

HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE

BY W. ROBERT PALMER

Study Course for Youth and Adults

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Philip:

"Do you understand what you are reading?"

Ethiopian:

"How can I, unless someone explains it to me?"

Foreword

Learning in our modern day has become exceedingly skillful and productive. Never before have the tools and methods of education been so refined. Man is now able to absorb an enormous amount of facts, successfully dissect truth from error, scientifically test all evidence, free his thinking from prejudice, draw conclusions that are amazingly accurate, and manifest a level of wisdom unsurpassed. This he can do, if he wishes to pay the price. The horizon of good thinking in all areas of life is at its greatest extent.

Now consider what all this means to the Christian and his Bible. The Scriptures have been preserved and restored to their original message with scientific precision. Thus, the Word of God stands ready to be grasped by anyone with the faith and desire to do so. No generation of disciples has a better opportunity than do we to know the thoughts of God as He revealed them down through the ages in the Bible record. What a grand thought! If the Bible student will but take every modern skill and technique of learning, and add to it his insatiable desire and faith to understand the word, he will know the mind of God as no other people have yet had the privilege of knowing it.

This little book is intended to help point the way to this end. It is the hope that these few suggestions, methods, and rules will prove practical to those who simply say, "I want to understand God's Word." In this regard, all of us at times can use help.

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45).

Thus, if the user comprehends the Lord and His will a little better, and walks a little closer with the Lord, then this work has served its purpose .

. . . for the Lord will give you insight into all this (2 Timothy 2:7).

The greatest moment and point of contact is the meeting of two minds, God's and man's.

This is what the LORD says: Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice, and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight, declares the LORD

(Jeremiah 9:23,24).

CONTENTS

1.	Before You Begin.	1
2.	Tools You Will Need..	11
3.	Use Common Sense..	22
4.	Ten Essential Attitudes.	31
5.	Methods of Interpretation.	40
6.	Rules of Interpretation..	50
7.	The Divisions of the Bible..	59
8.	Periods of Revelation.	70
9.	The Covenants of the Bible..	78
10.	The Importance of Setting..	89
11.	The Types of Language Used.	98
12.	Know the Meanings of Words and Sentences.	107
13.	The Limit of Divine Revelation..	116

CHAPTER ONE

Before You Begin

In the beginning God created . . . And God said. . . "
(Genesis 1:1,3).

As in any study, one must have a point of beginning. In mathematics we begin with a simple set of axioms. An axiom is a commonly accepted truth. By laying a foundation of self-evident truths, a system of mathematical exercises can be worked out resulting in logical and useful conclusions.

In like manner, we first need to outline some principles nine simple facts in all. We shall not spend much time to prove these, for this would be a separate study of its own. We merely begin at these points because they all must be firmly fixed in our minds before we can begin to understand the Bible.

God Has Spoken

This must be first. The whole Bible is based on this truth. Open the Scriptures at the very beginning and read. Just as we become aware of the universe around us and conclude that "God is," we read from this book to find out who God is. Notice: "In the beginning God created . . ." (Genesis 1:1), and we do not read much farther until ". . . God said . . ." (Genesis 1:3).

Is it not plain common sense that the God who made us, with all the righteousness and power of the divine Creator, would also talk to us? Is it not equally sane for all of us to want to know what He has said?

"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son. . ." (Hebrews 1:1,2).

The Bible Is a Revelation of His Will

The Bible is not man's effort to reach up to God, but God's effort to reach down to man. If you are a young person, consider the school you attend. We do not go to all the expense and time to develop a school system just to enable one to go to class to show off what he has learned by himself. Instead, textbooks and trained teachers are combined to impart to a student all the needful time-tested truths possible. That is to help him to think rightly about the physical world in which he lives. Similarly, when it comes to God and spiritual truth, man has everything to learn and nothing to teach. Thus, the Bible is the product of God teaching us what we cannot learn by ourselves.

