

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

By Dr. Albert Grimes

We are constantly being asked this question by those who want to really study the Bible, not only study it, but teach it in such a way that others also can be led into a real understanding of the Bible.

In this study we will outline a method of studying the Bible that we feel will be able to help believers study their Bible and rightly divide it.

The first principle that every believer should understand about the Bible relates to three things:

1. The first thing we should understand is that God wrote the Bible. It is God's instructions to the Jews, Gentiles and the Church. That it contains God's complete plan and purpose regarding the redemption of all three mentioned, 2 Timothy 3:16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.
2. Those who know God and desire to follow Him and understand His Word and teach His Word, are exhorted to study it as in 2 Timothy 2:15 Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed rightly dividing the word of truth.
3. Why we should study it is further brought out in 2 Timothy 3:16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. Then 2 Timothy 2:15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Now let us consider the full truth of what these scriptures say. That all that the believer needs to completely be instructed in all areas of Christian truth is a complete study of the Bible alone. If the believer desires to enter into all that Redemption's Plan has for him, or her, they must study the Bible. If they desire to expound the Bible to others, and always be up to date in present truth, that they never need to be ashamed, they need to study the Bible.

There are many kinds of helps relating to Bible study, but we will be better able to use them after we have, to some degree, mastered the Bible itself.

Another principle is that we who desire to teach others should understand that the first purpose of Bible Study is related to teaching ourselves. If the Bible cannot speak to us first, we will never make it speak to others.

METHODS OF STUDYING THE BIBLE

The Bible is a book of books. Sixty-six books make up the one book. The Writers, forty-four in number, writing through twenty centuries have produced a perfect harmony of doctrine, relating to the whole plan and purpose of God.

The separate books may be regarded as chapters and each book is complete in itself. Each book must be studied in the light of its own theme because each book has a distinct theme, and it can be named according to that theme.

For example, Genesis is the Book of Beginnings, Exodus relates to Deliverance, Leviticus to holiness. Matthew is Christ the King and the Kingdom. Acts is the First Century Missions. Romans is the Gospel of God. Corinthians is Christian Conduct, and Revelation is the Consummation.

These books of the Bible fall into five great divisions and Christ is the one theme as stated in Luke 24:25 Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: 26 Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? 27 And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

These Five Divisions are:

1. Preparation: Old Testament
2. Manifestation: Gospels
3. Propagation: Acts
4. Explanation: Epistles
5. Consummation: Revelation

THE FIRST METHOD OF BIBLE STUDY

The first method of Bible study is that of learning to divide the Bible. We should understand that dividing the Bible is of the uttermost importance. It will save us from getting into many forms of error. We must then learn and understand that the Bible is first divided into ages. There are five Ages in the Bible giving us a broad base of division.

Outside of earth's time, the scripture mentions two ages, the Alpha or Creative Ages, and after Earth's time, the Omega Ages, or Endless Ages.

The Earth's time began in Genesis 1:14 when the sun, moon and stars became earth's time recorders. During earth's time there are three ages spoken of:

1. The Creative Ages: Genesis 1:1 from the creation of the earth to earth's judgment in Genesis 1:2. Then the period of reconditioning, a period of six days. The creation of the earth and its judgments relate to the Alpha ages outside of time.
2. The Antediluvian Age: The word Antediluvian means before the flood. This age began in Genesis 1:26 at man's creation, until the flood of Genesis 7:24.
3. The Present Age: This age began after the flood and will last to the Revelation of Christ in Matthew 24:29-30, when He comes to set up His Kingdom.
4. The Kingdom Age: Beginning at Revelation 20:5-7, lasts one thousand years and ends at the burning over of this present earth, 2 Peter 3:10-13.
5. The final or Eternal Ages: Begins after 2 Peter 3:10-13 and ends the dispensations, Ephesians 1:10 of the fullness of times, with the New Earth of Revelation 21:1. Then the Omega ages continue throughout eternity.

A careful study of these ages and what events took place within them gives us our first broad divisions of God's eternal Word.

Having now our broad base of our Bible Outline, we can now begin to fill in the events which took place between these ages. These events which took place between these Ages are called Dispensations.

