

Summer 2015 Newsletter
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Our Greatest Endeavor

***“Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation;
on thee do I wait all the day.” Psalm 25:5***

What could be more important to man than to know the mind of his God! Every day new discoveries by the Hubble telescope impress us with the vastness of the universe and leave us in awe of the power and wisdom displayed in the ordering of the galaxies. We also recognize our smallness and ask with the prophet Job, “What is man that you should exalt him? That you should set your heart on him?” (Job 7:17) Has God really revealed Himself to us in the Bible? Does the Bible contain a message for the present day? Can it stand up to the challenges of science and reason, or does it belong on the back shelf with the mythologies of ancient Greece and Rome?

We are living in a time of reason, analysis, and investigation. In the past century, knowledge on all subjects has grown by leaps and bounds. According to the latest estimates, the accumulated knowledge of the world doubles every three days. This has led to an atmosphere of rationality resulting in skepticism regarding old beliefs and practices.

Today's reasoning minds are questioning the long-held teachings attributed to the Bible. The doctrine of eternal

torment has been openly attacked in popular news magazines, television news programs and in a nationally circulated movie. The problem is we are told we are sinners by nature—inclined to do wrong. Then we are told that if we continue doing what we are *inclined* to do—what comes naturally through no fault of our own—we will be tortured. Additionally we are told that this torture will serve no purpose; that rehabilitation and repentance will not be possible; and that an *eternity* of brutal, agonizing torture will be applied as punishment for the sins we have committed in our short lifetime. Twenty-first century man recoils at this and other unexplainable teachings of the creeds, and seeing the errors but not knowing the truth, drifts into the hollow pursuits of materialism and technology to fulfill his longing for meaning.

What We Need

We need food for our minds and hearts. We need a reliable authority. We need an explanation for man's disappointing past and present and an indication of what we might expect for the future. We need assurance that good men in all ages have not died in vain. We need the

conviction that evil will ultimately be punished—not vengefully, but with *justice*. We need help in overcoming our own faults. We need hope for ourselves as well as for all the poor, downtrodden, heartsick, and deluded members of the human family—both those living and those already dead.

All of these things we need; and above all we need confidence in God's love; confidence that God will supply these needs in his due time. Can we find the answers we long for in the Bible? Does the Bible have relevance for today?

The Bible's Claim

The Bible claims to supply these needs. It claims to be an infallible authority—the testimony of God himself—able to make us “wise unto salvation.” (2 Timothy 3:15-17) The Lord told his disciples, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life:...” (John 5:39) The Bereans were commended in that “they studied the scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.” (Acts 17:11) As we have seen, however, human theories and creeds have conditioned us to believe that we cannot study or understand the Scriptures unless we attend a seminary or have a theological degree. Setting aside the creeds and our preconceived ideas, let us examine the Bible in a reasonable and thoughtful way. The following five steps will help to open the Bible testimony for any conscientious searcher.

Study One Topic at a Time

The most common format used for Bible study is a chapter by chapter reading. This does not provide as comprehensive an understanding as a study by topic since the teachings of the Bible are found scattered throughout its pages. For example, with regard to the current debate on the nature of hell—is it fiery torment, is it annihilation, is it darkness and eternal separation from God?—proponents of the various views have a few scriptures to support them. However, we should not think that we understand what hell is until we have read *all* the Bible verses on the subject.

The best way to find out about hell (or any other Bible topic) is to use a Bible concordance. This is a book that contains an alphabetical list of every word that occurs in the Bible, with the verses in which it can be found. Many Bibles have an incomplete concordance in the back. *Strong's Concordance* and *Young's Concordance* are complete—every word in the Bible is listed. (Both of these are available in most libraries and Christian book stores.)

If we look up the word “hell” in a complete concordance, we find the Hebrew and Greek words from which it is translated. By looking these words up in the lexicon at the back of the book, we find that each word is also translated “grave” and “pit.” In the Old Testament alone, the Hebrew word for hell, *sheol*, is translated “grave” as many times as it is translated “hell.” Until we have read all these verses, we cannot claim to know the Bible's teaching about hell. *Englishman's Concordance* (also available in book stores) is a good help with this as it lists all the verses together for easy comparison. This holds true for doctrines such as immortality, resurrection, salvation and every other teaching ascribed to the Bible.

The study of one topic at a time, the use of a concordance, and looking up all that the Bible says on any given topic, is the first step to enlightening Bible study.

Consider the Context

As we read Bible verses, we should not think of them as isolated statements. Each of them is part of a *context*; each relates to the verses and chapters which go before and after. In study, therefore, notice: Who is speaking? To whom is the statement addressed? What are the circumstances or events in which the statement is found? When was the statement made? Is the statement in the setting of a parable or picture story, or is it given as a plain statement?

Noticing the context is important if we hope to make sense of *all* that the Bible says.

Is This Verse Literal or Symbolic?

In other words, does the scripture mean just what it says, or is it describing something else in picture form?

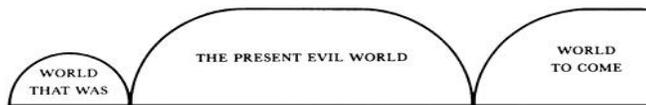
For example, when we read in Revelation 12 about a woman clothed with the sun, and with the moon under her feet, our reason tells us that this must be symbolic or pictorial of something else. Also, Jesus is not literally a lamb. However, not all symbolic references are so clearly obvious, so how should we decide whether a scripture is literal or symbolic?

If it does not seem reasonable if taken literally, or if it would contradict other more straight forward Bible statements, it should be considered symbolic and we should look for an interpretation of the symbols in harmony with the rest of the Bible. To do this we would again turn to our concordances to find all the places where similar

statements or words are found and, comparing scripture with scripture, resolve the question.

Notice the Time Periods Involved

Some scriptures apply at one time, but not at another time. How do we find out *when* a verse applies? To begin with, the Bible divides history into three great periods or ages, which can be diagrammed thus:

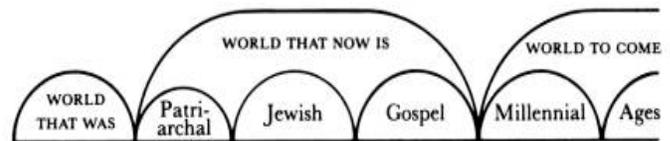


1. "The world [social order] that was" before the flood (2 Peter 3:6).
2. "The present evil world [age]" which is under Satan's control by God's permission (2 Corinthians 4:4; Galatians 1:4; 2 Peter 3:7).
3. "The world [age] to come, wherein dwelleth righteousness." This will be the time when God will put to an end all sin, evil, and death (2 Peter 3:13; 1 Corinthians 15:22-26; Revelation 21:1-4; Isa. 25:8).

Further, the second world is sub-divided into three ages—a Patriarchal Age, a Jewish Age and a Gospel Age. Scriptures such as Amos 3:2, addressed to the Jewish people, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth," and Matthew 15:24, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel," apply during the Jewish Age.

In the 10th chapter of Acts we read of the vision with which God directed Peter to go to the Gentiles with the gospel for the first time. From Acts 15:14-17 we learn what God's program for the Gospel Age entails: "God at the first did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name." Thus, God first selects a "little flock" of believers as a "people for his name" (Luke 12:32). This occurs during the "present evil world."

Afterward, during the "world to come," he will give the residue of men the opportunity to seek and know God, and he will restore Israel (the "tabernacle of David") so "that the residue of men (those not already selected as the special people of God) might seek after Lord." The words "first" and "after" in these verses (Acts 15:14-17) indicate time periods. Additionally, the first part of the third world is delineated in Revelation 20:4,6. These can thus be diagrammed:



Understanding God's time periods is a very important step in studying the Bible with understanding.

Be Aware of "Types" and "Antitypes"

Much of the Old Testament is like a scale model in which God used those historic events to illustrate the greater events of the future. The model, or pattern, in the Bible is the "type" and the event it illustrates is the "antitype."

An example of a type is the Passover recorded in Exodus, chapters 12 to 14. The New Testament tells us that the Passover lambs which died on behalf of Israel typified, (were a type of) the Lamb of God—Jesus—who died on behalf of the world (1 Corinthians 5:7, 8; John 1:29). The first-born children of Israel typified the true followers of Christ of this Gospel Age, the "church of the firstborn." (Hebrews. 12:23)

The entire book of Hebrews was written to show the Jewish Christians how the sacrifices performed every year on the Day of Atonement in their Tabernacle pointed to Christ and his church as a "shadow of good things to come." (Hebrews 10:1) Paul tells us that everything that happened to Israel "happened unto them for ensamples (Greek --*tupos*, a die or pattern, a type) and they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world (age) are come." (1 Corinthians 10:11) Jesus said that the brazen serpent erected by Moses in the wilderness pointed to him as well as the experience of Jonah. (Matthew 12:40; John 3:14; Numbers 21:5-9) Types and symbols are common teaching tools in the Bible.

When we understand types and antitypes, we begin to see that nothing in the Bible just "takes up space"—everything in God's word has meaning and is valuable to us **today**.

One Last Consideration

Unless you are able to read Hebrew or Greek, the Bible you are using is a translation from these original languages. In translation, word for word renderings are seldom possible. Therefore, translators take the sense of the text as they understand it and put it into the grammar of their own language. This opens the door for the interjection of ideas biased by personal beliefs. We assert that the Bible is harmonious and reasonable throughout when correctly

understood, and it reflects the glory and power of its Author. Comparing multiple translations will help greatly in unlocking the meaning of scriptures.

While it may seem a daunting task, Bible study is the most rewarding of all pursuits. God gave us his Word because he wanted us to know his mind—his love for mankind, his plans for us, his unwavering justice, and his perfect wisdom. He put all these things into the minds of prophets who were moved by the Holy Spirit to record them for us. He gave us Jesus to ransom us from the power of the grave, and the apostles who gave their lives to establish his church which would preserve the Word and carry its teachings all the way into the modern age. Shouldn't we study it, since so many lives were given for it? Let us help you. Send for your free booklet today.

Please send me the following FREE booklet

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE-
AND HAVE IT MAKE SENSE

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