

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

76.3 How Can I Profitably Study the Bible by Myself?

Part III

Scripture: Revelation 19:1-9; Acts 17:10-12

I have in mind to begin by asking you to exercise your imagination. Let us make believe that a person has come to visit us this morning who originated in one of the remote parts of the world. Our guest has come to know that there is a certain book which is read by many and is called the Bible. Our imaginary friend is intelligent and literate. There is also a great desire to know what the Bible contains and why it is so important to mankind. We are pressed to respond. What are we able to tell our guest? What do we feel the Bible has to say to such a person?

Well, the first thing we can say is that the Bible was written by men, but, it was authored by God. Men long ago put the words into writing. The words even reflect their individuality. The English word "inspiration" means "in-breathed." In mysterious fashion God breathed into the minds of select men the Scriptural utterances which means that the Bible is the product of the Divine mind. The expression, "Thus saith the Lord" appears 359 times in the Bible. The exact process by which God used human beings to transmit His message in writing is not understood, the fact that it happened is believed. A concise and accurate estimate of these proceedings is recorded in Revelation 19:9 which reads, "*These are the true sayings of God.*" We have taken for granted the Divine authorship of Scripture in this series dealing with a profitable study of Scripture.

The second thing we might tell our guest regarding the Bible is that it was written to be studied and understood by all people. If these are the true sayings of God, we had better be aware of them and what they mean. One very helpful method of Bible study lays a great deal of stress upon observation. Involved are the efforts to recognize, analyze, perceptualize, summarize and personalize. This is known as the inductive approach to the study of Scripture which simply means there is a great deal of input on the part of the student. Here not one can be considered a Bible student who handles the Bible in a haphazard way. This whole series is devoted to the thesis that the Bible can be studied effectively in an

inductive way, to the conviction that the deeper things of Scripture are not for the select few. Rather, they are available for those who seek and search.

V. FIVE STEPS ARE BASIC TO THE INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY METHOD:

1. Study to Recognize What Is Actually Being Said:

The first step is to recognize or to be mindful of what is there. In Acts 17:11 we read, *“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so.”* We note that these early believers searched the Scriptures. The Revised Version has it, *“examining the Scriptures.”* The word translated searched or examining is a particularly meaningful word. It means to investigate and to concentrate upon. It has to do with the most careful inquiry.

The verse concludes with the words, *“whether those things were so.”* How often I have asked myself what those things were. The reference may have to do with the Jewish leaders. They had in the synagogue copies of the Pentateuch and writings of the prophets and some of the Psalms. It therefore became their daily practice to find in Scripture the answers to those questions being put to them by the crowds which heard the message of Paul and Silas. What they did was to inquire as to the exact teaching of those Scriptures, to discern what the Scriptures actually said. It is to their credit that they did seek to use the writings to support conclusions which had already been reached, or to study to make the Bible say what they wanted to say. They came to Scripture to recognize what God had already said.

A very successful business man said to a Christian leader, “Tell me in a single word how to study the Bible.” The answer came, “It is a pretty big contract to tell a person in a single word how to study the Bible, but if I must put it into one word, this is the word, thoughtfully. Study the Bible thoughtfully. Give your whole attention to the Bible as you study it.” Thinking 'is hard work, but it is essential in profitable Bible study. People who write books which deal with principles of education have much to say about methods which break down because of a lack of reflection. The first step in the inductive approach is to read so as to recognize what is being said. At this point we are not thinking about interpretation or understanding, our concern is to note with care the words themselves.

One of the approaches the reformers of the 16th century brought to Scripture was that of grammatical exegesis. **Exegesis** means getting out of Scripture what is actually there; its opposite is **Eisegesis** which is reading into the text what one would want to see there. The term **grammatico** refers to grammar. It was their feeling that grammatical analysis was very important in finding plain meaning from plain passages as well as from those passages which are not so clear. We need to develop the habit of observing carefully the words before us. Sometimes we may see words which are not even there. Other times we may not see the words which are before us. Recognition has to do with taking careful and thorough notice. It is undivided attention to what one sees, it is being mentally aware of what is there and what is not there. Perhaps a few illustrations from Scripture will help us to realize the importance of recognition.

Not a few times have people made reference to the Bible as teaching that money is the root of all evil. The fact of the matter is that the Bible does not say that. What it does say is that the love of money is the root of all evil. (I Timothy 6:10) People are all the time telling us that Jonah was swallowed by a whale whereas the Bible clearly states that it was a great fish the Lord prepared. (Jonah 1:17) One particular alleged inconsistency skeptics have often made has to do with the words placed on the cross of Christ at the time of crucifixion. Matthew 27:37 states, *"This is Jesus the King of the Jews."* Mark 15:26 reads, *"The King of the Jews."* Luke 23:38 records, *"This is the King of the Jews."* And John 19:19 reads, *"Jesus of Nazareth, the King Of the Jews."* Here we have different wording which quite obviously has reference to the same inscription. The problem is irresolvable unless one goes to the Scriptures to note exactly what is being said. John 19:20 tells us there were actually three inscriptions, in Hebrew, Latin and Greek. It is possible that they were each slightly different. Luke may have combined them. Or it is possible that the complete inscription was, "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" and each gospel writer recorded a portion of it. Each writer would have been correct in what he said. The first step in an inductive study is to recognize what is there.

