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Document 1
Bible Study Methodology – Suggestions
Regarding the 'How-to'.

Introduction

“Remember the mark! Remember the mark!” the teacher would say to his excited amateurish theology students as they were leaving class when the lecture of the day was not to be finished until a later class session.

What he was talking about is a principle which observes that the mark of a mature mind is the ability to withhold judgment until all the evidence is in.

When the question is raised, “what does the Bible say?” about a particular subject, how one proceeds to the conclusion which answers that question is very important because a proper methodology must be followed for the conclusion to be valid.

Remember, “We may be taught by man to see the truth clearly, but God alone can teach the heart to receive the truth savingly, which means to receive the words of eternal life into good and honest hearts.” Ellen G White, Ye Shall Receive Power, P. 38.

Not only must we not form pre-mature conclusions, but we must follow proper procedure, under the guidance and enlightenment of the Lord, or our study will lead to enlightenment without leading to our salvation.

Bible Study Methodology 1

When the interest point is a single word or concept in one author.

- A. Identify the passage, if it is being recalled from memory. Check to see the verse or verses say what is remembered.
- B. Read the verses again.
- C. List the key word or words in your English translation.
- D. Look up the passage in the Hebrew or Greek Bible; if you don't know the languages use an interlinear Bible.

Note:

If you use The Interlinear Bible: Hebrew-Greek-English, translated by Jay P. Green Sr., the words are numbered with Strong's Concordance numbers above each word so you can do some word studies without learning a foreign language.

- E. Look the word up in the proper dictionary.

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance has a dictionary arranged numerically in the back; this enables you to arrive at a dictionary definition to a foreign word simply by reading under the right number. (The same numbers as the Interlinear Bible uses.)

Dictionaries are not always equal in usefulness. Therefore also looking your word up in Index to Brown Driver and Briggs Hebrew Lexicon will give you access to another Hebrew dictionary. This Index is arranged in order of the English Bible books, chapter and verse, and tells you which page and where on the page to find the proper entry in the Brown Driver and Briggs Lexicon. But it is still sometimes difficult to use.

Note: If the foreign language word you wish to study has already been transliterated, that is written in the American English alphabet, use the "Index-Lexicon" section in the back of Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible. This section will give you the various English translations in the King James Version for each Hebrew or Greek word. Using those translations you should be able to find your word in the Concordance.

- F. Look the word up in the proper concordance.

Having looked up the passage in the Interlinear Bible to get the number of the proper word, and having looked up the number in the dictionary you now know the basic meaning of your word.

Using this basic meaning look up your word in Strong's Concordance. Then read the entries in your Bible which have a corresponding number in the concordance (right hand column) to the number you found in the Interlinear Bible.

For illustration I have selected the word virgin in Isa. 7:14 - #5959.

Turn in your Strong's Concordance to virgin and look up only those texts with the number 5959 in the right hand margin of the entry; this way your text in English will only be presenting one Hebrew word.

Note: An easy way to get a quick dictionary and concordance meaning of some words is to carry the Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible which uses Strong's numbering system, though not all the words are numbered. This is a nice looking and inconspicuous Bible available in hardcover and leather, and has an abbreviated dictionary and concordance in the back.

- G. Read the word in a word study; and/or study all its occurrences in the book or author being studied. Sometimes you will want to check all its occurrences in the Bible.

For Old Testament words:

Having read the texts where your word occurs, the work Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament by Harris, Archer and Waltke, will give you information on the usages of the word that give it meaning. To find the proper entry turn to the back of vol. 2, to the table which translates Strong's numbers into Theological Wordbook numbers.

In the illustration above our word was #5959, which Theological Wordbook converts to #1630. Now you can easily turn to the proper entry and read; all entries are in numerical order.

For New Testament words: Use Strong's Numbering & the Hebrew Greek Key Study Bible by Zodhiates.

Note: Generally an exhaustive word study can only be done with an appropriate foreign language concordance.