THE DISPENSATIONS BETWEEN THE AGES

These dispensations all deal with man's time from Genesis 1:14. In the Antediluvian age which was the first Age in man's time, there are two other Bible periods which are called Dispensations. A Dispensation relates to a revelation of God's dealing with man.

Two Dispensations existed in this Age: The Dispensation of Innocence, from Genesis 1:26 to Genesis 3:24, relating to man's period of innocence until his fall.

Then the Dispensation of Conscience: Genesis 3:24, until the flood, Genesis 7:24. In this period man was guided by his conscience.

The Present Age has in it four of these Dispensations: The Dispensation of Human Government, Genesis 9, until Genesis 11:9, and the Dispensation of the Nations.

Then after the Dispensation of Promise from Genesis 12 to Exodus 1:1-5, when Israel became slaves in Egypt.

Then the Dispensation of Law from Exodus 20 until the cross of Christ in John 19:18. It was at the cross when the Law was abolished, Ephesians 2:15.

Then the Dispensation of Grace: From the cross to the Rapture of the Church, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. We live in this dispensation towards its end. Now we can understand just how much of God's purposes are now completed.

Then the Dispensation of the Kingdom: This period is an Age as well as being a Dispensation, beginning at Revelation 20:1-7, and ending in the same scripture spoken of.

Now to fill in further between these Ages and Dispensations, there are lesser periods of time, which are called Parenthetical Periods.

These are the flood between Conscience and Human Government, the Children of Israel in Egypt between Promise and the Law, then the Tribulation between Grace and the Kingdom.

The burning over of the earth in 2 Peter 3:10-13 takes place while the White Throne Judgment takes place in heaven, Revelation 20:11-14. This period of these two events is between the Kingdom and the New Heaven and the New Earth, Revelation 21:1. Then the eternal Ages begin.

This then is the complete division of the Bible into its Ages, Dispensations, and Parenthetical periods. Thousands of so called Bible Teachers, because they refused to accept this principle of Bible Division, have gone into error. So without this principle outline of the Bible no one can rightly divide the Word of God.

THE STUDY OF THEMES

Throughout all these Ages and Dispensations issue forth like streams and rivers, what is known as Thematic teachings or doctrines.

We must study these doctrines, finding the source of each one, in whatever Age or Dispensation. Sometimes these doctrines begin in the early ages or dispensations. When we understand these doctrines and their beginnings, we know then where to begin our study of them. We will never make the mistake of looking for or trying to teach certain doctrines from the Old Testament dispensations, if we know that they were not revealed in those periods.

These main streams must be studied and understood before we can expect to study and teach the Books of the Bible.

HOW TO STUDY THE THEMES OF THE BIBLE

Christ is the main theme or doctrine of the Bible. This is pointed out in Hebrews 6:1 Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God.

This is also pointed out in Luke 24:25-27 as Jesus related the principles of scripture concerning Himself. These themes of Christ have their beginnings in the Redeemer, Genesis 3:15, His first Advent, Isaiah 7:14, His second Advent, Deuteronomy 30:3, the theme of the Church, Acts 1:12-15, Ephesians 2:14-22, the theme of Israel, Genesis 12, the theme of the Nations, Genesis 10:1-32.

After these main streams of truth have been studied, all the other doctrines or themes relating to the Word of God must also be studied to fill in the broad outline of Ages and Dispensations.

In order to teach themes or doctrines, we must learn now to place complete scriptures together to produce a theme, or a doctrine. This type of teaching must be mastered by all who expect to teach the Bible.

In this type of teaching we refer the student to the Summaries in the Schofield Bible. There are about seventy-three summary footnotes already set out.

The student of the Bible can profit from the work of other good teachers and use them to much profit.

Never try as a Bible Teacher to become original. Why labor to try and produce themes, when others have successfully produced them. You can always change what you do not agree with when you become capable of doing so.

In this producing of a theme, collect together scriptures relating to the theme, beginning, if the theme begins there, from the Old Testament through to the New Testament. This method of collecting verses can be accomplished by using a Concordance, or as we have stated from Summaries from other sources.

