

How to Study the Bible

Studying God's word must be an integral part of the daily life of a Christian, a time set aside to understand His will for us. We must first of all read these words, or hear them spoken, but even more so we must act upon them, for we are told, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22; see also Romans 2:13). James 1:25 says that if we are not forgetful of doing His work and words we will be blessed in what we do.

We should never minimize the importance of reading or hearing God's words, for Paul told Timothy that Scripture will "... make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (II Timothy 3:15). Understanding Scripture is essential for us!

Here are some basic instructions and understandings for studying God's words.

- Be diligent in your study. "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (II Timothy; 2:15).

diligent = *spoudazo*, "to use speed and effort, be prompt or earnest."

- Correctly interpret God's words. See II Timothy 2:15 in Point 1.

rightly dividing = *orthotomeo*, "to make a straight cut, or figuratively to dissect and expound correctly."

- Recognize that Scripture is inspired by God. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (II Timothy 3:15-16).

inspiration = *theopneustos*, "divinely breathed, or inspired by God."

- God's word is profitable for the following (see II Timothy 3:15 in Point 3):

- a. *Doctrine* = *didaskalia*, "instruction or teaching."

- b. *Reproof* = *elegchos*, "to convict, show your fault, or reprove."

- c. *Correction* = *epanorthosis*, "to straighten up again or rectify."

- d. *Instruction in righteousness* = *paideia* in *dikalosune*, "disciplinary correction in being right or just."



- Recognize that no prophetic scriptures are of a personal interpretation. "... knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation" (II Peter 1:20).

private = *idios*, "pertaining to the self, one's own."

interpretation = *epilysis*, "explanation."

- Understand that the word of God is written so that we may learn who He really is. "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

learning = *didaskalia*, "instruction."

- The written lessons of Israel's history are meant to alert us to not repeat their mistakes. "Now all these things [relating to the Israelites' golden calf incident at Mt Sinai, etc.] happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the earth have come" (I Corinthians 10:11).

admonition = *nouthesia*, "calling attention to, by implication a mild warning."

- We must study the word of God regularly to discover whether the things we have been

taught are correct. "These [brethren from Berea] were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

searched = *anakrino*, "to scrutinize."

- Understand that God's word is a guide for life. "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105).

lamp = *miyr*, "a lamp or light."

light = *owr*, "illumination in every sense, including lighting, happiness, etc."

See also Proverbs 6:23, where the commandments are likened to a lamp, and the law to a light.

- The laws, testimony, and statutes of Yahweh in His word are perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, true, and righteous, covering the soul, making the simple wise, rejoicing the heart, enlightening the eyes, and totally righteous, to be desired more than fine gold, and sweeter than honey (Psalm 19:7-11).

A Simple Way to Study the Word of God

There are different ways to study God's word, but here is a simple and useful way to do so.

1. First, formulate a question concerning a Biblical subject, one that excites you. Keep the question simple enough so you will not be overwhelmed by the scope of the study. Some examples might be:

What is faith?

How can I show love to my spouse or children?

Why was Abraham called the father of the faithful?

Why is it so necessary to forgive others of their sins towards you?

Are the dead conscious and active in the spirit realm right after death?

2. Since the Scriptures are words, it is essential to discover the meanings of these words as closely as possible; one must "rightly divide the word of truth." To do this you need a concordance or lexicon, of which there are many available.

Strong's Concordance, an old standby, with Hebrew and Greek lexicons

The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, by Strong and John Kohlenberger, III. This is the old *Strong's* plus expanded definitions added from a variety of lexicons for many words.

Vine's Expository of Biblical Words, by W.E. Vine

The Complete Word Study Old Testament, by Spiros Zodhiates

The Complete Word Study New Testament, by Warren Baker

The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew Aramaic English Lexicon

Thayer's Greek Lexicon

Various computer software programs like eSword (free on-line) or Accordance

The best single source that I use is the *New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance*. Look up the word, and find the scriptural references listed that include that word. Then search for the definition of the word in the lexicon in the back to further define the word. Write down what appears to be the most appropriate scriptures and word definitions. Take, for example, the word *faith*.

In *Strong's*, *faith* is shown in the KJV to occur 247 times. You might refer to Hebrews 11:1 to

begin with, check the Greek lexicon in the back for number 4102, which is listed opposite the word *faith*, and find that the word in Greek is *pistis*. *Strong's* gives the various words that *pistis* is translated into (assurance, believe, belief, faith, etc.), and also the definition (persuasion, i.e. credence, mor. conviction etc.), plus the word it is derived from. In the case of *pistis*, it is a form of the word 3982, which is *peitho*, meaning to convince. This word *pistis* is further defined in a paragraph to give further understanding of the word as it is used in different contexts.

3. For further understanding of how the word(s) is used in the context of the verse, you can consult different translations, of which there are many. Each has its strengths and weaknesses, and I personally like the New King James Version, since it closely follows the 1611 King James Version (KJV), but uses more modern English. *Strong's Concordance* also uses the KJV for its citations. Here are some common versions, though it is good to avoid modern transliterations of the Bible, since they oftentimes do not reflect the true meanings of the words.

New International Version (NIV)

English Standard Version (ESV)

Berean Study Bible

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

New King James Version (NKJV)

King James Version (KJV)

American Standard Version (ASV)

Darby Bible Translation

Young's Literal Translation

Concordant Translation (New Testament only)

Phillips Translation (New Testament Only)

Rotherham Version

Moffat Translation

The Interliner Bible, Hebrew, Greek, English, by Jay Green, Sr.

These translations can be accessed on-line as well, such as on www.biblehub.com, where every Bible verse can be accessed in 29 versions.

Many Bibles have cross references in the margins, so you can view a verse and follow the footnotes go search out closely related verses that shed additional light on the verse's meaning. The best Bible I know for this is *The Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible (KJV)* by Spiros Zodhiates. Incidentally, this Bible also contains the complete *Strong's Concordance*.

4. To add further understanding to a verse or section of scripture, you can refer to any number of helpful Bible commentaries, such as the following:

Clarke's Commentary, by Adam Clarke

Barnes' Notes, by Albert Barnes and various other authors

The Anchor Bible Dictionary edited, by David Freedman

The Companion Bible, by E.W. Bullinger (some really fine appendices)

The New Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge, edited by Jerome Smith

The Abingdon Bible Commentary, by Eiselen, Lewis, and Downey

The Eerdmans' Bible Dictionary, edited by Allen Myers

Nave's Topical Bible, by Orville Nave

A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical, by Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown

Halley's Bible Handbook, by Henry Halley

Illustrated Dictionary and Concordance of the Bible, edited by Geoffrey Wigoder

5. Understand that some scriptures are idiomatic or metaphorical, so cannot be understood literally. For example, Revelation 5:6 states, “Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.” The Lamb is Jesus Christ, but He does not literally have seven horns and seven eyes. These terms are symbolic of the seven spirits of God sent out to all the earth.

6. It is wise to write a summary of your findings from the above efforts so you can coherently think through your topic and be confident that your analysis is correct. Remember that the Bible is of no private interpretation, but the book interprets itself by comparing references that corroborate every topic you might investigate.