

How To Study The Bible

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Table of Contents

Foreword	5
Part I Introduction	6
Part II Before We Begin	7
Part III Initial Concerns	8
Part IV What is the Bible	11
1 The Importance of the Bible.....	12
2 The Bible and History.....	13
3 The Structure of the Bible.....	14
4 Methods of Bible Translation.....	16
Complete Equivalence	18
Dynamic Equivalence	19
Paraphrase	19
5 On the Original Languages.....	19
6 Choosing a Bible Translation.....	20
New American Standard Bible (NASB)	23
King James Version (KJV)	23
Green's & Young's Literal Translations (LIT & YLT)	24
English Standard Version (ESV)	24
New International Version (NIV)	24
World English Bible (WEB)	25
Part V Why Study the Bible	25
1 Knowledge of God.....	26
2 Knowledge of Self	27
3 Knowledge of Truth.....	29
Part VI What is Bible Study	30
1 The Necessity of Interpretation.....	32
Part VII Bible Study Tools	34
1 The Bible.....	34
How to Use the Bible	40
How to Read the Bible	41
2 Bible Dictionary/Encyclopedia.....	42
3 Concordance.....	43
4 Lexicon	45
5 Cross References.....	45
6 Commentary.....	47

7	Background Resources.....	49
8	Dictionary.....	49
9	Software.....	50
10	The Most Essential Tool.....	51
Part VIII Types of Writing in the Bible		51
1	Composition.....	52
2	Genre	54
	Poetry	55
	Wisdom Literature	57
	Narrative	57
	Letters	58
	Genealogy	59
	Prophecy	60
	Symbols	66
	Types	68
	Figures of Speech	70
Part IX Common Mistakes		74
1	Closing the Mind.....	74
2	Cultural Redefinition.....	75
3	Reading In Instead of Reading Out.....	75
4	Getting Lost in the Details.....	77
5	Giving Up.....	78
6	Ignoring Clarification.....	78
7	Indecisiveness.....	79
8	Missing the Obvious.....	79
9	Overlooking the Context.....	80
10	Seeing Only the Spectacular.....	80
11	Selective Interpretation.....	81
Part X The OICA + M Methodology of Bible Study		82
1	Observation.....	83
2	Interpretation.....	84
3	Correlation.....	86
4	Application.....	86
5	Meditation.....	88
Part XI Bible Study Methods		91
1	The Devotional Method of Bible Study.....	92
2	The Chapter Summary Method of Bible Study.....	95
3	The Character Quality Method of Bible Study.....	99
4	The Thematic Method of Bible Study.....	104

5	The Biographical Method of Bible Study.....	107
6	The Topical Method of Bible Study.....	114
7	The Word Study Method of Bible Study.....	117
8	The Book Background Method of Bible Study.....	120
9	The Book Survey Method of Bible Study.....	123
10	The Chapter Analysis Method of Bible Study.....	128
11	The Book Synthesis Method of Bible Study.....	135
12	The Verse by Verse Method of Bible Study.....	139
Part XII Bibliography		142
Index		143

Foreword

This document has been the work of many years, beginning in the late nineties when it was originally designed to be a study guide for a course on Bible study I was teaching at the time.

This current version is intended for a much larger audience and I hope you find it rewarding.

1 Introduction

There is no practice available to mankind that is more rewarding, more beneficial, and more enlightening than the diligent pursuit of God. Solomon has written in Ecclesiastes that:

This is the end of the matter. All has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether it is good, or whether it is evil.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

Mankind was created by God to enjoy fellowship with Him but the rebellion of our first parents in the Garden of Eden (and man's continual rebellion ever since that time) erected a barrier between God and man that will only be completely removed when Christ returns to claim His own. Until that time one of the most time honoured means of enhancing our fellowship with God is through the study of the Bible yet there seem to be fewer practices that are more consistently ignored. All too often Christians seem more than willing to uncritically accept Bible teaching from others and little motivated to perform even the most elementary of studies and so miss out on the great good that may be enjoyed as we immerse ourselves in the study of the word of our God.

The Bible has been called the Christian's sword. It is one of our primary tools in the proclamation and defence of the Gospel of Christ. However, if we cannot use it with skill and dexterity we are like a carpenter who is unable to build a structure that will stand the test of time because he is cannot properly use the tools of his trade. Our own ineffectiveness in our handling of the Word will have a similar result in making us less effective Christians and we likewise will be unable to produce a work that will stand the test of time since our understanding of God and His involvement in the activities of man will have been built upon a shoddy foundation and our teaching of others will be equally questionable.

It is the purpose of this study to encourage each of us to devote ourselves more thoroughly to Bible study and to set out some basic principles by which we may put to better use the time that we spend on Bible study. Various methods of Bible study will be introduced so that a structured study may take place which will make use of study practices that have been

developed, tested, and found valuable by other Christians. When properly done Bible study is an enjoyable and rewarding task that will bring us nearer to our God. It is my hope that this study will permit that joy as you enter into the study of God's Word and help you to think the thoughts of God.

The underlying premise of this study is that Bible study is not an end unto itself but is a method by which we come to learn more of God. Salvation rests not on knowledge of the Bible but on Jesus who died in our place. If Bible study does not help us appreciate more the glory of our God and the love God has for us then it is a fruitless occupation filling us with false hope and proud knowledge. The ultimate purpose of Bible study is to draw us nearer God, to help us be amazed at who He is and what He does and to fall to our knees in adoration of the One who loves us so much that He did all that needed to be done to reconcile us to Him. Study the Bible and in doing so love God.

This study is best summarized as follows: Come to the Bible with questions, not answers. If you read no further than this, I want to leave you with this: Read the Bible. Read the Bible in prayer, much and regularly.

2 Before We Begin

This study was first prepared to be used in a course on Bible study as a means of becoming more intimate with God and was presented over a period of four weeks during the fall of 1999 as a series of lessons for the Wednesday Night Bible Study classes at Pickering Standard Church. The aim at that time was as it is now, to enhance the Christian's ability to study and understand the Bible, and in so doing come to know God more intimately. This study has since been expanded, edited and formatted for presentation over the internet so that it may hopefully be of value to a greater audience.

All scripture references in this document, unless otherwise indicated, will be taken from the World English Bible (WEB), a free, public domain update of the 1901 American Standard Version.

If you have any comments and/or suggestions about this document please contact me at this email address: peter@eachnewday.com. Thank you.

3 Initial Concerns

If the Bible is truly the revelation of God to mankind then it is a book that must not be taken lightly but must be treated with care, with the realization that God is speaking through its pages to all who come to it. The internal testimony of the Bible supports that it is the revelation of God to mankind:

In the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from Yahweh, saying, "Take a scroll of a book, and write in it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel, and against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah, even to this day. It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I intend to do to them; that they may each return from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin." Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah; and Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all Yahweh's words, which he had spoken to him, on a scroll of a book. Jeremiah commanded Baruch, saying, "I am restricted. I can't go into Yahweh's house. Therefore you go, and read from the scroll which you have written from my mouth, Yahweh's words, in the ears of the people in Yahweh's house on the fast day. Also you shall read them in the ears of all Judah who come out of their cities. It may be they will present their supplication before Yahweh, and will each return from his evil way; for Yahweh has pronounced great anger and wrath against this people." Baruch the son of Neriah did according to all that Jeremiah the prophet commanded him, reading in the book Yahweh's words in Yahweh's house.

Jeremiah 36:1-8

When they didn't agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had spoken one word, "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah, the prophet, to our fathers, saying, 'Go to this people, and say, in hearing, you will hear, but will in no way understand. In seeing, you will see, but will in no way perceive. For this people's heart has grown callous. Their ears are dull of hearing. Their eyes they have closed. Lest they should see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their heart, and would turn

again, and I would heal them.'

Acts 28:25-27 (quoting Isaiah 6:9-10)

At no point does the Bible take any stand other than that it is "given by inspiration of God." Its internal consistency is without peer in any written work of man and continually reveals the hand of God. It is also consistent with the world in which we live. As we read the creation story we learn a story of origins more believable than any theory put forth by man. We can almost understand the anxiety of Paul and his shipmates as they are tossed about in a furious storm. We feel the fear that Adam and Eve felt when God confronted them in their sin. The story of Jonah swallowed by the fish amazes us but does not strain credulity. The Bible speaks of the world that we inhabit with an attention to detail that is beyond the ability of any novel. We can rest assured that the Bible is like no other book that has been or will ever be printed. It has a source that is beyond humanity. If we were to approach the text of the Bible as being no more than a work of great literary beauty, as though it were the mere equivalent of Homer, Shakespeare or Milton, we would do an injustice to the book which, alone among all other books, contains the revelation of God in the words of God. Yet all too often, in part because many of us have grown up with its teaching and feel that it has become stale or cliché, we tend not to be impressed by the words that we are reading. No matter how familiar we become to some of its contents we must continually remember that it is through the prayerful study of the Bible that we can better come to know our God and better live as His people in this life.

Some will say that we need only to rely on the Holy Spirit to teach us and that the Bible is supplementary. This seems as though it should be true but we must also realize that God has given us minds, that these minds are intended to be used and that they are also capable of being deceived. We need to learn and remember that the Bible is trustworthy, that it too is the product of God and that through its proper use we can evaluate what we believe and what we are being taught - either by the Holy Spirit or by human teachers - and so learn to discern truth, be able to accept the teaching of God's good ministers and also refute the lies of our enemy as we lay hold of the truth of our God. As was the Ethiopian eunuch we are convicted of the truth of the Bible by the Holy Spirit if we remain willing to be taught.

But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise, and go toward the south to the way that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. This is a desert." He arose and went; and behold, there was a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was over all her treasure, who had come to Jerusalem to worship. He was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. The Spirit said to Philip, "Go near, and join yourself to this chariot." Philip ran to him, and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He said, "How can I, unless someone explains it to me?" He begged Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of the Scripture which he was reading was this, "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter. As a lamb before his shearer is silent, so he doesn't open his mouth. In his humiliation, his judgment was taken away. Who will declare His generation? For his life is taken from the earth." The eunuch answered Philip, "Who is the prophet talking about? About himself, or about someone else?" Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture, preached to him about Jesus. As they went on the way, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "Behold, here is water. What is keeping me from being baptized?" He commanded the chariot to stand still, and they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, and the eunuch didn't see him any more, for he went on his way rejoicing.

Acts 8:26-39

We must also keep in mind that the Bible is not a difficult book to understand. Yes, there are sections that are more difficult to understand than others, but overall the Bible is a book that can be understood by anyone. The Bible itself is written from the point of view that it can be understood and that there is only one way to understand it. Since the Bible is God's written revelation of Himself to mankind it is not unreasonable to say that He has intended for us to understand what He is telling us of Himself through it. Just as we can apprehend the existence, glory and justice of God through creation so we can apprehend characteristics of God and His involvement with humanity through the Bible.

God does not change. God who spoke to Adam in the Garden of Eden is the same God who spoke to John on the island of Patmos. Every word God said, from before the beginning of creation to the other side of its end, consistently reveals both the unchanging character of God and the unchanging nature of His plan for our redemption made before the world was. Each book of the Bible teaches a single cohesive message that is supported and built upon by every other book. John's visions in Revelation do not change the visions of Ezekiel or Daniel but add more detail to their existing structure. We have a tendency to agree to disagree when we differ with others on points of Biblical interpretation, but this is something that those who wrote the Bible could never countenance. Even a simple reading of the letters of Paul, James, Peter and John as they appear in the New Testament will reveal that these men understood that there is only one proper interpretation of the Bible and that those interpretations that disagree with this interpretation are to be examined and corrected.

The study of the Bible will take careful thought, hence this document, but it is not beyond our ability to grasp its teaching. There is infinitely more to God than human wisdom can conceive but what He tells us of Himself is not beyond our reason or understanding. Study the Bible like someone digging for treasure: There may be significant effort but the reward is worthy of the task.

4 What is the Bible

Cultural historians place the Bible at the foundation of Western thought and morality. Until very recently the moral teachings of the Bible have been almost universally embodied in the laws of the Western world and even in this present age, with its moral teaching under increasing attack, the teaching of the Bible still forms the foundation of the Western judicial system. Educators study the Bible as an example of the highest forms of human expression, as a source for information on ancient civilizations, and as a historical document of unparalleled accuracy and depth. The Bible has been variously described as: literature, history, poetry, drama, logic and myth (both in the sense of a traditional story accepted as truth and in the sense of an untrue tale of an unknowable past) to name only some of the responses to it. We who are Christian believe that while the Bible may be each of these in part it is also more than these in the whole (and that it is certainly never myth in the sense of

an untrue tale of an unknowable past). We believe that it is in fact Truth as revealed by God to mankind over numerous centuries. The Bible does contain history and it is used extensively to date other historic events; it does contain poetry, some of the most beautiful ever written; it is logic, filled with irrefutable proofs to the validity of its teaching; it is even literature, giving great insight into literary methodology of cultures long vanished. But more than any of these the Bible is the one document that relates the story of God's interaction with mankind and His vast and glorious plan to fulfill His purpose within the created order and redeem mankind from his sinful condition.

The Bible does not present itself as an exhaustive text on any one subject; but since it has been written under the guidance of God, the incorruptibly perfect creator of all that is, where it touches on any subject it teaches the absolute and unalterable truth.

In one sense the entire Bible is a textbook, not of history or ancient styles of writing, but of God. In the Bible we are studying God. What is more is that it is a textbook of His own design and therefore ultimately reliable. Each page of the Bible is a lesson and we will do ourselves an injustice if we read the Bible without attempting to apply its lessons to our lives.

4.1 The Importance of the Bible

In a following section we will discuss the four components of inductive Bible study (observation, interpretation, correlation, and application) with the intent of emphasizing the need that we treat the Bible carefully. Why is it so important to treat the Bible with care? Because it is the word of God. If we know anything about God it is that He is a life changing God, it is His desire that we be turned from our ways of sin and restored to the ways of life:

This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their hearts; who having become callous gave themselves up to lust, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you didn't learn Christ that way; if indeed you heard him, and were taught in him, even as truth is in Jesus: that you put away, as concerning your former way of life, the old man, that grows corrupt after the lusts

of deceit; and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, who in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of truth.

Ephesians 4:17-24

But don't forget this one thing, beloved, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some count slowness; but is patient with us, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore since all these things will be destroyed like this, what kind of people ought you to be in holy living and godliness, looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God, which will cause the burning heavens to be dissolved, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? But, according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

2 Peter 3:8-13

Since this is the case, and since the primary means of man's apprehension of the reality of God's love for him is through the Bible it is essential that the Bible be properly understood so that its message may be taught undiluted. Therefore the means by which the Bible is studied is critical.

4.2 The Bible and History

Considering only the names of the authors that appear with their writings, the Bible is a collection of 66 individual books that was written over a period of approximately 1,500 years; roughly from the time of Moses (the Pentateuch) to some time shortly after the ascension of Jesus Christ (Revelation). Some legitimate argument can be made, however, that the earliest writings significantly predate Moses and are perhaps almost as old as creation itself. Specifically, that the literary structure of the book of Genesis is unique among the Pentateuch in that it is divided into a series of narratives framed around the genealogy of the significant character of each narrative. While Moses could indeed have written Genesis using this unique

literary framework, the fact that the other books of the Pentateuch show no similar structure does seem to indicate that Moses was not the original author of most of Genesis but was, in fact, an editor of earlier documents presumably written by each section's significant character or one closely associated with him or his history.

If it is true that Moses was the editor of works predating him by thousands of years, then it follows that the Bible spans all of human history from its very beginning through to the first century after Christ. And if we also consider prophecy as part of the Biblical record of history, then the Bible's narrative doesn't end with Revelation but continues on into the events of which Revelation speaks, in which case the Bible's coverage of human history extends from the beginning of our existence into eternity.

The impact upon the Bible scholar can be profound. Once we see that the Bible, rather than acting as a commentary on human history (both recorded and discovered through archaeology), is instead the subject of which recorded history is the commentary we will begin to view the Bible as being of critical importance to our understanding of human history. We will begin to see the Bible not as a light to more fully illuminate what is already known through research, as it is currently seen, but as the source in which all other histories find their light.

4.3 The Structure of the Bible

The Bible is comprised of 66 books which were written over a period of roughly 1,500 years by various individuals as the Holy Spirit moved them. The books themselves fall into different categories which are determined by their literary structure. These categories, which reflect in part the author's purpose in writing each book, are further discussed in the section: Types of Writing in the Bible - Genre. Between categories there is often some overlap. Prophecy is not restricted only to the prophetic books but is frequently found elsewhere and much that is within the prophetic books themselves is in the form of poetry, Isaiah is an especially good example of prophecy in poetic form. Many of the Psalms are poetry and at the same time are unquestionably prophetic; the fact that much of the Bible is couched in poetry should not detract from the value of the text as poetry is often a far more capable method of expression than is prose and it is in no way reduced in its ability to convey truth.

OLD TESTAMENT			
39 Books			
Historical	Poetical	Major Prophets ⁵	Minor Prophets ⁵
Genesis 1	Job 3	Isaiah	Hosea
Exodus 1	Psalms 3	Jeremiah	Joel
Leviticus 1	Proverbs 3	Lamentations	Amos
Numbers 1	Ecclesiastes 3	Ezekiel	Obadiah
Deuteronomy 1	Song of Songs 3, 4	Daniel	Jonah
Joshua			Micah
Judges			Nahum
Ruth			Habakkuk
1 & 2 Samuel 2			Zephaniah
1 & 2 Kings 2			Haggai
1 & 2 Chronicles 2			Zechariah
Ezra			Malachi
Nehemiah			
Esther			
<p>1. These are also referred to as "The Law," "The Law of Moses" or "The Pentateuch"</p> <p>2. The books of Samuel and Kings give the history of both Israel and Judah from a moral standpoint, while the books of Chronicles give the history of the kings of Judah alone to a restored nation from an idealistic perspective.</p> <p>3. Though poetical these are also known as "Wisdom Literature," they also contain a great deal of prophecy and refer frequently to events recorded in the historical writings</p> <p>4. Also called "The Song of Solomon"</p> <p>5. The major and minor prophets are not named to signify their importance or the importance of their message but to indicate the size of their prophetic writings, both together are referred to as "The Prophets" by the Jews.</p>			

NEW TESTAMENT			
27 Books			
Biographical	Historical	Letters	Prophetic
Matthew 1 Mark 1 Luke 1 John 1	Acts 2	Romans 3 1 & 2 Corinthians 3 Galatians 3 Ephesians 3 Philippians 3 Colossians 3 1 & 2 Thessalonians 3 1 & 2 Timothy 4 Titus 4 Philemon 4 Hebrews 3 James 3 1 & 2 Peter 3 1 & 2 & 3 John 3 Jude 3	Revelation 5
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Known as "The Gospels," first-hand biographical accounts of the life of Jesus 2. The history of the early Church beginning at Jesus' ascension and ending with the imprisonment of the apostle Paul; overlapping most of the letters 3. Letters to churches, not churches as we know them today groups of believers in various regions 4. Letters to individuals 5. An apocalyptic account of the end times and the beginning of eternity, although most of the other books of the New Testament also contain prophecy they are not devoted entirely to prophecy as is Revelation 			

4.4 Methods of Bible Translation

Translation is essentially bringing information from one language into another as accurately as possible, and must pay attention not only to the translation of the words themselves but also to their setting, or context. A poem that has its words translated accurately but is no longer in poetic form is not accurately translated. Effective Bible translation would therefore bring the

work of the original writers into a modern form that is both readable and intelligible.

In a sense, the process of translation is an ongoing one. The KJV was the most modern and accurate English version of the Bible available in 1611 and it has undergone several revisions over the centuries. Currently, the English Standard Version (ESV) which is one of the most up to date and accurate English versions of the Bible. Years from now there may be an even more modern translation made so that the text of the Bible can be reliably understood by the readers of that day.

All translations of the Bible fall into one of three categories, each of which determines the value of the translation for a given use and each of which has its own advantages and drawbacks. It is a good idea, especially if you have reason to be concerned about the translation of a given passage, to compare the translation of your preferred study Bible to that of an other translation in order to determine how other scholars have dealt with the text. Although there is today a great deal of dialogue concerning the value and integrity of the translations replacing the King James Version it is a fact that no modern translation disagrees with any other on any significant doctrinal issues of Christianity. Feel free during your study to compare the English Standard Version to versions such as the New International Version, American Standard Version, the King James Version or others, in so doing you will at the very least satisfy yourself that the passage being studied has been handled accurately and perhaps enhance your understanding of what is being said.

Following sections will briefly discuss the three major schools of thought with regard Bible translation:

1. Complete Equivalence
2. Dynamic Equivalence
3. Paraphrase

But even within the various categories of translation there are differing viewpoints as to how the translating should be done. Some will translate all measures into their modern counterparts and refer to all geographic locations by their modern names, while others will make no attempt to modernize these expressions. There are problems to be found in both

schools. If we are to modernize the ancient monetary terms to their modern counterparts then we may find that we have devalued what was a not unreasonable sum of money in ancient times. Likewise when we modernize locations we will find that on occasion we are operating on assumption and local custom that may be incorrect. Yet if the archaic terms are retained we will have difficulty putting what we read into its proper context. Until it is interpreted for us into its roughly equivalent modern terms we will have no idea what a shekel is. Yet, once we assign a modern value to the shekel we link the ancient currency to our current problems of inflation and monetary devaluation. By the same token if we tie ancient locations to their modern counterparts we may actually relocate some of them by great distances due to the difficulty in certainly identifying geographic locations that are at least several thousand years in the past.

It is also difficult to place a definite meaning on some terms such as the cubit. There are at least three different lengths assigned to the cubit (eighteen, twenty-one, and thirty-six inches) which makes it almost impossible to understand how big Noah built the Ark or how large was Solomon's Temple until we determine which cubit was in use at the time or referred to in the narrative. Once we are aware which methods the translators of our favourite study Bible have used in their work we can begin to better understand what that translation is telling us.

