

How to study a book of the bible

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Each year there are many who resolve to spend more time reading and studying the Word of God. Many, who make such a declaration, have the desire but not the discipline or skills to accomplish this worthy goal. They are more likely to skim the top of the milk of the word than to engage in a systematic study of the meat provided by God.

Our God has blessed us greatly with His will revealed to man which is “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Word which He has blessed us with is something that can be understood by man (Eph. 3:2-40). Although there are some things that take more effort than others, it is worth the effort (2 Pet. 3:16).

The Word can sanctify, save the soul, give inheritance among the sanctified, allow us to be born again, and will be our standard for judgment (John 17:17, Jas. 1:21, Acts 20:30, 1 Pet. 2:21, John 12:48-50). Therefore we must make great effort to “present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

The task before this article is not to develop a greater desire for the Bible, but to suggest a practical, systematic and useful guide for those who desire a more meaningful study as they approach a study of any book of the Bible. In order to provide such tools, let us consider the following suggestions.

First prepare for a productive study

The first step of any productive study is to first prepare yourself through prayer (Ezra 7:10, Jas. 1:5). Next, we will benefit greatly when our area is conducive for prolonged studying such as a table or desk with comfortable seating and good lighting. Next prepare your tools for study; writing pad, pens highlighters, an exhaustive concordance, and a Bible dictionary. It is at this time that you also must resist the urge to consult commentaries prior to and during the early stages of your study. Remember the Bible can be understood.

Second approach the text

Now we are ready to approach the text before us. I submit that we begin with three questions: What, So What, and Now What

WHAT: examination of the text

During this phase of study we are attempting to ascertain as much information provided to us about the book as we can. One tool that is helpful are the five W's— Who, What, Where, When and Why. We must always begin with the biblical context, so first read the text to glean the facts revealed. As we read the content (what) we will find the penman and recipient (who), the

location (where), the date (when), and the purpose (why). We must also consider the cross reference of events from different books (i.e. Acts 16:12-40, 2 Cor. 8:1-5, Phil. 1-4) in order to gain a totality of biblical information revealed.

After a thorough examination of the biblical context, it is here that we consider the historical context. Is there some insight that can be gained by considering the historical significance of the region, the date, the people or events in our book of study? For example, would knowing that Philippi was a Roman colony during the New Testament help us to better understand the term “citizenship” in Philippians 3:20?

SO WHAT: explanation of the text

Many students of the Bible do a great job of phase one of the study; gathering all the facts, but fall short after that. The Bible is more than a textbook for men to acquire knowledge of God’s will for man (Jas. 1:22). There are two questions we should continually ask ourselves as we engage in diligent study: What does the text mean? What does God expect man to learn from it?

NOW WHAT: application of the text

While we may consider that many fall short of phase two, even more do so here. After becoming familiar with the text and understanding God’s message to mankind the difficult task begins. What changes are necessary in my life to make application and conform to heaven’s will? It is with this ultimate goal in mind that every Bible student endeavors to achieve. Our God has blessed us with His revelation and our ability to logically reason, so let these two combine to make us better students of the Word.