

## “Bible Study”

Tuesday 9th February 2010

In the recent post-apocalyptic film *The Book of Eli* after a religiously motivated war the Earth has been turned in to a wasteland, where only one Bible remains. One man (Eli) is tasked by God to protect that book and take it across America to safe place.

In the film there are several people who will kill to get hold of God’s word so that they can use it for their own ends, as they recognise it’s power.

What do you think the world would be like if there had been no Bible, or if the Bible were lost for some period (as Deuteronomy was lost for some time in Israel’s history, see 2 Kings 22).

The format of the study tonight will be looking at some introductory passages about God’s word, five other groups of passages, and finally looking at some practical tools we can use to help us understand it.

In these handouts there are some things underlined, and some comments above the passages. In the study itself there was quite a lot of discussion about each passage (but Rob didn’t note down everything people said). You may find it fruitful to meditate on some of the passages yourself and make your own notes.

Most of the passages given below are from the New International Version, but a few are from the English Standard Version.

This week’s Bible study is based on the paper *The Perspicuity (Clarity) of Scripture* by Wayne Grudem, which can be accessed online @ <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/publications/34-3/the-perspicuity-of-scripture>



## Introductory passages

- <sup>1</sup>Blessed is the man  
who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked  
or stand in the way of sinners  
or sit in the seat of mockers.
- <sup>2</sup>But his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and on his law he meditates day and night.
- <sup>3</sup>He is like a tree planted by streams of water,  
which yields its fruit in season  
and whose leaf does not wither.  
Whatever he does prospers.
- <sup>4</sup>Not so the wicked!  
They are like chaff  
that the wind blows away.
- <sup>5</sup>Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
- <sup>6</sup>For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish. (Psalm 1:1-6)

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. (2 Tim 3:16)

The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple. (Psalm 119:130)

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

**The Bible was written for our instruction, to give us perseverance, encouragement, and hope.**

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Romans 15:4)

**The Bible is God's word, not the word of men (dual authorship).**

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

**We are to correctly handle the word of truth. This will mean learning how to handle it, and then spending the time learning what it says.**

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

### **Scripture affirms that it can be understood**

It is so simple even children can understand it.

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. (Deut 6:6–7)

It makes simple people wise.

The law of the LORD is perfect,  
reviving the soul.  
The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,  
making wise the simple. (Psalm 19:7)

And gives understanding to the simple.

The unfolding of your words gives light;  
it gives understanding to the simple. (Ps 119:130)

*Question: If the Bible can be taught to children and gives understanding even to the simple, why can we find some of it hard to understand, and why do people disagree about what it says?*

### **Scripture affirms that it can be understood, but not without God's help**

The psalmist realises that God needs to intervene for him to have understanding.

<sup>18</sup>Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law ... <sup>27</sup>Make me understand the way of your precepts, and I will meditate on your wondrous works ... <sup>34</sup>Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart ... <sup>73</sup>Your hands have made and fashioned me; give me understanding that I may learn your commandments (Psalm 19)

Jesus had to open their minds for them to understand.

He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. (Luke 24:44–45)

The things of God are spiritually discerned. The man without the Holy Spirit cannot understand them.

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Cor 2:14)

The gospel is veiled to those who are perishing.

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Cor 4:3–4)

There is a veil over the minds of the Jews.

But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. (2 Cor 3:14–16)

The Holy Spirit will be sent to teach the apostles, and there is a promise to them that he will remind them of the things Jesus said. This great promise is one of the reasons we can be sure that the New Testament is an accurate account of the things Jesus said and did. We should also expect the Holy Spirit to prompt us, bringing to mind those things we have read in God's word.

But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (John 14:26).

The Holy Spirit enables us to understand the things of God.

We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us (1 Cor 2:12).

*Application: It's a good idea to ask for God's help whenever we read the Bible, as God needs to be involved for scripture to be properly and fully understood.*

### **Scripture affirms that it can be understood, but not all at once**

God's word is not something we can quickly study completely and move on from, we need to meditate on it *day and night*.

Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. (Joshua 1:8)

But his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and on his law he meditates day and night. (Psalm 1:2)

Paul (in 1 Cor) and the author of Hebrews talk about the idea of mature and immature Christians, with some elementary teaching (milk) needing to be understood before more complex things (food for the mature) can be understood. There is an expectation that we will mature.

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory (1 Cor 2:6–7)

In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. (Heb. 5:12-14).