4.4.1 Complete Equivalence

The translation is done in such a way as to make the translated text as accurate as possible and most closely follow the literary structure of the original languages (therefore it is also given the term Literal Translation). In this category are the English Standard Version, King James (and the New King James) Version, American Standard Version and the Revised Standard Version, among others. Though highly accurate and praised for their literary beauty, translations of this style are sometimes difficult to read since the thought processes of the minds that used Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek are conveyed as accurately as possible and are often quite alien our own. Complete equivalence translations seek to bring the Bible to its readers in their own language with as little additional translation as is necessary to make it readable.

4.4.2 Dynamic Equivalence

In this category are the New English Bible, the New International Version, and several other modern translations. The thrust of this type of translation is to translate the text so that it has the same impact upon the reader today as the original did to its readers of many years ago. Thus many idioms, figures of speech, locations, and weights and measures will be updated to their modern counterparts. The danger of this style of translation is that, although it is usually very readable and coherent, the translated text has already undergone a level of interpretation which may further remove the reader from the truest meaning of a given text. Because of the aim of dynamic equivalence translations an additional layer of interpretation has been performed based on current understanding of Biblical culture.

4.4.3 Paraphrase

The most readable of all translations, the paraphrase is also the least accurate and is generally unable, and often unwilling, to hide the bias of the translator. Some popular paraphrases of today are The Living Bible, The Phillips Bible and The Message. Where literal and dynamic equivalence translations are usually done by a group of scholars commissioned for the task, paraphrases are typically the work of a single translator working to put the text of the Bible into "common speech" and therefore they are less likely to be a balanced treatment of the word of God. While for general reading they may be of some value as they make the Bible text seem more alive to the modern reader, they should be avoided for Bible study since quite often the translation does not accurately reflect the thoughts of the writers of the Bible. I would not recommend a paraphrases in general and believe that they convey the thoughts of God mingled with the thoughts of the translator. That being said if the only Bible you have is a paraphrase then by all means use it and do not think that it is of no value for study and for gaining some awareness of God as long as you realize that there are more accurate resources available and that you will not gain the best understanding of the Bible if all that you use is a paraphrase. The paraphrased Bible that you study diligently will be of far greater benefit to you than the literal or dynamic equivalence Bible that you ignore.

4.5 On the Original Languages

There can often be a temptation to delve at depth into the original languages of the Bible,

especially during teaching sessions, in the belief that this will result in a better understanding of the Bible than is otherwise possible from a translation. While I believe that there is merit to this practice, I also believe that it can be taken to the extreme; to the point that the translation itself is viewed as an unreliable alternative to the original manuscripts. The problem with this extremism is that it could lead people to believe that the translation is untrustworthy and that, to be a true Bible scholar, one must learn the languages that the writers of the Bible themselves used. While certain nuances of one language cannot be accurately translated into an other language; in general we must trust that the translators made decisions that were guided by God as they were choosing how to translate the Bible to more modern languages. In most of the cases that I have encountered in my study of the English Bible (I will not say all cases) the English translation has been of so satisfactory a quality that there has been negligible benefit from going back to the original languages.

This is not to say, however, that a study of the original language is entirely without value; just that we must be careful to avoid forming the impression that a translation of the Bible is not as worthwhile or trustworthy for in-depth study as the Bible in its original languages. As a Bible student who is conversant only in English, I wish to say that, while we may encounter possible alternate translations of certain passages or ideas, we must trust that the translators are of far greater skill in this area than we who are not. We must trust that their decisions in these situations are made with integrity, the desire to serve and honour God and the commitment to give us the best translation of the Bible in our own language that is possible. We must be very careful with our own retranslation of these passages into possibly "better" phrasing that we do not ignore the overall context of the areas in which these passages are found. The Bible is the word of God and is worthy of our greatest respect. We cannot be making the Bible say what it was never intended to say.

4.6 Choosing a Bible Translation

At this point the question "Which translation of the Bible should I use?" should be answered. Although there is a great deal of discussion between the supporters of each of the various translations the best answer is most likely this: As long as your main study Bible is a trustworthy translation created with the aim of portraying as accurately as possible, and as

readably as possible, the thoughts originally presented in Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic you cannot go far wrong.

When choosing a translation you will need to be sure that it is relatively free from such dangerous bias and poor translation methodology as would cause a distraction from the Bible study itself; we are, after all, embarking on our Bible study to learn more about our God, not to be annoyed by the foibles of our fellow man. No one translation is entirely free from bias but some are far more serious than others. If you know where errors of this nature occur in your Bible you can overlook them but over time they may become annoying and also begin to act as a detriment to Godly study.

A good selection of the translations discussed above are available in most of the current selection of study Bibles so your primary question will eventually become: "Which set of study helps do I wish to have accompany the Bible I use?" It is recommended that the study Bible you use for yourself not be one of the special interest Bibles currently on the market such as the Spirit Filled Life Bible, or others of its kind. While these Bibles will contain worthwhile study helps they are generally concentrated along a narrow topic of interest or doctrinal stance and may overlook other areas of study. Be sure to look for a study Bible that has a proven history of limited bias, and a conservative interpretation of doctrine.

One drawback of study Bibles with in text notes is that the notes are often an abbreviated or condensed form of commentary and that there is consequently a great temptation to allow the textual notes, which are printed on the same page as the verses to which they refer, to determine how the text itself is to be interpreted. It is important to realize that any study notes, all chapter and verse divisions, as well as all section headings were not originally part of the Bible and have been added subsequently by human editors as study helps to the reader. They are very often trustworthy and can enhance our understanding of the text but they can never be placed on the same level as the text itself. Remember that the purpose of inductive Bible study is to allow the Bible to speak to us as we study, keeping in mind that the Holy Spirit will teach the willing heart just as Jesus promised:

But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and will remind you of all that I said to you.

John 14:26

Many guides to Bible study will encourage the Bible student to compare various Bible translations to have a good understanding of what the Bible is saying in a particular passage. But, how can we do this since most of us have little or no understanding of the languages that the writers of the Bible used and have not had sufficient education to accurately determine which translation is correct in the instances where one translation uses different words or phrasing than an other translation. One of the best methods of comparing translations is to read the passage in question several times in your favourite translation. Read it until you are familiar with the flow of the passage, the words that the translators used and how they determine your understanding of the passage. Once you have familiarized yourself with the passage in your translation of choice read it several times in one or more alternate translations. Make notes of instances where you feel the alternate translation says things differently than the first translation did. Then use various of the tools referred to in the section Important Bible Study Tools to determine why the translations differ; asking yourself questions such as:

- Why did the translators use this particular selection of words?
- Is there a reason why the translations differ?
- Is my understanding of the passage affected by the alternate readings?

Commentaries are quite often useful when comparing translations as many explore these very questions in far greater detail than you or I might be capable of. Of special value is the use of an exhaustive concordance, such as Strong's or Young's (where the words in our modern translations can be traced back to the Aramaic, Greek and Hebrew words of the original writers). With such a concordance, you will be able to see for yourself the various alternatives available to the translators and perhaps learn why they chose the translation that they did.

Remember, all translations, commentaries and other Bible study helps have a bias. Bias is not wrong in and of itself, but it is good to be aware of the particular bias of the author(s) of the

tools you are using, especially if that bias is different than your own.

Also remember, no matter how good the Bible translation is that you use, it is only as good as your willingness to allow the Bible to change you. A poor translation that is allowed to speak is infinitely superior to a good translation that is forced into silence.

4.6.1 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

An other fine translation is the New American Standard Bible, an updated version of the American Standard Version (itself an Americanized descendant of the Revised Standard Version which was published in the United Kingdom). The NASB follows closely in the footsteps of the ASV in attempting to be as faithful as possible to the original languages of the Bible text while retaining the majesty and beauty of translations such as the KJV. Though not found in as wide a range of study Bibles the NASB is considered to be one of the most literal translations available, maintaining as much of the flow of thought of the Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic of the original text as is possible to express in English.

4.6.2 King James Version (KJV)

The King James Version remains quite popular and has the significant advantage of having a great many study helps referenced to its text. Three of the tools mentioned below (Young's Analytical Concordance, Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, and The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge) are themselves most helpful when used with the KJV. The majestic structure of its language lends a grandeur to the text to which many modern translations cannot compare. It is quite literal and very specific in its use of English phrasing and so is highly accurate. A drawback of this translation is that it contains many words which, due to the changes in the English language since 1611 which were not updated in the subsequent revisions, are obsolete or used in a different manner than they were when it was originally printed and thus require translating themselves. It is also a difficult translation to read in public for the same reason, although in general its sentence structure is easier to read than that of the NIV.

A very good update of the King James Version is the New King James Version (NKJV), which updates much of the language yet retains the beauty of the text and accuracy of translation and makes available the results of modern textual research. One outstanding feature of both the KJV and the NKJV is that they indicate by use of italics words that have been added

during translation to make the English flow more easily.

4.6.3 Green's & Young's Literal Translations (LIT & YLT)

Some lesser known translations of great value are Green's Literal Translation and Young's Literal Translation (Young also authored Young's Analytical Concordance, one the finest English language concordances available). The value of these translations is that they are extremely literal interpretations of the original text of the Bible into the English language. As such they are not as easy a read as some other translations but they serve as valuable resources to the serious Bible student. Both Green's and Young's are the work of single individuals but are generally free from the errors found in many paraphrases due to the desire of the authors to remain faithful to the original texts. Unfortunately, neither of these translations are widely available at bookstores but are freely available on the internet; both E-Sword and the Online Bible (see Offsite Links page) have these versions available as downloadable modules.

4.6.4 English Standard Version (ESV)

Continuing the fine tradition of the King James Bible into the twenty first century is the English Standard Version. The ESV is a highly literal translation of the Bible that places an emphasis on being as readable as possible. One of its predominant features is the use (as much as possible) of consistent English translations when the same word or phrase is used in the original languages. The ESV well deserves its growing reputation and is justifiably becoming the favoured translation of Christians throughout the world.

4.6.5 New International Version (NIV)

The New International Version is a popular translation, available in a wide variety of formats and is accompanied by an ever growing list of supplementary references. It is a good translation though not as literal as some other translations. Since the NIV was translated by a group of scholars from a variety of Christian denominations in an attempt to avoid denominational bias it occasionally has an ambiguous stand on certain points of doctrine. A significant criticism of the NIV is that there is less of a sense of reverence when reading the Bible and more of the sense of reading a newspaper.

4.6.6 World English Bible (WEB)

Building on the 1901 edition of The American Standard Bible, the World English Bible was produced with the aim of making available to the English Bible reader a version that both accurate and modern. Because the WEB is in the public domain it is free of copyright and as such is widely available in a variety of formats. It is a beautiful and easy to read translation that improves on what was good with the 1901 ASV with a modern, conservative approach. Unless noted, all Bible references in this document are (or will soon be) taken from the World English Bible.

5 Why Study the Bible

Perhaps the best reason for studying the Bible is that through the diligent study of the Bible we gain God's approval, learning how to properly handle the truth it contains and the truth that He has revealed in His creation:

Give diligence to present yourself approved by God, a workman who doesn't need to be ashamed, properly handling the Word of Truth.

2 Timothy 2:15

Paul is comparing Timothy's use of the Bible to a workman's use of his tools and encourages him to consider the embarrassment that would occur if the workman were to use his tools improperly. Paul argues further that Bible study is crucial for the proper spiritual development of all Christians in all places and at all times:

Every Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, that each person who belongs to God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

We are encouraged to remember that the Bible is more than just good literature, although it is the very best of literature. It is more than simply a detailed historical document, although it is the most detailed of any historical document. It is more than a general handbook on how to live a good life and become a good member of society; even though we would become good

members of society if we followed its teaching. (Though isolating the moral teaching of the Bible from the spiritual teaching of the Bible there remains no foundation for its moral teaching which consequently has no worth.)

5.1 Knowledge of God

The Bible is the verbal revealing by God of Himself to His people. It is, as the theologians say, special revelation and contrasts with general revelation (God revealing Himself through creation and our apprehension of Him through reason) in that the information it provides about God and His relationship to us is specific and detailed, rather than imprecise and general.

As His revelation to mankind, the Bible takes on an importance far beyond any other writings in all of mankind's history. If we isolate the teachings of the Bible from the reality that the Bible is God's revelation of Himself to us, we are left with a book that, while still worthy of study, can give us no coherent reason why we should study it or why we ought to live as it teaches us to live. The Bible is important not because it is a beautiful and good book but because it was given to us by God who is Himself beautiful and good. The reason that the Bible is worth studying is that it is the word of God and when we study the Bible we are actually studying God's thoughts as He has shown them to us. Therefore, Bible study is not merely an interesting intellectual exercise, it is one of the best methods by which we come to know God better.

There has been an ongoing trend for Christians to rely on the Church leadership as a primary source of their interpretation of the Bible. While to a certain extent this is unavoidable there is the temptation for the lay members of the Church to rely solely on the teaching of the Church leadership and to not do any Bible study of their own. But it is this very practice that was precisely what was changed during the Reformation. The Reformers believed that all the people of God should be able to read and understand the Bible, not only the leadership of the church. This is, in fact, the very thrust of the Bible itself. While there are passages that are aimed specifically at the leaders, most of the Bible is directed to all the children of God, with the intent that they learn personally who God is, where they stand in relation to Him and what He requires of them.

Not only do we learn about God as He has revealed Himself to us, we also learn that He is the primary participant in the story that the Bible tells. We learn that God is a creator God and that this world which we inhabit is His handiwork. In reading that God created man to enjoy fellowship with Himself we learn that He is a personal God (not personal as belonging to an individual but personal as possessing individuality) and that He is not remote from His creation but is intimately involved with it. In reading of the fall of man and God's plan of redemption we not only learn that God is holy but that He is also just and forgiving, characterized by an unending love for His creation. The Bible does not describe the god of the mechanist's universe who merely "set the ball rolling" and then stayed out of its way. The Bible describes the God who created all that is and who through His personal and active involvement in that creation is working out His plan for those who will be saved. As the writer to the Hebrew believers has said:

God, having in the past spoken to the fathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, has at the end of these days spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds. His Son is the radiance of his glory, the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, who, when he had by himself purified us of our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Hebrews 1:1-3

5.2 Knowledge of Self

It is important to study the Bible because in so doing we not only learn of God but we also learn of ourselves. In the lesson series [Who Am I](#) I discuss four foundational questions that each of us must deal with at some point in our lives:

1. Who am I?
2. Where did I come from?
3. Why am I here?
4. Where am I going?

The Bible gives us the answer to these questions by making us aware of our identity, our source, our purpose and our destination. The Bible is important not only because it reveals God to us but because it also reveals us to ourselves; we are not merely readers of the Bible story we are also participants in it. Through the Bible we learn that the answers to these four questions are:

1. Who am I? I am a someone who has been made by God and is loved by Him
2. Where did I come from? I am a created being, made by God to carry His image
3. Why am I here? I am here to learn about God and to serve and enjoy Him
4. Where am I going? I am going to die, after which I will have an eternal existence in Heaven or Hell, depending on how I live this life

We learn that we who have been saved by Jesus Christ are participants in the Great Commission, just as were His disciples:

Jesus came to them and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:18-20

We also learn that we who believe in God are among those who make up the Church of Jesus:

... coming to him, a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God, precious. You also, as living stones, are built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:4-5

The Bible is not just a book about God, it is a book about us and in studying the Bible we learn more about ourselves.

5.3 Knowledge of Truth

By studying the Bible we learn truth and gain a standard against which the teachings of this world can be measured and their worth evaluated; giving us the ability to accept or reject them by their adherence to a wisdom greater than our own.

Additionally, it is through Bible study that we become able to discern errors in doctrine. At the time of this writing books, music and movies dealing with Biblical themes may be purchased in any store (I write from North America, in other parts of the world this may be less true).

Preachers can be seen on television or on video at any hour of the day teaching their views of God and His interaction with mankind. In the midst of all this available Christian teaching (for regardless of the author's stated motive the creative process reveals some aspects of the author's beliefs) how are Christians to become equipped to understand where the difference is between truth and lie. We often allow these teachers to form our beliefs because of the assumptions below:

1. The topic has been fully and honestly researched
2. The teacher is accountable to God and to man
3. The teacher is doing the work of God

Unfortunately these assumptions are not always true. Many teachers adored by Christians today are trustworthy and care more for the sheep than the shepherd. There are, however, those who are mistaken either deliberately (under demonic influence) or accidentally (from carelessness or lack of education). In either case (and therefore in every case) the teacher's teaching must be evaluated for its adherence to the Bible. Just as one prepares for a race well in advance of the event so must Christians prepare in advance to evaluate Christian teaching. This is done through prayer and Bible study. Luke, the writer of the book of Acts, actually goes so far as to praise those who evaluated the teachings of the apostle Paul himself, one of the most dedicated evangelists in history:

The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Beroea. When they arrived, they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, examining

the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

Acts 17:10-11

A fourth assumption that prevents many Christians from studying the Bible is this:

4. The teacher has had greater training and therefore has an ability greater than my own

There has been an ongoing trend for Christians to rely on the Church leadership as a primary source of their interpretation of the Bible. While to a certain extent this is unavoidable there is the temptation for the lay members of the Church to rely solely on the teaching of the Church leadership and to not do any Bible study of their own. We do ourselves and God a grave injustice when we begin to rely on training rather than understanding. We respect the expertise of the experts and somehow feel that their additional training and study makes them trustworthy. But such is not always the case. Many world class theologians today discount the historical reliability of the gospel accounts of Jesus and instead believe Jesus to be more of an idea than an individual. Many other men and women have formidable training in the sciences yet do not acknowledge God at all. If you are a Christian you believe in God, the creator of all that is in just six days; you believe in His Son Jesus Christ, our Saviour who is alive today as He was two thousand years ago; and you believe in and are inhabited by the Holy Spirit, a personal force no amount of "secular" science could ever prove. In so believing you are in serious disagreement with the vast majority of scholars and Nobel Prize winners today. Scholarship does not make scholars so well as does unbiased inquiry into the facts and allowing the facts to lead you to the appropriate conclusions.

6 What is Bible Study

Bible study is the process by which we dive deeply into the text of the Bible in order to better understand what has been written in its pages and why it is there. Bible study is an in depth analysis of the Bible with the aim of allowing the Bible to teach us that we may be better able to know God and to do His will and is not so much our hearing a someone expound upon Biblical teachings as it our discovering those teachings on our own. The best and most productive Bible study is inductive, meaning that we come to the Bible as people who are

willing to allow the Bible to speak to us rather than looking in the Bible for support for our own ideas regardless of if they are right or wrong. Bible study is for those who wish to think, not for wishful thinkers. Our attitude should be one that would say: "I want to hear what the Bible says" rather than: "I want the Bible to say this."

We must also remember that we do not just study the Bible and learn it to become experts at it or to prove ourselves right on some point of doctrine, we are to study the Bible in such a way that its teaching will make an impact upon our lives, changing us to become ever more what God desires us to become. If in our Bible study we do not allow God to speak to us by whatever means He chooses then we will have missed the best part of it. Bible study is not only an intellectual exercise to increase our knowledge (though this is always a part of Bible study), it is in addition a heart changing encounter with God through which we learn more of He who desires to be the goal of our lives and His perfect will for those lives. Bible study should always be wrapped in the prayer that we will be able to hear what God would say to us.

When to study the Bible

The best time for Bible study is when you have the time available to do it regularly and the attitude to do it properly. We may each have different times of day when it is better for us personally to study the Bible but in every case the Bible study cannot be profitable if we do not permit ourselves to spend the time required to make it profitable. It is recommended to set aside a predetermined amount of time for Bible study at regular intervals so that Bible study can become a part of your way of life. A definite place in which to study, where you can lay out your various resources and can study without interruption is also a very good idea. These are not absolutely essential and we understand that God will reward any who will diligently approach Him in order to learn more of Him and His desires for our lives. But every effort that is taken to ensure that the time spent in Bible study will lead us to a personal encounter with God will be rewarded by God. The following episode taken from the life of Daniel will illustrate the point:

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the offspring of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans, in the first year of his reign I, Daniel,

understood by the books the number of the years about which Yahweh's word came to Jeremiah the prophet, for the accomplishing of the desolations of Jerusalem, even seventy years. I set my face to the Lord God, to seek by prayer and petitions, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to Yahweh my God, and made confession, and said, "Oh, Lord, the great and dreadful God, who keeps covenant and loving kindness with those who love him and keep his commandments While I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before Yahweh my God for the holy mountain of my God; yes, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening offering. He instructed me, and talked with me, and said, Daniel, "I have now come to give you wisdom and understanding. At the beginning of your petitions the commandment went out, and I have come to tell you; for you are greatly beloved. Therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision.

Daniel 9:1-4 ... 20-23

All the information we have about Daniel indicates that he was a man who sought after God and desired greatly to please Him in all ways. In the above passage he discovers, through reading the prophecies of Jeremiah that the captivity of Judah was to be of seventy years duration.

This whole land will be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. "It will happen, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation," says Yahweh, "for their iniquity. I will make the land of the Chaldeans desolate forever."

Jeremiah 25:11-12

Whereupon he prays and God acknowledges his prayer and gives him an understanding of the events to come. God rewarded Daniel's diligence and He will do the same for each of us.

6.1 The Necessity of Interpretation

Whether we want to or not we begin to interpret as soon as we begin to read the Bible.

Primarily this is due to the fact that twenty centuries or more have elapsed since the events recorded in the Bible took place. While this is of greatest disadvantage to those of us living in what today are termed "highly advanced cultures" it is also a disadvantage to those living in cultures more closely approximating the culture in which the Bible was written. No one alive today has any direct connection with the events recorded in the Bible, lives are simply not lived in the same way today as they were then. This is perhaps the greatest single reason that debate can exist concerning the meaning of various passages of the Bible; what could have been perfectly understandable to the original audience is often meaningless to we who are so far removed from the culture of the times. Picture what the book of Revelation would have meant to you if you were alive in the time in which it was written. You would understand more of the symbolism and the number 666 might actually specify a living person familiar to you (many interpreters believe that the number actually was a code to represent the emperor Nero, but such speculation is beyond the scope of this work, the basic point I am attempting to raise is that it is a very real possibility that the original readers of Revelation knew of whom John was speaking).