There is ample proof that the Bible is that record of God speaking to man. Consider the marvelous unity of the Scriptures (some forty different writers produced sixty-six books over a span of about fifteen hundred years), its overwhelming miracles, the abundance of irrefutable prophecies, the grand scope of the whole book, the powerful influence of its truth, its scientific and historical accuracy, the unexcelled moral tone, and the genuine uniqueness of its material, and you have evidence piled upon evidence that this is God's Word.

Of course, this is what the Bible has always claimed for itself. "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). Listen to the Apostle Paul when he said, ". . . what I am writing to you is the Lord's command" (1 Corinthians 14:37). Hundreds of times the Bible makes such claims of inspiration.

The Bible Has Been Accurately Translated

Yes, the original Old Testament was written in the Hebrew and Aramaic languages, and the New Testament in the Greek. If we cannot communicate intelligibly in these tongues, then the next best thing must be done. The Bible must be translated

into the language we know and commonly speak. This practice makes it possible today to read the works of such great writers as Homer (writing in Greek), Plato (Greek), Virgil (Latin), Julius Caesar (Latin), Dante (Italian), Tolstoy (Russian), Guy de Maupassant (French), Omar Khayyam (Persian), etc.

With all of our wisdom and modern techniques, this task has been done for us in a very clear and thorough manner. Just think, from the original languages of the Scriptures, thousands of words have been translated into our everyday English language. And we can be assured that the Bible we read today is faithful to that which the Lord first had recorded through the guided efforts of inspired men. Floyd E. Hamilton says of the New Testament, "There is no doubt that we have the text . . . as it came from the hands of the original writers, in 999 words out of every thousand, and that the one out of every thousand about which there is still doubt, in no instance affects the meaning of any vital doctrine of the Church."¹

The Bible Is Infallible/Inerrant

The Scriptures as they were originally written by inspired men were free of error. We can trust the Scriptures completely!

Have you not had some doubt about the trustworthiness of some writings or sayings of man? Have you not found some things that are not one hundred percent worthy of your complete trust? Often it is simply due to the human weakness of mind and flesh.

This is not true of the Bible. It is unique in the real sense of the word – none other like it. It stands out in sharp contrast to all the works of men. The great statesman, W.E. Gladstone, spoke well when he said, "The Bible is stamped with speciality of origin, and an immeasurable distance separates it from all competitors." Remember that all confusions, errors, and

¹ The Best of the Christian Faith (3rd ed.) New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers. 1946), p, 203

contradictions emanate from the mind of man, not from the Word of God.

Within the last century there has arisen a relatively new science—archaeology. This is the study of the various types of remains of the past civilizations of the world. As these items are unearthed, catalogued, and studied, it is interesting to note this overwhelming fact: in all of the thousands of discoveries, the Bible has yet to be shown inaccurate on any given point of history. To the contrary, archaeology has developed an abundance of evidence supporting and illuminating the text of the Bible. "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple" (Psalm 19:7).

The Bible Is Complete and Final

Any record of importance, though it is true, is not perfect, if it does not give sufficient information.

For example, suppose you sought directions on how to get from your house to a certain city, and someone very thoughtfully drew a neat map and carefully explained the route you should take for three-fourths of the journey. Though this help would not be worthless, nevertheless it would be imperfect and leave much to be desired. As a matter of fact, an incomplete message is not a clear message at all. Man must have the complete story, all the necessary truth, or else he will be misled. There must be no sequel.

Study the entire Bible content. Notice the grand theme of the divine-human relationship and you will see that it is final. There is completeness in every divine plan, an ending to the long story of man, an ultimate goal to every purpose of God, perfection in the life and sacrifice of God's Son, a perfect pattern for the faith and life of the Christian, and final glory in the system of salvation for man.

What else is there to say? Nothing! Where else is there to go? Nowhere! Truly, in the Bible we have "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3).

Therefore, the Bible is God's complete record for your life. You cannot outgrow it. It is not merely a key to truth – it is the truth. It contains all that you need to know about life here and the hope of life in the hereafter.

