

Rightly Dividing the Word

✘ Although it is true that the divine life of Christ resides within us, it also is true that we must make ourselves available to His working by filling our minds with the Word of God. If you're seeking fresh revelation from God, you're ready for some very practical guidelines and methods for mining this precious silver (see Prov. 2:1-8).

Some will undoubtedly prefer to gaze at the beauty of the treasure others have rather than picking up the tools and digging for themselves. But the revelation of another will not have the same power to redeem our souls that a personal encounter with God's Word has.

At first, these study tools may seem useless. But without these practical instruments to help us, we will not be successful in extracting the precious silver ore of wisdom and revelation.

Digging Tools

My daddy had quite an elaborate workshop in our home. His many expensive and sophisticated tools qualified him to do difficult carpentry, plumbing and electrical home-improvement tasks. But he also had a small toolbox that he carried with him everywhere.

As a little girl, tagging behind my daddy, I learned to identify the tools in that little box. I even learned to use some of

them. In a similar way, we do not need an elaborate theologian's library to study God's Word effectively, but we do need to have a toolbox filled with basic items that will help us in our task.

The Scriptures describe the practical work involved in digging for silver when they admonish us to "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15, KJV). If we aren't willing to apply ourselves to the work of study, we don't want wisdom badly enough. We need to get alone with God and ask Him for a greater hunger for Himself.

A Place of Study

In this world of electronic noise and distractions, we must prepare a place for study that will afford us the quiet we need to "Be still, and know that [He] is God" (Ps. 46:10). We need a place where we can effectively limit the interruptions of clients, family, pets and phone calls.

Our place of study should include a desk (or table), writing utensils and shelves for storing study books. The necessary tools for mining silver should be conveniently placed so we don't have to run to the basement or upstairs to locate something we need. We should take care to prepare a comfortable place to seek God

and furnish
it with all the necessary instruments.

The Bible

A prerequisite for Bible study is a good study Bible. It should be one with print that can be easily read and with paper that is suitable for marking.

I find the King James Version unsurpassed for its beauty of expression in the English language. However, in view of language changes, a reading of various modern translations will help to throw light on many Bible passages.

Some translators have allowed their theological bias to enter into their translating work. Therefore, it is wise to anchor our reading in the King James Version and to use other versions as supplements, referring to the original languages, if possible, when questions are raised regarding translation.

Here is a partial listing of other useful translations, each with its own study helps.

The Scofield Reference Bible is a popular resource. The text is prominent in bold type, with comments at the foot and numerous synopses on various subjects. Some of the notes are excellent; to many, others are unacceptable.

In places the comments are strongly Calvinistic. Unlike a number of other Bibles, it is not self-pronouncing. A loose-leaf, wide-margin edition is available for notes.

The Thompson Chain-Reference Bible has a host of notes in the margin and the "Condensed Encyclopedia," which is an excellent section divided into more than 4,000 topics. It also contains information on the canon and the principal English versions, an outlined analysis of each book, a number of maps, a concordance and an index. This Bible also has a good harmony of the four gospels and several excellent charts.

The New King James Bible is believed by many to be the translation nearest to the original transcripts of the Bible.

The New Jerusalem Bible is esteemed by many, along with several other reference Bibles that are worthy of mention such as The New Oxford Reference Bible, The Holman Study Bible and The New American Standard Bible.

The Worrell New Testament includes notes by the translator, A.S. Worrell. It is footnoted with many helpful alternative renderings and explanatory notes.

The Emphasized Bible by Joseph Bryant Rotherham is useful as a study and reference book, particularly in sections containing Old Testament notes.

The Moffatt Bible translation has many brilliant insights. However, the liberal theology of the author shows on occasion.

The New Testament in Modern Speech by Richard F. Weymouth is a clear, simple, dignified translation. It is sound from a doctrinal viewpoint.

The New Testament: In the Language of the People by Charles B. Williams is valuable, particularly in the translation of the Greek tenses.

The New Testament in Modern English by J.B. Phillips is a paraphrase. Its low-key prose is almost casual. For example, the familiar King James "holy kiss" (see 1 Cor. 16:20) becomes "shake hands all around."

Reading the same verse from different translations can shed light on the passage's true meaning as we ask the Holy Spirit to unveil the divine message it contains. Although it is good to follow a daily reading schedule, it is not necessary to devour large portions of the Scripture at a time.

Many times the Holy Spirit will illuminate one word in a passage, and it becomes beneficial to search out that word in other passages. He will always lead us to unearth the richest veins of silver.