Today we have the perspective of distance. We are greatly removed in time and circumstance from those who originally read its words. In one sense this can be a benefit since we have a greater awareness of the flow of the Bible as a whole, and the Old Testament in particular, than did the men and women of Jesus' day who had only the Old Testament and so we are able to understand many of the themes of the Bible because they have actually taken place in human history. In an other sense this is also a tremendous liability since we have no idea of what it was like to walk along the Judean roadways with Jesus, we have not directly interacted with Him as did His first followers. We can speculate at the impact that Jesus had on the lives of those who lived with Him and come to the conclusion that He was a man of incredible personality but we can never directly experience Him in this life in the same way as those who ate with Him, spoke with Him and walked with Him. Jesus Himself acknowledges the limitation of our distance in His words to Thomas after His resurrection:

After eight days again his disciples were inside, and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, the doors being locked, and stood in the middle, and said, "Peace be to you."

Then he said to Thomas, “Reach here your finger, and see my hands. Reach here your hand, and put it into my side. Don’t be unbelieving, but believing.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen, and have believed.”

John 20:26-29

Given that interpretation is unavoidable we have the obligation to ensure that our interpretation causes us to understand the message of the Bible as did its original readers. It is for this purpose that this document is being presented, so that the person devoutly seeking to understand what God is saying in the Bible may be given some direction as to what approach to take and what tools are available to make the study as worthwhile as possible.

7 Bible Study Tools

In order to get the most out of your Bible study you should employ the correct tools. Just as a carpenter, or a doctor will make use of tools to perform their tasks, the Bible scholar uses tools to assist and enhance the study process. As you become skilled in the use of these tools you will find that your Bible studies will yield ever increasing rewards. The following sections review several of the more important Bible study tools.

7.1 The Bible

The Bible may seem to need no mention but a trustworthy translation of the Bible is essential if we are to be confident that we are as close as possible to the original reading of the passage except that we are reading it in English. A study Bible will not be essential but it will be a tremendous asset as study Bibles usually include in one volume many useful study helps such as: cross references, historical background information, book introductions and outlines, etc. An other important type of Bible worth purchasing is a parallel Bible, one that shows on one page several translations side by side, making it easier to compare various translations of a passage. My personal preference for a study Bible would contain only the text of a reliable translation, a good collection of cross references, a useful dictionary/concordance and a relevant set of maps and charts. The primary benefit of such a Bible would be that it would tend to avoid the risk of doctrinal error that is inherent in study Bibles laden with interpretive

notes and encourage its use in allowing the Bible to speak for itself.

There are many study Bibles available, far too many to include in this study guide; of those that I have personally enjoyed using I can recommend the following:

- The NASB Topical Reference Bible is the study Bible that I've been dreaming of for years and is currently my favourite Bible for reading and study. While it doesn't quite have everything that I mention below in "My Ideal Study Bible", the Bible study resources that it does include are comprehensive and eminently useful. 1) A 255 page topical index. 2) An extensive center column cross reference system with over 90,000 references. 3) A 210 page concordance. 4) Charts showing: a) Jesus' genealogy b) God's promises c) Jesus' miracles d) Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in Christ e) Jesus' parables f) Jesus' titles g) Book introductions and h) a One year reading plan. 6) Eight full colour maps. Built on the very literal and highly respected 1995 edition of the New American Standard translation, the text of the NASB Topical Reference Bible includes in-text indicators of alternate translations and italicizes words that have been added during translation to enhance readability.
- The ESV Study Bible is perhaps the finest all-in-one study Bible I have yet encountered. Combining a translation that is both readable and highly accurate with study notes that enhance the Bible's message, the ESV Study Bible is a joy to use. Copious charts, maps and notes make the text come alive and enable our entry into a culture 2,000 years gone as much as is possible in a single volume. With 80,000 cross references, extensive tables of Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in the New Testament, geographical and historical background it is possibly the most comprehensive study guide available.
- The NIV Thinline Reference Bible is a compact reference Bible combining the NIV text with the extensive cross reference system of the NIV Study Bible and a moderately sized concordance. This Bible is very good for inductive Bible study as it includes none of the study notes commonly included with study Bibles and allows Bible students to follow a concept through the Bible and come to their own conclusions on the Bible's teaching.
- The NIV Study Bible which with its in text maps and historical notes is an excellent

choice. Its cross referencing system is almost without peer as to quantity (about 100,000) and usefulness. It also contains excellent book introductions, maps, and quite a large concordance, as well as many other useful tools. The interpretive notes frequently tend to ignore the power of God and attempt to give natural explanations for supernatural events. Other notes, however, offer very useful biographical, historical and cultural information in a very timely manner.

- The Thompson Chain Reference Bible which is still one of the standards by which other study Bibles are measured and is one of the few study Bibles actually included in readily available Bible study software. Over forty years of research and study were spent in compiling the system of topical chains and references that allow the Bible student to quickly come to an understanding of almost any area of study. Extensive archaeological information is also printed for many places referred to within the text of the Bible. As well it boasts a considerable topical Bible, and a large concordance each of which enhances the ability of the Bible student to easily locate specific teaching or verses in the Bible. All in all there is very good reason why the Thompson Chain Reference Bible is still one of the most popular study Bibles available. One further advantage of the Thompson Chain Reference Bible is that, since it is in the public domain, it is frequently bundled in Bible software packages.
- The New Inductive Study Bible is an excellent study resource with a minimum of interpretive notes but a wealth of guidelines on interpretive principles, even the various book introductions refrain from specific analysis and offer guides to interpretation instead. The New Inductive Study Bible is also a relatively conservative treatment of the Bible; for example, although many study Bibles include a chronology of Biblical events the chronology included with the NISB is one of the few I have seen that begins at 4000BC rather than ambiguously referring to the pre-Abrahamic period as the undatable past. With many maps, charts, cross-references (although not as many cross references as in the NIV Study Bible, there are significantly more than in many other study Bibles) and wide margins around the text this is an especially useful resource for the serious Bible student.

- The Open Bible which contains a cyclopedic topical index, a concordance, book introductions and analyses, and many other valuable helps and study guides. Although its cross referencing system is not up to the standard set by other study Bibles this lack is ably compensated for through its comprehensive topical dictionary. The Open Bible also includes tools of value for Christian workers such as answers to common objections to Christianity and basic Gospel presentation. Although more difficult to obtain than previously it is an extremely useful tool and is highly recommended.

My Ideal Study Bible does not yet exist; but perhaps a Bible publisher will one day read this and is moved to produce it. This list of features is more of a personal preference than anything else and is my response to the observed failings of currently available study Bibles. Any combination of the following would appear in-text; as much as possible without disrupting the readability of the Bible so that the necessary resources are present where and when they are needed with a minimum of page turning except to minimize repeated identical references. My Ideal Study Bible would contain the following:

- Extensive cross reference system with a minimum of 100,000 references
- A concordance listing all verses for significant items and comprehensive listings for less significant items (or a combination of concordance & cross reference system where the reader can easily locate any verse not listed in the concordance by means of cross references at the verses that are listed in the concordance)
- Historical notes highlighting significant points in history from creation to relatively modern times
- Biographical snapshots of significant individuals, groups & nations found in the Bible
- Treat the Bible as a valid and reliable reference document (ie: Creation occurred near 4000BC rather than in the undated past; the flood of Noah was global rather than local; miracles really occurred rather than being fabricated events; Jesus is coming back as opposed to the world continuing on forever and etc.)
- Abundant in-text charts and illustrations

- Minimal use of interpretative notes except where absolutely necessary
- Comprehensive maps, political, geographical and historical
- Archaeological notes on major Biblical locations with illustrations

Many other excellent study Bibles are available but those listed above enjoy almost universal approval. Regardless of which study Bible you make use of you must be aware of any apparent bias on the part of the study helps incorporated into the Bible. Some study Bibles emphasize through their notes and helps doctrinal opinions that are accepted by only a small minority of believers and which can sometimes be at odds with the truth of the Bible itself. Even several of today's standard translations will occasionally exhibit a theological trend somewhat off the beaten path and of which the student must be aware. When in doubt as to the value of a specific study help remind yourself that any contradiction between human understanding of the Bible and the true meaning of God's word is always due to finite capabilities of the human mind and its ability, regardless of level of education, to make mistakes.

For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is complete has come, then that which is partial will be done away with. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child. Now that I have become a man, I have put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, even as I was also fully known.

1 Corinthians 13:9-12

No set of notes will ever be perfect as each will be the product of the human mind and will never be without a certain amount of bias; all comments and reference notes must be compared against the Bible itself. It is always a worthwhile task to review the editorial and copyright information within any Bible you wish to purchase/use in order to determine the nature of the bias present in that treatment of God's word and be prepared for when it appears during your studies. It is also a very good idea to ask if you can preview any Bible before you purchase it and examine its notes on specific issues. Pay specific interest to the notes relating to issues that would be of concern, such as: creation, eschatology (study of end

times), theology (study of God), or soteriology (study of atonement). For those who interpret Genesis literally the notes in most modern study Bibles will fall far short of their ideal, having chosen to compromise the teaching of God with that of man by interpreting the Bible in the light of evolutionist teaching. Also controversial are modern translations that remove gender specifics in reference to God, weaken the Bible's authority on homosexuality and/or other morality issues, or deny the interruption of the normal by acts of Gods' power (miracles). If no available study Bible meets your immediate needs perhaps a combination of any or all of the tools below should be considered.

The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Beroea. When they arrived, they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. Many of them therefore believed; also of the prominent Greek women, and not a few men.

Acts 17:10-12

Two additional types of Bible that can be very useful aides in Bible study are Interlinear Bibles and Parallel Bibles. These typically are not accompanied by in-text notes or maps, but by printing various translations side-by-side the reader can easily compare translation styles.

- Simply put, an Interlinear Bible is a Bible in which each line of English text is interspersed by that same text as it would appear in the original language. This allows you to actually see the structure of thought in the original and gives you an extremely literal translation, although very difficult to understand. A second advantage of using an interlinear Bible is that you can determine at a glance the actual words used by the original authors and how these words have subsequently been treated by the translators of the English Bible. Most bookstores will have copies available of some form of interlinear New Testament, and most computer Bible programs will also have an interlinear New Testament. Interlinear copies of the Old Testament are less practical as Hebrew was written from right to left and therefore an exact English translation would be extremely difficult to read unless the Hebrew original were to be reversed, which would somewhat defeat the purpose of the process.

- A Parallel Bible is a Bible that contains two or more translations of the Bible in the same language. This tool is useful when the student wishes to compare how a passage has been translated by differing schools of thought. Again, although the student may be tempted to accept one translation's treatment over another's, we must all remain open to the guidance of God's Holy Spirit and allow Him to teach us what we need to be taught rather than choosing a translation that appeals to our opinions or bends the Bible to our own will. As the difference between even the two most divergent translation traditions (as represented by the King James Version and the New International Version) amounts at most to only 5% of the Bible, and as this difference in no way affects any critical Christian doctrine, the parallel Bible is often less important than the other Bible study tools. It does, however, allow the student to easily determine where differences have occurred and perhaps note those areas for further study. One problem with studying with a parallel Bible lies in the uncertainty of which text to follow in the event of textual differences. In the case where such differences occur it is recommended that you fall back upon an alternate resource, such as "The New Treasury of Scripture Knowledge" (below) in order to determine what alternate passages of the Bible may have to say regarding the passage being studied. As the various translations within a parallel Bible will often express Biblical teaching in different ways we may be tempted to choose the translation that most suits our desires. Again, it is the context of the passage that determines its meaning. Alternate translations may shed light on a passage but their teaching must not be accepted simply because it appeals to us. We must also take care not to reject an alternate translation merely because it states things differently than does our favoured translation.

7.1.1 How to Use the Bible

As has been and will be stated throughout this work let the Holy Spirit speak to you through the Bible. Do not come to it seeking confirmation of a favoured idea (unless it has been supported through previous study) but come to the Bible seeking to have your mind opened and your ideas directed toward your God..

The Bible is itself the inspired word of God and, as Paul has said, is suitable for training and

correction unto Godliness. The chapters, verses, divisional headings, marginal notes, cross references and all other additional materials are all the work of man and are therefore not nearly so trustworthy. It can sometimes be of great benefit to read the Bible without all that has been added throughout the years to facilitate our use of it. A Bible with only chapter and verse notation (as it is next to impossible to obtain a Bible with the words alone) can be very useful when you are gathering a feel for the context of the passage being studied.

Read the Bible not merely as a textbook on how everything came to be but as a textbook on yourself. You and I are participants in the Bible story to as great an extent as any of the characters portrayed within its pages. You and I are as much (potential) recipients of salvation through Jesus Christ as were the Hebrews of Jesus' day (in His physical presence on Earth in human form).

7.1.2 How to Read the Bible

Even a casual look at the Bible will reveal that it is not only composed of 66 books divided between the Old and the New Testaments, each book has itself been divided into chapters and each chapter divided again into verses. The chapter and verse divisions are not canonical; that is, they are not part of the Bible text as it was written by the original authors. The chapter divisions were added by Archbishop Stephen Langton in the 13th century and the verse divisions were added by Robert Estienne in the 16th century. It is my opinion that these chapter and verse divisions (as convenient as they are in locating specific passages) are among the worst things that has ever been done to the text of the Bible as they too frequently break a passage unnaturally, frequently in the middle of the flow of the narrative, and make the study of natural sections of text far more difficult than necessary.

Given that chapters and verses are universally used in today's Bibles, what can be done to maintain the narrative flow of the Bible and minimize the disruption caused by these artificial divisions? Perhaps the best solution is to not allow these divisions to determine where our Bible reading begins and ends but to maintain narrative coherence by having our reading

begin at the start of a narrative section and stop at the end of that section, despite the fall of the chapter and verse divisions. For example, in reading the story of creation, the temptation could be to stop reading at the end of the first chapter, when the six days of creation have come to an end. Yet the first verse of the second chapter adds a final summary of the first six days of creation and the second and third verses discuss the seventh day and the reason why God made it holy; both of which must exist in the context of the first chapter in order to be properly understood. Perhaps a better way to read the creation account would be to start with Genesis 1:1 and stop at Genesis 2:3; or even Genesis 2:25, after the creation of Adam and Eve.

As much as possible, the books and narrative sections of the Bible are best read in a single sitting. One would hardly consider reading only part of a love letter; we would, in fact, be hard pressed to read it only once and would often read it as often as we could, perhaps even carry it with us in our day to be read during a quiet moment and remind of us the one who wrote it. What would happen if we looked at the Bible in the same way as we do a love letter? Suppose we regarded the Bible as what it truly is, a love letter to us, from God. Would we not be encouraged to read it carefully, as often as possible and pay close attention to every word?

7.2 Bible Dictionary/Encyclopedia

Bible Dictionary or Bible Encyclopedia - Since the Bible was written in a culture that no longer exists it is difficult for us to place ourselves in a position to understand Biblical writing in a manner similar to those to whom it was originally written. The distance between us and the original audience is great, in terms of both culture and time. Many individuals, events, and nations referred to in the Bible are completely unknown to the average reader while some are unknown even to our current understanding of history and are only revealed as archaeological inquiry unearths extra-Biblical evidence of their existence (indeed many will doubt the Biblical record as a legitimate historical document unless such extra-Biblical evidence is found).

These two tools are designed to reduce this difficulty and contain much information that will help us to feel as much as possible the impact that the text would have had on its original recipients. At the very least they enable us to participate to a small degree in the culture in which the Bible was produced and come to some understanding of the times in which it was

written. Some very good Bible encyclopaedias and dictionaries are: Eerdmans Bible Dictionary (a good, well rounded dictionary, predominately in text), The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (a great deal of information on most items of interest but with an occasional liberal tendency), and The Revell Bible Dictionary (many illustrations and a comprehensive index). Other very good dictionaries abound at a variety of levels of detail.

How to Use This Tool

1 - Use a Bible Dictionary/Encyclopaedia to look up the definition and significance of unfamiliar words as you encounter them.

2 - Read it in your free time as a way of becoming familiar with the way of life as it was lived in Bible times.

3 - Compare information in two or more Bible Dictionaries/Encyclopaedias. Occasionally versions of these resources make compromises on critical issues (such as creation vs. evolution) that many Christians may not necessarily feel equipped to evaluate critically. Where disagreement exists between the teaching of the Bible and the teaching of man it is the teaching of man that must be modified.

7.3 Concordance

A concordance - such as "Young's Analytical Concordance" or "Strong's Exhaustive Concordance" - contains the location of every use of every word of the Bible; or most major words in the case of smaller concordances. Most Bible software include similar capabilities which are often extended to include logical and phrase searches; greatly adding to the value already found in the concordance. A sample entry from the book version of "Young's Analytical Concordance" appears below:

LOVE –

1. Love, hbha, ahabah.

Gen. 29:20 (but) a few days, for the love he had to her

2 Sa. 1:26 thy love to me was .. passing the love

.
.
.
5. Love, agaph, agapé

Matt 24:12 because iniquity shall abound, the love of

As can be seen each word entry in this particular concordance is catalogued by language. Item 1 above lists entries for one of the Hebrew words for love; Item 5 lists entries for one of the Greek words for love. Following each item is a transliteration of the actual word in the original language prior to its translation which is in turn followed by a phonetic rendering showing how the word should be pronounced. Below each entry is listed a line from each verse that contains that variant of the word. Other concordances vary how the words are listed but the basic concept is the same in that verses are listed which contain the word being studied.

A concordance is an excellent tool to use when performing a word study as it allows us to follow the usage of the word in question in both negative and positive contexts. Were we to use a cross referencing system to follow a particular word through the Bible we might find that in general only usages of a certain type would be included since the cross reference is an edited listing of related verses. When studying the meaning of words such as faith, love or sin the concordance is the best tool to use gain an appreciation of the Bible's understanding of the word.

How to use this tool

1 - As there are many different translations of the Bible available it would be cumbersome to have a concordance for each one. A very practical way of using one concordance with multiple Bible translations is to look up the verse you are studying in the translation for which you have a concordance and see what word in that verse most closely matches the word in the translation you are using as your study Bible. This has the added benefit of letting you see how the word was treated in different translations of the Bible and how it was translated

elsewhere in the Bible you are using.

2 - Keep a bookmark or two in your Bible and use them as you could be looking up a great number of passages. Keep one or two in your concordance as well.

7.4 Lexicon

A lexicon - or word study such as "Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words" or the "Theological Dictionary of the New Testament." Since the Bible we read today is a translation of thoughts and ideas that were originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, such a tool is useful in determining the original intent of the author by making available to the modern reader a detailed definition of the English word(s) in the context of the original language word(s) used. Most lexicons will also give detailed information as to how the original word(s) would have been used by men and women alive at the time that the passage was written.

How to use this tool

1 - Like a concordance the lexicon is usually keyed to a specific translation of the Bible so the usage tips that apply to finding a specific word in a concordance also apply to the lexicon.

2 - A good lexicon will also list the various ways in which the original word was translated into your language, some of which may better agree with your preconceptions than others. Let the context in which the word appears in the Bible be your guide as you select which of the definitions to apply to your study.

7.5 Cross References

Cross Reference - A system of cross references, like those found in most modern reference Bibles or in dedicated works such as "The New Treasury of Scripture Knowledge," (which contains over 600,000 cross references, several different indexes, and a comprehensive note system) can refer you to other passages that relate to the one being studied. Cross references are quite possibly the single most important and useful Bible study tool available as they operate on the foundational principle of allowing the Bible to be its own interpreter. When purchasing a study Bible it is a good idea to review the type of cross referencing

system it employs as well as the quantity of references printed. Many of today's study Bibles have an average of 50,000 cross references. A concordance, such as those mentioned above, is useful in cross referencing specific words and phrases so that methods of usage of a specific word sequence may be discovered but a good cross reference system allows you to follow concepts and ideas throughout the Bible as well as specific words and phrases.

Below is a portion of the entry for Genesis 1:1 taken from "The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, Enhanced" (prepared by Timothy S. Morton) as it appears in the excellent eSword program (created by Rick Myers):

Genesis 1:1

Num_1:21, Num_1:42, Num_2:28, Num_4:36, Num_7:17, Num_7:73, Num_10:14,
Num_26:51, Num_31:32, Num_35:4; 2Ch_9:1; Eze_43:14;
Deu_11:29

beginning: Pro_8:22-24, Pro_16:4; Mar_13:19; Joh_1:1-3; Heb_1:10; 1Jo_1:1

God: Exo_20:11, Exo_31:18; 1Ch_16:26; Neh_9:6; Job_26:13, Job_38:4; Psa_8:3,
Psa_33:6, Psa_33:9; Psa_89:11-12, Psa_96:5, Psa_102:25, Psa_104:24,
Psa_104:30, Psa_115:15, Psa_121:2, Psa_124:8, Psa_134:3; Psa_136:5,
Psa_146:6, Psa_148:4-5; Pro_3:19, Pro_8:22-30; Ecc_12:1; Isa_37:16, Isa_40:26;
Isa_40:28, Isa_42:5, Isa_44:24, Isa_45:18, Isa_51:13, Isa_51:16, Isa_65:17;
Jer_10:12, Jer_32:17; Jer_51:15; Zec_12:1; Mat_11:25; Act_4:24, Act_14:15,
Act_17:24; Rom_1:19-20; Rom_11:36; 1Co_8:6; Eph_3:9; Col_1:16-17; Heb_1:2,
Heb_3:4, Heb_11:3; 2Pe_3:5; Rev_3:14, Rev_4:11, Rev_10:6, Rev_14:7, Rev_21:6,
Rev_22:13

Reciprocal: Gen_2:1 - Thus 2Ki_19:15 - thou hast made 1Ch_29:11 - all that
2Ch_2:12 - that made heaven Job_26:7 - General Psa_90:2 - or ever Pro_8:26 - as
yet Isa_66:2 - For all those Mar_10:6 - the beginning Joh_1:3 - General Joh_5:19 - for
2Th_2:13 - from Rev_10:5 - lifted

As you can see, there are entries keyed to each major word (in bold text), allowing you to follow specific themes, ideas, and usage through the entire Bible. In certain instances the

Hebrew or Greek original meaning is given and numerous topical entries are also catalogued and extensive notes are included as well.