Paul wrote to Timothy:

And how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

The Bible Is Intelligible

You receive a letter through the mail. What are your first thoughts? Do you not automatically conclude that some person had some thoughts, wrote them down on paper, mailed them to you, and your first response is to open the letter and read it? There is little other value in a message. It is not a charm; neither is it to be framed nor worn, but is to be read and understood.

The Bible is first, last, and always a message. The mere possession of it, or even a casual glance at its contents, does not provide one with some kind of a magical blessing. God has something to say to man that is important. Through many inspired persons God has directed it to the mind of man. As Alexander Campbell once wrote, "*God has spoken by men, to men, for men.* The language of the Bible is then, *human language.*"²

² *Christianity Restored*, p. 22.

Read the Bible! God has always wanted man to hear and understand Him. He has used every means known to human communication of thought to accomplish this. "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

The Bible is a revelation; and a revelation is an uncovering of that which is hidden, so that it may be clearly seen. A crowd gathers around a statue. When it is unveiled for the first time, the public beholds the beauty of the long-awaited masterpiece. It is no longer a mystery. Through sense perception the audience understands what it is. God did the same with a body of truth, which man could not discover by himself, but which man can now understand for the first time. The mysteries of God, necessary for man's well-being, are now open and plain to man.

The Bible Can Be Understood by Man

Man is a rational being, made in God's image to think and to reason. By exercising this divine right, man is able to read the mind of God – that portion which God revealed. No other created being has this privilege.

Is it not reasonable that God, in communicating with His children, would call upon man's highest faculty – the power of reason? Reason surpasses emotion, instinct, intuition, etc. Why use a lesser or more undependable trait for such an important matter? Why listen for the sound of an enemy when you have radar; or why trust your feelings about health, when you can submit to an accurate scientific diagnosis?

The mind is not our God, but it should be used to know God. In building our house of divine knowledge we must use our mental power as a tool to understand the meanings of God's blueprint (the Bible). "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17).

Two children were playing on a hillside when they noticed that the hour was nearing sunset. One said wonderingly, "See how far the sun has gone! A little while ago it was right over that tree, and now it is low down in the sky."

"Only it isn't the sun that moves, it's the earth. You know, Father told us," answered the other.

The first one shook his head. The sun did move, for he had seen it; and the earth did not move, for he had been standing on it all the time. "I know what I see," he said triumphantly.

"And I believe Father," said his brother.

The first boy had permitted himself to be completely mastered by his own powers of reason and observation; while the second boy used his reason and memory to direct him in the truth as revealed by his father. We should let the mind then be servant to the revealed mind of God in all spiritual truth.

Understanding the Bible is a duty. When God speaks, we are to listen and understand. There is no alternative.

God never expects the impossible of man. The Bible is filled with examples of this teaching. The Word is never grievous to hear. God is perfect in holiness and mercy, as well as justice. He would never demand that we know the unknowable. The apostle Paul wrote what was revealed to him, "In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ" (Ephesians 3:4). Again, he said to young Timothy, "Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:7,15). This implies that we can handle the Word "incorrectly" – and leads us to the next point.

The Bible Correctly Understood Is Authoritative

If our tool of the mind should ever be dulled by such weaknesses as prejudice, wishful thinking, superstition, pre-

conceived notions (or any of the violations of logic and common sense), then our understanding will be impaired. In turn, to that degree the authoritative voice of God will be weakened. This is what Peter meant when referring to the writings of Paul in Scripture:

His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:16).

The end is more deadly than many suppose. We should ever be alert to the distinction of truth and error.

The truth is always there for those who seek it. Jesus taught this principle as He stood face to face with those who loved error and would not embrace the truth. Therefore, they refused Him as their Lord.

You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them (Matthew 13:14,15).

Back in the sixth century when ignorance, tradition, and superstition were prevalent in the world, there arose a society of believers, like a rose rising out of a swamp. A man named Columba set up a school of the Scriptures on the small island of Iona, just off the coast of Scotland. Here the people were taught to know, understand, and obey the teachings of the Bible. Historians tell us that for a brief time there lived a people who knew only the works of love, worship and righteousness as taught in the Scriptures – their sole authoritative guide.

