

The Sure Word Bible Studies

Lesson 1

The Sure Word of Truth

One thing is certain – we live in uncertain times. And as always, most people depend upon their fellowman for truth and spiritual guidance which leads to more uncertainty. The Catholic Priest, the Jewish Rabbi, and the Protestant preacher, all say they speak for God. They all claim to have the truth, yet they all are teaching different things! How can that be? Common sense tells us that all of them can't be right. In fact, the Bible warns us that even some ministers will be agents for Satan!

II Corinthians 11:14,15 *"And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works."*

This being the case, how can we know for sure what is true? Jesus praying to the Father, said: *"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth"* (John 17:17).

God's word is truth and is found in the Bible. The Bible is the only constant, unchanging guide we have to help us navigate the uncertain times in which we live.

Here are some important facts about the Bible:

- * The Bible is not one book, but a collection of books in one binding.
- * Over 40 different men wrote the Bible over a period of 1500 years.
- * Each Bible writer wrote in his native language, Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek.
- * These men came from various backgrounds, different levels of education and different cultures.

Scripture is not the thoughts and ideas of these individual men, but the Bible itself tells us: *"for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."* (II Peter 1:21)

The Bible is not a word for word dictation from God, but rather God speaking through the human mind with each writer expressing it in their own way.

The Bible was written in a way that enables it to speak to all men in every age, language and culture. Because of this we will find some difficulties which will require more than a casual reading to understand.

The Bible was first circulated as a complete unit during the 4th century and copied by hand until 1469 A.D. and the invention of the printing press.

The original writings had no chapters, verses, or punctuation. Punctuation was not added until the Bible was translated into the English language. Verses were added to the Old Testament in by Jewish rabbis in 900 A.D. The Bible was divided into chapters by Stephen Langston, professor in the University of Paris, during the 12th century and finally verses were added to the New Testament in A.D. 1551 by Robert Stephens.

The Jewish Bible has 39 books. (The Old Testament only)

The Catholic Bible has 73 books, the Old and New Testaments plus seven additional "apocryphal" (which means "hidden") books which were rejected by the Protestants as un-inspired.

The Protestant Bible has 66 books including both the Old and New Testaments.

The combination of books selected to be included in the Bible are known as the "canon" of scripture. They meet the criteria set by the church qualifying each one as an inspired writing.

Today the Bible has been translated into more than two thousand languages and many different versions. The versions can be divided into three different types of translations.

(1) "Word for word" translations. Examples are the King James KJV, New King James NKJV, New American Standard NAS and the English Standard Version ESV.

In these versions the translators have attempted to stay as close to the original wording as possible.

(2) "Thought for thought" translations. Examples are the New International NIV and New Living Translation NLT.

In these versions the translators have attempted to convey the thought the writer had in mind rather than the exact words.

(3) "Paraphrase" translations. Examples are the Clear Word, the Message, or the Living Bible.

These versions are usually done by one person rather than a group in which the translator puts into his own words what he believes the writer was saying.

The "word for word" translations are considered the best for study and teaching while the others are considered best for public and / or personal reading.

A casual reading of the Bible isn't enough. We need to know for ourselves how to study and correctly interpret and understand its contents.

If our study is to be fruitful it will involve work, effort, and patience. There will be times of discouragement, especially in the beginning, but we must be persistent. Because we do not understand or can't make sense of something should not cause us to lose confidence in the scriptures, if we keep studying – understanding will come.

Some of the problems we find as we study may be products of our inaccurate perception rather than actual mistakes in the Bible. We must be careful that we do not put God on trial when we come across a text that we cannot understand. Remember, God is infallible - we are not.

The following is a list of helpful tools for Bible study.

1. Different versions of the Bible for comparison.
2. Exhaustive concordance with Hebrew and Greek dictionary.
3. Bible dictionary.
4. Bible commentaries.
5. Computer Bible programs. (There are some free ones, like Bible Explorer and E-sword.)

The following ten principles will help us better understand the Bible and correctly apply it to our lives.

- 1. Before studying the Bible always first ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.**

John 14:26 *"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."*

The same Holy Spirit that inspired the writing of the scriptures will help us to understand them.