1 - Cross references, either in a study Bible or in a stand alone resource, will indicate to which words the cross references apply by a letter, symbol or some other method.

2 - Give yourself a lot of time to properly explore the cross references, especially if using a resource such as The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge (which contains several hundred thousand cross references).

3 - Avoid distraction. As you explore the cross references you will come across verses which seem to require follow up (this is especially true if you are using a computer based study Bible). Stay close to your primary area of inquiry and follow the side trails as time permits.

4 - If possible use two Bibles, one to keep open to the passage you are studying and the second with which to look up the various cross references.

7.6 Commentary

Commentary - Although somewhat limited in value to inductive Bible study (since it confines us to an other's understanding of a given passage) a good commentary can be beneficial in opening our minds to thoughts of a passage that we may otherwise have neglected or not noticed. Most generally available modern commentaries are reprints of such classics as that of Matthew Henry, as well as compendiums of thought by (usually) trustworthy modern scholars. Such a commentary can shed additional historical or theological light on the passage being studied and we can gain great benefit from the knowledge of those who have made it their life's work to make available further information pertaining to the Bible. In many instances a great deal of background research into the times of the passage has been done by the commentator which can be of great value to our own study. Used with care and prayer a commentary can significantly increase the rewards of our Bible study. It is important to remember that in inductive Bible study you are seeking your interpretation of the Bible as guided by the Holy Spirit and so a commentary should not generally be referred to until you are fairly certain that you have gained an understanding of the passage in question and require the corroboration and/or further information that a commentary can provide. Many

modern study Bibles also include short, in context commentary as a part of their system of helps, the NIV Study Bible and the Life Application Study Bible are notable examples of this technique which, while useful, presents the constant temptation to forgo one's own analysis of the Bible in favour of that which has been presented to us by others..

One important point to remember when employing a commentary is that, while commentaries are generally the trustworthy works of scholars who have made careful study of the Bible, we should not be afraid to suspect the work of even the most trusted source if it seems at variance with an honest interpretation after diligent study. The temptation writers of commentaries face is to comment on or give an explanation of everything in the text, even if in some instances no such commentary or explanation is warranted or necessary. Occasionally the commentator's desire to convey information outpaces his understanding of the passage. The temptation also exists to allegorize passages that seem to defy belief. A case in point is found in the book of the Bible called "Song of Songs." Quite frequently this book is allegorized to be symbolic of the union of Christ and His Church. While this may not be unfaithful to the Scripture this practice does tend to overlook the obvious celebration of human sexuality that is enjoyed by the main characters. But maintaining that the "Song of Songs" is no more than such a celebration may be as much an injustice to the text as it would be to maintain that it is no more than an allegory.

It is important to remember, therefore, that God does not restrict correct interpretation to the commentators but to those who honestly seek to discover what God is saying in the Scripture. Just be absolutely certain that you are making an honest attempt at interpretation rather than seeking support for your preconceived ideas. Many commentators have much of great value to share with the Bible student but we must stay clear of the trap of allowing their interpretation to overwhelm our own. Treat a commentator as you would a discussion of a Bible passage with an other, as a sounding board for your ideas and conclusions but with a willingness to have your mind changed or the courage to remain firm on an honest interpretation. Keep in mind that your interpretation of the Bible is also a commentary of sorts and is subject to the same benefits and limitations of any other commentary.

How to use this tool

1 - Because we have an innate tendency to trust what our teachers tell us try to gain some idea of the meaning of a passage on your own before consulting a commentary. This way you will be able to evaluate your conclusions against those of the commentary and minimize the risk of simply accepting what the commentary says without question.

2 - As commentators will often have differing perspectives on a given passage it is a good idea to compare commentaries against each other for more balanced research as well as to guard against potential false teaching.

3 - Commentaries also differ in style. A devotional commentary, such as that by Matthew Henry, will look at a passage from a different viewpoint than a theological commentary, such as that by John Gill. Being aware of the style of the commentary you use will help you to get the most out of it.

7.7 Background Resources

Background Resources - Since we live in a time removed, at best, by twenty centuries from that of the writers of the Bible it is almost impossible for us to react to the Bible's teaching as did the early believers. Our culture, our lifestyles, even our way of thought, all are radically different from what was normal in the days when the Bible was being written. Some tools that can help us to better understand what life was like back then and how the Bible would have been received are books that tell us about the culture of the day. Bible handbooks are a basic tool of this category and Bible dictionaries and encyclopaedias are more advanced devices serving the same purpose. What are really useful, however, are books that illustrate in detail the way in which life was lived back in Bible times as they can help bridge the gap of years and allow you to, as much as possible, pick up on the finer points of ancient culture. While we can never enjoy an intimacy with the culture of the times of the Bible as its inhabitants did such resources can serve to minimize the bias our own cultural experience has upon our study.

7.8 Dictionary

Since languages change over time no-one can have a complete grasp of even their native language. It is highly recommended that you make use of a dictionary of your native

language, or the language of the other Bible study tools you are using so that words with which you are unfamiliar or which may have dual meanings or which may have had their meaning changed since the word was first used may be properly understood. Most modern translations employ common speech, especially those of the Dynamic Equivalence and Paraphrase methods of translation, and as a consequence you may not require a dictionary of your language at every Bible study but keep one handy for those times when a word you encounter ends up surprising or puzzling you.

7.9 Software

With the advent of inexpensive personal computers many of the above tools have been migrated into software applications that can take advantage of the incredible speed of information processing and retrieval of these devices. Most Bible study programs come equipped with the tools mentioned above but it is always a good idea to confirm this before you buy a given product. A well designed Bible study program makes it possible to perform an amazing amount of study in a much more efficient manner than would be possible with books and paper. An added advantage of such software lies in the ability to perform complex word and phrase searches such as finding all verses that contain the word "Jesus" but do not contain the word "Christ;" a capability that is very difficult to implement using any other tools. Bible software can range from packages costing several hundreds of dollars to those that may be distributed freely.

1 - My preferred computer Bible study software is "e-Sword" which consists of hundreds of megabytes of material, most of which is free and of very high quality. This program is constantly being improved for ease of use and additional modules are freely available at a multitude of internet sites.

2 - Since the advent of powerful cell phones (both Android and iPhone) many highly portable Bible study software tools have become popular. Since I use an Android phone my two favourites are: AndBible and MySword Bible (both available from the Google Play Store). Both are free and include a large selection of resources.

3 - An other free electronic Bible of very high quality is the "Online Bible" which contains a

slightly different set of features and user interface than the "Online Bible" but which is equally functional. Many of its features are unique and truly valuable. Both "e-Sword" and the "Online Bible" also contain extensive maps, charts and images to enhance your study and understanding of the Bible.

4 - If you wish to have your electronic resources available outside of the host program a good choice would be "Bible Database." All textual material included with this software can also be opened by any text editors and can generally be copied to a single 1.44 Mb floppy for distribution.

5 - Logos is the name of a commercial software package with an extremely good reputation and which is available in several price ranges with a corresponding range of features.

6 - One final program I would like to recommend is "The Scripture Memory System." Created by my friend and associate Stephen Simpson "The Scripture Memory System" is a program designed to help you systematically memorize portions of Scripture. Though not a Bible study tool per se "The Scripture Memory System" is a valuable tool to help you to keep the word of God on your mind at all times and there is no better way to come to an understanding of the Bible than to meditate upon it.

7.10 The Most Essential Tool

The most essential Bible study tool is an open and willing mind. Without this most important tool we will never profit from our study; no matter how much we may learn, our Bible study will be of no benefit to us if we are not willing to be changed by it. We must be willing to be taught when ever we approach the Bible, allowing it to change our minds and be an instrument of change in our lives rather than bending it to support our own preconceived ideas. The word of God possesses great power but only if it is studied honestly and with a willingness to allow God to speak through it to us. As we read the Bible we must be constantly thinking of what the Bible is telling us, not what we want to be telling it.

8 Types of Writing in the Bible

The Bible contains a wide variety of types of writing yet all of the Bible teaches God's truth,

despite the type of writing used. Some will no doubt argue that certain passages cannot be taken literally due to their being poetic in nature; but if that were indeed the case then by that same argument every other poem is also unable to teach truth. That a poem, or any other genre of literature, does not reveal its facts in narrative form does not in any way mean that it does not reveal truth. Definitely there are poems that are no more than entertainments or have been written merely to display the poet's skill but this does not prove that the words to the song sung at every child's birthday can mean anything other than that those singing it have sincerely wished their friend a Happy Birthday.

8.1 Composition

Prior to any study of the Bible it is important to realize that the composition of the text can and does play an important role in conveying a written message to its reader, regardless of the type of writing that is being studied. We will frequently make use of the rules of composition unconsciously as we read or write. In her book *How to Study Your Bible* Kay Arthur lists several compositional tools to look for:

Introduction - Presents the information that the reader will need in order to understand what is to follow.

Comparison - Holding one person, event or thing against another in order to show similarities between them

Contrast - Holding one person, event or thing against another in order to show differences between them

Repetition - Use of a word, phrase or concept more than once in order to emphasize and/or call the audience's attention to the idea being conveyed

Progression - The development of an idea or theme as the reader progresses through the passage to increase the reader's understanding by degrees

Climax - The use of progression to develop an idea or theme to a critical point

Pivotal Point - A change in the overall direction of the passage where ideas on one side of the pivotal point differ in some way from ideas on the other side

Radiation - The central point of a passage which can be either the target or source of all other points in the passage

Interchange - The author switches between two or more significant themes in a sequential manner

General to Particular - The passage moves from discussing a theme in global terms to covering the same theme in more detailed terms, can also be reversed to move from detailed coverage of a theme to a more general coverage of the same theme

Cause and Effect - The passage progresses one action to subsequent actions caused by the first, can also be reversed so that caused events are traced back to their sources

Analysis - The author presents an idea and proceeds to analyze the idea

Interrogation - The author presents a question to the reader and follows by presenting the answer

Summarization - The author presents an overview of what has been said, reviewing the principal points and making appropriate concluding comments

One must always be careful to observe the context of any figure of speech or literary device as the context will always allow us to determine the cause and situation for any specific passage. We cannot isolate discrete passages from their context at the risk of greatly misrepresenting the truth of the Bible. An example of this taken to the extreme is found in the Bible student who took the following two passages out of their context:

Then Judas, who betrayed him, when he saw that Jesus was condemned, felt remorse, and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, "I have sinned in that I betrayed innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us? You see to it." He threw down the pieces of silver in the sanctuary, and departed. He went away and hanged himself.

Matthew 27:3-5

He said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Luke 10:37

It is obvious from this example that the context is important to the proper understanding of any passage within the Bible if we are to remain true to its teaching.

8.2 Genre

The Bible is actually a collection of works composed over great spans of time by various authors who each had a unique message and a unique style of writing in which to present this message. Because of this the Bible contains writings of several genres, or literary styles. Each genre is suited to the message that is being used to present but in order to understand the message being presented we must first know how to approach the genre itself. The section above entitled The Structure of the Bible gives a generalization of the genre that each book of the Bible falls into. Within each book, however, various genres may be present. The book of Isaiah is an excellent example of the mixture of the historical, prophetic, poetic, and narrative genres. The principle genres found in the Bible are discussed in the sections that follow, with some suggestions as to how they are best to be treated.

At even a casual reading it becomes evident that the Bible is comprised of many different literary formats each of which is utilized to a different end. Correctly identifying the various types of writing in the Bible is a skill that will enhance your personal Bible study in allowing you to properly interpret the words you are reading. Where the poetic passages allow for incredible imagery, powerful expressions of thought, and great lyrical beauty the narrative passages are better suited to the representation of historic details and technical descriptions. The genealogical and prophetic passages are also used to better present the material being presented by each. Understanding how each genre is used will assist you as you seek to discover the meaning of any passage being studied.

As noted above there are various genres of writing found within the Bible, each of which requires our attention in a different way just as we read newspapers, novels and wills in different ways. Of primary importance is to remember that the Bible is not merely a collection of various literary genres but that it represents God's revelation of Himself (and of His actions in history) to man.

8.2.1 Poetry

Being a poet myself I am greatly appreciative of the poetry found in the Bible and how it can be used to convey vast concepts in an efficient and beautiful manner. However, one must not discard what is taught by Biblical poetry simply because it is poetry and therefore not to be taken seriously. Poetry is a form of writing that relies greatly on the reader's knowledge to teach the ideas that it is being used to teach; it is, for lack of a better example, a more "emotional" method of communication and as such can often be used to say in a word or two what prose would require sentences or paragraphs to communicate. Poetry is used in the Bible in much the same way as hymns are used in our churches or songs, such as "Jesus Loves Me, This I Know," are used to teach our children the truths of God. Poetry is not necessarily to be taken literally as it often employs imagery and other literary devices to transmit its message but some poetry, such as Psalm 139, is extremely literal in their presentation of truth. It is very important to keep in mind the context of the writer, as it is with any style of writing, in order to best understand the idea that the writer is trying to communicate.

The chief characteristic of Hebrew poetry is that it is written not to rhyme as is our western poetry but rather as a progression of thought or ideas. This form of poetry is called parallelism and refers to a style of writing that makes use of couplets, two lines usually but sometimes three or four, that vary in their relationship to each other. A tremendous asset of this style of poetry is that it is translatable into a form that retains the splendour of the original since it is not a system of rhyme and rhythm so much as a sequence of thought that is being translated. In western culture we consider poetry (or song) as nothing more than entertainment but poetry is no less important a means of communication than, say, a historical narrative. Neither is poetry less capable of conveying information than a newspaper although it is in a more subtle form. Words are used sparingly in poetry and frequently convey ideas larger than they would if used in prose. Each word in a poem is therefore of utmost value and has far greater significance than it would normally have if found in any other form of writing. Poetry is a largely symbolic form of expression; each line of a poem may have greater impact and depth

than paragraphs of prose (though it is possible for prose to take on some of the aspects of poetry).

Some of the various types of Hebrew poetic parallelism are:

A) Antithetic parallelism - each line expresses opposing, or contradictory thoughts.

The sacrifice made by the wicked is an abomination to Yahweh,
but the prayer of the upright is his delight.

Proverbs 15:8

B) Synonymous parallelism - each line expresses a similar thought, the second repeating the first for purposes of emphasis or clarity. The second line thus often sheds additional light on the first.

Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

Psalms 1:5

There are several variations of synonymous parallelism, two of which are listed below:

a) Climactic parallelism – the second line echoes a portion of the first and adds to it.

Yahweh, in the morning you shall hear my voice.

In the morning I will lay my requests before you, and will watch expectantly.

Psalms 5:3

b) Emblematic parallelism - one line is literal and the other is figurative or symbolic.

I am weary with my groaning.

Every night I flood my bed.

I drench my couch with my tears.

Psalms 6:6

c) Synthetic parallelism - the first line is added to by the second which expresses a complimentary thought and often gives the reason for the first.

Blessed is the man who doesn't walk in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stand on the path of sinners,
nor sit in the seat of scoffers;

Psalms 1:1

8.2.2 Wisdom Literature

Wisdom Literature consists of proverbs laid out in the format of Hebrew poetry but which generally do not have the same style or impact of poetry proper. Proverbs by their very nature are statements (usually couplets of contrasting ideas) giving generalizations describing how life in general goes for the subject of the proverb. Where poetry may take some time to develop a theme to maturity the proverbs are most often single statements or pairs of statements, though occasionally a series of proverbs be used to develop a single theme (such as occurs in the treatment of the theme of wisdom in the book of Ecclesiastes).

It is important to realize that proverbs do not usually have universal application nor are they usually universal truths but are more along the line of rules of thumb with a religious meaning, although many proverbs may be interpreted to be of eternal significance in describing the final outcome of the righteous and the rebellious. Proverbs must be treated with as much care as the rest of the Bible to determine how they are to be applied to our lives today.

8.2.3 Narrative

As the name indicates narrative literature is that which lays out its material in a prose style of writing. Information is presented without adornment, poetic structures may be inserted into the text but overall the passage resembles a modern novel in its design. Our concept of discrete sentences, paragraphs, and chapters would be alien to the ancient Hebrew writers, in fact many of the oldest manuscript copies have no sentence or paragraph breaks at all. One must be careful to follow the progression of thought contained by the passage itself apart from the occasionally arbitrary sentence, paragraph, verse, and chapter structure placed upon it by

various translators and scholars.

A subset of the narrative form is historical writing which differs from the narrative mainly in the sense of its view of time. Narrative is generally written with regard to the present while history is written with regard to the past, and in the case of the books of the kings of Israel and Judah is done so as to present a moral standpoint; contrasting the actions of the various kings to that desired by God. Historical writing also allows present day readers to view past events as though they were there. In this regard Genesis is historic in that Moses wrote what God revealed to him of events that occurred at times ranging from the recent past to events of several thousands of years in the past. Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, however, are narrative because Moses is primarily writing about events as they occur and most certainly within the memories of people still alive at the time of the writing.

Typically, the biographical/historical sections of the Bible present events that have occurred in time and as such are similar to the newspapers, historical reference works and biographies of our day. The primary distinction of the Biblical material is, however, that it is presented in the context of God's activity throughout history (preceding time, during time and after time) to work out His plan of salvation for mankind. Consequently there are deeper meanings and greater significance to the Biblical historical narratives than would be given to their modern counterparts. Many have said that the Bible is a historical document and to some extent it is in that it records events and describes individuals in a historical context. In this regard it can be read as history and much useful information can be received. But the Bible is more than a mere historical document and, just as we read a newspaper seeking to understand the bias/viewpoint of its contributors, so we should read the historical portions the Bible within the greater context of God's interaction with humanity to afford its redemption.

8.2.4 Letters

Just as letters today are personal communications between an author and a specific recipient so the letters found in the Bible are personal communications between authors and specific recipients with the added feature that they were most likely circulated to a wider audience either after the original recipients were finished with them or out of obedience to the wishes of the authors. Again, just as we read our own letters in their entirety, Biblical letters should be

read, if at all possible, from start to finish in a single sitting to grasp the full impact of the purpose, or occasion, of the letter and the points that the author is making. More so than for any other genre of writing is the force of the letter destroyed if it is read in bits and pieces here and there. Larger letters, such as Paul's letter to the church in Rome, may not suffer as much as the smaller letters in being read in sections, but even these were received by their recipients as a single communication from someone who cared deeply for them. Imagine then how each letter would have been studied as we today would study a letter received from a loved one from whom we did not hear often enough. We would do well to approach the letters in the Bible in the same way, treating them as we would a letter from a distant and dear friend, poring over each word and working to understand the overall theme of this work that was the only way in which its author could communicate.

8.2.5 Genealogy

The Israelites placed a great value on genealogical records so that each person's familial background would be understood. Liberties were taken with the genealogies on some occasions for reasons of emphasis; an example being the division of the generations of Jesus Christ as recounted in Matthew 1 into three tidy groups of fourteen. This would be done as a memory device and possible for literary symmetry and in no way takes from the accuracy of the genealogy in this particular instance as its stated purpose was to prove that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. That names have been omitted from this record, indicating that certain generations have been left out, does not overwhelm its goal. The genealogies of the book of Genesis may also contain gaps but in this case they are often accompanied by a number of years assigned to each individual. In this case the purpose of the genealogy would be to place certain events and people in time so that it is much less likely for generations to have been skipped.

The genealogical records within the Bible serve three primary functions:

Domestic – Used to determine the individual's social position, privileges, and obligations; such as the rights falling upon the first born son.

Political – Used to determine hereditary office, as well as to settle legal claims such as that pictured in the book of Ruth.

Religious – Used to establish membership, function, and descent of priestly and levitical duties and position.

8.2.6 Prophecy

Prophecy is not really a genre of writing but a style of writing (actually, this can also be said for the other genres listed here but is more evident in prophetic writing). Prophecy occurs in poetic form (most spectacularly in the prophecies of Isaiah), in historical narrative (such as occurred between God and Abraham when God promised Abraham a son) and in a variety of other literary genres. Its most notable feature is that it is declarative, speaking of events that are not as though they are, and in so doing shows that the purposes of God cannot and will not be thwarted. However, the surety that God's word will be fulfilled does not allow us to apply prophetic teaching to every event that occurs, as has been said elsewhere "Prophecy is a poor guide to the future." Often such application is the result of a very narrow understanding of a very limited group of prophecies. God does not and has not spoken to us in bits and pieces but in the person of Jesus Christ, Himself God and God's ultimate revelation to man. Prior to Jesus' own ministry, death and resurrection very few of His contemporaries understood how He was the fulfillment of prophecy. Subsequent to that, however, it became very clear, to the point that we now see that the entire Old Testament can be viewed as an arrow pointing directly at Jesus. In the same way the events of today cannot usually be understood in light of Biblical prophecy until that prophecy is completely fulfilled. Paul makes reference to this when he writes to the Corinthian church that while on earth he sees things as though through a mirror in Heaven he will see things perfectly. We await that day and know that as well as we understand things now we will understand them perfectly when we stand in His presence.

Much of the Bible is composed of prophecy which, though a genre of writing, can occur in the form of poetry, prose, or narrative. Taken as a whole the Old Testament of the Bible can be viewed as an ongoing prophecy of the coming Messiah that is fulfilled in part at the nativity. A prophet is one who speaks the words of God and has been given specific instructions regarding the content, occasion, and audience of the prophetic message. Moses, when arguing with God at the burning bush about his inability to perform the task to which God was

calling him was told that his brother Aaron was coming to look for him and would accompany Moses on his mission. God specifically told Moses that he would be as God to Aaron and that Aaron would say and do all that Moses commanded him to say and do. It is in this context that the prophet acted as the mouthpiece of God. The prophet (either man or woman) would be given a direct message from God to be delivered to whomever God commanded, in what ever form God desired. Prophecy in the Bible ranges from the height of human expression (as in the book of Isaiah) to some of the most humiliating acts (as in Ezekiel eating food cooked over animal waste for one of his prophecies) to the depth of human grief (Ezekiel, again, whose actions concerning the death of his wife were symbolic of the actions of God over the destruction of Jerusalem).