- H. If the word you are studying is a concept read a dictionary of theology regarding the word. You will also need to consult a Subject Index or Naves Topical Bible.

Note:

The dictionary of theology will have a slant; you need to know its orientation.

Baker's Dictionary of Theology is basic Bible teaching. Richardson's A Dictionary of Christian Theology is more philosophical theology, while Parente, Piolanti, and Garofalo's Dictionary of Dogmatic Theology is Roman Catholic and bears the imprimatur and nihil obstat.

- I. Check the pronouns relevant to the passage – both preceding and following it, and identify their antecedents carefully.
- J. State in your own words what meaning the word or concept conveys to you.
- K. Read a commentary on the passage you are studying.

Check on the opinions of authors writing from various perspectives.

i.e.:

Soncino Bible is Jewish, and gives only limited commentary but can be interesting.

Note: If the concept occurs in a historical setting you may find a dictionary of archeology, or of the christian church, or of the Bible and religion, etc. to be very useful.

- L. Read Ellen White on the passage under study.

Using the "Scripture Index" in the front of the three vol. Index to the Writings of Ellen G. White, the Subject Index to the Ellen G. White periodical Articles, or A Scripture Index to the Review and Herald Articles by Ellen G. White will help to speed up and broaden your understanding of Ellen White's relevant materials.

- M. Modify, if necessary, your understanding. Identify where you erred.

Note:

Sometimes it is necessary to identify the theme of the book in which the concept occurs, because your concept may be a major thrust in that book.

- A. First identify the basic structure of the book being studied. (See Document 2 – pp. 7, 8)
- B. Identify: When the book was written

To whom written
By whom written
Basic thrust of the author

- C. Ask – does your conclusion about the theme fit into the book? If not, your conclusion may be erroneous!

Bible Study Methodology 2

When the concept or word being studied is of general application; that is it often appears in the whole Bible.

- A. Study the key word or words of the Bible passage where they occur in both parallel and non-parallel passages. (Remember, for example, Isaiah and Matthew don't use the word "virgin" in the same way.
- B. Determine whether the contextual definition (See bottom of this page for meaning of this term) of the word is different in any passage than the dictionary definition.

Note:

In Greek there are two words for lamb; both are said by the dictionary to mean the same thing in the Bible times.

When one reads of Jesus being the Lamb the question to be put to the dictionary is, "what is a lamb?" Then one asks, "What message does the title "Lamb" carry?"

The word AMNOS for lamb occurs in the Greek Old Testament about 85 times; approximately 70 of those occurrences are references to sacrifices – the context message is clear; the AMNOS lamb suffers and dies.

When John the Apostle speaks of Jesus as the Lamb of God in John 1:29, 36 the message is clear to us because he uses the Greek word AMNOS.

However when the same Apostle John writes of Jesus as the Lamb in the Revelation he uses the Greek word ARNION.

To start our study to find the meaning of this title we look at a Greek concordance to the Old Testament which is called the Septuagint; there we find ARNION occurs only 4 times, and never refers to a real lamb; lamb-like qualities are being presented; which characteristics of a lamb are being presented is determined in each occurrence of the word by studying the context in which the word appears

The resulting conclusion is of course called a contextual definition.

NOTE:

In the Revelation John uses ARNION as a composite symbol – Lion + Amnos; therefore we can read of the wrath of the ARNION. The ARNION word study tells us that AMNOS and ARNION are not synonyms; in this case the dictionary is wrong.

We can know we are correct because of doing the contextual definition.

Good word studies refine the dictionary definitions – sometimes. Contextual definitions are very important when Bible words are studied.

- C. Define the word or concept, identifying both the dictionary meaning and
- D. The divergent contextual meaning if there is one.
- E. Define the word or concept in each of your passages of study in your own words, identifying its message.
- F. Formulate the Biblical position.

Bible Study Methodology 3

When the point of interest is to know the Biblical teaching of a whole book regarding a doctrine.

