

How to Study the Bible

by Walter Wilson

To study the Bible effectively, you need to approach it with a specific goal in mind, use the right tools, and rely on the Holy Spirit to guide you.

Duration: 32:28

Scripture: John 4:14, John 6:35, John 7:8-9

Topics: "Bible Study"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of studying and digging into the Bible. He encourages listeners to have a thorough understanding of the scriptures and not just read a little bit to satisfy their conscience. The speaker also discusses the significance of mountains and rivers in the Bible and relates it to the attitude of Christians. He urges believers to examine if they are truly living out their faith and sharing the gospel with others. Additionally, the speaker suggests studying four specific books of the Bible and reading them repeatedly to gain a deeper understanding of God's word.

Transcript

Thank you very much, and I thank all you friends for being so patient, listening, and for the wonderful kindness I've had from this group, both the staff of the Winona Lake Bible Conference and the Jewish friends, who treated me like the king of Sweden, far better than I ever deserved. I thank all of you for it. Tomorrow morning I'll be preaching out at Seattle, Washington, at Lake Sammamish Bible Conference, God willing, and then going down to spend two days with Bill Graham in Los Angeles.

I was with him in his first meeting in Los Angeles in 1949, and I hope to have two days with him next week, and then home to get acquainted with my relatives. You'll be able to get the tracts again. A new supply, I believe, has come in.

The Holy Spirit in you, and whose body is yours, and then the booklet on theologies and phobias that I wrote for the benefit of school teachers and education leaders who will never throw it away. They'll use it constantly, and the gospel message is in the back of it. So if you get the gospel to them, and the book is all thoseologies and phobias, you can get that too at the bookstore.

Bill, I'm going to talk to you this morning about how to study the Bible. And it's a wonderful subject, because it looks so easy, you know, to milk a cow. All you do is squeeze, you know, and get a tear in your face.

That's about all you'll get, unless you know how to get it out. In fact, that's true in studying the Bible. Now, studying the Bible is not reading the Bible.

You read and get what you can while you're reading. But studying is taking one subject and learning that subject. A preacher called me up one time and asked me if I'd give him two weeks on the book of Revelation.

He said, I read through that book once, and I couldn't understand it. And I said, I read through a cookbook once, and I didn't understand it either. Now, if you're reading your Bible, may I suggest that you begin at Genesis for history, the Psalms for devotion, Daniel for prophecy, and Matthew for the gospel.

Read a chapter in each of those four places, and that mixes up so nicely that you don't get tired of it. You start in on 1 Chronicles, begat, begat, begat, begat, and you get sick of it. But if you start in those four places, you get a good mixture.

History from Genesis 1, and then there's devotions from Psalms, and then prophecy from Daniel, and the gospel from Matthew. One chapter in each place takes you through by Thanksgiving Day. Two chapters in each place takes you twice, one through in June and the next time in November.

So read it and read it and read it and read it, and then study it. So I want to give you a suggestion. We study to get something for our minds.

We feed on the word of God to get something for our souls. Don't always be studying to learn something. Study to get something.

We have to have the will. We send our children to the dining room for food and to the schoolroom for education. If they go all the time to the schoolroom, they get pretty thin, they get heady.

If they spend all the time in the schoolroom, they go to the dining room, they get wonderful and heady, but they get to carry their bodies. And if they spend all the time in the dining room, they get awful fat. But don't worry.

When you open your Bible, open it first to get something for your own soul, and then in order to learn the precious truth of the word of God. I want to suggest to you that you get four books for Bible study. You can't go to college, perhaps, but you can have a college in your own home by use of four books.

Of course, the first one is five. The first one is a Bible with print big enough so you can read it when the light is dim and when your eyes are not too good. And you have no excuse for not reading it.

Get one with type big enough. And get a Bible, beloved, that has center references. I'm going to tell you how to use them in a minute.

Center references down through the middle with very tiny letters in the verse that refer to the margin. I'll tell you about that pretty soon. That's your first book.

Then the second one is, get a good Bible dictionary. The best one I know of is the New Pictorial Bible Dictionary that is so thorough, so wonderful, with pictures of all the different things, flowers and animals and fish and birds and money and all sorts of things illustrated and explained, so that you learn what things are in the Bible. The third is, get a one-volume or six-volume, if you want to, Matthew Henry or one of the good commentaries.

