

“Line Upon Line”: A Brief, God-Dependent Method of Bible Study for Beginners

by Earl B. Finley

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the late Elder Douglas Lawson. This man of God blessed me with his Bible sometime before his death and it has been a great blessing in my labors. The text he often spoke of forms the method of study you are about to learn.

“Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little:” (Isa. 28:9-10)

Preface

On the evening of April 29, 2020, I received a request to teach someone how to study the Bible. They were always being called to study it at church, but no one ever taught them how to do it. I accepted this request and we began the next day.

Nothing was done without prayer. From the time I was asked through the time we went over the matter, I petitioned God for help because studying His Word is something I don't take lightly. Though I've studied the Bible since 2008, studying the sanctuary the Israelite nation built in the wilderness in 2013 taught me how to really study the Bible and I've been blessed because of it. But this is the first time I've ever written down how I do it. It must be Providence's will that I share this with you now.

I can only wonder how many people are wanting to know what the Bible teaches right now, but are in need of instruction on how to do it. But the Lord be praised, when I went over everything, I wrote down plenty of notes and developed the rest of the guide that same day. I hope it will be a blessing to you as it was to me.

Earl B. Finley

Three Important Requirements of Studying the Bible

There are three important requirements to keep in mind when you're studying the Bible. The most important one is to pray. Pray throughout the entire study from beginning to the end. Seriously.

Why? Because you can read these instructions, follow them to the letter, and still miss out on what God wants to reveal to you. There are more than enough skeptical and godless Bible scholars to make this point plain and the fruit of their labors is abundant.

Like the Sadducees, they err, "not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God" (Mt. 22:29) because they receive it as the word of men and not the Word of God (1 Thess. 2:13). As such, it cannot work in their hearts as it has in the lives of countless millions that have turned from drunkenness, gambling, abusiveness, and other shameful acts against themselves and their fellow men. They cannot receive divine understanding because they do not recognize the Source of Bible truth that gives it.

By prayer, you are acknowledging your dependence on the Author of the Bible. You are saying to Him that you need His help, His guidance, to give you a correct interpretation of its passages. Prayer-filled study will help us avoid the trap of developing and advocating erroneous and godless interpretations of His Word (2 Pet. 1:20,21).

The next important requirement when studying the Bible, which is just as important, is to leave your opinions at the door. Human traditions have done more to impede our understanding of and our desire to understand the Bible than we will ever imagine. The Gospel accounts of old, and the mainstream doctrines of today make it plain that we have been teaching the people of God to observe the commandments of men as doctrine (Isa. 29:13; Mt. 15:7-9).

You have to be willing to be "taught of God" (Jn. 6:45; Isa. 2:3), willing to forsake what you've held onto as the truth, willing to study to show yourself approved (2 Tim. 2:15), and most importantly, willing to receive what God reveals to you as the truth. The worst thing that you can do as a believer, especially in the end times, is to stubbornly hold onto your opinions when God is trying to show you the truth. The Bible warns us that we would live in such a time as this.

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." - 2 Tim. 4:3,4

The Lord wants to reveal the truth to you, even truths not yet discovered. With all due respect to your parents, and the Reformers of old, they did not have all of the truth. They lived up to what they knew and ideally, they sought more. Then they taught it to you. But now, the time has come when we are to glean for more understanding. The final thought of this section will make this abundantly clear.

The last important element of studying the Bible is what you will do with the truth after it's been revealed to you. Ask yourself what your intentions are for studying the Word of God. If you plan to use what you learned for selfish gain, exaltation, or mastery in Bible arguments, I will share this counsel with you and for your sake, I hope that you remember it.

My study of the sanctuary I mentioned earlier, over two years worth of hard labor, has not been shared. It has sat in a green binder for five years and to this date, no door has been opened for its promulgation. I had those same sinful desires for exaltation and mastery over others and I've paid the price for it. I say again, do not enter into studying the Bible for selfish reasons. Retain your humility as you study. Otherwise, you will the same mistake and the fruits of your labors will be taken from you.

In addition to my experience, the word of the Lord counsels us that what God sent Him here to do.

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"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." - Jn. 1:1

"For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." - Jn. 3:17

God sent His Word to save men from their sins, not to condemn them. Through studying the Word, the Lord Himself will show His people what is right and they will follow Him. It is not your place to determine who will and will not enter the kingdom. God did not assign that role to you. The testimony of John 8 makes it plain: The guilty cannot condemn the guilty.

Perhaps you want to know the truth simply for the sake of knowing, but not for the sake of sharing it with others. There are countless billions in need of a right understanding of Bible truth and there are those who refuse to share what God has revealed to them. Jesus made this plain in the parables of rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-21) and the wicked servant did (Mt. 24:45-51). If you plan to study, plan to share. Please do not repeat the mistakes of these hoarders of Bible truth or you will receive the same result they did.