The Authority of the Bible Demands Submission

There is no other conclusion. This progression of thought leads us to one point: we must now, without delay, embrace

with full faith and obedience all that God says. As we hold the Bible in our hands, we stand before God. Paul says:

(God) "will give to each person according to what he has done." To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor, and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile (Romans 2:6-9).

What have faith and obedience to do with the understanding of the message? When one begins to rebel against the truth, in the process of learning it, he will soon find the true understanding of its meaning slipping from his grasp or out beyond his reach. This is a Bible principle. More than once the Lord has withheld spiritual understanding from the wise and prudent who were often arrogant and rebellious, while revealing it to humble children who have lovingly trusted and obeyed Him. Read Matthew 5:8; 13:14,15; Acts 7:51-53; 2 Corinthians 4:3,4; 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12; 2 Timothy 4:3,4.

Questions for Review

1. How has God spoken to man?
2. It took how many authors about how many years to write the Bible?
3. The Bible was originally written in what languages, and why must it be translated?
4. What relatively new science has helped confirm the accuracy of the Bible, and how?
5. What does the word "revelation" mean?
6. Does God expect you to understand the Bible? Why?
7. Why is obedience to the teachings of the Bible important to your understanding of it?

Assignments for Study

1. Remembering that there are hundreds of references in the Bible that refer to its inspiration, ask each student to find at least five.
2. Have several students study and relate in class an archaeological story that graphically supports the accuracy of a Bible narrative or claim.

Topics for Discussion

1. If the Bible were incomplete, discuss what effect this would have on our understanding of God's truth.
2. Give examples of how misunderstandings of the Bible message lead people to actually do things that are wrong.

CHAPTER TWO

Tools You Will Need

"You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me"

(John 5:39).

The Importance of This Task for You

You are about to enter upon one of the most blessed and rewarding experiences of all mankind – studying the Bible. This book is no mere collection of human opinions, theories, or fancies. The Bible is a book of great facts from God. These are life-and-death facts, truths that pertain to your salvation. They must be understood, for much is at stake. You must study so that His thoughts will become your thoughts, and that you may understand His will for you. As R.A. Torrey wrote,

This Book makes men wise with the wisdom that is golden, the wisdom that brings eternal salvation. No one can study this Book aright, no matter how ignorant he may otherwise be, without being possessed of that priceless wisdom that means eternal life. No other book has the power to make us acquainted with God and with his Son, Jesus Christ, that this book has. Oh, study the Book that shows the way to eternal life; make it in your own experience "the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21).

A serious warning was issued by Jesus to those who hear the Word and fail to understand it. "When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart" (Matthew 13:19).

Understanding the Bible is a job. You do not inherit understanding, nor is it given you, nor does God cast a magical spell over you. It takes study. Study, among other things which this book shall list, takes tools. It seems fitting then, at this point, for us to suggest twelve practical tools every Bible student should have.

A Bible

The first need is a *Bible*, but not just any Bible. This is important! The writer counted thirty-one different Bibles in his study, with nearly as many different uses. Many may be convenient to carry, pretty to look at, expensive to buy, but not suited to study. Secure a bold, clear print Bible, one that is easy to use and inviting to read. Too many cause fatigue and eyestrain just to read, not to mention study. The type should be large enough for marking, and there should be margins for notes. A stiff board cover (like an ordinary book) is recommended, with heavy paper pages.

A Bible Concordance

This is nothing more than an alphabetical arrangement of all (or most) of the words of the Bible. This is most useful and saves hours of time for those many occasions in which you need to locate certain passages of Scripture. Simply look up a word (part of the verse desired), and the concordance will indicate where you may turn in the Bible to find your passage. This enables you to find a verse of Scripture when you remember a part of it, or even only one word of it.

A Bible Dictionary

This helps the student understand the meanings of Bible things, persons, places, events, laws, ordinances, mountains, rivers, cities, etc. It is not enough to use a modern dictionary, for this gives the present-day uses of terms. This is not what we want. We want the meanings of these terms in Bible times, and the meanings of the words that we no longer use.