This class of answers to questions comes from an accumulation of information taken from the Bible book being studied. Issues which are directly relevant here are issues such as

the reason the writer is writing

the audience the writer is directing his work to

the themes the writer uses to draw attention to the emphasis he wants the reader to see

the arraignment of the material the writer uses.

The answers to these types of questions are found by the seeker by counting the occurrences of the words that are most often repeated as determined by a quick reading of the material, and by noting questions raised by the writer who is writing because of his knowledge of the subject. Questions raised by a writer are often pivotal in the arraignment of the material he is presenting to the reader. Very often pivotal questions will be answered by the writer at some point in his telling of his story.

Example:

The Gospel writers

Mark: Question – What manner of man is this? 4:41

Answer – 16:19 The ascension; Jesus work taken up by others whom the Holy Spirit now works.

Luke: 1:1-4 To give certainty to a reader who will believe because he trusts Luke. For the full story the reader must be aware that the Gospel of Luke is only the first half of his story – Acts being the other half.

John 20:31 All things were written in order that you might believe.

Matthew (See overview chart, document 2, p. 8) One must also notice the repetition of themes. (The Parables all have a common theme.)

1. Read rapidly, two or three times the book or passages to be studied; looking for impressions and/or repeated words or ideas. Do not seek to interpret any of the symbols if there are any. Note only their relation to one another.

2. Note the big sections of the book, chart them and name them. Identify their boundaries.
(See Document 2 – pp. 7, 8)
3. Write a title to each chapter in each section.
4. Write a title to each paragraph, and write a one sentence summary of each paragraph.
(See Document 2 – pp. 7, 8)
5. Ask, and write out your answers in 2 or 3 sentences.
 - 1 – What is the teaching of the paragraph in a chapter; in each section of the book?
(See Document 2 – pp. 3-4, 7, 9-11)
 - 2 – Do the larger sections of the book or paragraph together change the message one would find if they were separated? What is that change or emphasis?
 - 3 – Count the words that are repeated often; is that emphasis different than your findings?
 - 4 – Identify the purpose for which the author is writing his material. (Which words appear most often?) Does the author state the purpose or theme? (See Document 2, p. 8)
 - 5 – Note what the problem in the passage is – if there is one—
--ask: does the author show a conclusion or solution to the problem?
 - 6 – Do you see progression in the arrangement of the material of key words?
 - 7 – Is there a reason the author does it in this order?
 - 8 – Does the structural arrangement contribute something to the general message or to the messages of the smaller sections? What is that contribution?
 - 9 – What contrasts or comparisons do you see? in the section and/or in the words repeated.

Summarize:

- A – The information you gathered as you studied and draw it together.
(See Document 2 – pp. 9-11)

State in your own words the general teaching of the book or doctrine you have been studying. (See Document 2 – pp. 9-11)

B – Note if other inspired writers have used the material you have been studying; is there usage different than yours? What is being taught by the difference – if there is one?

C – Identify the historical or primary setting and message.

- Identify the secondary application used by other inspired writers.
- Ask: is there a third dimension to the message?

In Conclusion: Summarize in a few words the teaching which is contained in the concepts and/or vocabulary you have been studying. Note also dimensions added by the usage of the primary passage by other inspired writers.

Bible Study Methodology 4:

When the point of interest is to do an inductive doctrinal study.

- 1 – Identify the key Biblical passages using a concordance.
- 2 – Do book – chapter – paragraph summary studies, identifying and naming the various sections you see – write out your observations. (See Document 2 – pp. 7, 8)
- 3 – Identify the central teaching of the doctrine, and circumstances that would limit or alter that teaching as set out by the respective authors studied.
- 4 – State in your own words the teaching of that doctrine. (See Document 2 – pp. 5, 6, 9-11)

Remember the mark! Withhold judgment until your work is done, but do formulate hypotheses as you go along, checking them by your subsequent research.

The mark of a mature mind is the ability to withhold judgment until all the evidence is in.

Have fun! Bible study is very rewarding.