Prophecy is very often symbolic and, as will be seen below, often indicates more than one event of similar character separated by large spans of time. This actually leads to one of the dangers of studying prophecy in that we often seek to interpret some of the more spectacular prophetic passages (such as Revelation) within our current context, interpreting the passage in the light of recent events. While this is a valid exercise and indeed is how prophecy is to be treated we often embark on this exercise seeking support for our conclusions rather than to have our conclusions guided by the prophecy. Prophecy is at the same time a perfect guide to the future and an poor guide to the future. It is a perfect guide because God through prophecy has told/is telling us what will occur and He is utterly trustworthy. It is a poor guide because we fall into the trap of believing that the prophecy will be fulfilled in our time.

It is crucial in the study of prophecy to have a reasonable view of history and the flow of events. Prophecies of the destruction of Israel, Judah, or various other nations of the time only become clear when we understand how history happened at the time under question. Likewise, prophecies of future events such as the second coming of Christ or the rise of the anti-Christ can only make sense when we understand what has happened in the world since the time the prophecies were made and even, in some schools of thought, what has happened since creation.

Prophecy in general encompasses both declarative and predictive forms, though we are by far more familiar with the later. It is very important when reading prophecy to have an

understanding of history.

A brief breakdown of both types follows:

A) Declarative prophecy - In this sense the prophet is one who speaks for an other, carrying the context of the prophet being the mouth through whom the other speaks. Although the prophet is generally understood to be speaking for God it is possible for the prophet to speak for an other human as well. In the Old Testament we have an example of the declarative prophet in the relationship between Moses and his older brother Aaron:

Yahweh's anger burned against Moses, and he said, "What about Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. Also, behold, he comes out to meet you. When he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. You shall speak to him, and put the words in his mouth. I will be with your mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do. He will be your spokesman to the people; and it will happen, that he will be to you a mouth, and you will be to him as God.

Exodus 4:14-16

Yahweh said to Moses, "Behold, I have made you as God to Pharaoh; and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet.

Exodus 7:1

In this case Moses would be the speaker for God Himself as the prophet of God and Aaron in turn would speak for Moses as the prophet of Moses.

B) Predictive prophecy - This form of prophecy is concerned with what we generally view as the function of the prophet: The prophet predicts events yet to occur, often speaking of them as though they are accomplished fact as a reflection of the power of God's word. There are two types of predictive prophecy: That which is immediately fulfilled and that which is fulfilled at some later point in time. A brief definition of both types appears below:

a) Immediate fulfillment - in which the prophecy is fulfilled shortly after it is spoken and is a key in determining if the one who claims to be a prophet truly is a prophet, as seen below:

You may say in your heart, “How shall we know the word which Yahweh has not spoken?” When a prophet speaks in Yahweh’s name, if the thing doesn’t follow, nor happen, that is the thing which Yahweh has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You shall not be afraid of him.

Deuteronomy 18:21-22

An example of an immediate predictive prophecy is shown below:

Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, that they turn back and encamp before Pihahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, before Baal Zephon. You shall encamp opposite it by the sea. Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, ‘They are entangled in the land. The wilderness has shut them in.’ I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will follow after them; and I will get honor over Pharaoh, and over all his armies; and the Egyptians shall know that I am Yahweh.” They did so. The king of Egypt was told that the people had fled; and the heart of Pharaoh and of his servants was changed towards the people, and they said, “What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?”

Exodus 14:1-5

b) Delayed fulfillment - in which the prophecy is not fulfilled immediately but is delayed by a variable period of time. The prophecies of Christ's birth and ministry were fulfilled after centuries, those concerning His return are yet to be fulfilled. Most good study Bibles will include a list of at least some of the prophecies made concerning Jesus Christ. An example of a prophecy of Christ that has a delayed fulfillment is shown below:

Yahweh your God will raise up to you a prophet from among you, of your brothers, like me. You shall listen to him. This is according to all that you desired of Yahweh your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, “Let me not hear again Yahweh my God’s voice, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I not die.” Yahweh said to me, “They have well said that which

they have spoken. I will raise them up a prophet from among their brothers, like you. I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I shall command him. It shall happen, that whoever will not listen to my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.

Deuteronomy 18:15-19

There are frequent occurrences in the bible where both the immediate and the delayed types of predictive prophecy are combined. In these cases the prophecy of a significant event to take place in the future is immediately fulfilled as a sign confirming the more complete fulfillment, or simply as a blessing. Many examples of this type of prophecy are found in the book of Isaiah one of which is used to apply as a confirmation of Isaiah's own prophetic ministry and that of Jesus Christ:

The Lord Yahweh's Spirit is on me; because Yahweh has anointed me to preach good news to the humble. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of Yahweh's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion, to give to them a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of Yahweh, that he may be glorified.

Isaiah 61:1-3

Prophetic passages in the Bible can be found in a variety of literary forms and can range in length from several words to several pages of text. The prophet's personal response to the message that has been received from God is also frequently found within prophetic literature. One example of this occurs in Isaiah 21 where Isaiah describes the physical effect of God's proclamation against Babylon upon his own body:

The burden of the wilderness of the sea. As whirlwinds in the South sweep through, it comes from the wilderness, from an awesome land. A grievous vision is declared to me. The treacherous man deals treacherously, and the destroyer destroys. Go up,

Elam; attack! I have stopped all of Media's sighing. Therefore my thighs are filled with anguish. Pains have taken hold on me, like the pains of a woman in labor. I am in so much pain that I can't hear. I so am dismayed that I can't see. My heart flutters. Horror has frightened me. The twilight that I desired has been turned into trembling for me. They prepare the table. They set the watch. They eat. They drink. Rise up, you princes, oil the shield! For the Lord said to me, "Go, set a watchman. Let him declare what he sees. When he sees a troop, horsemen in pairs, a troop of donkeys, a troop of camels, he shall listen diligently with great attentiveness." He cried like a lion: "Lord, I stand continually on the watchtower in the daytime, and every night I stay at my post. Behold, here comes a troop of men, horsemen in pairs." He answered, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the engraved images of her gods are broken to the ground. You are my threshing, and the grain of my floor!" That which I have heard from Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, I have declared to you.

Isaiah 21:1-10

The prophecy of Habakkuk also includes personal commentary on God's message to the extent that the entirety of his prophecy is in the form of a discussion between God and himself.

Prophecy is often regarded by Bible students as the most difficult literary form within the Bible to interpret. While this is often true the study of prophecy is also extremely rewarding. By means of prayerful contemplation of prophecy the Christian gains a wonderful sense of the power of God and the effectiveness of His plan. As well, some of the most beautiful passages in the Bible are prophecies in poetic form that concern the advent and mission of Jesus Christ. In one sense the entire Old Testament is prophetic in that Christ is foreshadowed within its text. For us to gain the greatest benefit from our study of prophecy some guidelines for interpretation are now given:

- Study the New Testament treatment of Old Testament prophecies and how the New Testament authors come to regard the prophecies as being fulfilled (this can also act as a guide to our own study of the Bible as a whole, we would not be going far wrong if we were to treat the entire Bible as characters in the New Testament treated the Old

Testament).

- As many prophecies contain both an immediate and a delayed fulfillment we must for each prophecy attempt to grasp the meaning for the people who would originally have heard it, its near fulfillment, and continue by studying its practical message for Christians of all times, its delayed fulfillment.
- Always consider the literal meaning of the prophecy before assigning some symbolic understanding that may or may not be accurate. William of Occam was reported to have said: "If something can be interpreted without assuming a complicated hypothesis, there is no ground for assuming that hypothesis." This is known as Occam's razor and it fully applies to Bible study. Do not assume a complex interpretation of the Bible when the Bible itself gives no clear support for such an interpretation.
- Look within the prophecy for other figures of speech to see how they are used, how they may apply to the prophecy, and why they were employed in the first place

8.2.7 Symbols

A symbol is something which contains a meaning beyond what is regarded as the normal meaning. In the Bible symbols are most frequently found in the prophetic writings but they occur throughout the Bible and must always be interpreted with attention being paid to the context surrounding the symbol. Symbols can be of almost any form such as number, colour, appearance, and imagery.

- Numbers - Numbers often used as symbols in the Bible, especially in the books of Daniel and Revelation. Below is a list of common interpretations of the symbolic value of numbers as they are used in the Bible (note that this list is not exhaustive, merely a guide):

1 – unity, independent existence, the number from which all others descend

2 – strengthening, confirmation, increase of courage and/or strength

3 – the divine number of God, symbol of the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

3 ½ – incompleteness, unattained or anticipated fulfillment, imperfection; 42 months;

1,260 days; "times, time, and half a time" – see especially the prophecies found in the books of Daniel and Revelation for usage of this number

4 – representative of the world or mankind

5 – the number of the complete and normal human being

6 – incompleteness, one short of 7

7 – perfection (3 + 4), significant of the union of heaven and earth - predominant in Genesis and Revelation

10 – human perfection and wholeness (2 x 5)

12 – Christian endeavour in the world (3 x 4) – as in the 12 tribes of Israel

24 – perfection and wholeness of Christian endeavour in the world (2 x 12) – reflected in the 24 elders that bow before the throne of God in heaven, see Revelation 4:4

40 – a generation, human activity in the world, testing and/or judgement (4 x 10)

70 – very sacred, completeness and perfection (7 x 10)

1,000 – ultimate completeness and perfection (10 x 10 x 10)

144,000 – indicates the absolute security of the people of God of all generations (12 x 12 x 1,000)

- Colours - Some interpretations of colours as symbols follow:

Black – famine/need/death (Rev. 6:5-6)

Red – war (Rev. 6:4)

White – conquering (Rev. 6:2), purity (Isaiah 1:18)

- Objects - Objects, both living and dead, are often used to exemplify broad themes. The use of objects as symbols include:

Animal (often described as having horns) – Kingdom or nation (Dan. 8; Rev. 13)

Horn – King, emperor or ruler of a kingdom or nation, either physical or spiritual; size

occasionally indicates significance, the horn representing Alexander the Great is described as "conspicuous" (Dan. 8:5)

Woman – Nation or people:

- i) Whore or prostitute when describing an evil or fallen people (Rev. 17);
- ii) Wife, bride or daughter when describing a holy, redeemed or chosen people (Rev. 19)
- iii) Mother when describing the nation of Israel; specifically when portrayed as giving birth to one who would rule the nations (Rev. 12)

8.2.8 Types

The general definition of a type is that it is a divinely purposed literal reality in the Old Testament that foreshadows a spiritual reality in the New Testament. Types may be persons, places, objects, events, institutions, and offices; the anti-type (New Testament fulfillment) of which should always be clear. There is often the temptation to see a type where none exists, the relationship between the type and the anti-type does not have to be strained if it exist the relationship should be obvious.

Two examples of the types that appear in the Bible are:

- A) The lifting up of the brass serpent in the wilderness as a type of the lifting up of Christ on the cross at His crucifixion. The scripture references are Numbers 21:4-9 with John 3:14-15.

They traveled from Mount Hor by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom The soul of the people was very discouraged because of the journey. The people spoke against God, and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no bread, and there is no water; and our soul loathes this disgusting bread." Yahweh sent venomous snakes among the people, and they bit the people. Many people of Israel died. The people came to Moses, and said, "We have sinned, because we have spoken against Yahweh, and against you. Pray to Yahweh, that he take away the serpents from us." Moses

prayed for the people. Yahweh said to Moses, "Make a venomous snake, and set it on a pole. It shall happen, that everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." Moses made a serpent of brass, and set it on the pole. If a serpent had bitten any man, when he looked at the serpent of brass, he lived.

Numbers 21:4-9

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

John 3:14-15

B) The Passover celebration of the Israelite nation as a type of the atoning sacrifice of Christ on our behalf. The scripture references are Exodus 12:3-13 with 1 Corinthians 5:7-8

Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying, 'On the tenth day of this month, they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household; and if the household is too little for a lamb, then he and his neighbor next to his house shall take one according to the number of the souls; according to what everyone can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without defect, a male a year old. You shall take it from the sheep, or from the goats: and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month; and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at evening. They shall take some of the blood, and put it on the two door posts and on the lintel, on the houses in which they shall eat it. They shall eat the meat in that night, roasted with fire, and unleavened bread. They shall eat it with bitter herbs. Don't eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted with fire; with its head, its legs and its inner parts. You shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; but that which remains of it until the morning you shall burn with fire. This is how you shall eat it: with your belt on your waist, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste: it is Yahweh's Passover. For I will go through the land of Egypt in that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and animal. Against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am

Yahweh. The blood shall be to you for a token on the houses where you are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and there shall no plague be on you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

Exodus 12:3-13

Purge out the old yeast, that you may be a new lump, even as you are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed in our place. Therefore let's keep the feast, not with old yeast, neither with the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

1 Corinthians 5:7-8

In each of the preceding examples the type and its anti-type are clearly defined and interpreted by the Bible.

8.2.9 Figures of Speech

A figure of speech is a word or phrase that is used to convey something beyond its ordinary meaning. An example of figure of speech would be to say that "The Sun has set." The Sun has not actually set but has become hidden beyond the edge of the Earth due the Earth's own rotation, we say that it has set but we are conveying information of an entirely different sort. It is clear that we are using a figure of speech because the context of the expression has been established over time and it has become understood that the obvious meaning of the figure of speech is not the meaning that is intended and that we are speaking of things as they appear, not as they are. It is important to regard the Biblical context of each figure of speech as it is encountered in order to interpret properly what is being said, for often the opposite of what seems to be true will be used and will only become apparent through reading the surrounding verses. Several types of figures of speech are:

A) Parables and Allegories - stories told for the purpose of driving home a specific idea or collection of ideas.

a) Parable - A parable is a story that is true to life but is not usually an event that has actually occurred (much like the novels of our day) and may be considered to be an extended simile (see below). The parable is usually designed to teach one main point,

such as the parable of the Good Samaritan is used by Jesus to teach the concept of loving one's neighbour. Parables are generally found in the gospels and are usually introduced by a phrase similar to this: "And Jesus spoke this parable," an example is below:

Luke 5:36-39 - 36 Then He spoke a parable to them: "No one puts a piece from a new garment on an old one; otherwise the new makes a tear, and also the piece that was taken out of the new does not match the old. 37 "And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. 38 "But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved. 39 "And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, 'The old is better.'"

Some guidelines for interpreting parables are as follows:

- Take note of the actual meaning of the story
- Study the occasion that prompted the parable if it is given, this is the context
- Find the central point of the parable
- Compare this point with the teaching of the Bible
- If there seems to be some interpretive problem obtain what information you are able relating to the cultural background of the story and the people it was told to
- Resist the temptation to allegorize the parable, a parable is a sermon of one point and frequently the details of the parable merely exist to set off the main point and do not have significance in and of themselves

b) Allegory - An allegory is a story that is usually not true to life and may be considered to be an extended metaphor (see below). An example of an allegory is shown below:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the farmer. Every branch in me that doesn't bear fruit, he takes away. Every branch that bears fruit, he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already pruned clean because of the word

which I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I in you. As the branch can't bear fruit by itself, unless it remains in the vine, so neither can you, unless you remain in me. I am the vine. You are the branches. He who remains in me, and I in him, the same bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If a man doesn't remain in me, he is thrown out as a branch, and is withered; and they gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you remain in me, and my words remain in you, you will ask whatever you desire, and it will be done for you. "In this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; and so you will be my disciples.

John 15:1-8

The allegory usually teaches several points but may concentrate upon one or two of significance. Some useful steps for interpreting allegories are as follows:

- Note the details and features of the allegory
- Note any interpretation that is given by the story teller for the various details
- Consider the other features of the allegory and see if a meaning can be derived for them from other passages
- Do not try to identify all the details of an allegory, some will just not fit into any interpretive scheme since they exist solely for the purpose of setting off the main points

C) Figures of comparison - one item being compared to an other.

D) Metaphor - an implied comparison between two dissimilar items as in: "But Yahwh has been my high tower, my God, the rock of my refuge." (Psalm 94:22)

E) Simile - a comparison between two things usually using the words like or as, as in: "His heart is as firm as a stone, yes, firm as the lower millstone." (Job 41:24)

F) Figures of relation - the substitution of one word for an other that is related to it.

G) Metonymy - a figure of speech in which an idea is deduced or named through the use

of a term indicating an associated idea, as in: "But to this day, when Moses is read" (2 Corinthians 3:15) to refer to the writings of Moses rather than the person of Moses.

H) Synecdoche - the use of a specific term in place of a general term, or vice versa, as in: "If harm happens to him along the way in which you go, then you will bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol." (Genesis 42:38) which refers not only to the gray hairs on the man's head but to the man himself.

I) Anthropomorphism – speaking of God, either by man or by God Himself, as though He had human body and formation. Although man has been created in God's image, and Jesus Himself ascended into heaven in human form, it is not necessarily the case that God looks just as we do. Creation in His image is generally believed to refer to our abilities of reason, self-consideration, intelligence, and our possession of a soul. When anthropomorphism is used it gives vivid imagery to the acts, thoughts, and will of God.

J) Apostrophe - this occurs when the writer directly addresses things or persons that are either absent or imaginary, as in: "Then Joshua spoke to Yahweh in the day when Yahweh delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel. He said in the sight of Israel, 'Sun, stand still on Gibeon! You, moon, stop in the valley of Aijalon!' (Joshua 10:12)

K) Euphemism - the substitution of a more agreeable expression for one less accepted, as in the use of "He fell asleep" in the place of "He died."

L) Hyperbole - a deliberate exaggeration for the purpose of emphasizing the stated point, as in: "I am weary with my groaning. Every night I flood my bed. I drench my couch with my tears." (Psalm 6:6)

M) Interrogation - essentially a rhetorical question to which the answer is obvious and does not need to be given, as in: "Is any thing too hard for Yahweh?" (Genesis 18:14). The question of Jesus upon the cross is also a rhetorical question: "About the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lima sabachthani?' That is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'" (Matthew 27:46)

N) Irony - in which the opposite of the intended meaning is stated in order to emphasize or call attention to the intended meaning, revealed by tone of voice in living people and by the

context when written. In 2 Samuel 6:20 King David's wife says, "How glorious the king of Israel was today ..." and by the following context of the verse "... who uncovered himself today in the eyes of the servants of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!" shows clearly that she was telling him how she thought he had actually dishonoured himself.

O) Litotes - saying something by denying its opposite, as in the use of "He is not far off" in the place of "He is near."

P) Personification - the writer speaks about, not to, a non-personal or non-living thing as though it had human characteristics, as in: "Let the rivers clap their hands. Let the mountains sing for joy together." (Psalms 98:8)

Q) Pleonasm - the use of superfluous words, as in: "according to all that we have heard with our ears." (2 Samuel 7:22)

9 Common Mistakes

In this section some common errors are explored that will have a negative impact on the value and effectiveness of your Bible study. It is not intended to be exhaustive but shows examples of the grossest errors so that they may more easily be avoided.

9.1 Closing the Mind

We may be tempted when studying the Bible to believe that we already understand what is being said to us, especially when dealing with more familiar passages. Since we do not possess infallibility it is entirely possible that an interpretation of Scripture which we have held for a significant period of time may be in need of correction or of further development. It may even be possible that our interpretation is correct but that more detailed study of the passage is in order. As much as possible we must put aside our previous conclusions while in Bible study so that the truth of what is being told to us may be unearthed. This is not to say that our initial interpretations are necessarily incorrect but that they cause us to be predisposed to further interpretation that is in favour of our initial interpretations. There is a fine line that needs to be walked here since the building up of a body of doctrine depends by necessity on

maintaining a history of previous interpretations and inter-relating them to each other.

9.2 Cultural Redefinition

In this practice the culture to which the particular passage under investigation was addressed is re-defined in such a way as to dispense with the universal application of an uncomfortable mandate. This practice is most commonly used in instances such as the presentation of homosexuality as a legitimate lifestyle rather than one that is condemned by God. Each passage that speaks out against the practice of homosexuality is re-interpreted in such a way as to make the culture to which it is addressed guilty not of immoral behaviour but of an incomplete practice of love. In this manner the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah is no longer homosexuality but inhospitality. However, once the Bible is twisted in this way it can be made to say everything anyone would like it to say and it can therefore say nothing at all. It is no longer a guide to salvation or an example of Godly behaviour but an echo of our own desires, an interesting book which may or may not apply to our lives today, depending on what we wish. However, the Bible is not a book that addresses itself in one way to the people of one age and in an other way to the people of an other age. It cannot be since the Bible is the word to all ages by an eternal unchanging God. What God demanded of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, Jerusalem and Rome, he demands of people today since it is His law that determines proper and improper behaviour and that law does not change because He does not change.

9.3 Reading In Instead of Reading Out

One of the most common errors is for the student to replace inductive Bible study (exegesis: where meaning is pulled from the Bible) with deductive Bible study (eisegesis: where meaning is pushed into the Bible). The difference between the two lies in the fact that while inductive Bible study (that which is promoted throughout this document) seeks to glean knowledge from the Bible, deductive Bible study attempts to use the Bible to support a previously made conclusion. Inductive Bible study allows the Bible to lead the student. Deductive Bible study has the student leading the Bible. One of the greatest examples of the deductive method causing Christians to mis-understand the Bible centres upon the following passage:

After these things I looked and saw a door opened in heaven, and the first voice that I heard, like a trumpet speaking with me, was one saying, "Come up here, and I will show you the things which must happen after this."