*Application: Don't be disheartened if you don't feel like you understand everything at once. Consider doing a Bible overview and getting a Systematic Theology to help you fill in the gaps.*

## **Scripture affirms that it can be understood, but not without conscious effort**

It requires time being put aside for study. Although Ezra was already “a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses” (v6) he still needed to study the Law, and *set his heart* to do the study.

Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel (Ezra 7:10)

Some things in scripture are hard to understand, even for the apostles! Here Peter talks about how some of the things Paul wrote are hard to understand.

And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. (2 Pet 3:15–16)

It requires dedication and prioritising it over other things. That means putting some time towards it above other things, even above other things that are good (like Martha’s good desire to do the preparations)

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38-42)

*Application: Set aside time in your week to study God’s word. Make it a priority. Start small. Consider doing some daily reading notes. If you fail to do what you planned to, or miss a day, then don’t worry, just pick yourself up and continue.*

## **Scripture affirms that it can be understood, but not without being obeyed**

James calls them to be ‘doers’ (ESV), to ‘do what it says’ so as not to deceive themselves. What does it mean for them to ‘deceive themselves’?

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does. (James 1:22–25)

The psalmist asks God to give him understanding *so that* he can obey.

Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart. (Ps 119:34)

Paul explains that he can't teach them more advanced things *because of* their disobedient nature (not 'spiritual people', 'people of the flesh', 'as infants')

Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? (1 Cor 3:1–3, NIV)

But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? (1 Cor 3:1–3, ESV)

God's blessing comes to those who hear and obey.

As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you." He replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." (Luke 11:27-28)

*Application: What has God revealed to you from his word that you're not obeying? Ask for God's help in obeying his word.*

### Some practical issues

And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. (1 Cor 12:28)

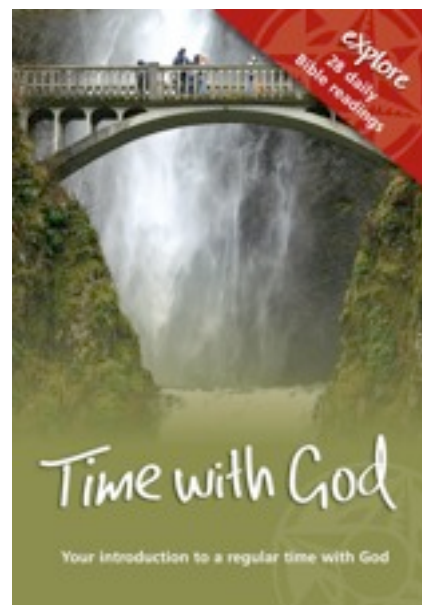
In this final section we're going to look at some tools that you may find useful. God richly gifted the body of the church with *teachers* who help us to understand the Bible. In the days before the printing press their teaching could not be easily copied and given to others, but today we are lucky in that such teaching can be easily distributed on paper (or electronically) and that we have much of the teaching of earlier Christians (like Augustine and Calvin) easily available.

### Daily reading notes

It's a useful discipline to read God's word every day. Although (as far as I know) we're not commanded to read the Bible every day, doing so will help you set your day in perspective and will give you something to meditate on throughout the day. As Cat said a few months ago, "It's much better to get a little often than a lot all at once".

Usually these sorts of notes will take you about 10-15 minutes a day, and optionally you can spend another 20 minutes or so doing enough reading to read through the whole of the Bible in a year.

There are many different types of reading notes out there, I would recommend Explore by The Good Book Company. You can try these notes out for free by accessing the free PDF on their website @ [http://www.thegoodbook.co.uk/Explore-Large-Print-free-Download-explp\\_25/](http://www.thegoodbook.co.uk/Explore-Large-Print-free-Download-explp_25/)



# according to plan

the unfolding revelation of GOD in the Bible



graeme goldsworthy

## Bible overviews

Do you long to get an overall grasp of the Bible? Do you want to venture beyond your favourite passages and explore the Bible as a whole? Would you like to know how the Old Testament builds up to the coming of Jesus? If so, then what you're looking for is a Bible overview.

