of the Bible should include memorization of significant verses. The frequent meditation upon and repetition of a verse results in deeper insight into its meaning.

To help others understand and apply the teachings of the Bible to their daily lives, biblical truth must first be applied to the life of the teacher. Biblical teaching is less effective when it is intellectual and objective. When a truth becomes meaningful to the teacher, he can share it with others in a personal way. Unless he lives according to the truths he teaches, few people will take seriously what he says. Greater influence comes through attitudes and character than through formal lectures. The unguarded words of a teacher which reveal his attitude and character are often more effective than his planned words for teaching a lesson. Planned lessons are effective when they express the personal conviction of the teacher.

As the teacher begins to prepare a lesson, he may ask, What is God wanting to say to me and my class members through this study? He must know first what God said to Abraham, David, or

*Interpretation is to discover the divine principle of \_\_\_\_\_.*

*Application is to suggest forms of expression by which the principle might be*

*\_\_\_\_\_ in today's \_\_\_\_\_.*

*(truth, expressed, society)*

Paul; however, if he discusses only this aspect, *he has interpreted but not applied the lesson*. The teacher must be concerned with what God wants us to do with the truths which He revealed to Abraham, David, and Paul. "What does God want us to do today?" is a basic question in determining the contemporary application of the Bible.

### Selecting Helpful Books

#### A good Bible

The beauty and familiarity of the language of the Authorized Version make it the favourite Bible, but it is not necessarily the best for study. Paragraph divisions are indicated in it, but they are obscured by verse and chapter divisions. The verse and chapter divisions were not in the original manuscripts, and they are not always accurate. Since the Authorized Version was translated more than 350 years ago, some of the expressions are obsolete. Two recent revisions have retained the dignity of the language of the Authorized Version, have employed modern language, and have taken advantage of the most recent results of archaeological discoveries and progress made in scholarship.

*The New American Standard Bible* retains the chapter and verse divisions and indicates paragraph divisions by using bold type.

*The New English Bible* magnifies the paragraphs and minimizes the verse divisions. Both give dependable translations based on the latest textual work of scholars.

A recent translation which has become very popular is the *Living Bible*. It is actually a paraphrase by which biblical thoughts are expressed in contemporary concepts. It is enjoyable to read and illuminates many biblical subjects. It should be remembered, however, that a paraphrase involves an interpretation of Scripture instead of a strict translation. A paraphrased Bible is not the best to use in determining doctrinal teachings.

New Testament studies are implemented by the use of parallel New Testaments. *The Layman's Parallel New Testament* gives the texts of the Authorized Version, the Amplified New Testament, the Living New Testament, and the Revised Standard Version in parallel columns. It is very valuable for comparing the various translations of words. There are other parallel New Testaments which place different combinations of popular translations in parallel columns.

#### Concordances

The serious study of the Bible requires a concordance. A concordance lists the important words of the Bible in alphabetical order and indicates chapters and verses where they may be found.

Many Bibles have brief concordances in the back to assist the student in locating Scriptures. However, the serious Bible student needs a more extensive concordance than is available in most Bibles.

*Cruden's Concordance* is relatively complete and less expensive than larger concordances. *Young's Analytical Concordance of the Bible* and *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* give extensive treatment to the location of all the words of the Bible. Concordances are available for the Revised Standard Version also.

#### Bible dictionaries

A Bible dictionary gives information about words, persons, places, and events which appear in the Bible. Some of the dependable dictionaries are those edited by J. D. Davis (Baker Book House), James Hastings (Scribner's), and Madeleine and Lane

Give two advantages for using a modern translation of the Bible.

(modern language more easily understood, to take advantage of most recent archaeological discoveries and progress in scholarship)

What is a concordance?

(Compare your answer with the text.)

What information does a Bible dictionary give?

(words, persons, places, and events which appear in the Bible)

Miller (*Black's or Harper's Bible Dictionary*). Abingdon Press has published an excellent, extensive work, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Some Bible dictionaries are now in paperback editions and are much less expensive than the cloth-bound editions.

#### Bible commentaries

A number of excellent one-volume commentaries are available. A critical approach to the Bible is followed by *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*. A conservative approach is followed by *The New Bible Commentary: Revised*. Recommended multi-volume commentaries are listed in Appendix D of the study guide *Pastoral Ministry: The Pastor's Personal Life and Duties*.

#### Other books

Alan Richardson's *A Theological Word Book of the Bible* gives important information on key words of the Bible. The root meaning of words, the various shades of meaning, and the use in various parts of the Bible are presented.

Some Bibles contain a few maps for reference, but a better understanding of geography in Bible lands can be gained from Bible atlases. *The Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible* is a standard work, but other good atlases are also available.

Good books for the Bible student's library are endless in number. Publication information on some of the recommended books is given in the Selective Bibliography of this study guide. Since recommended books are listed in each study guide, no attempt is made to give an extensive list in this one.

## Home Study Exercises

### Basic assignment (for Levels 1, 2, and 3)

1. In studying a biblical book, what should a student attempt to learn from it during the first reading? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Give three questions to keep in mind during the first two readings of a book. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Name four changes which may indicate new divisions in a book. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Why base divisions of thought on paragraphs instead of chapters? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. How is the central idea of a paragraph determined? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Give the steps in outlining a book. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. Name five facts to seek in a biographical narrative. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
8. List five questions to consider in evaluating the character of an individual. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
9. Name two methods of doctrinal study. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
10. Name three social institutions of the Bible which deserve study. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
11. (Underline the correct ending for this sentence.) The application of the Bible concerns—  
 (1) discovering the essential principles of the divine truth.  
 (2) the form of the expression of the divine truth.  
 (3) the determination of new moral standards for our day.
12. Give two reasons for using a modern translation for Bible study. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Supplementary assignment (for Levels 2 and 3)**

1. Apply the suggestions for studying a biblical book to Philippians or Titus. Be prepared to share your notes and outline in the seminar.
2. Do a character analysis of one of the following:  
 Rebekah (Gen. 24:10–27:46)  
 Caleb (Num. 13, 14:1–10; Josh. 14:6–15, 15:13–19)  
 John Mark (Acts 12, 13; 2 Tim. 4)  
 Barnabas (Acts 4:36, 11:22–15:36)  
 Stephen (Acts 6, 7)

**Advanced assignment (for Level 3).**

Read the preface in as many translations of the Bible as are available and use the information to determine the suitability of each translation for pulpit, study, or devotional use.

**Seminar Discussion**

1. One or more students should present the background information and outline of Philippians and Titus. They should give special attention to the major theme and the paragraph divisions.
2. Students who have done character studies should share their findings.
3. Evaluate or classify the following Bibles according to usage as a pulpit, study, or devotional Bible: The Authorized Version, The Revised Version, The Revised Standard Version, The Living Bible, The New English Bible, The New American Standard Bible, Phillips Modern English, and Good News for Modern Man.