I like Matthew Henry the best myself. But you can get any of them. Jameson, Fossett and Brown has one-volume commentary.

And then Matthew Henry, you can get him one-volume commentary. You can get these books, any of them, from Moody Bookstore in Chicago or at Zonderman's here. That's the next book.

Then the third one is, get a book on types. Mine only is the best, of course. Wilson's Dictionary of Bible Types.

It has 4,739 types described in it. Not pictures, but descriptions telling you the story. What each one represents.

All the birds in the Bible, all the animals, all of the 37 parts of the human body are used as types in the Bible. And all the minerals and metals and jewels and mountains and all sorts of things that God uses as types or symbols or pictures of truth in the word. Get that book.

And then you want one, of course, on concordance. And I suggest Krugan's to you. Krugan's Concordance.

Because most of what you use it for is to find things, where things are in the Bible. I know there's Strong's and Young's and Wigram's. I have all three of them.

I gave away two of them. But you don't use those too much. They're too hard to handle for the ordinary person.

If you're a Bible student, you can use them better. But ordinary, Krugan's Concordance is the one. I carry one with me all the time in my satchel.

I don't know how many I've worn out. I think I've worn out two or three already. Because I use them all the time.

I decided when I was 17 years old, I'd never let a verse get away from me. Think about it, quote, the verse, and I didn't know where it was. I went and looked it up right away.

I'm still doing that. I've had to use that thing sure a few times since I've been here. It kind of hurts my conscience to have to do it, because I think I ought to know where everything is.

But some verses get away from me. So get those books. And that will give you a library that will teach you.

Something you can learn. Then second, look for something definite in the Bible when you're studying. Something definite.

If you're going to look up the blood or the clouds, God said to Job, Dost thou understand the balancing of the clouds? Well, clouds are mentioned all through the Bible in many ways. They are types, of course. Look up clouds.

Look up shoes. See what the Bible says about shoes or hair or sitting down or riding up or running. Anything, any thought that you find as you read your Bible, make a note of it on a piece of paper in front of your Bible, and then after you get through your reading, then do some studying of that particular thing that struck you.

It might be a bald head. I eat bald heads and they ain't saved for Christ. And I've had some wonderful success with that.

Or it might be a book. Or it might be life. Or it might be thought.

Or it might be the word grace or mercy or peace. Take one thing and look that thing up in your Bible so you know that subject. That's studying the Scripture.

And then the third thing is, when you go to your Bible, be sure you know what you want. Don't just go and read it. I had a friend who wanted to go to a Bible conference, and so he let his Bible fall open and said, My Lord, you show me from your Bible where I'm to go and whether I'm to go or not.

And it fell open on the 7th of John where Jesus said, Go thou up to this feast. Boy, he said, there's a right answer right now. So off he went.

But when he got there, the two preachers were tearing everybody to pieces, taking their salvation away from them, putting doubts in their minds and making them miserable. After two days of that skimming, he says, I don't know why the Lord sent me here. I'm going to see what the Bible says.

So he let his Bible fall open, and to his astonishment, it fell open in the same place. So he read again. Go ye up to this feast.

But the next verse said, I go not up to this feast. Boy, he said, Lord, if I'd known you weren't coming, I wouldn't come myself. That's what your Bible says.

Look at the text. Look at the context and find what he's talking about. So when you go to your Bible to study it, have something definite, specific in your mind to look up.

It might be an action, or it might be an object. Personally, I look up everything. Every time I find something in the Bible, some object, I look it right up.

I have books on birds and bees and bats and bugs and butterflies and wild animals and tame animals and weather and wind and stars. I go right to my library and look that thing up. The other day I had a letter from a woman saying, Who was that giant Pleiades that had such a wonderful influence on people? Pleiades, a man, a giant.

I had to write him back and tell him that was a bunch of stars up in the sky. So if you have a heart hunger for something, go and look it up so that you know what he's talking about. Look up the word hell or the word grave.