But if your motives are to study for yourself and for others, I encourage you to move forward in faith. Do not draw back from receiving the truth or be afraid of critics that will hear the truth of God's Word through you. You will not have to guess if something is right. He will give you understanding (Jn. 16:13,14), He deliver you from scoffers (Jer. 1:8,19) and He will send you to people who need to hear it (Ac. 8).

Prayerfully acknowledging your dependence on God, being willing to forsake human opinions to learn the truth from God, and willfully, selflessly sharing the fruits of your labors are essential to studying the Bible. If what you believe is consistent with the Bible, then it will surely hold up under examination by its light (Isa. 8:20).

From here, I want to leave you with a testimony that powerfully testifies why the condition of our church currently exists and the vital importance of seeking the truth from John Robinson, written 400 years ago, as of this publication. As the Mayflower departed from Holland, he said these words as part of his solemn address. Please bear this in mind after you have received the blessing of Bible truth.

"We are now ere long to part asunder, and the Lord knoweth whether ever he should live to see our faces again: but whether the Lord had appointed it or not, he charged us before God and his blessed Angels, to follow him no further then he followed Christ. And if God should reveal anything to us by any other instrument of his, to be as ready to receive it, as ever we were to receive any truth by his Ministry:

For he was very confident the Lord had more truth and light yet to breake forth out of his holy Word. He took occasion also miserably to bewaile the state and condition of the Reformed churches, who were come to a period in Religion, and would goe no further then the instruments of their Reformation:

As for example, the Lutherans they could not be drawne to goe beyond what Luther saw, for whatever part of God's will he had further imparted and revealed to Calvin, they will rather die then embrace it. And so also, saith he, you see the Calvinists, they stick where he left them: A misery much to bee lamented;

For though they were precious shining lights in their times, yet God had not revealed his whole will to them: And were they now living, saith hee, they would bee as ready and willing to embrace further [2] light, as that they had received. Here also he put us in mind of our Church-Covenant (at least that part of it) whereby wee promise and covenant with God and one with another, to receive whatsoever light or truth shall be made known to us from his written Word: but withall exhorted us to take heed what we received for truth, and well to examine and compare, and weigh it with other Scriptures of truth, before we received it;

For, saith he, It is not possible the Christian world should come so lately out of such thick Antichristian darknesse, and that full perfection of knowledge should breake forth at once."

- John Robinson, *Words of John Robinson. Robinson's Farewell Address to the Pilgrims upon their Departure from Holland, 1620 (and other sermons) [1620]*

Supplies & Instructions

Supplies

There are several supplies that you'll need for studying the Bible: the Bible itself, a Strong's Concordance, writing utensils, paper, and a Bible verse or topic that you want to study. If you want to study a topic, look for a passage in the Bible that highlights this topic. When you've done this, you'll have everything you need to get started.

If you want to use digital resources, the two main online resources I've used in more recent times are the Blue Letter Bible (blueletterbible.org, which has an online Strong's Concordance you can use) and Bible Gateway (biblegateway.com). I've also been using the MySword Bible app on my phone, which also can be equipped with a Strong's Concordance. All of these things have been very profitable when studying. Before I went digital, I carried the Strong's Concordance to work every day on the bus. Needless to say, they've been very helpful.

If you've got everything, let's get started!

Instructions

On top of a sheet of paper, write down a Bible verse that you want to study. What words in that verse do you need further insight on? Bear this in mind after you go through this study. You'll be able to use what you learn to help you study it. For now, put this sheet aside.

1. For this sake of this study, we will use Exodus 25:8 as an example. Exodus 25:8 reads:

"And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them."

I'm familiar with most of the words of this verse, but I want to know more about the word "sanctuary." Let's use this word for our study.

2. Search in the front part of your Concordance for sanctuary and look for the Strong's entry. The Strong's entry for the word "sanctuary" in Exodus 25:8 is H4720. Then go to the back of your Concordance and look for that entry for the definition.
3. Read the definition. We've provided the Strong's definition below from the Blue Letter Bible website.

מִקְדָּשׁ *miqdâsh* mik-dawsh'; or מִקְדָּשׁ *miqqêdâsh*; (Exodus 15:17), from H6942; a consecrated thing or place, especially, a palace, sanctuary (whether of Jehovah or of idols) or asylum:—chapel, hallowed part, holy place, sanctuary.

Now our goal is to gather all of the texts that use this particular entry, H4720. This will help us learn more about that word in application to the Bible verse you are studying.

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Gathering the Texts

From here, we're going to gather all the texts related to our topic of study to learn more about the sanctuary in Exod. 25:8. According to the Blue Letter Bible, that word occurs in the Bible 69 times.