Revelation 4:1

This passage is interpreted by many Christians to symbolize the rapture of the Church prior to an event known as "The Great Tribulation" at the time of the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Though in order for this interpretation to be valid the following must be true:

- 1 - John must be defined as a type of the Christian Church in order for his call into Heaven to be symbolic of the rapture
- 2 - The fact that John was called into Heaven to see the things that would happen "after this," not be a participant in them must be addressed
- 3 - The trumpet must be defined as the last trump of which the apostle Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 15:52
- 4 - Christ must be seen as returning to gather up His followers as must occur at the time of the rapture
- 5 - Adequate explanation must be made why the almost identical statement in the passage below does not also refer to the rapture as it seems to more appropriately satisfy the weaknesses mentioned in points 1, 2 and 3; although it fails to satisfy point 4:

I heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here!" They went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies saw them.

Revelation 11:12

It may be argued that each of the preceding points has been successfully dealt with, yet they must be explained away while the simplest and most natural interpretation seem to show that these points are neither supported by this passage nor by any passage which follows it. What seems to be most readily apparent is that John has been called by God to spiritually enter Heaven in order to see "things which must be hereafter." Those who deduce the rapture into this passage must overlook the last half of the verse which clearly refers to John as an

individual granted the special privilege of seeing with his own eyes what the end of the world will look like and to write about it so that his fellow believers may also know. Facts are being read into the Bible that are not there and facts which are there are being overlooked.

(Please note that in this short discussion I am not arguing against the pre-Tribulation rapture of the Church but against the incorrect interpretations of Scripture used to support this, or any other, doctrine. The actual timing of the rapture is beyond the scope of this document to address, though I personally believe that the Church will exist on the earth during the tribulation and will be raptured at the return of Jesus Christ when He defeats the beast and the false prophet and establishes His Millennial kingdom upon this present Earth after which the dragon will raise a new army of rebellion and be utterly and finally defeated.)

It is possible to deduce a correct interpretation as well. It is critical that the student makes a conscious attempt to prevent their preconceptions from interfering with their interpretation. We must remember that God is speaking to us through the Bible as well as through His Spirit, we must allow Him to speak and be guided by Him rather than by our own desires. We must be willing to discard a favoured belief if our Bible study shows it to be in error. We must be unwilling to discard a belief that is supported by the Bible even when “wiser minds” inform us to believe otherwise.

9.4 Getting Lost in the Details

This is an error that is all too easy for many of us to fall into and involves analyzing a passage of the Bible to such depth that we overlook the actual significance of the text. An exaggerated example of this can be found in some treatments of John 8:1-11 where various analysts have gone through great effort to determine the means by which the condemned woman was caught in her sin. While in many instances looking at this passage in such detail may be intellectually rewarding such a practice does have the danger of causing us to lose sight of the fact that Jesus, when confronted by a person guilty of a sin worthy of death, did not Himself condemn her; even though He alone met His own criteria for condemnation and punishment. The overwhelming theme of this passage is one of forgiveness and looking too deeply at the events surrounding this theme will distract us from it.

9.5 Giving Up

In the study of some passages of the Bible, such as "obscure" sections of prophetic material, we may conclude that since we could never come to an understanding of the passage in question we might as well give up before we even start. What we often fail to understand, however, is that all of the Bible was written by real people in a manner which would be understood by the readers, who were also real people; both with the same failings as we have ourselves. While those who lived at the times during which the Bible was being written may have had a more intimate connection with the people, places and events that the Bible refers to than we do today, we are no less capable of coming to a proper understanding of what has been written than were they. We may occasionally have to end a study with out the Holy Spirit having given us all the answers we wanted but we are certainly capable of appreciating the answers that we have been given.

Bible study, as has been said before, is not merely an intellectual exercise (where we must collect enough knowledge to gain a proper understanding of the text), nor is it merely a spiritual exercise (where we are given knowledge by the Holy Spirit without studying the text at all). Bible study is a process in which the Holy Spirit guides and give blessing to the diligent student in the process of learning from the word of God. As God spoke at an earlier time

You shall seek me, and find me, when you search for me with all your heart.

Jeremiah 29:13

9.6 Ignoring Clarification

An excellent argument of Ignoring Clarification occurs in one argument used to support the pre-tribulation rapture of the church. Verses in the Bible that indicate that God will not allow His children to suffer are used to argue that God will not allow His church to suffer and that the church must by necessity be raptured before the tribulation. Typical of such error the argument makes sense on the surface, until we come to realize that there are more Christians being persecuted around the world today than there have ever been in history. A broader view of the world around us, with a realization of what our brothers and sisters in other lands are enduring, would show us that the church is suffering now and that a pre-tribulation rapture will

only end its suffering, not eliminate it.

9.7 Indecisiveness

Frequently, where two or more interpretations of a particular Biblical teaching have gained popularity, it is possible to come to the conclusion that any of the available options is correct and we need merely choose one that suits our fancy. At other times we are told that it does not matter what we believe the Bible teaches about a certain idea so long as we believe something and have good reasons for doing so. But if the Bible is truly God's authoritative word and our accurate guide in the living of our lives is it possible to be ambivalent about its teachings. Or to put it another way, if the Bible is God's primary (or a primary) method for communicating His desire to His children how can we then say that what the Bible teaches is indefinite? It must either say one thing or it must say another but it cannot be made to say both. Once we begin to see the Bible as teaching many apparently conflicting ideas we tend to diminish its authority over our lives. Indecisiveness on Biblical teaching, or approaching the Bible with the attitude that differing interpretations are equally valid undermines its authority by leading us, and others, to believe that the Bible says nothing definite. It is legitimate to say that we do not know, that we have not been given understanding in a certain area (for we do not understand prophecy as it was understood in the days of its delivery), but we should never say that conflicting ideas are equally valid for they cannot be, one or the other must be right.

9.8 Missing the Obvious

We can sometimes be so intent on finding significance in a Bible passage that we unconsciously overlook an obvious lesson. A case in point can be found in Jesus' teaching on God's provision of food and shelter for the birds:

See the birds of the sky, that they don't sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns.
Your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you of much more value than they?

Matthew 6:26

We often will come from this passage with an assurance of God's concern for our wellbeing. While this is legitimate conclusion it fails to connect God's provision of food for the birds with the observation that the birds themselves are actively involved in the process. We can read

this verse and be rightly impressed with God's care for us yet fail to make the connection between the passage and the world it takes its example from, subsequently we make an incomplete interpretation and never come to the realization (from this passage anyway) that we carry a responsibility of care for ourselves as well and must often work hard to receive what God has given us, as do the birds work hard for what God has given them.

9.9 Overlooking the Context

This error, also referred to as “proof-texting,” is the practice where a verse or a phrase is isolated from the surrounding text in order prove a point. Many examples of this occur in each case of which the words of the isolated text are completely re-interpreted once they are removed from their surroundings. This is especially prevalent among certain cults that claim to be Christian but are not; such as the Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Seventh Day Adventists. Many non-Christian religions are also very good at proof-texting as well, such as the New Age Movement and the religion of Islam. While Jesus Himself was often the subject of proof-texting, as can be noticed predominately in the gospel accounts of His life, in each case the text in question is not taken out of its original context but is used to show Jesus’ credentials by means of passages to which most contemporaries would have already been familiar. The error of proof-texting occurs when the original text is interpreted to say that which is in opposition to, or ignorant of, the context in which the text is found.

9.10 Seeing Only the Spectacular

In reading passages such as 2 Kings chapters 4 through 6 we may be tempted to concentrate on the more spectacular aspects of the passage and in so doing come to the potentially erroneous conclusion that because we do not have the same ministry as men like Elisha we are not as Godly. The logical conclusion of such a line of thought would lead us to question the reality of our own salvation and our right to do any Christian ministry at all. While it may be true that we are not as Godly as Elisha, or other great men and women of the Bible, this is not a conclusion that can be supported by merely comparing our activities to the activities of a man moved by God to do great things in His name.

9.11 Selective Interpretation

The translation method and style of too many of our modern translations tend to suggest that human opinion is of sufficient authority to modify the reader's understanding of the text. An example of this occurs in the NIV footnote for Genesis 1:2:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was {Or possibly <became>} formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

Genesis 1:1-2 (NIV)

Here the word "became" is considered as a possible translation of the word that most translations translate into "was" in the text. Some Hebrew scholars do indicate that "became" is a viable alternative and so on the surface its use seems to be acceptable in translation; however, the context of the passages indicates that "was" is the more accurate translation. Using "became" is unsupported in the context for the following reasons:

- 1) It suggests that the creation was made by God, became corrupt and was re-created by God to be the creation He proclaims "very good." Throughout the Bible it is made very clear that God's perfect creation was made corrupt by the actions of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Support cannot be found in the Bible for believing that creation became corrupt and was re-made "very good;" that it will be set free from the curse upon Jesus' return is the only conclusion supported by the Bible
- 2) It also implies a pause of indeterminate length between verse one and verse two that contradicts statements throughout the Bible that God created the heavens and the earth in six days. The Bible's opening words, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," show that the heavens and the earth were created during the six days of creation. Since this is the case then any gap that exists between verse one and verse two must take place on the first or second day. With the general idea that light was created on the first day along with the heavens and the earth being supported most easily by the text.

The problem lies in why "became" is desired rather than "was." Since the most natural reading of the passage shows that God is involved in an act of creation rather than repair we must

determine the motivation for the use of “became” rather than “was.” The primary motivation appears to be to provide space between verse one and verse two for the spans of time required by the theory of evolution and various other alternatives to creation in six twenty-four hour days. In this gap long millions of years are said to have occurred, during which time evolutionary process is supposed to have resulted in the fossils that are discovered throughout the world. The problem is that this type of interpretation is selective, translating the text to say what translators wish it to say rather than to say what is actually being said and it results in an inaccurate understanding of the Bible. Allowing evolution to occur prior to verse two ignores the fact that death did not enter creation until Adam and Eve rebelled against God in Genesis 3 and also ignores that God did not create any animal life until the fourth day of creation. It seems that it is in capitulation to evolutionary thought that the word “became” has even been considered since the only defence ever made in its favour is that it allows within the Bible framework the time that evolution demands.

10 The OICA + M Methodology of Bible Study

OICA is an acronym representing the four steps of an inductive Bible study:

1. Observation - What is being said
2. Interpretation - What is being meant
3. Correlation - Where else is it being said and/or explained
4. Application - What will I do about what is being said

I have added a fifth step, "M", to the above which, while closely related to the step of applying what you have learned to your life, is more of a stand alone practice whose sole purpose is to keep God's word at the forefront of your mind.

5. Meditation - Keeping the Bible and what it teaches on your mind

Inductive Bible study is that Bible study which occurs when the passage being studied is allowed to speak to us, our conclusions being drawn from the passage. It is the opposite of deductive Bible study, that which forms conclusions prior to the Bible study and searches the Bible for support for these conclusions, often taking passages out of their context in the

process. In performing inductive Bible study we are reading data from the passage, while in performing deductive Bible study we are reading data into the passage.

The Bible study methods that follow are all built upon the principles of OICA.

10.1 Observation

Read the passage being studied several times in order to get a good feel for the details. Act as though you are reading this passage for the first time and observe all the facts. Ask questions of the passage:

1. Who is involved?
2. What are they doing?
3. Where are they? Where are they going?
4. When did this happen, what happened before, what will happen afterwards.
5. Why is this happening, what happened to lead up to this event?
6. Had this been foretold?

More questions may be found in the section on the Chapter Analysis Method of Bible study. Observation is crucial in obtaining a good understanding of any given Bible passage, in order for it to be effective we must learn to avoid the following traps:

1. Speed reading. Often, either through familiarity, boredom, or lack of time, we tend to rush through a passage. We must learn to take our time, extracting from the text every detail.
2. Trusting our memory. Too seldom do we actually write down what we are seeing in the Bible's pages, our memory for detail will be greatly enhanced once we start to take notes during the observation process.
3. Giving up. Just because we have already studied a given text does not mean that we know all there is to know about it. Simply because we have not studied the Bible in a classroom environment, or have not gone to Bible college, does not mean that our Bible study will be ineffective. It is God who rewards the student, as we gain experience in

Bible study we will still need to rely on His guiding hand, our mind will simply be better at doing the work of Bible study.

4. Immediate application. Many passages of Scripture may seem to be easily understood, especially to those who read the Bible frequently. In some cases this may not be out of place but in general the point of Bible study is to put off application until we fully understand what we have been studying. The danger of immediate application is that we tend to apply what the passage means to us personally rather than what the author intended the passage to mean to all.

Some of these questions will lead to the next step of interpretation but that is not the goal during the observation step, what you are attempting here is to get a good understanding of the flow of the passage, its surrounding events, its characters – you are in short looking for every detail you can find. Take your time through this stage as it is foundational to the overall impact of the study.

10.2 Interpretation

Regard the passage as though you are a detective, studying the passage for any clues that can help to answer the following questions:

1. What does this passage mean, what is being said? Attempt to discover the actual meaning of the passage.
2. What was the author trying to say to his original readers, how would the original readers have understood this passage?
3. What is the author trying to say to me? Keep in mind that there is often significant distance (historical, political, societal, cultural, geographical, covenantal and positional to name just a few) between ourselves and the original readers.
4. Why is this here, what is the theological significance of the text?

Keep in mind that: When the plain sense of Bible makes common sense, seek no other sense, you might find nonsense. The Bible was written for normal people to understand, not merely the super intelligent or those who (according to some cults) claim an additional

knowledge not generally given to all. Don't look for hidden meanings unless you have good reason to think there is further meaning that is not obvious or indicated by the surrounding context. This means that we are not to modify the plain sense of the Bible when it contradicts our treasured beliefs but must instead modify even our treasured beliefs when the teaching of the Bible is against them. Remember also to ask questions, Christianity is not a faith for the intellectually challenged and our God is not a God who acts in a manner that is beyond our ability to understand, though He often acts in ways that are beyond our capacity to understand. We can ask questions of all that we read in the Bible and expect reasonable answers that we are able to understand and that are consistent with teachings elsewhere in the Bible.

Some general principles of interpretation are:

1. Interpret the Bible by the Bible, refer to parallel passages, noting both differences and similarities
2. Research the words recalling that even in English the meanings of various words will change over time. Remember, too, that different words may be used to convey similar concepts, such as our use of acquaintance, friend, intimate friend, girlfriend & boyfriend, fiancé, wife & husband, or parent & child to define various aspects of the love relationship between humans.
3. Evaluate the use of grammar, why were the words put together as they have been? Would an other idea have been conveyed if the grammar had been different?
4. Carefully consider the context of the verse, passage, paragraph, chapter and book. Context is either near (in the same body of text) or remote (in a removed portion of text).
5. Discover what the author's intent was in writing what you are reading. For example: Paul's letters generally convey the occasion of each letter, as do some of the gospels, for other writing you may have to do some research.
6. Study the background of the book of which your study passage is a part by use of Bible dictionaries, encyclopaedias, maps, etc.

7. Consider the author's themes in other writings. For example: Does Revelation have anything to offer to our study of the Gospel of John.
8. Evaluate how you would understand the writer if they were communicating directly with you. What would you most immediately understand him to be saying.

10.3 Correlation

Correlation can actually be part of interpretation and is frequently done simultaneously. When you correlate, you are bringing up sections from other parts of the chapter, book, or entire Bible that help you to understand the section you are studying and are operating on the principle that: The Bible is its own best interpreter. An example of correlation would be to refer to parallel passages in the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) during a study of the gospel of John. A concordance, cross reference system or study Bible (such as the Thompson Chain Reference Bible) will be especially valuable at this stage. Other useful practices in correlation are: paraphrasing the passage, summarizing the passage, outlining the passage, and making charts that relate concepts and ideas in the passage to each other and to other passages dealing with similar ideas. Various of these devices will appear in some form or another in the following section on the Bible study methods.

10.4 Application

Application begins during your study but continues on into your day-to-day living. Bible study without application becomes a stale, intellectual exercise, like sitting in a car without fuel you will not go anywhere. Your spiritual growth will not occur by merely reading the Bible, its truths must be acted out. Do not rush into application until you are sure what the passage says and means, then adjust your life accordingly. Take steps also to measure your application, evaluate your progress and make the necessary changes in your application. If you are unable to apply the passage, try asking yourself these questions:

1. Is there a command for me to obey?
2. Is there a good example for me to follow?
3. Is there a sin here for me to avoid?

4. Is there something here I want to thank God for?
5. Is there a promise I can call my own?
6. Is there a blessing I can enjoy?
7. Is there a failure from which I can learn?
8. Is there a victory for me to win?
9. Is there a new thought about God, the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit, Satan, man?
10. Is there a truth in this passage that has greatly affected me?

Remember during your study the words of Jesus:

“Everyone therefore who hears these words of mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man, who built his house on a rock. The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat on that house; and it didn’t fall, for it was founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of mine, and doesn’t do them will be like a foolish man, who built his house on the sand. The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat on that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.”

Matthew 7:24-27

This is a clear warning to all who would learn the Bible that its teaching is for application into one’s life in order that that life may be build upon the Solid Rock. It is important to allow change to occur as we read the Bible else we become like the man who built his house on the sand, we hear the words of God but fail to take heed of them and so our life is lost in the storm. Some of the study methods that follow will give you opportunity to note various applications and provide for you to be able to evaluate you application after a certain period of time. If you will follow those prompts you will be able to allow God to change your life through you times of fellowship with Him in the study of His word.

As you begin to apply what you are learning through your Bible studies you will find that you have made some progress toward change in a certain aspect of your life. At this point you may be tempted to stop this particular application process and carry on with an other

application. Don't. There may always be room for improvement, as Paul has said in his letter to the church in Philippi:

Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect; but I press on, that I may take hold of that for which also I was taken hold of by Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:12

If you have been prompted by the Holy Spirit toward some change in your life, or He is leading you through such a change, you must not be satisfied with the fact that you may no longer be doing the worst of what the Holy Spirit is leading you away from while continuing to do the less bad aspects of this thing. When God comes to change us He is asking that we eliminate all within us that is contrary to His will, not merely the worst of it.

10.5 Meditation

For an excellent discussion on the importance of meditation please see [How To Meditate On God's Word](#), by my friend Stephen Simpson.

We live in an age where entertainment of various types is widely available and it is quite possible to fill all of one's uncommitted time with the enjoyment of these entertainments. While entertainment in and of itself is not a bad thing entertainment becomes bad when it consumes all of our time and it becomes especially bad when it takes from our time with God. You may well ask "How much of my time belongs to God?" The answer is all of it. Every second that you "own" is given to you by God and is His to command. Any activity that takes our time from God is harmful. The Israelites were commanded by God at Mount Sinai to meditate upon the scripture at every opportunity.

These words, which I command you today, shall be on your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them for a sign on your hand, and they shall be for frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the door posts of your house, and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 6:6-9

The overwhelming idea of this command was that the words of God would constantly be on the mind of His people. They were to think about God and what He has said at every opportunity. His words were to greet them as they entered their homes. His words were to be on their minds as they lay on their beds. His words were to be their guide as they went about their business. In every aspect of their lives they were to consider the words of God so that no part of their lives would be seen as separated from Him. That this command was not restricted to the Israelites of Moses' day is made evident in Paul's admonition to

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your heart to the Lord.

Colossians 3:16

Meditation involves a variety of activities, some of which are: Praise, prayer, Scripture memory and worship. We may feel out of place praising God or worshipping Him as we go about our daily tasks but keep in mind the response of Paul and Silas to being unjustly imprisoned, beaten and uncomfortable as they sat on the floor with their feet fastened to stocks:

The multitude rose up together against them, and the magistrates tore their clothes from them, and commanded them to be beaten with rods. When they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely, who, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison, and secured their feet in the stocks. But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

Acts 16:22-25

Even in prison, in pain and surrounded by criminals of every sort Paul and Silas were unashamedly praising God rather than encouraging each other in feeling sorry for themselves. They were more concerned with God than they were with their circumstance and could therefore praise Him in spite of their circumstance. Similarly the Psalmist, when confronted by the Godlessness of his society could meditate on the magnificent things that

God had done in history for Israel and remain assured that all would be well. Regardless of what happened he could rest in the knowledge that God is in control.

Prayer as well is something that we can do throughout our day rather than at set times within the day. We are told in the Bible to pray without ceasing. A song popular in the 1980s was entitled *Make My Life a Prayer to You* interpreted the idea of unceasing prayer as the making of our lives a constant prayer to God. Prayer is not merely asking God for what we want or need. Prayer is communication with God where we lay ourselves open to His will and lay before Him the deepest needs of our hearts (be they the need to praise Him or the need for food). Many people have experienced great fellowship with God simply by praying the portion of the Bible that they have been studying. For example: If you are reading about Paul and Silas as quoted in the above passage you might pray that God would enable you to endure hardship and suffering in the same manner. Or you might pray that you would be able to worship God in every circumstance of your life. The idea is that prayer is not isolated from our lives (and everything we do with our lives) but is a fundamental component of our lives.

Scripture memory is perhaps the primary aspect of meditation as it relates to Bible study. Of Scripture memory John Ortberg writes that

Memorizing Scripture is an important part of keeping a mind focused on Christ....The point of memorizing Scripture is not to see how many verses you can memorize. The point is what happens to your mind in the process of rehearsing Scripture. When you are rehearsing statements from Scripture, you are having different thoughts than you would be if you were watching some television show Too often we avoid Scripture memory, thinking that it is too hard, that we are too old to being to memorize Scripture, or that with all the resources around today we do not need to memorize the word of God. The verse quoted above from Deuteronomy does not exempt the aged from contemplation of the word of God, nor does it suggest that having a book handy is sufficient to obey the command. The entire emphasis of this that the followers of God are to be intimately involved with Him and His word. Our knowledge of God and His word is to surpass our knowledge of anything else for there is a life to be lived and we dare not find ourselves unprepared.