By the way, hell and grave are never the same place. I know it's taught by some groups that they are, but they're not. The word for grave in the Old Testament is quiber.

The word for hell is sheol, and they never are the same place. You notice that nobody ever digs a sheol, but they dig lots of quibers. Nobody ever named a sheol for himself, but they named lots of quibers for themselves.

Quibers is often in the plural. Sheol never is in the plural. And then men put people into quibers.

Nobody ever puts anybody into sheol. They're entirely different things. Don't let anybody fool you into telling you the grave and hell are the same thing, because they're absolutely not.

Well, look it up in your Bible. You might look up the five kinds of forgiveness that there are. I love that subject.

There are five kinds of forgiveness. I won't tell you what they are. I want you to look them up for yourself.

I don't mind milking the cow for some people. And then there are five kinds of kindness in the Bible. Look those up and see what he's talking about when he says kindness.

Look at the context and see what it is, and then take your concordance and look up the word kindness all the way through. It might be glass. Now we see through a glass darkly.

What's he talking about? Well, I use that for winning sores. When I see anybody with dark glasses on, I say, Are you a Bible student? I see it says, Now we see through a glass darkly. And you're looking through these dark glasses.

I wonder if you're one of those. And I won some sores to Christ by it. It might be the nose.

You know a man with a broken nose couldn't be a priest? An animal with a broken nose couldn't be a sacrifice? I wouldn't tell you these if you don't buy my book on types. But then the nose is the organ of discernment. You stick your nose into a bag of eggs, and you know whether the two of them are real old hens or not.

You can tell when you go in the door what they're going to have for supper. Your nose tells you. Now, if you can't tell what's of God and what's of the devil, what's from heaven and what's from hell, what's right and what's wrong, how can you be a leader of God's people or a teacher of God's word? Well, I mustn't tell you that much.

Then in studying your Bible, look for something that will help you yourself. Look up anger or kindness, attitudes of the human mind and heart. Take your concordance and look at that word and see every place where that word occurs, and then apply it to your own heart, and let the Holy Spirit do it.

Then coming back to the study itself, be sure you go to the Holy Spirit when you open your Bible, and because he wrote it, and the Lord Jesus said, He has come. He will teach you. Don't say your Father will teach you by the Spirit.

Don't ever use that expression. That's the devil's expression. Only five times in the whole Bible do we read that God does something by the Spirit.

Only five times. And never about his dealings with us at all. For the Spirit is God.

The Spirit's a person. Go right to the one that wrote it. And say, what do you mean by this passage? I've had to do it many a time when reading passages I couldn't understand.

Just go to the Holy Spirit and ask him about it. For instance, there's that verse, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. I looked up singing, and I wondered why no earthly tribe has ever been found that has music, until the Bible went there.

No heathen tribe ever has music. They have noises and tom-toms and bladders and disassociated sounds, but no music. Then when the Bible goes there and the Savior is preached, oh, then they sing.

Why? Well, I'm on my knees to it, and I said, Lord, why is this? You say singing, that's a mark of the Spirit-filled Christian, is singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. And he told me about it. You know, Lord, you can go to the Holy Spirit about things you don't understand in your Bible.

And then again, we must go to him to let us know, to tell us what we need in our particular line of life. Each one of us has a different kind of living. All of us live in a different way and have a different group of friends.

And we don't know what it is we need to know. Now, when I started studying medicine, my father, who was a doctor, said, Lord, get a job in a doctor's office if you can, and get a job at night running errands for the drugstore. And read medical magazines.

You don't know what they say, but read them and get those words in your mind. And learn what the medicines look like, whether they're liquids or powders or granules or what they are, and what they smell like and what they look like and what they do. Learn all you can, in other words, saturate your life with medical things.

Well, I thanked him a hundred times for it, because I did it. I got a job in a doctor's office with two surgeons. One was a doctor and one was a surgeon.

And I didn't know a thing about it, but I learned a lot listening to them. And then I said to myself, if that works in my medical experience, what about my spiritual experience? And I said, I'm going to saturate my soul and heart in the word of God and read it and read it and read it and study it and study it and read it. And I want to tell you something.