The Concordance

One of the foremost tools for Bible study, the concordance, provides immediate access to any verse of Scripture, even if one remembers only one word or a few words contained in it.

Three concordances are recognized as leaders in the field: Cruden's Unabridged Concordance, Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible and Strong's Exhaustive Concordance. The latter

two are
more comprehensive.

Englishman's Greek Concordance of the New Testament and
Englishman's Hebrew Concordance of the Old Testament, along
with a
Greek lexicon and Hebrew lexicon, can be of great value for
more
advanced Bible students.

Bible Dictionaries and Encyclopedias

Another very important aid to Bible study is a dictionary
of the Bible. It is an alphabetically arranged compilation of
words and
their definitions, all with biblical significance. Included
are proper
nouns—the names of persons and places—as well as common nouns
with
scriptural meanings.

Through the use of a dictionary and an encyclopedia, the
student can obtain a clearer understanding of difficult words
and
unfamiliar names of persons, places and things. For example,
the

"cubit," a biblical unit of measure, is found to be nearly 18
inches.

The word "penny" is discovered to be the translation of the
Greek word

"denarius," which was the chief Roman silver coin, worth about
15 to 17

cents, or the equivalent of a day's wages in Jesus' time.

A Bible dictionary defines the word "publican" as the
collector of Roman revenue. It gives detailed information
regarding
this class of Romans, hated among the Jews for their

fraudulent

extraction under the vicious system of government.

A Bible dictionary and encyclopedia will bring a flood of light to the student when he is looking for the meaning of unfamiliar

terms. Among the better-known works are The Concise Bible Dictionary by

Merrill F. Unger, The New International Bible Dictionary and Zondervan's Pictorial Bible Dictionary, both by J.D. Douglas and

Merrill C. Tenney.

For those who desire a more exhaustive treatment of subject matter, there is The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia

by Geoffrey W. Bromiley in four volumes and A Dictionary of the Bible

by William Smith in one volume. The Westminster Concise Bible Dictionary by Barbara Smith and George Ernest Wright is one of my

favorites to use.

Bible Atlas and Bible History

Though of secondary importance to the basic aids already listed, a Bible atlas, along with books on biblical history and

customs, can make substantial contributions to the study of the Bible.

One example, the Holman Bible Atlas by Thomas V. Brisco, is a source book of general information on Bible geography, geology and

archeology. Baker's Bible Atlas by Charles F. Pfeiffer is a good tool

for study purposes.

For example, the missionary journeys of Paul as recorded

in the book of Acts, along with his epistles to the churches, take on enriched meaning to the student who has a knowledge of the geography of the lands involved. The same could be said for the journeys of Jesus, Abraham and other significant Bible personalities.

A knowledge of Bible manners and traditions can broaden your understanding of the Scriptures. Books such as *The Land and the Book* by Charles R. Page and *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Manners and Customs* by Howard F. Vos are helpful in this regard.

Commentary

A Bible commentary, as the name suggests, interprets the meaning of each Bible passage—verse by verse. For hundreds of years Bible scholars and spiritual leaders have recorded the results of their studies, and much of this has been gathered in various commentaries.

Some commentaries are the work of a single author, while others are a compilation of the efforts of several scholars and range in size from one volume to well over 50 volumes. Three of the better-known versions are *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*; *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown's New Commentary on the Whole Bible*; and *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* by Everett F. Harrison and Charles F. Pfeiffer.

Additional Resources

The Complete WordStudy Dictionary: New Testament (1992) and The Complete WordStudy New Testament, both by Spiros Zodhiates, are wonderful tools for studying the words in the original languages. They give invaluable help in the digging of silver.

Nave's Topical Bible is a kind of concordance with full texts, a digest of 20,000 topics and subtopics and 100,000 references to the Scriptures. Also, another valuable tool for study, and a mine of general Bible information, is Halley's Bible Handbook.

My purpose here is to introduce the believer to a variety of effective tools for serious study of the Word. This list is limited, but perhaps it will serve as a help to those who are beginning to develop a Bible study library.

It is important to note that the serious study of the hidden treasure in the Scriptures will not always be convenient. With all of our timesaving devices, we are still the busiest generation that ever lived. It will require sacrifice just to come to a place of study.

Once there, we need to be willing to exert effort in study and prayer in order to uncover the rich veins of silver awaiting us in the revelation of the Word of God. Whatever sacrifices and efforts are required, it will be worth it all to savor the presence of God in your soul, which is the only source of true satisfaction we can

know.

The late Fuchsia Pickett was a noted Bible teacher and author of numerous books, including Receiving Divine Revelation and How to Search the Scriptures, from which this article is adapted.