After you have all your verses collected, then go over them and place them in order, in order that you can teach them.

In this part of the study it is necessary to set forth a group of gathered scriptures on the subject of “Physical Death”: Hebrews 9:27, Genesis 3:19, Romans 5:12-14, Habakkuk 2:5, Luke 16:23, Revelation 6:9,10, Job 19:25, 1 Corinthians 15:51,52, Genesis 5:24, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, Philippians 3:20,21, 1 Thessalonians 4:14,18, 2 Corinthians 5:1-8, 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 2 Peter 1:13-15, Philippians 1:23, 1 Thessalonians 4:13,14.

As these scriptures are carefully studied they will produce an outline that will divide the theme in order. Notice that certain verses will inform us of certain aspects of the theme dealt with. These different aspects will produce for us our Headlines, or sub-points of the theme.

These same verses can now be laid out in the following order:

PHYSICAL DEATH

Hebrews 9:27, read as introduction.

1. Physical Death is a consequence of sin, Genesis 3:19.
2. The Universality of death proves the universality of sin, Romans 5:12-14.
3. Physical Death affects the Body only, and is not the end of existence or of consciousness, Habakkuk 2:5, Luke 16:23, Revelation 6:9,10.
4. All physical death ends in the resurrection of the body, Job 19:25,26, for the righteous, 1 Corinthians 15:52.
5. Because Physical Death is a consequence of sin, yet all saints will not die, Genesis 5:24, 1 Corinthians 15:51,52, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17.
6. Physical Death has for the Christian a peculiar qualification. It is called sleep, because his body may be awakened at any time the Lord comes, Philippians 3:20,21, 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18.
7. The soul and the spirit live independently of the death of the body, which is described as a “Tabernacle” or “Tent” in which the “I” dwells, which may be put off, 2 Corinthians 5:1-8. Compare 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 2 Peter 1:13-15.
8. At the Believer’s death his spirit is at once with the Lord, and his body awaits the resurrection at the return of Christ, 2 Corinthians 5:1-8, Philippians 1:23, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17.

Again, “The Resurrection Summary”: 1 Corinthians 15:52, Genesis 22:5, with Hebrews 11:19, Job 19:25-27, Isaiah 26_19, Daniel 12:2,13, Hosea 13:14, 2 Kings 4:32-35, 13-21, Matthew 9:25, Luke 7:12-15, John 11:43-44, John 10:18, Luke 24_1-8, Matthew 27:52,53, Acts 9:36-41, 20:9-10, John 5:28,29, 1 Corinthians 15:22,23, 37-53, 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17, Revelation 20_4-15, Isaiah 26:16-21, Daniel 12:1-3, Philippians 3:21,21, Romans 8:23, Ephesians 1:13,14, John 5:29.

The outline as given by this collection of scriptures can be set forth in the following manner:

THE RESURRECTION

1 Corinthians 15:52

1. The resurrection from the dead was believed by the Patriarchs, Genesis 22:5, with Hebrews 11:19, Job 19:25-27.
2. It was revealed through the Prophets, Isaiah 26:19, Daniel 12:2,13, Hosea 13:14.
3. Miracles of the dead restored to life are recorded in the Old Testament, 2 Kings 4:32-35, 13:21.
4. Jesus restored life to the dead, Matthew 9:25, Luke 7:12-15, John 11:43,44, and predicted His own resurrection, John 10:18, Luke 24:1-8.
5. A resurrection of bodies followed the resurrection of Christ, Matthew 27:52,53.