It's wondering what the Holy Spirit will do for you if you do it. He's the one that wrote it, and He's the one that explains it, and He's the one that gives us what we can use. There are some things in medicine I never tried to learn.

Being colorblind, I knew I couldn't. I don't know red from green or pink or blue or what they are. They're all look alike to me.

And I knew it was no use when I studied skin diseases, because I couldn't tell whether it was red or pink or green. And under the microscope, I couldn't tell the colors. So I had sense enough to stay off of that stuff and study the things I could understand.

Now, beloved, you do that with your Bible. You open your Bible and say, Holy Spirit, I don't know what I can take in. I don't know what my mental ability is.

I don't know what You want me to know and what I can use to the best advantage. So I'm looking to You when I read Your Word to tell me what I need to know. And I want to say to you, your Bible will be a new book, beloved.

That's the honest truth. You can't read your Bible like you read a novel or a history or something of that sort. You can't do it.

Well, you can do it, but you won't get anywhere. But if you want something from heaven, you go to that lovely one that wrote the Bible and the Savior sent Him to teach us. Didn't I say that? When He has come,

come to you, He will teach you all things.

I love that. And, beloved, I'll tell you, I just revel in it. Sometimes I take a dry subject like the first chapter of 1 Chronicles.

Begat, begat, begat. I couldn't get out of that chapter for about six months. I started looking up the meaning of the names.

I took my prudence concordance, and in the back of it there's a list of the meaning of all the names in the Bible. And I started in with Adam first to see what that name meant, and then the next one, and then the next one. It was about six months before I got through that thing, but I'll tell you, I was a-shouting somebody when I got through with it.

It's wonderful what you learn, studying the meaning of the names and why they occur, why they do, and why some names were omitted from the genealogy of Christ. Because I took a lead pencil and made a line from Adam and put it down at the end of the chapter, and I wrote a little down underneath each name that occurred in Matthew 1 or Luke 3, where you get the genealogy of the Savior. And I picked out his genealogy in that first chapter, and I will tell you, it was simply wonderful to see what he did not put in the list, as well as what he did put in the list.

And I thank God for the first chapter of 1 Chronicles when I got about halfway through. You see, when you study, you learn something. The Lord doesn't want us to be an ignoramus.

He wants us to know what his Bible says. Or you might take a person like Asher, for instance. You study the names, the meanings of the names of the twelve patriarchs, and then the history of each one.

How he lived, what he did. And if you read the life of Asher, oh, say, you won't want to go to bed reading the life of that man. Or Zerubbabel.

His life is wonderful. God said something about Zerubbabel that he didn't say about any other man in the Bible. It's in the last verse of Haggai's little book of two chapters.

It says, I will take thee, O Zerubbabel, and make thee as my signet, saith the Lord of hosts. Oh, boy, and I wrote in the margin of my Bible, God do that to me. So that every life he would touch would receive an imprint of heaven, an imprint of God.

Every life he touched would know that he'd been in touch with God. Oh, I said, Lord, do that to me. I've known Christians that did that to me.

When I met them, conversed with them, listened to them, they did something to my soul for heaven that I never forgot. Two men particularly in my life, C.J. Baker, my father-in-law, and Mr. Donald Ross, a Scotchman, and another one, Archie Payne, and another one, a fourth one, John Moffat, a coal miner at Central Iowa. Those men touched my life and I never forgot it.

What I am today, I owe to these dear men and women who touched my life with something from heaven. And I love it. I want that.

Wouldn't you like to be one of God's signets? Well, such is life in Zerubbabel. His name occurs in the first chapter of Matthew. He was born of Salatheo down in Babylon.

Then you go through your book, look in your concordance under the name of Zerubbabel, and see all that he did. Oh, say, it's ice cream and cake. Be one of them.

Or you might take Daniel. Read the story of Daniel's wife, who came out of obscurity and slavery and was a eunuch, couldn't have a wife or a family. And God made him the world ruler under four dynasties.

As far as I know in my ancient history, he's the only man in the world that ever ruled under four different kings. Ruled the whole world. Read the story of his life.

What he did and what he said and how he acted. I tell you, it'll make you want to be like him. And you will say, Lord, do that to me.