A good Bible overview to consider would be *According to plan* by Graeme Goldsworthy. A simpler Bible overview written by New Tribes Mission would be *The Stranger on the Road to Emmaus* by John Cross, which can be viewed as a free PDF @ <http://www.goodseed.com/products/str-eng-book-ebook/>

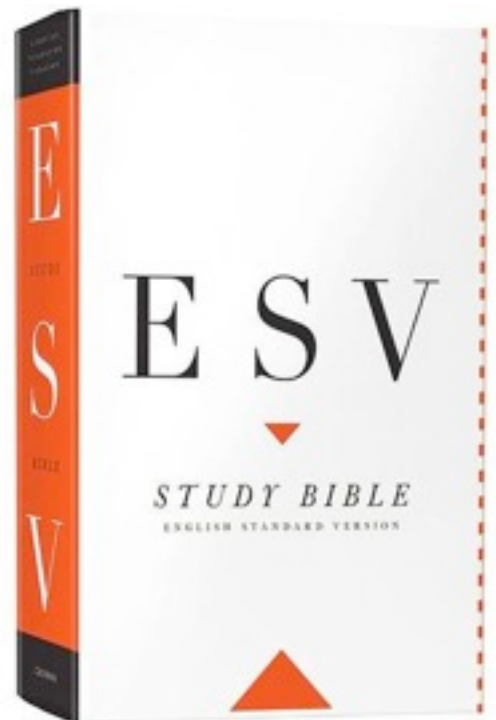
If you'd rather listen to a Bible overview, you may find the *Rough Guide to the Bible* 4 seminar MP3 series (£4) by John Risbridger useful. You can buy / download that @ <http://newwordalive.org/shop/new-word-alive-media>

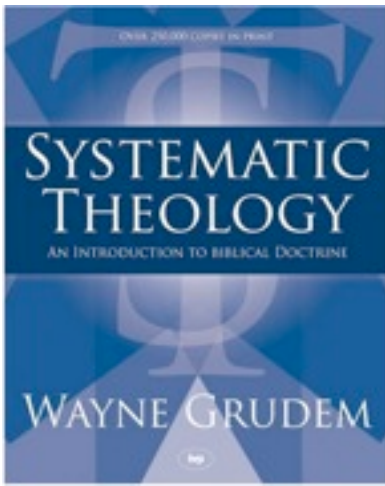
## Study Bibles

Have you ever read a verse or a passage and wondered what it means? Study Bibles are useful because they distill down the most useful information from larger commentaries to a few sentences. Alongside the notes, the better study Bibles will also include maps and charts (timelines etc), cross references, and articles (on all the basic things we ought to know).

There are quite a few study Bibles out there, the better known ones in the UK being the NIV Study Bible, NLT Life Application Study Bible, and the ESV Study Bible. There are plusses and minuses of each, it's worth taking a look at each before making up your mind. My own view is that the ESVSB, being the most recent is by far the most comprehensive, and that having a 'more literal' translation is more useful for study.

While a Study Bible can be expensive, it's much cheaper than buying individual commentaries, and will be very useful and last you a long time. Consider spending a bit extra to get a leather or fake leather version, as they last much longer.





### **Systematic theologies**

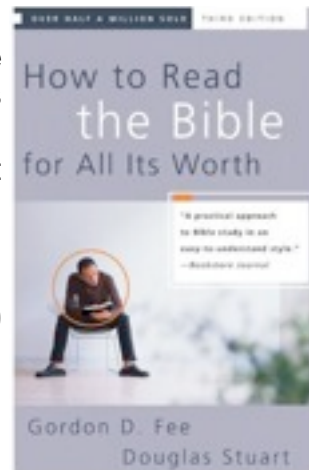
A systematic theology is a book which groups together Christian theology in to logical topics like 'God', 'Man', 'Baptism', 'The Bible', and so on. Rather than taking you through chronologically as a Bible overview would.

A book like *Know the Truth* by Bruce Milne will tell you all the basic things you need to know, while a more comprehensive systematic theology like Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* can sit on your bookshelf and act as a reference when you want more detail, want to know other views Christians hold, and want to look at issues less relevant to the individual's life (e.g. church governance).

### **How to Read the Bible for All it's Worth**

The first task of Bible study is to determine what the Scriptures meant at the time they were written and the second is how that meaning applies to us today. *How to Read the Bible for All it's Worth* focuses on the historical contexts of the Bible and explains differences between the Old Testament narratives, the Epistles, Gospels, Parables, Psalms and more. It's a practical approach to Bible study.

*How to Read the Bible for All it's Worth* by Fee and Stuart is only £7.20 delivered from Amazon UK.



### **Listening to sermons**

Cambridge is full of excellent Bible teachers whose sermons you can easily download and listen to, and the internet gives us even more opportunity to do that. Have you ever thought of listening to a sermon while you're driving or doing household chores?