6. The Apostles raised the dead, Acts 9:36-41, 20:9,10.
7. Two resurrections are yet future, which relate to all that are in the graves, John 5:28.
8. These are distinguished as the first resurrection, which is one of life, John 5:28,29, 1 Corinthians 15:22,23, 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17, Revelation 20:4-6.
9. A second resurrection, which is one of damnation, that is judgment, John 5:28,29, Revelation 20:5,6, 11-13.
10. These resurrections are separated by a period of one thousand years, Revelation 20:5.
11. The first resurrection, that unto life, will occur at the Second Coming of Christ, 1 Corinthians 15:23. The Believers of the Church Age will meet Him in the air, 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17.
12. The Martyrs of the Tribulation, being raised at Christ's return at the Revelation of Christ, Revelation 20:4, to set up the Kingdom.
13. Old Testament saints will likewise share in the first resurrection, 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17, 1 Corinthians 15:51-53.
14. Others teach that it is more harmonious with the Old Testament scriptures as in Isaiah 26:16-21, Daniel 12:1-3, to include the Old Testament saints with those who rise after the Tribulation than with the Church, Revelation 20:4-6.
15. The mortal body will be related to the resurrection body as grain sown is related to the harvest, 1 Corinthians 15:37,38.
16. The resurrection body will be incorruptible, glorious, powerful, and spiritual, 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 49.
17. The bodies of living believers will at the same time be instantaneously changed, 1 Corinthians 15:5-53, Philippians 3:20,21.
18. This change of the living and the resurrection of the dead in Christ is called the redemption of the body, Romans 8:23, compare Ephesians 1:13,14.
19. After the thousand years, the resurrection unto judgment, John 5:29, will occur. The resurrection of the bodies of the wicked dead is not described in much detail, Revelation 20:13,14. They will be judged according to their works and will be cast into the Lake of Fire, Revelation 20:7-15.

It is necessary then to make a study of summary teaching and this will give us the basics for expository teaching of Books.

In expository teaching we are constantly coming in contact with doctrine, and as we have said, summary teaching will help us to master these doctrines which we will need in our expository teaching of Bible Books.

EXPOSITORY TEACHING OF THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

In this kind of teaching, after we have mastered the broad divisions of the Bible, and the different doctrines or themes, now we are ready to enter into expository teaching, the expounding of the books of the Bible in their divisions, and chapters and verses.

It must be understood that this method of Bible teaching is the last form of Bible teaching, yet it is the most important, and very few teaching ministries move into this type of teaching because they do not have the basic background to do so.

The word "expository" means a setting forth the meaning or purpose of the book. It is also a verse by verse explanation of the purpose of the whole book.

THE STUDYING OF THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

Each book has its own theme, and each book is divided into chapters, and each chapter has a theme. Each book has an author, a date when written, a history or purpose for its being written, and an introduction. All these must be carefully dealt with before entering into the teaching of the book.

FINDING AN OUTLINE FOR THE BOOK

We must understand that the better our outline is, the better able will we be to teach the book, because in the outline is hidden the purpose and the method of teaching the book.

There are many books from which we can get our outlines: The Schofield Bible, Thompson Chain Reference Bible, The New Testament Survey by Tenney, or a Bible Dictionary.

Example: The First Book of the Corinthians

The Epistle may be divided as follows:

Introduction: The believer's standing in grace through Christ: Chapter 1:1-9

1. Divisions in the Corinthian Church: Chapter 1:10 through 4:21.
2. Immorality Rebuked and Discipline Commanded: Chapters 5:1-6:8.
3. The Sanctity of the Body, Christian Marriage: Chapters 6:9-7:40.
4. Things Offered to Idols: Limitations of Christian Liberty: Chapter 8:1-11:1.
5. Christian Order and the Lord's Supper: Chapter 11:2-34.
6. Spiritual Gifts and their use in Love: Chapter 12:1-14:40.
7. The Resurrection of the Dead: Chapter 15.

Conclusion: Instruction and Personal Greetings: Chapter 16.

The completed form of this same outline, including its chapter divisions, is further brought forth:

Introduction: The believer's standing in grace through Christ: Chapter 1:1-9

1. Divisions in the Corinthian Church: Chapter 1:10 through 4:21.
 - a. Human wisdom divides the body: verses 10-17.
 - b. Human wisdom contrasted with the wisdom of God (that is the Cross): verses 18-25.
 - c. The Corinthian believers were not of the wise: verses 26-31.
 - d. The Christian revelation owes nothing to human wisdom: Chapter 2:1-8.
 - i. Spiritual statements of truth are not made by human wisdom but revealed by God: verses 9-12.
 - ii. The revealed things are taught in words given by the Spirit: verse 13.
 - iii. The revealed things are spiritually discerned: verses 14-16.
 - e. A carnal state prevents spiritual growth: Chapter 3:1-4.
 - f. God alone counts in Christian service: verses 5-8.
 - g. Christian service and its reward: verses 9-10.
 - i. The only foundation, Jesus Christ: verse 11.
 - ii. Two kinds of ministry and their result: verses 12-23.
 - iii. Judgment of Christ's servants is not committed to men: Chapters 4:1-8.
 - h. The Apostolic example of humility and patience: verses 9-17.
 - i. Apostolic Authority: verses 18-21.
2. Immorality Rebuked and Discipline Commanded: Chapters 5:1-6:8.
 - a. Indifference to evil in the church, the result of divisions: verses 2-8.
 - b. In the world, not of it: verses 9-13.
 - c. Christians forbidden to go to law against each other before unbelievers: Chapter 6:1-8.
3. The Sanctity of the Body, Christian Marriage: Chapters 6:9-7:40.
 - a. Because it is washed and justified: verses 9-12.
 - b. Because it is the Lord's: verses 13-18.
 - c. Because it is God's Temple: verses 19-20.
 - d. Because God has established marriage: Chapters 7:1-9.
 - i. Regulation of Marriage between believers: verses 10-12.
 - ii. Regulation of Marriage between believers and unbelievers: verses 13-16.

- iii. Remain in the place of calling: verses 17-24.
 - iv. Apostolic advice to the unmarried: verses 25-40.
 - 4. Things Offered to Idols: Limitations of Christian Liberty: Chapter 8:1-11:1.
 - a. Paul vindicates his Apostleship: Chapter 9:1-6.
 - b. They who preach the Gospel are to live by means of the Gospel: verses 7-18.
 - c. The method and reward of true ministry: verses 19-27.
 - d. Israel in the wilderness: Chapter 10:1-10.
 - e. Wilderness experience, an example: verses 11-15.
 - f. Separation essential at the Lord's Table: verses 16-22.
 - g. The law of love in relation to eating and drinking: verses 23-33; Chapter 11:1.
 - 5. Christian Order and the Lord's Supper: Chapter 11:2-34.
 - a. Order of women in the services: verses 2-16.
 - b. Disorder at the Lord's Table rebuked: verses 17-22.
 - c. Order and meaning of the Lord's Table: verses 23-34.
 - 6. Spiritual Gifts and their use in Love: Chapter 12:1-14:40.
 - a. Gifts and Ministries, the work of the Triune God: verses 1-11.
 - b. Every believer is a member of Christ's Body with a definite ministry: verses 12-31.
 - c. Ministries and Gifts must be controlled by love: Chapter 13:1-13.
 - d. Utterance gifts must be made understandable in open assembly: Chapter 14:1-13.
 - e. The order of tongues in private devotion and in the open assembly: verses 14-22.
 - f. The open meeting for all the church and its order and the believers' meeting: verses 23-33.
 - g. The order for the women not to disturb the meeting by asking questions: verses 34-40.
 - 7. The Resurrection of the Dead: Chapter 15.
 - a. Fact of the resurrection of Christ: verses 1-11.
 - b. Importance of Christ's Resurrection: verses 12-19.
 - c. Order of the resurrection: verses 20-28.
 - d. Moral value of the Resurrection: verses 29-34.
 - e. Body of Resurrection: verses 35-50.
 - f. Mystery of the Resurrection: verses 51-53. Compare 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17.
 - g. The believer's ultimate victory over death is a motive for faithful service: verses 54-57.
 - h. Practical value of the Resurrection: verse 58.
- Conclusion: Instruction and Personal Greetings: Chapter 16:1-24.

In order to write out the interpretation of each verse as it relates to this outline, one would have to use a commentary, or Wuest's Word Studies, where the verse is dealt with according to the Greek. This greatly expands the verses in each Book.

This outline was taken from the Schofield Bible.

The student can easily see how much work is involved in Book Study, but it is also surprising how much can be achieved when we have the desire to really become a Teacher of God's Word.