Or take the life of Issachar, one of the twelve great patriarchs. Issachar. And see what it says about resting under that man's influence.

Resting. It's one of the few things it'll make you want to be like him. Or you might take the subject of dogs.

What a wonderful subject it is. Go on through your Bible about dogs. You know, cats are only mentioned once in the Bible.

Dogs are mentioned a great many times. But as far as I know, there's only one reference to cats. It's found in Psalm 91.

It says about this pestilence that walketh in darkness. That's cats. I know some of you like cats, but you can have them.

But look up the subject of dogs. Or I'll tell you an interesting subject. Look up the subject of asses.

Now, in the third chapter of Ecclesiastes, there are seven pairs. No, is it? Fourteen. Yeah, fourteen pairs of things.

A time to love, a time to hate, a time to build, a time to tear down, a time to get, and a time to give. There are fourteen of those pairs. That makes twenty-eight.

And there are twenty-eight asses mentioned in the Bible. And there's an ass for each of those times. Now, don't look at me so funny.

I'm telling you the truth. Look it up for yourself. It's most interesting to see what God says about asses.

And you'll take your hair off the next time you see one. Or you might want to look up money. All the different kinds of money and see what they represent.

What a talent of gold is. If you get in the back of your concordance or in some Bible dictionary or in a pictorial dictionary, you can find what all the money is and what weights are. When he mentions different weights of things, look it up so you know what you're talking about.

Or sizes. Then you know what the size of the ark was. Or the things that Solomon made for the temple.

I was riding one time from Los Angeles out to Pasadena to address the students of Fuller Seminary. And the man who was driving me was the principal of a high school. He said, Dr. Wilson, I don't think the Old Testament writers knew much about mathematics.

Oh? Give me a sample. Well, he said, when Solomon made his labor, he said, for ten cubits across, that's 180 inches. And then he says, a line of 30 cubits did compass it.

And he says, Wilson, you know 30 won't go around 10. It takes 3, 14, 16 to go around 10. That's pi.

That's right. I'll read what it says. So I opened my Bible to the passage.

He was driving the car out the freeway. And I opened my Bible and I read it. It said that it was ten cubes across, 180 inches.

But, it also said, which he hadn't noticed, that there was a crown, a hand bridge wide around the top of it. A hand bridge is four inches. So I took out a paper and pencil, and I subtracted eight from 180.

I didn't need the pencil for that. And that left me 172. Then I divided that by 3, 14, 16, and got 30.

You see, he was measuring the outside of the thing, and God was measuring the inside. See? Don't look so funny at me. I'm telling you the truth.

God was right. You see, he was measuring the outside, and God was measuring the inside of the opening. Well, he said, there's another thing you can't explain so easy.

It says in one place it held 3,000 bars, and another place it said it held 2,000 bars. Now, which is right? Well, I said, well, read it. It's one of what you learn by reading.

So I took my Bible, turned to the two passages. In Samuel it said it contained, it held 3,000 bars. But in Chronicles it said it contained 2,000 bars.

One was the capacity, and the other was the contents. My, wasn't that too bad? I thought he was going to wreck that car. He took his hands off the wheel.

We were going about 60 miles an hour. I said, boy, who wrote that wheel? We'll fix up the measurements. Another time, an atheist came up to me, and he said, now, listen here, Wilson.

Your Bible is full of contradictions. I said, tell me one. Well, it says in one place David paid 50 shekels of silver for a certain thing where he wanted to build an altar.

He didn't know anything about the place. Well, I said, that's the Erewon of the Jebusite, I know. Another place it said he paid 600 shekels of gold for the very same thing.

Now, which is right? Well, I said, well, read what it says. It's wonderful what you learn by reading. So I read the first place.

It says, David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for 50 shekels of silver. But in Chronicles it said he bought the place of the threshing floor, that's the farm on which it's set, for 600 shekels of gold. Did you expect him to pay more for the farm than he would for this piece of wood? He just turned and walked off.

Learn the sizes of things. Study the weights and the measures and the distances and all that sort of thing. It's most delightful.

And it will fill your heart with joy. Or look up locations in your Bible. Now, it says Samuel was buried at Ramah.