2. Study to Analyze What Is Actually Being Said:

Having given ourselves to the difficult task of recognizing what it is that the Bible has said, we are now in a position to seek an understanding concerning certain facts having to do with the text. It was the English author, Aldous

Huxley, who said, "I sat down before the facts as a little child." He sought to inquire concerning the information before him. What kind of information might we seek with a given passage of Scripture before us? There are several questions which come to mind. Rudyard Kipling has a four line quotation from *Traina* which may serve as a guide at this point. "I have six faithful serving men, Who taught me all I know. Their names are What and Where and When And How and Why and Who?"

In answer to these questions a synthetic approach to Scripture is helpful. Bible synthesis is the putting together of information and facts to form a whole. It is to synthesize the contents of the Bible. Survey is another word which is used to give the proper perspective to a particular passage. Jesus used this method when he talked to the discouraged disciples who were on their way home across the hills of Judea following his crucifixion. With their dream over all these men had left were memories. Unexpectedly, they were joined along the weary road by a companion. "*Ought not Christ to have suffered?*" He asked them. Then, "*beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.*" What Jesus did as they walked the dusty road was to give a survey of those many Scriptures in order that those broken men might gain a new perspective. It gave them a direction. There is great value in seeing the Bible as a whole and, in particular, the book from which we might be reading. Seeing the book as a whole will enable one to better understand the where, what, when, how, why and who of the passage. It is at this point that certain tools will prove helpful. The following outline and introduction to the Book of Hebrews is given as an example of the material which can be gleaned from Bible dictionaries, handbooks, encyclopedias. Books on introduction are more complete. Thiessen's **New Testament Introduction** is a classic, and Ungerts **Introductory Guide to the Old Testament** is also a good source of information.

I. Introduction to Hebrews

A. Circumstances

1. Failure of Christians to rest completely in Christ. 6:9-12; 9:13-14; 10:22, 35-36
2. Wavering of certain Jews between acceptance and rejection. 2:3; 10:25, 26-31; 12:4; 4:11; 6:4-6 10:26-31

- 3. Day of doom for Jews. 2:3; 3:17-4:2; 4:11
- B. **Theme:** The Superiority of Jesus Christ. 1:1-4; 3:33 4:14; 5:5-6
- C. **Key Word:** Faith (32 times) 4:2; 10:22, 38; Chapter 11 - 24 times.
- D. **Key Verse:** 7:25
- E. **Date:** Probably between 63 & 68 A.D. (Before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in A.D. 70) 8:4-5; 9:25; 10:11)
- F. **Author:** Unknown for certain
 - 1. Many suggest Paul - 10:38 with Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11
 - 2. Some see a collaboration - the use of "we" in 5:11, 6:3, 13:18

II. Outline of Hebrews

- A. **Book of the Superiority of Jesus Christ** (1:4; 3:3; 5:6; etc) Here, the person of our Lord Jesus Christ (1:2-4; 3:1; 4:14; etc) and His work (7:25; 9:14, 23-24; 10:14), are presented for faith to discern (2:9) and to appropriate (10:19,22-23, 38; 12:1-2).
- B. **The Person of Jesus Christ** - Ch. 1-4
 - 1. Better than prophets - 1:1-3
 - 2. Better than angels - 1:4-2:18
 - 3. Better than Moses- Ch. 3
 - 4. Better than Joshua - 4:1-13
 - 5. Our Great High Priest, the Son of God - 4:14-16
- C. **The Work of Jesus Christ** - 5:1-10:18
 - 1. His priesthood of a higher order than that of Aaron 5:1-7:28
 - 2. He mediates a better covenant - 8:1-10:18 (8:2, 6-8)
- D. **Our Responsibility to Trust Him** - 10:19-13:25
 - 1. Exhortation to full confidence in Him - 10:19, 22, 11:40,
 - 2. Exhortation to run our race with patience - Ch.12: 1-4, 11).
 - 3. Exhortation to love, faith, worship, prayer, etc. Ch.13: 1, 5-6, 15-16, 18)

From the introduction and outline we have been able to discern the time of writing, the who of the book the what in reference to events contrasts,

admonitions, and what certain people did. We are able to note how the message ends and why the characters acted and responded the way they did. With this synthetic understanding of the Book of Hebrews we are able to analyze more accurately the particular passage that we are studying. The background material will prove very helpful in our coming to interpret the meaning.

3. Study to Perceptualize What Is Actually Being Said:

Perception is the ability to become aware of something. It has to do with understanding. As far as studying the Bible is concerned, it is the act of interpretation. To interpret means to understand and to explain the meaning of something. A very important aspect of interpretation is that of illumination. This is the Holy Spirit's enlightenment of the believer's mind to assist him in the understanding of the Scripture. It is the privilege primarily of believers although the Holy Spirit is also at work in this way to enlighten the mind of the unbeliever to understand and appreciate the Gospel. The amount of illumination in the believer's experience is governed by a number of factors. Sin, unyieldedness and immaturity greatly hamper the Holy Spirit's work of illumination. (I Corinthians 3:1-3) The reason some believers have little or no insight into Scripture is because they are carnal. There is a danger in categories but I suppose it is allowable to think of degrees of carnality and degrees of spirituality. Christians do differ in their ability to interpret the Bible. Illumination is an important factor in arriving at an accurate interpretation of a passage.

However, it is not the only factor. Others have to do with intellect, educational advantages, ability to make critical judgments and skills in the use of hermeneutical principles. We will consider these important principles in our next study. It is important to note that as believers we are to pray for illumination (Psalm 119:18) and to allow the Word to correct our hearts, minds, and manner of living. (Psalm 139:23-24)

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