Maps and Atlases

Maps and atlases are also essential to good study. The Bible record is an historical record. Thus, understanding is increased by locating and depicting the events of Scripture.

A Modern Language Bible

It is also good to select one or more reliable *modern speech Bibles*, and there are some excellent ones. Some of the better known modern versions include:

Revised Standard Version (the first of the modern spate of popular English translations, a bit dated now) (1952)

Amplified Bible (tries to give the exact shades of meaning by "amplifying" words with their synonyms) (1964)

Jerusalem Bible (translated into English from a French translation) (1966)

New English Bible (smooth-reading modern translation, with British spellings and some expressions) (1970)

Living Bible (a paraphrase of the old American Standard Version; not recommended for in-depth study.) (1971)

New Testament in Modern English (Phillips translation; paraphrase by a British scholar, not as loose a paraphrase as the Living Bible) (revised 1972)

New American Standard Bible (the most accurate to the original languages of all the modern versions, but this makes it read a little "rough" at times) (1977)

Today's English Version (from the United Bible Societies, originally developed to aid translators into other languages; also known as Good News for Modern Man, or the Good News Bible) (1976)

New King James Version (1982)

New International Version (1984)

New Jerusalem Bible (1985)

Revised English Bible (a revision of the New English Bible) (1989)

New Revised Standard Version (1989)

Contemporary English Version (the latest from the American Bible Society: NT, 1991, full Bible anticipated 1995)

We should be willing to use different versions in order to bring the original meaning of the word into the living language of our day. The truth of God does not change, even though the languages of men (the conveyances of that truth) do change with time. Such versions, therefore, can reveal fine shades of meaning, use more words to explain all the facets of meaning in a given word, and more accurately explain verb tenses and idioms. Any version that is true to the text and makes it more understandable is useful. The biggest objection to these versions is that often they are products of individual scholars and thus apt to be more biased. Also, it must be remembered that some translations are so "free" (Living Bible is a good example) that they practically become commentaries.

Books and Commentaries

Select, with care, certain *books* and *commentaries*. This should often be done with help. A trustworthy student of the Bible could offer wise suggestions in the matter of selecting reliable commentaries. And then they should be used carefully, only as human aids.

Time for Study

The next tool is *time*. You will never *find* time to really study the Bible – you will have to *take* time. We live in a busy age. For the average person there are more interests and duties than can be crowded into one's schedule. So it is a matter of budgeting one's time. One must apportion things according to their true worth and satisfaction. You will have to arrange for your study time, plan on it, hold to it, and exclude lesser things that hinder. Select the time when you are physically and mentally alert. Make a schedule. Then resolutely hold to it. This is good stewardship.

A Place to Study

Don't forget to select a good *place* for study. The room, the desk, the chair, the lighting, an atmosphere that aids concentration, and privacy to prevent distractions are not to be overlooked. There is merit in having a particular place to study the Bible.

A Plan of Study

It is also important that you pick out a *system* or *plan* of study. Never let it be aimless. There are many plans to follow. Here are a few: study books of the Bible verse by verse, persons of the Bible, doctrines (such as prayer, faith, sin), prophecies, promises, types, narratives, parables, miracles, Bible school lessons, midweek prayer meeting lessons, sermon studies, and word studies. Change your plan from time to time.

There is a good advantage for some "together" studying, such as husband and wife, two or three friends, brothers and sisters, and the immediate family. Try it!

Pencil and Paper

Next, get out *paper* and *pencil*. These will become two of the most useful tools in understanding the Bible. More about this is under the next item.