11 Bible Study Methods

In this section some of the most effective Bible study methods are described and accompanied by resources that will allow you to do these studies in your own way. More complete information is to be found in the following book:

Warren, Richard, with William A. Shell, *12 Dynamic Bible Study Methods*, Victor Books, Wheaton, Illinois, 1987.

which is unfortunately now out of print. All the material that follows has been taken exclusively from this book and summarized for this course. I had the privilege of studying this material under William (Bill) Shell in a class on Biblical Interpretation at Reformed Bible College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1988 –1989 and found both him and his teaching very beneficial as his heart was dedicated to the equipping of the saints. If there is any copyright infringement I am solely to blame and plead the excuse that this material is simply too valuable not to be shared with others. In the interest of full disclosure, I did contact Richard Warren's organization to indicate that I wished to publish this material on this website I was not told that I could not do so. To the best of my knowledge you can freely copy and use this document and its associated documents; I would encourage you to credit *12 Dynamic Bible Study Methods* should you choose to re-publish this material on any other forum.

In each case a basic outline of the method will be given and some useful tools for this method will be listed. The studies begin with the basic types and progress toward studies that are more in depth and require greater allocations of time but which will also yield greater results. Each Method in this document is accompanied by a chart which has been reproduced from the above book as a series of links to a chart in either HTML format or Adobe PDF format. You must have Adobe Acrobat Reader installed on your system in order to make use of the PDF charts. The reader may be freely downloaded from the Adobe website.

The Bible study methods discussed in this document are:

- 1 - The Devotional Method of Bible Study
- 2 - The Chapter Summary Method of Bible Study

- 3 - The Character Quality Method of Bible Study
- 4 - The Thematic Method of Bible Study
- 5 - The Biographical Method of Bible Study
- 6 - The Topical Method of Bible Study
- 7 - The Word Study Method of Bible Study
- 8 - The Book Background Method of Bible Study
- 9 - The Book Survey Method of Bible Study
- 10 - The Chapter Analysis Method of Bible Study
- 11 - The Book Synthesis Method of Bible Study
- 12 - The Verse by Verse Method of Bible Study

11.1 The Devotional Method of Bible Study

Method 1 - The Devotional Method of Bible Study

In the Devotional Method a passage of the Bible, large or small, is read and meditated on until the Holy Spirit guides you to an application of the passage into your life in a way that is personal, practical, possible, and measurable. It is the simplest and least costly in terms of time of all the Bible study methods in this outline. The goal is to take the Bible seriously and to do what it says to do.

1.1 - Tools

1.1.1 - Bible

1.2 - Hints

1.2.1 - This method can be used as part of your quiet times with God

1.2.2 - Requires little investment of time and can be done as you travel or wait for life to catch up to you

1.3 - Steps

Step 1 - Pray for understanding and guidance as you apply the passage into your life.

Step 2 - Meditate on the verse(s) you have chosen for your study

Step 3 - Write out the application you will make from the passage into your life.

Step 4 - Memorize a verse from the passage that summarizes what you have learned.

Step 5 - Assess your application in the weeks that follow for success or failure.

Date:	Passage:
1. Prayer: <input type="checkbox"/> (Check when you have prayed over this passage)	
2. Meditation:	
3. Application: (How you will apply this passage to your life)	
4. Memorization: (Key verse of the passage, for this particular study)	
5. Assessment of Application: (Perform this step over the next couple of weeks)	

11.2 The Chapter Summary Method of Bible Study

Method 2 - The Chapter Summary Method of Bible Study

In the Chapter Summary Method we attempt to gain an understanding of the contents of any given chapter of the Bible by reading it in its entirety several times (at least five), asking a series of questions relating to the content of the chapter, and ending with a general summary of the chapter. Note that the chapter divisions currently in our Bible are not in the original manuscripts but were added later (about 1,200 AD) by Bishop Stephen Langton in order to make the various parts of the Bible more accessible to the general reader. Although usually well done, at some points the chapter divisions interrupt the natural flow of the text. There are 1,189 chapters in the Protestant Bible so there is a wealth of material to study.

2.1 - Tools

2.1.1 - Bible

2.1.2 - Cross references

2.2 - Hints

2.2.1 - Read the chapter from a Bible without notes in order to encourage fresh insights rather than reaffirming those already found.

2.2.2 - Read the chapter without stopping in order to get a feel for the flow of the chapter.

2.2.3 - Read the chapter in various translations noting important differences discovered.

2.2.4 - Read the chapter aloud but quietly to yourself as an aid to concentration.

2.3 - Steps

Step 1 - Caption - Give the chapter a short but descriptive heading. Headings that are short and/or convey a vivid image of the chapter are especially beneficial.

Step 2 - Contents - Make a list or outline of the major point of the chapter.

Step 3 - Chief People - Make a list of the major individuals in the chapter, some reference to the surrounding chapters may be necessary.

Step 4 - Central Verse - Select a verse that is significant in the chapter or which you find is important during this study.

Step 5 - Crucial Word(s) - Make a list of the key word(s) of the chapter.

Step 6 - Challenges - List any difficulties you may have with the chapter. What don't you understand? Are there areas of your life that need changing but cannot be changed?

Step 7 - Cross References - Use your cross references to find other passages in the Bible that help you to understand this chapter.

- You should evaluate cross references in steps:

2.3.7.1 - Internal Cross References - Look for cross references within the book you are studying.

2.3.7.2 - External Cross References - Look for cross references within other books by the same author.

2.3.7.3 - Compare with cross references within the same Testament (Old or New)

2.3.7.4 - Compare with cross references within the Bible as a whole.

- There are also several types of cross reference, three are listed below (see your cross reference resource for more details):

2.3.7.5 - Pure Cross Reference – Says almost exactly the same thing as the verse you are studying.

2.3.7.6 - Illustrative Cross Reference – Illustrates what the verse you are studying is saying.

2.3.7.7 - Contrasting Cross Reference – Says the opposite of what the verse you are studying is saying.

Step 8 - Christ Revealed - As the Bible as a whole is the revelation of Jesus Christ (the Old Testament points to Him, the Gospels give the details of His earthly life, and Acts and the Letters show His activity in the world) it should be possible to find His presence in all areas of the Bible. Find out what you can discover of the nature, ministry, or person of Christ from this chapter.

Step 9 - Central Lesson(s) - List the major lessons taught in the chapter that you have learned at this time (next time you study this chapter entirely new insights may become evident).

Step 10 - Conclusion - Here you will begin to apply what you have learned. Two questions that are important to ask during any application of the Bible are:

2.3.10.1 - How do these insights apply to me personally?

2.3.10.2 - What am I going to do about them?

Passage:	Read five times: <input type="checkbox"/> (Check when done)
1. Caption:	
2. Contents:	
3. Chief People:	
4. Choice Verse:	
5. Crucial Word(s):	
6. Challenges (Difficulties I need to study):	
7. Cross References:	
8. Christ Seen:	
9. Central Lessons:	
10. Conclusion (Personal application):	

11.3 The Character Quality Method of Bible Study

Method Three - The Character Quality Method of Bible Study

In the Character Quality Method we begin to use tools other than the Bible itself in order to discover what the Bible has to say of specific personal characteristics. A major emphasis of this study method is on personal application of the lessons you will be learning into your own life. The main goal of this Method is to learn God's view of personal characteristics.

3.1 - Tools

3.1.1 - Bible

3.1.2 - English dictionary

3.1.3 - Bible dictionary

3.1.4 - Lexicon

3.1.5 - Cross references

3.1.6 - Exhaustive concordance

3.1.7 - Topical Bible or topical listings

3.2 - Hints

3.2.1 - Select a character quality that is of interest to you or that you wish to develop or have victory over in your own life.

3.2.2 - This study may take some time, be sure to allocate enough time to complete the study adequately.

3.3 - Method

Step 1 - Select the character quality you wish to study, look it up in an English dictionary and make note of the definition

Step 2 - Name and define the opposite quality, again using the English dictionary

Step 3 - Do a simple word study of the character quality first using the Bible dictionary to

define the quality from a Biblical perspective. Use the concordance to find other verses containing the same word(s), remembering that often many different English words can be used to translate the same Hebrew or Greek original and vice versa. Then use the lexicon determine the usage by the author(s) of the word(s) defining this quality.

Step 4 - Find some cross references using either the verse listings within your Bible or a dedicated book of cross references such as "The New Treasury of Scripture Knowledge." The concordance and topical Bible (such as "Nave's Topical Bible") will also be of benefit in this step.

Step 5 - Do a brief biographical study of at least one person who exhibits the character quality you are studying. Describe in brief the quality and the Bible references to it in this person's life. Use the following questions to help you along:

3.3.5.1 - What shows this quality in this person's life?

3.3.5.2 - How did this quality affect this person's life?

3.3.5.3 - Did this quality help or hinder this person's growth to maturity, spiritual or otherwise? How?

3.3.5.4 - What are the results of this quality in this person's life?

Step 6 - Memorize at least one verse from your study that seems to stand out and which will help you as you apply the lessons you are learning into your own life.

Step 7 - Select a situation or a relationship in which to work on this character quality. Remember that we wish to minimize the negative qualities in our lives and emphasize or enhance the positive qualities. Jonah's stubbornness helps us to see our own in light of its impact on our ability to do the will of God in our lives, whereas Moses' humility before God in spite of his being able to meet God face to face can shed new light on how we are to treat special characteristics of our own lives.

Step 8 - Think of practical methods by which you may apply the positive aspects of your study into your life. If you are studying the quality of encouragement you might wish to go out of your way to encourage Christian behaviour in you fellow believers.

Step 9 - Make note of progress as you apply these lessons into your life. This will allow you to evaluate your development in the area you have studied.

A List of Positive Character Qualities to Find

A Servant	Courteousness	Generosity	Obedience	Sense of Humor
Agreeableness	Creativity	Gentleness	Observer	Sensitivity
Balance	Dedication	Good Stewardship	Optimism	Sincerity
Boldness	Deference	Gratefulness	Orderliness	Stableness
Bravery	Dependability	Honesty	Patience	Submissiveness
Calmness	Determinate	Humbleness	Peacemaking	Sympathy
Carefulness	Diligence	Independence	Perspective	Thankfulness
Cautiousness	Discernment	Industry	Positiveness	Thriftiness
Characterized by the Beatitudes	Discipline	Integrity	Pureness	Tolerance
Chasteness	Discreetness	Kindness	Quietness	Trustworthiness
Cheerfulness	Durableness	Lovingness	Resourcefulness	Uncomplaining
Cleanliness	Earnestness	Loyalty	Respectfulness	Uncompromising
Compassionate	Energy	Man of Faith	Reverence	Wholeheartedness
Confidence	Enthusiasm	Meekness	Righteousness	Wisdom
Consideration	Fairness	Mercifulness	Sacrifice	Zealousness
Contentedness	Faithfulness	Moderateness	Self-control	
Courageousness	Flexibleness	Modesty	Self-denying	
	Forgiveness		Self-giving	

A List of Negative Character Qualities to Find

A Busybody	Coarse	Friend of the World	Jealous	Selfish
A Cop-out	Complaining	Gluttonous	Lazy	Sensual
A Doubter	Compromising	Gossiper	Legalistic	Shallow
A Drunkard	Conceited	Greedy	Libelous	Shortsighted
A Liar	Covetous	Grudging	Loves Men's	Slanderer
A Sluggard	Cowardly	Halfhearted	Praise	Stingy
A Worrier	Crafty/Sly	Harsh	Lukewarm	Stubborn
Adulterous	Cruel	Headstrong	Lusts for Power	Talkative
Angry Without	Deceitful	Humorless	Malicious	Tyrannical
Cause	Dishonest	Hypocritical	Manipulative	Unclean
Annoying	Disobedient	Idle	Murmurer	Undisciplined
Apathetic	Disrespectful	Idolatrous	Negligent	Unfair
Apostate	Doctrinally Off	Immodest	Prejudiced	Unfaithful
Argumentative	Dogmatic	Immoral	Presumptuous	Unforgiving
Arrogant	Double-minded	Impolite	Procrastinator	Ungrateful
Ashamed of Christ	Envious	Impulsive	Profane	Unkind
Backbiter	Fearful	Independent Spirit	Proud	Unreliable
Bigoted	Fears Men	Indifferent	Rebellious	Unsociable
Bitter	Fickle	Inhuman	Rejoices in Evil	Vain
Blasphemous	Flatterer	Insensitive	Reprobate	Violent
Boastful	Foolish	Insulting	Rude/Gross	Wasteful
Callous	Forgetful	Irritating	Sarcastic	Wavering
Careless	Forgets God		Scornful	Worldly
	Fornicator		Self-righteous	

1. Character Quality:	2. Opposite Quality:
3. Simple Word Study:	
4. Cross Reference Insights:	
5. Simple Biographical Study:	
6. Memory Verse(s):	
7. Situational Application: (where God wants you to work on this quality in your life)	
8. My Project:	
9. Progress Report:	

11.4 The Thematic Method of Bible Study

Method Four - The Thematic Method of Bible Study

In the thematic Method you will approach a theme within the Bible and perform a basic study of it. It is shorter than the Topical Method, which comes later in these notes, and is much less exhaustive in its scope. In a topical study you would examine each possible verse that relates to your topic of study, including each sub-theme; in a thematic study you will study only those verses that apply directly to a single theme

4.1 - Tools

4.1.1 - Study Bible

4.1.2 - Exhaustive concordance

4.1.3 - Topical Bible or cross references

4.2 - Hints

4.2.1 - Stay narrowly focused on your theme since each associated idea can lead to hundreds of additional cross references causing your simple thematic study to grow quickly into a study requiring a great deal more time and effort than you have allocated.

4.2.2 - Keep your list of questions short as some themes may have one or two hundred references associated with them which, if you have too many questions, would cause you to tire of your study even before it is complete

4.3 - Steps

Step 1 - Choose a theme to study, for your first thematic study you may wish to choose a theme that is relatively simple

Step 2 - Make a list of all the verses you intend to study using the tools described above and select from this list the verses that are most applicable, or important, to your theme

Step 3 - Decide on, and make a list of, the questions you will ask of each verse. If you have written more than five you may wish to choose from this list as five questions is generally more than sufficient for the study

Step 4 - Ask these questions of each verse in your list of step two. You may not be able to obtain an answer for each question in each verse, some verses may only answer one or two of your questions but this does not mean that your verses have been improperly chosen

Step 5 - Draw some conclusions from your study. This would include collating the notes you have made and summarizing the details of the study

Step 6 - Write out a personal application and remember to evaluate your progress.

1. Theme:	
2. List of References:	
3. Questions to be Asked: A - B - C -	D - E -
4. Answers to Questions: Scripture Reference: A - B - C - D - E - Scripture Reference: A - B - C - D - E -	Scripture Reference: A - B - C - D - E - Scripture Reference: A - B - C - D - E -
5. Conclusion(s):	6. Application/Evaluation:

11.5 The Biographical Method of Bible Study

Method Five - The Biographical Method of Bible Study

5.1 - Tools

5.1.1 - Bible

5.1.2 - Exhaustive and/or biographical concordance

5.1.3 - Topical Bible

5.1.4 - Bible dictionary or encyclopedia

5.2 - Hints

5.2.1 - Remember that the person will often be referred to by means other than his/her proper name in many passages

5.3 - Steps

Step 1 - Choose an individual from the Bible for your study. See the list below for a selection of persons from the Bible.

Step 2 - List all references concerning that person. A concordance will help if the person is referred to in the Bible by their proper name, but you may also wish to look for ambiguous references to the person (ie: Pharaoh's wife, or: the son of Zebedee).

Step 3 - Note your first impression of the person after your first reading of the passages

Step 4 - Make a chronological outline of the person's life after your second reading

Step 5 - Obtain some insights into the person after your third reading

Step 6 - Identify some character qualities after your fourth reading

Step 7 - Show how some other Bible truths are illustrated in this person's life

Step 8 - Summarize the main lesson(s) you have learned

Step 9 - Write out a personal application

Step 10 - Make your study transferable

Step 11 - Note someone with whom you will share the results of this study and commit yourself to doing this.

A Partial List of Biblical People

The three following lists include some of the major men of the Bible, the minor but important men of the Bible, and the prominent women of the Bible.

Major Men of the Bible

Abraham	Isaac	Nehemiah
Daniel	Jacob	Paul
David	Jeremiah	Peter
Elijah	Jesus	Pharaoh
Elisha	John – apostle	Samson
Ezekiel	Joseph – OT	Samuel
Ezra	Joshua	Saul – OT
Isaiah	Moses	Solomon

Important Men of the Bible

Aaron	Aquila	Herod	Kings – any	Pontius Pilate
Abel	Asa	Hezekiah	Laban	Prophets – any
Abimelech	Balaam	Hosea	Lot	Rehoboam
Abner	Barnabas	Jabez	Luke	Shamgar
Absalom	Barzillai	James	Mark	Silas
Achan	Caiaphas	Jehoshaphat	Matthew	Stephen
Adam	Caleb	Jeroboam	Melchizedek	Timothy
Ahab	Eli	Joab	Mephibosheth	Titus
Ahithophel	Esau	Job	Mordecai	Tychicus
Amos	Gehazi	John the Baptist	Naaman	Uzziah

Ananias	Gideon	Jonah	Nathan	Zechariah
Andrew	Habakkuk	Jonathan	Noah	Zedekiah
Apollos	Haggai	Judas Iscariot	Philemon	Zephaniah
Apostles – any	Haman	Judges – any	Philip	Zerubbabel

Prominent Women of the Bible

Abigail	Eunice	Mary Magdalene	Rebecca
Abishag	Eve	Mary of Bethany	Ruth
Anna	Hagar	Michal	Sapphira
Bathsheba	Hannah	Miriam	Sarah
Deborah	Jezebel	Naaman's maid	The Shunammite
Delilah	Jochebed	Naomi	Vashti
Dinah	Leah	Priscilla	Zipporah
Dorcas	Lydia	Queen of Sheba	
Elizabeth	Martha	Rachel	
Esther	Mary – Jesus' mother	Rahab	

General Questions for a Biographical Study

Here is a list of seventy questions you can use in constructing a biographical study. You shouldn't try to use every question listed here in a single study. Depending on the depth of your study and the time you have, select the questions you would like to have answered. The questions are categorized into seven major divisions for easier use. As you think of other questions, add them to this list.

Reputation

1. Who wrote what we know about this person?
2. What did people say about him/her?
3. What did his enemies say about him/her?
4. What did his/her family (wife/husband, children, brothers, sisters, parents) say about

him/her?

5. What did God say about him/her?

6. Why do you think God allowed this person to be mentioned in the Bible?

Tests of Character

1. What were his/her aims and motives?

2. What was he/she like in his home?

3. How did he/she respond to failure? Did he/she get discouraged easily?

4. How did he/she respond to adversity? Did he/she handle criticism well?

5. How did he/she respond to success? Did he/she get proud when praised?

6. How did he/she respond to the trivial and mundane things in life? Was he/she faithful in the little things?

7. How quickly did he/she praise God for the good/bad things that happened to him/her?

8. How quickly did he/she obey God when told to do something?

Background

1. What can you discover about his/her family and ancestry?

2. What does his/her name mean? Why was he/she given that name? Was it ever changed?

3. What was his/her home life like? How was he/she raised? Where was he/she raised?

4. What were the characteristics of his/her parents? Did they influence him/her?

5. Was there anything special about his/her birth?

6. Where did he/she live? What was his/her everyday life like?

7. Was he/she exposed to other cultures? Did they affect him/her in any way?

8. What was the condition of his/her country -- politically and spiritually -- during his/her lifetime?

9. What kind of training did he/she have? Did he/she have any schooling?

10. What was his/her occupation?

11. How long did he/she live? Where did he/she die? How did he/she die?

Significant Events

1. Was there any great crisis in his/her life? How did he/she handle it?

2. What are the great accomplishments for which he/she is remembered?

3. Did he/she experience a divine 'call?' How did he/she respond to it?

4. What crucial decisions did he/she have to make? How did they affect him/her? Others?

5. Did any recurring problem keep coming up in his/her life?

6. Where did he/she succeed? Where did he/she fail? Why?

7. How did the environment and circumstances affect him/her?

8. What part did he/she play in the history of God's plan?

9. Did he/she believe in the sovereignty of God (God's control over all events)?

Relationships

1. How did he/she get along with other people? Was he/she a loner? Was he/she a team person?

2. How did he/she treat other people? Did he/she use them or serve them?

3. What was his/her wife/husband like? How did she/he influence him/her/his?

4. What were his/her children like? How did they influence him/her?

5. Who were his/her close companions? What were they like? How did they influence him/her?

6. Who were his/her enemies? What were they like? How did they influence him/her?

7. What influence did he/she have on others? On his nation? On other nations?

8. Did he/she take care of his family? How did his/her children turn out?
9. Did his/her friends and family help or hinder him/her in serving the Lord?
10. Did he/she train anyone to take his place? Did he/she leave a "Timothy" (disciple) behind?

Personality

1. What type of person was he/she? What made him/her the way he/she was?
2. Was his/her temperament choleric, melancholic, sanguine, or phlegmatic?
3. What were the outstanding strengths in his/her character? What traits did he/she have?
4. Did his/her life show any development of character as time passed? Was there growth and progression there?
5. What were his/her particular faults and weaknesses?
6. What were his/her particular sins? What steps led to those sins?
7. In what area was his/her greatest battle: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, or pride of life, ...etc.?
8. What were the results of his/her sins and weaknesses?
9. Did he/she ever get the victory over his particular sins and weaknesses?
10. What qualities made him/her a success or failure?

1. Name of Bible Personality:	
2. Scripture References:	3. First Impressions (first reading):
4. Chronology (second reading):	
5. General Insights (third reading):	6. Character Qualities (fourth reading):
7. Illustrated Bible Truths:	8. Summary of Lessons Learned:
9. Personal Application/Evaluation:	
10. Transferability Concepts:	11. Person to Share this Study with (and why):

11.6 The Topical Method of Bible Study

Method Six - The Topical Method of Bible Study

Previously you encountered the Thematic Method in which you studied a narrow theme of the Bible in simple detail asking prepared questions of verses from a chosen list. With the topical study you will study a topic of the Bible, which may contain several themes, and you will not be asking prepared questions, instead you will be recording all insights you find from your study. The topical method will usually take longer than the thematic so you will want to assure yourself that sufficient time is available to at least make a significant start on the study.