- 2. Approach Bible study with humility, an open mind, seeking to learn, never with preconceived ideas or pride of opinion.**

Matthew 18:3,4 *"Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."*

“Become as little children.” That is, being inquisitive, open minded and willing to be taught. No matter how old or how well educated we may be, that must be our attitude when studying the Bible if we are to know the truth.

3. Develop the practice of asking questions about what is read.

When we read the Bible or engage in conversations with other Christians, we will hear or read words and phrases we do not understand. There may have been times when we may have repeated them even though we couldn't explain them.

For example, can you clearly explain the meaning of the expression, *“covered by the blood”*? Or can you explain the meaning of words like *“justification, sanctification, and propitiation?”* If we can't explain it, it usually means we don't understand it.

Often the problem is that we don't ask, *“What does that mean?”* Because after all, a good Christian should know what all those words and phrases mean, shouldn't they? But if we don't know, we should set aside our pride and ask *“What does that mean?”* and diligently seek the answer.

4. Consider all scripture on a subject before drawing any conclusions on that subject.

A concordance is a must for this. We begin by looking up the key words of the topic or subject we wish to learn more about; for example, the baptism of Jesus. The key words would be “baptize,” “baptism,” or “baptized,” and “Jesus.” Next we look at the verses that include these words. In this example, we begin with a text in the book of Luke.

Luke 3:19 - 23 *"But Herod the tetrarch, being rebuked by him concerning Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, also added this, above all, that he*

shut John up in prison. When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased." Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age,"

These verses tell us 1) Jesus was baptized. 2) That the Holy Spirit came upon Him at that time, and 3) that He was 30 years old. But they do not tell us who baptized Jesus or where. So we look at another account of this event in the book of Mark.

Mark 1:9,10 *"It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove."*

This text has given us more detail; it tells us who baptized Jesus and where. Then reading another passage relating to this subject in the book of Acts we learn even more about Jesus baptism.

Acts 10:37,38 *"that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how **God anointed Jesus** of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him."*

Here we learn that Jesus' baptism signified His anointing by God with the Holy Spirit prior to His beginning His ministry. This is when He actually became, the "Christ" or the "Anointed." (The word Christ means "anointed one.")

By looking at everything the Bible has to say on a subject we can better know the truth about that subject. Remember, never say, "The Bible says" until you've looked at everything the Bible says!

5. Word Studies.

Since the Bible was not originally written in English it must be translated. Translation is a difficult work because some Hebrew and Greek words have no equivalent in English. In addition to that, the translators may be strongly biased to a particular doctrine and unintentionally allow that to impact their translation.

Therefore doing word studies by examining the original Hebrew or Greek words used in scripture to better understand their definition and use is critical to Bible study.

The exhaustive concordance and Hebrew and Greek dictionaries are essential for this. This is especially true if you use the King James Version of the Bible. Hundreds of the words used in the translation of that version back in A.D. 1611 have completely changed meaning and some are no longer used at all.

An example of a word no longer used is found in Philippians 1:22 *“But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not.”* (KJV - King James Version)

Few people know what *“wot not”* means. *“Wot”* is an old English word for “know.” He is saying *“I know not.”*

An example of a word that has changed in meaning is Luke 17:7 –

“But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat?” (KJV)

The phrase *“by and by”* is translated from one Greek word “euthos” which means “immediately.” Today the expression *“by and by”* means just the opposite, it means later on. These are just a couple of simple examples that show the benefit of word studies.

It also should be remembered that in the original languages of the Bible, just as in modern English, some words have more than one

meaning and only by the way the word is used can we determine which meaning to apply. Note the following examples of the word “day.”

In the first example, a day is a literal 24-hour period.

Genesis 1:5 *"God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day."*

In the next example, a day is an indefinite period. It could be a day, a week, months or even years.

Ecclesiastes 7:14 *"In the day of prosperity be joyful, But in the day of adversity consider:"*

The final example speaks of “a day for a year.”

Numbers 14:34 *"According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years,"*

The use of a “*day for a year*” only applies in the setting of Bible prophecy which relates the foretelling of future events found mainly in the books of Daniel and Revelation.

Word studies are essential in whatever version we choose to use for study. We want to determine as best we can what the writer of the text intended to say, and not necessarily what the translator determined he intended to say.

