


How to Study Scripture



*Reading the Bible with
the Holy Spirit who wrote it*

David Bergsland

I dedicate this to the Lord Jesus my Messiah. The help He has been in learning & understanding the bible for the past forty-six years is beyond knowing and a true joy.



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david@radiqx.com

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This is a work of biblical & Christian opinion: sharing the experiences of over forty-five years of serving Jesus of Nazareth, teaching the scriptures, and walking in the Spirit. All opinions should be examined and prayerfully considered before they are blindly acted upon.

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No Reference: My personal paraphrase based on 45 years teaching scripture.

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What is the Bible?



It's a gift from God to humanity: IT IS NOT AN OBJECT OF WORSHIP

The Bible is a collection of writings from well over forty people over a period of more than thirteen hundred years. The actual number of authors is not known because we do not know who wrote many of the writings. For example, we do not know who wrote Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Esther, Job, a third of the Psalms, or Hebrews—plus a few more.

On the other hand, you will discover as you study the scriptures that there is only one author who matters. That person is God Himself in the form of the Holy Spirit. The more you study the Bible the more you will realize this fact.

The Bible is literally true and you can trust it





Where it is not literal is obvious. The scriptures themselves will tell you. But, if you want to know Father, Jesus the Messiah, and the Holy Spirit you need to accept that the content is inspired, guided by the Holy Spirit as it was written, and preserved miraculously by the power of God.

If you cannot do this, the Bible will confuse you. But if you believe this simple truth, studying the Bible will change your life.

It can only be understood with the Holy Spirit

This includes several things you need to do. None of them are difficult. But they all require your trust.

Things you need to do

-  **Ask the Holy Spirit for help:** Only the Holy Spirit knows you well enough to explain the scriptures to you in a way you can understand. You must do this every time before you start reading. This is especially important, if you do not know Jesus personally.
-  **Turn to Jesus & introduce yourself:** Just talk to God like you would talk to your best friend. Just tell him the truth. If you are confused, tell him. If you are angry at him, tell him. If you want help, tell him that for sure. Jesus will only respond if you ask Him to do so.
-  **Repent & turn to Jesus:** Ask the Holy Spirit to show you your sin, repent, and turn to Jesus for help. Give your life to him, and make Jesus the Lord of your life.
-  **Ask the Holy Spirit to empower you:** The power of the Holy Spirit will come to live inside of you. But, only if you ask Him to do so. If you ask Him to do it, he will. Normally, another spirit-filled person will lay hands on you and pray for you about this.

If you've not done these things before, prepare for your life to be radically changed for the better. You can contact me if you like. But your help will come from Jesus. He is the Messiah. He is the Lord of Lords, and King of Kings.

Now you're ready to allow the Lord to show you the treasures within the Bible!

Why don't I call it the Word?

Because the Word is Jesus. I don't care if you call the scriptures "the Word". But, I don't want you to get confused. Calling it Scripture or the Bible helps to keep things clear in your mind. You can learn amazing things about all aspects of God, about Jesus as a man when He came to earth, about the Holy Spirit and his ministry to you, from the Bible. But the power, knowledge, and the wisdom all come from your starting point—the living person of Jesus our Messiah.

How much should I study?



You can't read the Bible too much: BUT EASILY CAN READ TOO LITTLE.

You need to find a time which you can rely upon to be available. The main thing in personal Bible study is daily consistency. For most people that's just after you get up. Starting your day spending some time reading the Bible and talking with the Lord is an amazing help.

The conversations with the Lord are a major part of all of this. Though it is true that He will often speak to you through the scriptures, a simple daily conversation will have a large impact on your life also.

This is all about reordering your life around the most important part of your life, your relationship with your Messiah. I know He's also my Messiah, but He is definitely your messiah, if you will allow that level of intimacy.

That personal intimacy is what the Lord wants. He already knows you on that level, of course. But he wants to share that with you. He wants you to get to know Him as well as He knows you.

That's one of the major promises of heaven. Paul in I Corinthians 13: 12 tells us: "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known."

Jesus is better than a brother, the best friend you'll ever have, the only person you know who has enough power and character to be completely trustworthy.

He's the reason we study the Bible in the first place. It is His story. It introduces us to aspects of Him we need to know to understand Him and to see what a wonderful person He truly is.