However, the definition says that the sanctuary can also refer a sanctuary of idols. Our goal is to gather the texts that refer specifically to the sanctuary of Jehovah, God, and filter out the ones that don't refer to this sanctuary.

We also need to filter out the entries of "sanctuary" that don't use the entry of our study. For example, if you look at the front part of your Concordance, H6944 is also a Strong's entry for the word "sanctuary." This means that the definition is different. Take a look.

-שִׁקְלָהּ qôdesh, ko'-desh; from H6942; a sacred place or thing; rarely abstract, sanctity:—consecrated (thing), dedicated (thing), hallowed (thing), holiness, (× most) holy (× day, portion, thing), saint, sanctuary.

Even though they are discussing the same thing, the author used a different word to describe the sanctuary. They did so for a reason and you'll see the same thing happen for plenty of words in the Bible. Your goal is to focus on the word that has the entry you're looking for. In our case, H4720. This will help you find the true meaning of the word and avoid any confusion that can happen when you blend two different words.

With this in mind, let's get started! What we want to do now is create a sheet of our texts. Take a sheet of paper and at the top, write down the scripture we're studying, Exod. 25:8. Then write down the word we are studying, the Strong's entry number, and the definition of the word. It should look something like this.

Fig. 1 Gathering Sheet

Scripture: "And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (Exod. 25:8)

Sanctuary (H4720) – *from H6942; a consecrated thing or place, especially, a palace, sanctuary (whether of Jehovah or of idols) or asylum:—chapel, hallowed part, holy place, sanctuary.*

1. Exod. 15:17
2. Exod. 25:8
3. Lev. 12:4

We started the list with the first three texts that contain our Strong's entry. Your task is to finish it.

Directions

1. Go to the word "sanctuary" in your Strong's Concordance. You will see an entire list of times that this word is used in the Bible. Go through this list. You'll see the Scripture reference, but now you've got to filter.
2. Read the entry. Does it have the Strong's entry number H4720? If not, leave it alone. If it does...

3. Read the text. Does this text refer to what you are studying, the sanctuary of God? If it does, add that reference to your list. If not, leave it alone. Keep going until your list is complete.

Important Notes

- **Whatever happens, do not study the text right then or you will get stuck.** You are gathering the Scriptures together first and determining the ones that are relevant to your study.
- Your list of verses first should NOT include a summary or note on that verse. That part comes next.
- At the end of this, you should now have a list of all of the texts relevant to your study. This will keep you from having to flip from source to source to confirm and re-confirm that you've got the right texts.

Studying the Texts

Now you're going to create the next sheet that will help you study the texts you collected. It's going to contain a summary of the verse you studied and any notes that may be pertinent to your study.

Like the Gathering sheet, this Study sheet will also list out the scripture of our study and the word we are studying, the Strong's entry number, and the definition of the word of our study. The difference here is what you will put next to each verse.

Fig. 2. Study Sheet

Scripture: "And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (Exod. 25:8)

- Sanctuary (H4720) – *from H6942; a consecrated thing or place, especially, a palace, sanctuary (whether of Jehovah or of idols) or asylum:—chapel, hallowed part, holy place, sanctuary.*

1. Verse 1 – Bible Verse (optional)| Summary in your own words.

Directions

1. **If you want to, write down the Bible verse first and your summary after it.** This will keep you from repeated flipping back to your Bible during your study.
2. Read the verse you are studying and summarize it in your own words, including the word that you're studying. Do this for every verse on your list.
3. Filter out any verse that is not focused on what you're studying.
4. In the end, you will have a full study guide on the word "sanctuary." Study those verses and create a summary on what you've learned about the sanctuary.
5. Compare this summary to the verses of your study. If it makes sense, then you've received a proper understanding from the Lord. If not, go back and prayerfully study the texts again and revise your summary.

Important Notes

- Look at how the word is used in the context of the verse. You may need to go back and look at the verses around the verse at study. That's okay! You need to understand what's going on before you write your summary.
- If you still need further clarification on a word, take the word they give you in the Strong's definition and look it up in the concordance first. After that, use a dictionary.
- If your word is part of a phrase, search for a part of the phrase and see if that entry has the remaining parts of it. For example, if I want to know what Jesus meant when He said "Follow me", I would look up the word "follow", make sure that I have the entry right, and then focus on the entries that have the corresponding words. In this case, "me." Once you develop the list and study the verses, you will know exactly what Jesus meant when He said to follow Him.

You should be able to use this method of study with great success. One thing to look out for is this:

- Sometimes, other words are used to describe the same thing. The word "tabernacle" is also used to describe the sanctuary of God. I often see the phrase, "tabernacle of the congregation." If you want to learn more about the sanctuary, you'll need to look up that phrase and study what it has to say, too. This will only expand your understanding.

References

1. Bible Gateway. <https://www.biblegateway.com/>
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4. The Holy Bible, KJV