6. Consider the context

The “*context*” is the main subject of a certain passage (a passage is a group of verses). Read the following passage and look for the context.

Romans 14:1 - 7 *"Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. For one believes he may eat all*

things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself."

Now think about what is being emphasized in these verses. It is obvious that the emphasis here is on judging others. Therefore judging others is the "context" of this passage. We must be careful that we do not take one or more verses out of this "context" and use them to teach something unrelated to the subject of judging others. Taking things "out of context" is how people can make the Bible say anything they want it to even though it may not be true.

7. Consider the cultural setting and time in which a passage of scripture was originally written.

By "cultural setting" we mean the way of life and customs of the people the writer of scripture was speaking directly to at the time he wrote. Once this is known, we can often times identify and apply the key principle of the text to our own culture and age. Note the following example.

I Corinthians 11:5,6 *"But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved. For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered."*

The context here is women being "covered" in public. If we look up the word "covered" in the Greek dictionary we find it is translated from a word meaning "a veil hanging down." Researching customs in Bible times in that part of the world reveal that it was considered disgraceful for a woman, especially a married woman, to be seen in public without a veil. This was seen as shameful to her husband which according to Ephesians 5:23 is her "head." *"For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church:"*

We can apply this in principle to our modern day society. Today women do not wear veils in most parts of the world, but they can dress in sexually provocative ways that may bring shame upon them in the eyes of society, their husbands if they are married, and to Christ if they claim to be Christians.

8. The principle of interpretation of figurative speech or symbolism.

How do we know when a passage is to be understood literally or figuratively in the Bible? The rule is this: If it makes good sense as it stands – if it does not violate the laws of nature, then it can be understood as literal. However, if that is not the case, then it must be taken figuratively or as a symbol. Here are two examples of this.

Matthew 5:29 *"If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell."*

Common sense tells us we need to take this figuratively. Jesus would not have us poke our eye out! Now note the following verse.

Revelation 13:1 *"Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns,*

and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name."

We know a creature as described here does not exist; therefore it must be a symbol. To understand the meaning of this symbol we must let the Bible interpret it. For this we need a concordance. In the concordance we look up all the places the Bible mentions a "beast" until we find one that explains the symbol. In this case this can be found in the book of Daniel.

Daniel 7:23 *"Thus he said: 'The fourth beast shall be A fourth kingdom on earth, Which shall be different from all other kingdoms,"*

Now we understand that in Bible prophecy, a beast is a symbol for a kingdom or a political power. Using a concordance in this way is very helpful in other areas of Bible study as well. This is allowing the Bible to interpret itself rather than depending on speculation or guesswork.

9. Dealing with discrepancies in the Bible.

As we study the Bible we will find some discrepancies. One example is found in the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. As you read through them you will find differences in details of the same events. But that does not mean that the writers were untruthful. The four gospels represent the life and teachings of Jesus through the eyes of four different men. A similar situation would be four people witnessing the same accident. The four people would most likely give four different views of the accident depending on how they saw it from where they were. That does not mean that any one of them was untruthful or that an accident didn't occur.

It's the same with all the different writers of scripture. That's another reason we need to read and study the entire Bible, comparing text with text so that we get all the evidence rather than

looking at only one or two verses and possibly drawing the wrong conclusions.

The good news is that with study and applying the correct principles of interpretation, we can learn from the discrepancies we find in the Bible rather than be confused and discouraged by them.

But the main thing in Bible study is that we come to know the One the Bible testifies about. Speaking of the scriptures Jesus said –

“These are they which testify of Me.” (John 5:39) and *“this is eternal life, that they might know You the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.”* (John 17:3)

When we say "know" we mean more than just intellectual knowledge, we mean a personal, intimate relationship with Him and Bible study is key to that end.

10. Study with persistence.

A superficial reading of the Bible will only result in a superficial understanding of the Bible. We must study the Bible for ourselves.

II Timothy 2:15 *“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”* (KJV)

II Timothy 3:16 *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”* (KJV)

“All scripture.” Remember, we must study the Bible as a whole and that it takes time and effort to correctly understand the scriptures. And don't forget to take advantage of the many tools available to help us with this work. The concordance, the Hebrew and Greek dictionary, Bible commentaries, computer programs, all these will greatly enhance our studies.