Good Study Habits

A strong emphasis should be placed upon the matter of developing good *study habits*. Many of our school systems are including this in the required studies for young people. Do you know how to study correctly? Many combine poor habits with good habits. We should emphasize not only the amount of study effort, but the direction of it as well. May we suggest four simple study habits that will help a student of the Bible?

a. *Read correctly*, since the main purpose of this practice is to understand. Reading the Bible is a method of inquiring into the truth as God has recorded it. Thus, there are a number of skills that should be involved as you proceed. They are

asking, comparing, contrasting, exploring, concentrating, rereading, orientating, analyzing, memorizing, defining, and concluding.

b. Next is *marking* the Bible or *making signs* – drawing charts, graphs, pictures, etc. The value of seeing the truth is never to be underestimated. One student while in college developed a series of "markings" in school, and later came to use this system to great advantage as he studied the Bible. Below is a sample of various helpful markings that have proved most useful.

c. *Making notes and outlines* has a way of helping the student understand and retain what he understands. Also, he is more apt to be accurate. When a person writes down what he is learning, he can better distinguish, relate, and orientate the material. For example, see the outline of Revelation.

d. *Self-recitation* is also most important. Some professional educators claim that learning is at its best when much time is

THE DIVINE PATTERN FOR UNITY

An exhortation EPHESIANS 4 *to unity*

think, according to the power that worketh in us,
 2 Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

CHAPTER 4

1 Paul exhorteth to unity. 24 Putting on the new man. 29 Casting aside corrupt communication.

I THEREFORE, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,
 2 With all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love;
 3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
 4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;
 5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism,
 6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.
 7 But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.
 8 Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.
 9 (Now that he ascended,

what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?
 10 He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)
 11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;
 12 (For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:
 13 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:
 14 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;
 15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:
 16 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

DIVERSITY

DOCTRINE

UNITY

CHARACTER

EACH MEMBER DOES HIS PART

381

spent in reciting to oneself. It makes learning more thorough, causes the understanding to be clearer, and increases interest in the whole subject. You understand better that which you can tell or teach. Remember this threefold rule: learn to read, reflect, and recall.

Our understanding of the Bible will be greatly increased when we put into practice these scientific study habits.

An Alert Mind

Our final tool is the *human mind* – it is by no means the least significant. On the contrary, it is so vital to the whole subject that we devote a whole chapter to it. Moreover, this tool is deeply involved in all the material that follows.

Of course, if you have accepted the Lord, you are expected, yes, you are commanded, to study the Word with the intention of understanding it (2 Timothy 2:15). This alone is reason enough for all this discussion. How our ignorance displeases God (Hosea 4:6, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9)!

But aside from this, let us consider the high privilege we have of understanding the Bible. There is such a constant, abundant flow of blessings into the life of the genuine student. How God blessed His chosen people (Israel), even though weak and fallen, when they gathered together "in the square" and gave attentive ears to Ezra as he (and his companions) "read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read" (Nehemiah 8:1-8). There are so many blessings awaiting your effort. May we list seven?

1. These are words that *reveal* divine wisdom. This is the Book of God (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Do you want to know the nature of God? Read Acts 17:23-31; Romans 1:16-32; Hebrews 6:17,18. To know the person of Jesus Christ? Read Matthew 16:16; John 1:1-14; 20:30,31; Philippians 2:5-11; 2 Peter 1:16-18. Do you need to know more about the identity of the Holy Spirit? Read John 16:7-15; Romans 8:9-17, 26; 1 Corinthians

2:6-13; 12:3,4,11. Concerning the will of God? See Isaiah 55:6-9; John 6:39,40. For the love and grace of God, see John 3:16; Acts 20:24; Romans 5:8-11; Ephesians 2:4,5; 3:18,19; Hebrews 2:9; 1 John 2:1,2; 4:8-11. The standard of right and wrong is defined in Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12; Micah 6:8; Ecclesiastes 12:13,14; Exodus 20:1-17; Matthew 22:36-40; James 1:27.

2. These are words that *save* the soul. Is there any greater blessing than this? If it is urgent for one to grasp the words of his physician in order to save the body from pain and disease and death, how much more imperative are God's words of salvation from eternal punishment – to the rich inheritance of everlasting life with God (Luke 1:76-79; John 5:39; 6:68; Acts 20:32; 1 Corinthians 1:21; 2 Timothy 3:15; James 1:21).