That's where he lived and he died there and was buried there in Ramah. But the witch brought him up at Endor, 42 miles away from there. Now, the way I know it is because I looked on the map.

That's what the maps are for in your Bible. I don't suppose you use them. But you use those maps.

42 miles away is where he came up. And then when I was over in Palestine I looked it up and I found that was right. Now, he was buried at Ramah.

Say, those folks who believe in soul-sleeping can't figure that out. Why didn't Saul go down to Ramah to find him? Because Saul didn't believe in soul-sleeping. He knew he could come up anywhere.

And the witch brought him up at Endor, 42 miles away. And then you want to know whether the dead know anything about what we're doing here? Look it up. Samuel knew that that witch was there.

He knew the house in which he lived. He'd been dead four years and yet he came up at her home and he knew she was there and he knew that Saul was there and knew that Saul was fighting in Palestine over at Mount Gilboa, 16 miles away. How do you know all that if the dead don't know anything? Then you remember that Abraham said to the rich man in hell, your five brothers have Moses and the prophets.

How did he know that was Moses? Moses wasn't born for 500 years after Abraham died. How did Abraham know that was Moses? And how did he know that Abraham had written some books? That Moses had written some books? And how did he know that there were other prophets after Moses that wrote books if the dead don't know anything? And he knew those five brothers had the Bibles in their homes. How did he know that if the dead don't know anything? He'd been dead 2,000 years.

And then he said they don't believe what's in there. How did he know they didn't read them and didn't believe what was in there if the dead don't know anything? And then Moses and Elijah were on the line of transfiguration and Moses had been dead 1,850 years and Elijah went to heaven without dying and there was Moses in his spirit not his body. His body was buried at Nebo.

But he was there in his spirit and Elijah was there in his body and they both knew Jesus was on the mountain. How did they know if the dead don't know anything? And how did they know he was going to die shortly after that if the dead don't know anything? All you have to do is look things up in your Bible, beloved. Don't just read a chapter and satisfy your conscience that you read a little bit.

Study it. Dig it into it. Heaven knows like an elephant.

Dig into things and learn what it says. Then again, look up the mountains in the Bible. Oh, that's interesting.

Mountains and rivers, they have a wonderful subject. Look up our own attitude as Christians. He that believeth on me out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water but this spake he of the Spirit.

You ask your heart, is anybody getting any living water from me? Am I a believer? And do the folks know it? Do I tell anybody about it? God sends somebody to your door to sell your magazines and you say, no, I don't want any. Bang. And maybe God sent that person to you to get the gospel.

I'm telling you the truth. I've seen it in my own life. God sent me patients over and over again and all they needed was Christ.

When I gave them the gospel and led them to the Savior, they're all well. He sends them into barbershops. We had a barber in Kansas City that got saved.

He started telling everybody about the Savior and then he started losing customers because most of them were of a religion that didn't want to hear what he had. And so he made John 3, 16 on a big card and nailed it on the ceiling. So when he threw a man back to shame, he had to read it up there on the ceiling.

I had a friend over in Australia who wanted to get the gospel to a big fair and they wouldn't let him in there or he would get trashed. So he made a 30 foot box kite and put the gospel on the underside of the lower wing and through that he got a car rope and fastened one into an automobile and off he went up the road and threw that kite up right over the racetrack. Great big kite and the gospel was on the underside of it.

He was going to get the gospel out. You ask your heart, is any flowing out of me in the living water? Or it might be food. He that cometh to me shall never hunger.

Look up the subject of hunger or thirst. The word thirst is a wonderful subject in the Bible to look up. Take your concordant to look up the word thirst and see what it says and I tell you you'll get a blessing out that will surprise you.

Or tongue. Or now let's go back to the center references. You'll find in the middle of the verse a little letter N and then you look in the margin under N it says chapter 3 verses 14 and 15.

Or up here there's a little letter D in the margin D says chapter 3 verses 12 and 13. Or here's an A up here and the margin says A chapter 1 verse 1. Look at the little tiny letter and then find that letter in the middle references and as you do you find another that same truth in another passage. Well our time is up.

I hope I've flattered you after that a little bit to love your Bible and study it. God bless you. Let us pray.

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