6.1 - Tools

6.1.1 - Bible

6.1.2 - Exhaustive concordance and/or cross references

6.1.3 - Topical Bible

6.2 - Hints (taken from Dr. R. A. Torrey)

6.2.1 - Be systematic by listing all the concepts related to your topic, being as comprehensive as possible and study each idea individually and in systematic and logical order.

6.2.2 - Be thorough by as much as possible making a study of every verse that relates to the topic.

6.2.3 - Be exact, trying to get the exact meaning for each verse you are studying. Remember not to remove the verses from their context but use the context to help you in your study.

6.3 - Steps

Step 1 - Compile a list of words related to the topic you will study

Step 2 - Collect all references relating to each word

Step 3 - Consider each reference individually

Step 4 - Compare and group the references

Step 5 - Condense the results of your study into a brief outline

Step 6 - Conclude your study

11.7 The Word Study Method of Bible Study

Method Seven - The Word Study Method of Bible Study

7.1 - Tools

7.1.1 - Bible and several alternate translations

7.1.2 - Exhaustive concordance

7.1.3 - Bible dictionary or encyclopedia

7.1.4 - Set of word studies

7.1.5 - English dictionary

7.2 - Hints

7.2.1 - Remember that often a single word in the original language may be replaced by many different words, or even phrases, when translated into English.

7.2.2 - An exhaustive concordance such as Strong's or Young's are especially valuable for this study since they associate each discrete original word to its English translation.

7.3 - Steps

Step 1 - Choose the word you will study

Step 2 - Find its English definition in the English dictionary

Step 3 - Compare treatments of the word in the various translations

Step 4 - Note the definition of the original word (Hebrew, Greek, or Aramaic)

Step 5 - Discover just where the word is used in the Bible

7.3.5.1 - How often does it occur?

7.3.5.2 - In which books is it found?

7.3.5.3 - In which book is it used most?

7.3.5.4 - Where does the word first appear?

7.3.5.5 - Where does it first appear in the book you are studying?

7.3.5.6 - Which writers used the word?

Step 6 - Find the origin and root meaning of the word, how the word was used by the secular culture of the day

Step 7 - Determine how the word was used in the Bible and how it would have been understood in the culture to which the Bible was originally addressed

Step 8 - Write an application

A Suggested List of Key Words for the Word Study Method

Adoption	Faint	Kingdom	Name	Sanctify
Adversary	Faith	Know	Obey	Save
Apostle	Favour	Law	Passover	Servant
Atonement	Fear	Laying on of	Peace	Sin
Baptize	Fellowship	Hands	Perfect	Soul
Believe	Flesh	Life	Perish	Spirit
Bless	Good	Light	Preach	Temptation
Body	Gospel	Lord	Propitiation	Trial
Call	Grace	Love	Reconcile	Truth
Chasten	Hear	Lust	Redeem	Understand
Christ	Hell	Manifest	Remnant	Vain
Church	Holy	Marriage	Repent	Vision
Confess	Hope	Mediator	Rest	Watch
Covenant	Immanuel	Meek	Resurrection	Wisdom
Death	Iniquity	Mercy	Righteous	Witness
Disciple	Jehovah	Mind	Sabbath	Word
Everlasting	Jesus	Minister	Sacrifice	World
Evil	Judgment	Miracle	Saint	Worship
		Mystery		

1. English Word:	3. Comparison of Translations:
2. English Definition:	
4. Original Word and Short Definition(s):	
5. Occurrences in the Bible:	
6. Root Meaning and Origin:	
7. Biblical Usage:	
8. Application/Evaluation:	

11.8 The Book Background Method of Bible Study

Method Eight - The Book Background Method of Bible Study

8.1 - Tools

8.1.1 - Bible dictionary and/or bible encyclopedia

8.1.2 - Bible handbook

8.1.3 - Bible atlas

8.1.4 - Various tools that allow you to experience in your time the environment of the Biblical cultures

8.2 - Steps

Step 1 - Choose the subject or book of the Bible

Step 2 - List your reference tools so that at the end of the study you can see which were of the greatest help in your study.

Step 3 - Discover what you are able of the following:

8.2.3.1 - Who is the writer of the book

8.2.3.2 - What is the date of the book

8.2.3.3 - Where was the book written

8.2.3.4 - For whom was the book written

8.2.3.5 - Why was the book written

8.2.3.6 - How does the book fit into the Bible overall; in addition, what light can be shed on the study when the book is evaluated in the following contexts:

- Geographical setting
- Historical events, prior, occurring, or expected
- Culture of the day

- Political situation

- Anticipation of coming events or personage(s)

Step 4 - Summarize your research

Step 5 - Write out your personal application

1. Subject:	
2. a. Reference Works Used:	2. b. Usefulness:
3. Context/Background Information:	
4. Insights:	
5. Application/Evaluation:	

11.9 The Book Survey Method of Bible Study

Method Nine - The Book Survey Method of Bible Study

The Book Survey Method is the first of three methods of Bible study that, together, give you an extremely comprehensive view of each book of the Bible. These three will require the greatest effort on your part but will ultimately yield the best results when used properly. Each of the three emphasizes a different aspect of one overall process of study which are:

Survey - Method 9 - Book Survey Method - in which you will obtain a detailed overview of a particular book of the Bible

Analysis - Method 10 - Chapter Analysis Method - in which you will study everything in each chapter in great detail

Synthesis - Method 11 - Book Synthesis Method - in which you will take what you learned in the previous two study stages and put it all back together, drawing conclusions as you go and gaining an appreciation of the whole of the book.

The basic goal of the Book Survey Method is to gain a detailed understanding as to why the book was written, its context, its theme, its structure, and its content.

9.1 - Tools

9.1.1 - Bible and several additional modern translations

9.1.2 - Bible dictionary and/or Bible encyclopedia

9.1.3 - Bible handbook, such as Unger's or Halley's

9.1.4 - Old and New Testament surveys

9.1.5 - Cultural contextualization tools

9.2 - Hints

9.2.1 - If you have already done a Book Background Bible study on the book you may wish to refer to it for background information useful to you in this study

9.3 - Steps

Step 1 - Read the book following the suggestions below:

9.3.1.1 - Read through the book in one sitting. After Psalms Isaiah is the Bible's largest book and the average reader can read through it in a few hours. Reading the book in this manner gives you a good overview of its contents. For the larger books you may wish to divide it into two more manageable sections which you can then read with a break between.

9.3.1.2 - Read through the book in a recent translation so that the language usage is current and will not distract from the contents of the book.

9.3.1.3 - Read through the book as though the verse and chapter divisions are non-existent so as to get the flow of the book and the relationship of its ideas to one another.

9.3.1.4 - Read through the book several times, you will be surprised at what you notice in a second or third reading that you missed originally.

9.3.1.5 - Read through the book without referring to any external notes of any kind, it is important to concentrate upon the text of the book itself without using any interpretive device.

9.3.1.6 - Read through the book with prayer, asking God to speak to you through this study and open your eyes to the lesson(s) he/she wants you to learn.

9.3.1.7 - Read through the book with pen or pencil in hand and begin to take notes and make observations on what you are reading on the second or third time through.

Step 2 - Make notes on what you read, this step actually begins toward the end of step one. Write down your impressions of the book and important details that you discover. Use the following list to guide you:

9.3.2.1 - Is the book written in one of the following genres: Historic, poetic, prophetic, law, biographic, correspondence, narrative, etc. See the section earlier on types of literature in the Bible.

9.3.2.2 - Note your first impressions as you read the book. What do you think was the purpose of the author?

9.3.2.3 - What words does the author use frequently? What words does the author consider

important or significant?

9.3.2.4 - Is there a key verse to the book or a key statement?

9.3.2.5 - What is the literary style of the author? How does the style of writing relate to the message of the book?

9.3.2.6 - Does the author reveal his emotions? How would the readers have responded to this emotion? How do you respond to this emotion?

9.3.2.7 - Make note of what you believe to be the main theme(s) of the book. Is there a major thrust to the book?

9.3.2.8 - How is the book structured? Remember that our chapters and verses (and often our paragraphs) were all added centuries after the original authors completed their work. Around what aspects of reality (people, geography, events, time, etc.) is the book centered?

9.3.2.9 - How do people fit into the book? Are there central characters and if so what part(s) do they play in the book?

Step 3 - Do a background study of the book. In this step you will essentially be following the outline given in the Book Background Method.

Step 4 - Make a horizontal chart of the book's contents. A horizontal chart is a pictorial representation of the book on one or two sheets of paper and which allows you to visually grasp the general details of the book. Follow these steps to make a horizontal chart:

9.3.4.1 - On a single sheet of paper, or at the most two, make as many vertical columns as there are chapters in the book you are studying.

9.3.4.2 - Re-read the book and note the major divisions, usually similar to the chapter divisions though not always, and make headings relating to these divisions in as few words as possible.

9.3.4.3 - Read through the book again, yes this will be the fifth time you read the book, and think of a short title for each chapter and record them just below the divisions of the previous step, above each of the columns. Some characteristics of good titles are that they are:

- short, usually one to four words
- picturesque, helping you visualize the chapter contents
- from the text if possible
- unique and not used as chapter titles of earlier studies
- able to show where in the book the chapter falls

9.3.4.4 - Read through the book again and create a series of titles for the paragraphs

Step 5 - Make a preliminary outline of the book from all that you have done before. You are concentrating on the major points of the book as later you will be using the Book Synthesis Method in which you will make a detailed outline of the book. Some helpful points:

9.3.5.1 - Make an preliminary outline of the book, concentrating on the major points.

9.3.5.2 - Have your outline organized in sequence of descending importance. List major points first followed by the minor points.

9.3.5.3 - Use paragraphs will help with the outline as they are generally grouped around major ideas.

9.3.5.4 - Compare your outline to those done by others to see where they differ and where they are similar.

Step 6 - Write out a personal application and remember to return periodically to this step so that you can evaluate your progress.

1. Book:	Number of Chapters:	Number of Times Read:
2. Notes on the Book:		
Reference Works Used:		
3. Book Background:		
4. Horizontal Chart (use blank sheet of paper and attach):		
5. Preliminary Outline:		
6. Application/Evaluation:		

11.10 The Chapter Analysis Method of Bible Study

Method Ten - The Chapter Analysis Method of Bible Study

The Chapter Analysis Method picks up where the Book Summary Method leaves off. You now have a reasonable grasp of the overall picture of the book, what it means, why it was written, etc. and you are now able to begin to examine the individual items making up the book. The best way of subdividing a book of the Bible is to use the chapter divisions, since these are generally accurate, and to study each chapter in detail. You will examine each paragraph, sentence, and word in a detailed and systematic manner.

The Chapter Analysis Method is the second of three methods of Bible study that, together, give you an extremely comprehensive view of each book of the Bible. These three will require the greatest effort on your part but will ultimately yield the best results when used properly. Each of the three emphasizes a different aspect of one overall process of study which are:

Survey - Method 9 - Book Survey Method - in which you will obtain a detailed overview of a particular book of the Bible

Analysis - Method 10 - Chapter Analysis Method - in which you will study everything in each chapter in great detail

Synthesis - Method 11 - Book Synthesis Method - in which you will take what you learned in the previous two study stages and put it all back together, drawing conclusions as you go and gaining an appreciation of the whole of the book.

10.1 - Tools

10.1.1 - Bible and several additional modern translations

10.1.2 - Bible dictionary and/or Bible encyclopedia

10.1.3 - Bible handbook, such as Unger's or Halley's

10.1.4 - Old and New Testament surveys

10.1.5 - Cultural contextualization tools

10.2 - Steps

Step 1 - Create a chapter summary. First read the chapter several times over, making some general observations on the chapter as a whole. Once you have completed this process describe the content of the chapter, summarizing it in one of the following ways:

10.2.1 - Paraphrase the chapter, rephrasing it in your own words in such a way that you could read it to an other person in a way that they would understand.

10.2.2 - Outline the chapter, following the internal paragraph divisions of the chapter. Give each paragraph a heading and place the subpoints of the paragraph beneath.

10.2.3 - Rewrite the chapter leaving out all modifying clauses and phrases. You would write out the chapter using just the subjects, verbs, and objects.

Step 2 - Note your observations and insights. Look at every detail of the chapter, examining each sentence and word, and writing down everything you see. Refer to the section on the OICA approach to Bible study involving observation for some assistance in this step. On the following page you will also find a list of things to look for in a Bible passage.

Step 3 - Ask detailed questions of the chapter. Write upon the form each question you ask even if you cannot find an answer for it now. The time may come when you do find an answer to the question in an other study and be able then to place it here as well. Be sure to note any difficulties you have with the passage so that you can research them in the future. Refer to the list below to help you find answers to your questions:

10.2.3.1 - Observe the context of the passage, refer to step two of the Book Survey Method for assistance here.

10.2.3.2 - Define the words and phrases used so that you have the correct meaning of the structural components of the passage.

10.2.3.3 - The structure and grammar of a passage is of benefit to help you to understand the flow of ideas and concepts within the passage so that you can see them in relation to each other.

10.2.3.4 - Use other translations to see if their use of English is more understandable.

10.2.3.5 - Try to view the passage against its background (historic, cultural, geographic,

economic, social, current events, etc.). Use your Bible dictionary or encyclopedia to obtain this information.

10.2.3.6 - See what other passages in the Bible say about the concepts covered within this chapter. This is actually done more thoroughly in step four.

10.2.3.7 - If all other means have failed refer to a commentary and compare your interpretation of the passage with that of the commentator.

Step 4 - Correlate your chapter with other Bible passages. See step seven of the Chapter Summary Method for help on using cross references.

Step 5 - Make a list of some possible applications. You will not be attempting to apply all that you write here, you are making a list for future reference and from which, in step seven, you will choose one application to work into your life.

Step 6 - Formulate and make note of some conclusions. After reviewing the first five steps of this study write down your conclusions on the chapter. You may discover additional information during this step which you should also note.

Step 7 - Write out one application from the list you compiled in step five. Be sure that it is practical and that it is applicable to your life. Remember to return to your written application in the near future so that you can evaluate your progress.

What to Look for in a Chapter Analysis Study

Listed here in brief form are 30 items to look for in your observation part of the Chapter Analysis Method:

1. Ask the six vital observation questions: What? Who? Where? When? Why? How?
2. Look for key words.
3. Look for repeated words and phrases.
4. Look for questions being asked.
5. Look for answers being given.

6. Look for commands.
7. Look for warnings.
8. Look for comparisons - things that are alike.
9. Look for contrasts - things that are different.
10. Look for illustrations.
11. Look for causes and effects and reasons for doing things.
12. Look for promises and their conditions for fulfillment.
13. Look for progression from the general to the specific.
14. Look for progression from the specific to the general.
15. Look for steps of progression in a narrative or biography.
16. Look for lists of things.
17. Look for results.
18. Look for advice, admonitions, and attitudes.
19. Look for the tone of the passage - emotional atmosphere.
20. Look for connectives, articles, and prepositions.
21. Look for explanations.
22. Look for Old Testament quotes in the New Testament.
23. Look for the literary form.
24. Look for paradoxes.
25. Look for emphasis through the use of space - proportion.
26. Look for planned exaggerations or hyperboles.
27. Look at the grammatical construction of each sentence.

28. Look for the use of the current events of the times.

29. Look for the force of the verbs.

30. Look for anything unusual or unexpected.

The above are just a few of the things you can look for in your observation step in your Bible study. Don't let this long list discourage you. You shouldn't try to do each one of the suggested items. It will take time for you to get into the habit of seeing more and more things in the text. The more you practice observing, the more alert you will become. So remember: look, search, observe, then write your findings down!

Chapter:	Chapter Title:
1. Chapter Summary:	
2, 3, 4, 5 - See Next Sheet	
6. Conclusions:	
7. Personal Application/Evaluation:	

11.11 The Book Synthesis Method of Bible Study

Method Eleven - The Book Synthesis Method of Bible Study

In the Book Synthesis Method we will summarize and condense the lessons learned previously. The word synthesis indicates the putting together of the discrete items that together compose a whole; thus in the Book Synthesis Method we will put back together the details we extracted from the book through our previous two studies.

The Book Synthesis Method is the last of three methods of Bible study that, together, give you an extremely comprehensive view of each book of the Bible. These three will require the greatest effort on your part but will ultimately yield the best results when used properly. Each of the three emphasizes a different aspect of one overall process of study which are:

Survey - Method 9 - Book Survey Method - in which you will obtain a detailed overview of a particular book of the Bible

Analysis - Method 10 - Chapter Analysis Method - in which you will study everything in each chapter in great detail

Synthesis - Method 11 - Book Synthesis Method - in which you will take what you learned in the previous two study stages and put it all back together, drawing conclusions as you go and gaining an appreciation of the whole of the book.

11.1 - Tools

11.1.1 - Bible and several additional modern translations

11.1.2 - Bible dictionary and/or Bible encyclopedia

11.1.3 - Bible handbook, such as Unger's or Halley's

11.1.4 - Old and New Testament surveys

11.1.5 - Cultural contextualization tools

11.2 - Hints

11.2.1 - Have the results of both your Book Survey Method and your Chapter Analysis Method

available and complete, you will need to refer to them frequently during this study.

11.3 - Steps

Step 1 - Reread the book several times in the same manner as you did in the Book Survey method

Step 2 - Write out a detailed, final, outline using the preliminary outline from your Book Survey and the passage summaries from your Chapter Analysis. These, when coupled with your current readings, will allow you to put this outline in its final form.

Step 3 - Write down a descriptive book title using the same methods by which you gave titles to each section in your Chapter Analysis. The title should be original and define the contents of the book in as few words as possible.

Step 4 - Make a summary of your insights. You will here summarize the major and minor themes as well as the conclusions of the book as you discovered them in the previous two studies. Avoid commentaries for the moment as you are attempting to arrive at your own understanding of the Bible. Feel free to add new ideas you have discovered during the readings in step one.

Step 5 - Write out a personal application. Review all applications listed in your Book Survey and Chapter Analysis studies, noting any which you have not yet completed and making definite plans to complete them in the near future if not immediately. If all are complete select other potential applications and make plans to implement these in your life as soon as possible.

Step 6 - Share the results of your study with other. The Christian faith is unique in that each of us is individually saved through Christ Jesus, yet our carrying out of that faith is best done in a community of believers. Time and again we as Christians are referred to in the New Testament as the Body of Christ and we are encouraged to build each other up in the faith:

Ephesians 4:11-16 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the

knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

One of the ways in which the building up other Christians takes place is to share with them what you have learned of God, be it through Bible studies such as this or illuminations from the Holy Spirit.

11.12 The Verse by Verse Method of Bible Study

Method Twelve - The Verse by Verse Method of Bible Study

In the Verse by Verse Method you will select a passage of the Bible and examine it in great detail, asking questions of it, finding cross references to it, and paraphrasing each verse within it. The Verse by Verse Bible study concludes with your obtaining a practical, personal application for each verse in the study.

12.1 - Tools

12.1.1 - Bible

12.1.2 - Cross references

12.1.3 - Exhaustive concordance

12.1.4 - Bible dictionary and/or encyclopedia

12.1.5 - Word studies

12.2 - Hints

12.2.1 - If you are short on time you can do this study without the reference tools above, except for the Bible of course.

12.3 - Steps

Step 1 - Write out each verse of the passage in your own words, striving for accuracy and not referring to other paraphrases except by way of example. You are attempting to put the passage into your own words, not into the words of an other person.

Step 2 - List any questions you have on any verse in your study, note any answers you are able to find, and record any observations you have made on that verse. Do this for each verse in the study. It may be helpful for you to indicate questions, answers, and observations with the letters Q, A, or O so that each will be easier to find upon returning to the study at other times.

Step 3 - Find some cross references for each verse, trying for at least one for each verse, and

indicate if the reference is for a specific word, phrase, or concept within that verse.

Step 4 - For each verse note any insights you have found in your study.

Step 5 - Write a brief personal application for each verse or, failing that, make note of some devotional thought to which you may return in a Devotional Bible study and build upon it.

Verse from Bible:	
1. Personal Paraphrase:	
2. Questions, Answers, and Observations:	
3. Cross References:	
4. Insights:	
5. Practical Personal Applications:	

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Index

- A -

Application 86

- B -

Biographical Method 107
Book Background Method 120
Book Survey Method 123
Book Synthesis Method 135

- C -

Chapter Analysis Method 128
Chapter Summary Method 95
Character Quality Method 99
Complete Equivalence 18
Correlation 86

- D -

Devotional Method 92
Dynamic Equivalence 19

- E -

Epistles 58

- F -

Figures of Speech 70

- G -

Genealogy 59
Genre - Epistles 58
Genre - Figures of Speech 70
Genre - Genealogy 59
Genre - Letters 58
Genre - Narrative 57
Genre - Poetry 55

Genre - Prophecy 60
Genre - Symbols 66
Genre - Types 68
Genre - Wisdom Literature 57

- I -

Interpretation 84

- K -

Knowledge of God 26
Knowledge of Self 27
Knowledge of Truth 29

- L -

Letters 58

- M -

Meditation 88
Method - Biographical 107
Method - Book Background 120
Method - Book Survey 123
Method - Book Synthesis 135
Method - Chapter Analysis 128
Method - Chapter Summary 95
Method - Character Quality 99
Method - Devotional 92
Method - Thematic 104
Method - Topical 114
Method - Verse by Verse 139
Method - Word Study 117

- N -

Narrative 57

- O -

Observation 83

- P -

Paraphrase 19
Poetry 55
Prophecy 60

- S -

Symbols 66

- T -

The Book Survey Method 91
The Book Synthesis Method 91
The Verse by Verse Method 91
Thematic Method 104
Topical Method 114
Translation - English Standard Version (ESV) 24
Translation - Green's Literal Translation (LIT) 24
Translation - King James Version (KJV) 23
Translation - New American Standard Bible (NASB) 23
Translation - New International Version (NIV) 24
Translation - World English Bible (WEB) 25
Translation - Young's Literal translation (YLT) 24
Types 68

- V -

Verse by Verse Method 139

- W -

Wisdom Literature 57
Word Study Method 117