How much should you read?

I suggest you read until you are satisfied you've learned what you need for that day. As you get into the habit of asking the Holy Spirit to show you what you need to know you will discover that what you learn each day is really helpful.

This isn't discipline or punishment. This is an opportunity to become close to the most amazing person you will ever meet. A person who truly loves you, and cares for you. A person who is the answer to every problem you have.

I read a chapter a day, unless it is one of those which is five, six pages long or more. So, it could be said I read at least a page a day. But then some days, he shows me something really neat and I read four or five chapters, chase down several cross-references, or whatever.

If you just make it a priority until it has time to become a habit, it will transform your life. You will discover that missing a day can have a decidedly negative impact.

But make it real, it's like making a daily phone call to someone you really love. You'll come to treasure it.

Actually getting started



Above all, talk to the author: FIRST, EVERY TIME, WITHOUT FAIL

Yes, this is repetitious, BUT it's a critical step in studying the Bible. Before you study the Bible, every time, ask the Holy Spirit to use the words you read to speak to you clearly and to keep you from error. You want to know what the Lord wants you to learn that day. So, the prayer is: *Show me what you want me to learn today, Lord.*"

You will quickly discover that you can tell the Lord [like He doesn't know], "I don't understand this Lord. Show me what it means please." Over the next hours and days, He will do that. You need to stay alert, for your answer might well come when you are working on something else.

There are also some things for which I've never gotten an answer. Some times the answers come when I look at other versions. Bible Gateway is very helpful here. It's easy to have four or five versions side by side, scrolling together. There are also areas where we simply won't know until after the rapture or during the millennium.

It's amazing how many new revelations have been given about end-times prophecy in the past seven decades since Israel became a nation. That's to be expected. What we call the end-times couldn't happen until Israel became a nation [1948], Jerusalem was the capital [1967], and the Jews scattered around the world were brought home [since the 1980s]. The Lord told Daniel this would happen.

You can certainly ask for a new revelation

Of course, be humble about all of this. It does get exciting. These new revelations can really help you. However, don't be surprised if it is common knowledge to those of us who have been doing this for many decades. I've been studying these things since 1974. There are quite a few who have been doing it longer and more intensely than I have.

Here's a suggested order of reading



There is no right or wrong

Everything in the Bible is important, but this type of order will build up foundational knowledge and understanding the quickest. It will also be in an order which can be processed more easily.

A practical order of reading to start

When you begin this quest, an order of study is very helpful. I'll give you what my father gave me in 1974. It worked very well and I highly recommend it. He suggested this for beginning to study and for your lifetime habitual study of the Bible.

Read entire books to get everything in context.



Gospel of John: This is the best foundation



Then a few Epistles: Galatians, Philippians, & James would be good



Then Acts



Then I & II Corinthians & Romans



Then Mark



Then Ephesians, Colossians & both Thessalonians



Then Luke



Then the three Johns



Then Matthew



Then the rest of the epistles

Now is the time to begin the triple reading process mentioned in the next chapter

The main additional advice my father gave me is deceptively simple. He told me countless times, “Don’t read books about the Bible, read the Bible. You don’t need to know what people have said about the Bible. You need to know what the Lord said in the Bible.”

After that, you can go to a regular routine of epistles, gospel, psalms, epistles, gospel, prophets, epistles, gospel, revelation, epistles, gospel, books of Moses, epistles, gospels, proverbs, and so on.

The next advice is just from my experience

Read the epistles (the letters to the church from Paul, James, Peter, and John + Hebrews) and the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John + Acts) the most. I usually go back and forth from one to the other.

After I’ve done that twice, I read one of the Prophets, Psalms, or Proverbs. Most people get a lot out of the Psalms. I find the Proverbs really help me in the way my mind works.

Then, in order of frequency, I recommend Psalms, Prophets, Proverbs, the books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), and least often the history books.

They are all important

The basic idea is that you need to focus on the New Testament—especially the letters and the gospels. Don’t read Revelation until you have read Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, & Zechariah.

There is a lot of good information in the history portions of the Old Testament. You need to read them, but only after you have a solid beginning in the gospels and letters.

Feel free to read whatever the Spirit leads you to read. