

PREFACE.

This book has been written for two reasons: first, because it seemed to be needed; second, to save the writer time and labor. Letters are constantly coming in from all quarters asking how to study the Bible. It is impossible to refuse to answer a question so important as that, but it takes much time to answer it at all as it should be answered. This book is written as an answer to those who have asked the question, and to those who may wish to ask it. Nothing is more important for our own mental, moral and spiritual development, or for our increase in usefulness, than Bible study. But not all Bible study is equally profitable. Some Bible study is absolutely profitless. "How to study the Bible so as to get the largest profit from it," is a question of immeasurable importance. The answer to the question, found in this book, has been for the most part given in addresses by the author, at the Chicago Bible Institute, before the sum-

mer gatherings of college students, at ministerial conferences and Y. M. C. A. conventions. Many, especially ministers, who have heard these addresses have asked that they might be put in a permanent shape. I have promised for two years to comply with this request, but have never found time to do so until now.

CONTENTS.

Part First.

METHODS OF PROFITABLE BIBLE STUDY.

	PAGE.
CHAPTER I.	
Introductory to Methods of Bible Study	II
CHAPTER II.	
Study of Individual Books	14
CHAPTER III.	
Topical Study	57
CHAPTER IV.	
Biographical Study	79
CHAPTER V.	
Study of Types	82
CHAPTER VI.	
Study of the Books of the Bible in the Order Given in the Bible and in Their Chronological Order	85
CHAPTER VII.	
The Study of the Bible for Practical Usefulness in Dealing With Men	88.

Part Second.

FUNDAMENTAL CONDITIONS.

CHAPTER I.

Fundamental Conditions of the Most Profitable Bible	
Study - - - - -	95

CHAPTER II.

Final Suggestions - - - - -	116
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PART I.

THE METHODS OF THE MOST PROF-
ITABLE BIBLE STUDY.

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER TO METHODS OF BIBLE STUDY.

We shall consider the most profitable Methods of Bible Study before we consider the Fundamental Conditions of Profitable Bible study. Many readers of this book will probably be frightened, at first, at the seeming elaborateness and difficulty of some of the methods of study suggested. But they are not as difficult as they appear. Their practicability and fruitfulness have been tested in the class-room, and that not with classes made up altogether of college graduates, but largely composed of persons of very moderate education; in some cases of almost no education. They do require time and hard work. It must be remembered, however, that the Bible contains gold, and almost any one is willing to dig for gold, especially if it is certain that he will find it. It is certain that one will find gold in the Bible, if he

digs. As one uses the methods here recommended, he will find his ability to do the work rapidly increasing by exercise, until he can soon do more in fifteen minutes than at the outset he could do in an hour.

The first method of study suggested will be found to be an exceptionally good mental training. When one has pursued this method of study for a time, his powers of observation will have been so quickened, that he will see at a glance what, at first, he only saw upon much study and reflection. This method of study will also train the logical powers, cultivating habits of order, system and classification in one's intellectual processes. The power of clear, concise and strong expression will also be developed. No other book affords the opportunity for intellectual development by its study, that is to be found in the Bible. No other book, and no other subject, will so abundantly repay close and deep study. The Bible is much read, but comparatively little studied. It will probably be noticed by some that the first method of study suggested is practically the method now pursued in the study of nature; first, careful analysis and ascertainment of facts; second, classification of facts. But the facts of revelation far transcend those of nature in sublimity, suggestiveness, helpfulness and practical utility. They are also far more accessible.

We cannot all be profound students of nature; we can all be profound students of Scripture. Many an otherwise illiterate person has a marvelous grasp of Bible truth. It was acquired by study. There are persons who have studied little else, who have studied the Scriptures, by the hour, daily, and their consequent wisdom is the astonishment and sometimes the dismay of scholars and theologians.

CHAPTER II.

THE STUDY OF INDIVIDUAL BOOKS.

The first method of Bible study that we shall consider is the study of the Bible by individual books. This method of study is the most thorough, the most difficult, and the one that yields the largest and most permanent results. We take it up first because in the author's opinion it should occupy the greater portion of our time.

I.—*The first work to do, is to select the book to study.* This is a very important matter. If one makes an unfortunate selection he may become discouraged and give up a method of study that might have been most fruitful.

A few points will be helpful to the beginner:

1. *For your first book-study, choose a short book.* The choice of a long book to begin with, will lead to discouragement in any one but a person of rare perseverance. It will be so long before the final results, which far more than pay for all the labor expended, are reached, that the ordinary student will give it up.

2. *Choose a comparatively easy book.* Some books of the Bible present grave difficulties not to be found in other books. One will wish to meet and overcome these later, but it is not the work for a beginner to set for himself. When his powers have become trained by reason of use, then he can do this successfully and satisfactorily, but, if he attempts it, as so many rashly do, at the outset, he will soon find himself floundering. The First Epistle of Peter is an exceedingly precious book, but a few of the most difficult passages in the Bible are in it. If it were not for these difficult passages, it would be a good book to recommend to the beginner, but in view of these difficulties it is not wise to undertake to make it a subject of exhaustive study until later.

3. *Choose a book that is rich enough in its teaching to illustrate the advantages of this method of study and thus give a keen appetite for further studies of the same kind.* When one has gone through one reasonably large and full book by the method of study about to be described, he will have an eagerness for it, that will make it sure that he will somehow find time for further studies of the same sort.

A book that meets all the conditions stated is the First Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians. It is quite short, it has no great difficulties of

interpretation, meaning or doctrine, and it is exceedingly rich in its teaching. It has the further advantage of being the first in point of time of the Pauline Epistles. The First Epistle of John is not in most respects a difficult book, and it is one of the richest books in the Bible.

II.—*The second work to do, is to master the general contents of the book.* The method of doing this is very simple. It consists in merely reading the book through—without stopping and then reading it through again, and then again, say a dozen times in all, at a single sitting. To one who has never tried it, it does not seem as if that would amount to much, but any thoughtful man who has ever tried it will tell you quite differently. It is simply wonderful how a book takes on new meaning and beauty upon this sort of an acquaintance. It begins to open up. New relations between different parts of the book begin to disclose themselves. Fascinating lines of thought running through the book appear. The book is grasped as a whole, and the relation of the various parts to one another apprehended, and a foundation laid for an intelligent study of those parts in detail. Rev. James M. Gray of Boston, a great lover of the Bible and prominent teacher of it, says that for many years of his ministry he had “an inadequate and unsatisfac-

tory knowledge of the English Bible." "The first practical idea which he received in the study of the English Bible was from a layman. The brother possessed an unusual serenity and joy in his Christian experience, which he attributed to his reading of the Epistle to the Ephesians. Mr. Gray asked him how he had read it, and he said he had taken a pocket copy of the Epistle into the woods one Sunday afternoon, and read it through at a single sitting, repeating the process as many as a dozen times before stopping, and when he arose he had gotten possession of the Epistle, or rather its wondrous truths had gotten possession of him. This was the secret, simple as it was, for which Mr. Gray had been waiting and praying." From this time on Mr. Gray studied his Bible through in this way, and it became to him a new book.

III.—*The third work is to prepare an introduction to the Book.* Write down at the top of separate sheets of paper or cards the following questions: (1) Who wrote this book? (2) To whom did he write? (3) Where did he write it? (4) When did he write it? (5) What was the occasion of his writing? (6) What was the purpose for which he wrote? (7) What were the circumstances of the author when he wrote? (8) What were the circumstances

of those to whom he wrote? (9) What glimpses does the book give into the life and character of the author? (10) What are the leading ideas of the book? (11) What is the central truth of the book? (12) What are the characteristics of the book?

Having prepared your sheets of paper with these questions at the head, lay them side by side on your study table before you, and go through the book slowly, and, as you come to an answer to any one of these questions, write it down on the appropriate sheet of paper. It may be necessary to go through the book several times to do the work thoroughly and satisfactorily, but you will be amply repaid. When you have finished your own work in this line, and not until then, it will be well, if possible, to compare your results with those reached by others. A book that will serve as a good illustration of this introductory work is "The New Testament and Its Writers," Rev. J. A. McClymont.

The introduction one prepares for himself will be worth many times more to him than any that he can procure from others. The work itself is a rare education of the faculties of perception, comparison and reasoning.

The answers to our questions will sometimes be found in some related book. For example, if we are studying one of the Pauline Epistles, the answer to our questions may be found in the Acts

of the Apostles, or in the Epistle written to the place from which the one studied was written. Of course, all the questions given will not apply to every book in the Bible.

If one is not willing to give the time and labor necessary, this introductory work can be omitted, but only at a great sacrifice. Single passages in an epistle can never be correctly understood unless we know to whom they were written. Much false interpretation of the Bible arises from taking some direction manifestly intended for local application to be of universal authority. So, also, oftentimes false interpretation arises from applying to the unbeliever what was intended for the saint. Noting the occasion of writing, will clear up the meaning of a passage that would be otherwise obscure. Bearing in mind the circumstances of the author when he wrote, will frequently give new force to his words. When we remember that the jubilant epistle to the Philippians, with its oft-repeated "rejoice in the Lord" and its "in nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus," was written by a prisoner awaiting possible sentence of death, how much more meaningful it becomes. Bearing in mind the

main purpose for which a book was written, will help to interpret its incidental exhortations in their proper relations. In fact, the answers to all the questions will be valuable in all the work that follows, as well as valuable in themselves.

I V.—*The fourth work is to divide the book into its proper sections.* This work is not indispensable, but still it is valuable. Go through the book and notice the principal divisions in the thought, and mark these. Then go through these divisions and find if there are any natural subdivisions and mark these. In this work of dividing the epistle, the Revised Version, which is not chopped up by a purely mechanical and irrational verse division, but divided according to a logical plan, will be of great help. Having discovered the divisions of the book, proceed to give to each section an appropriate caption. Make this caption as precise a statement of the general contents of the section as possible. Make it also as terse and striking as possible, so that it will fix itself in the mind. As far as possible let the captions of the subdivisions connect themselves with the general caption of the division. Do not attempt too elaborate a division at first. The following division of 1st Peter, without many marked subdivisions, will serve as a simple illustration of what is meant:

1. Chap. i: 1, 2. Introduction and saluta-

tion to the pilgrims and sojourners in Pontus, etc.

2. Chap. i: 3-12. The Inheritance reserved in heaven and the Salvation ready to be revealed for those pilgrims who in the midst of manifold temptations are kept by the power of God through faith.

3. Chap. i: 13-25. The pilgrim's conduct during the days of his pilgrimage.

4. Chap. ii: 1-10. The high calling, position and destiny of the pilgrim people.

5. Chap. ii: 11, 12. The pilgrim's conduct during the days of his pilgrimage.

6. Chap. ii: 13-17. The pilgrim's duty toward the human governments under which he lives.

7. Chap. ii: 18:-iii: 7. The duty of various classes of pilgrims.

a. Chap. ii: 18-25. The duty of servants toward their masters—enforced by an appeal to Christ's conduct under injustice and reviling.

b. Chap. iii: 1-6. The duty of wives toward husbands.

c. Chap. iii: 7. The duty of husbands toward their wives.

8. Chap. iii: 8-12. The conduct of pilgrims toward one another.

9. Chap. iii: 13-22. The pilgrim suffering for righteousness' sake.