3. These are words that instruct the mind in all manner of righteousness. It is plain common sense to want to know what is good for oneself and to study in order to find out (Acts 17:11). No situation nor condition of life is found without God's instruction on how one is to answer it – somewhere in Scripture the student should find just the right truth for his problem. Understand the Word so that you will know how to grow (2 Timothy 3:16,17) more godly (2 Peter 1:3) and righteous (Romans 6:17,18; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

4. These are words that *strengthen* the soul. Is there any one of us who at some time does not need comfort (1 Thessalonians 4:18; Isaiah 51:12; 2 Corinthians 1:3-5; Matthew 11:28), peace (Psalm 119:165), protection (1 Peter 5:7), strength (Psalm 27:1), hope and assurance (Romans 15:4; 2 Timothy 1:12)?

5. These are words that are *spiritual*. Less and less we need to speak the language of men and more and more we need to talk as God talks (Colossians 3:16) so that we shall be able to speak His language and understand our Creator (1 Corinthians 2:1-16).

6. These are words that are *profitable*. They work! They accomplish in us what God intended them to accomplish. That is why they were recorded for us (1 Corinthians 10:11; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 4:12).

7. Finally, these are words that will *last*. They are not temporary. They are not outdated (Matthew 24:35; 1 Peter 1:25). And this is even more significant when we understand that someday we shall all be judged by them (John 12:48).

See Bibliography for a list of tools.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

General Introduction	Chapter 1
I. Epistles to Seven Churches of Asia	2, 3
A. Church at Ephesus (2:1-7)	
B. Church at Smyrna (2:8-11)	
C. Church at Pergamos (2:12-17)	
D. Church at Thyatira (2:18-29)	
E. Church at Sardis (3:1-6)	
F. Church at Philadelphia (3:7-13)	
G. Church at Laodicea (3:14-22)	
II. Preparatory Vision	4
III. The Sealed Book	5-11
A. Preparation for opening the seals (5)	
B. First seal (6:1, 2)	
C. Second seal (6:3, 4)	
D. Third seal (6:5, 6)	
E. Fourth seal (6:7, 8)	
F. Fifth seal (6:9-11)	
G. Sixth seal (6:12-17)	
H. Intermediate vision (7:1-17)	
I. Seventh seal (8:1-11:19)	
1. Six trumpets (8:7-9:21)	
2. Intervening vision (10:1-11:14)	
3. Seventh trumpet (11:15-19)	
IV. Rise of the Antichrist	12-20
A. Introduction (12:1-17)	
B. The two beasts (13:1-18)	
C. A sign in heaven (14:1-20)	
D. Another sign in heaven (15:1-16:21)	
1. Seven angels and seven plagues (15:1-8)	
2. Seven vials (16:1-21)	
E. Judgment of the harlot (17:1-18)	
F. Fall of Babylon (18:1-24)	
G. Praise of God (19:1-21)	
H. Millennial period and final judgment (20:1-15)	
V. Final Condition of the Righteous	21:1-22:5
Epilogue or Conclusion	22:6-21

Questions for Review

1. What is unique about the Bible as a book to understand?
2. What is the difference between reading and studying the Bible?
3. Name at least five reasons why people do not study the Bible.
4. Name at least twelve tools one needs to be a good student of the Bible.
5. When do you feel is the best time during the day to study your Bible? Why?
6. Describe the place where you prefer to study the Bible, and tell why you prefer it.
7. Name at least two systems you have used to study.

Assignments for Study

1. Have each person bring his study Bible to class.
2. Assign five students the task of bringing to class the five tools (concordance, Bible dictionary, maps or an atlas of Bible lands, a modern speech Bible, and a commentary) and explain how each should be used.

Topics for Discussion

1. Discuss the good and bad points of the study Bibles brought to class.
2. Name four sound study habits and tell how each should be developed.

SAMPLE LIST OF TOOLS***CONCORDANCES***

Strong, James. *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*.

New York/Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953.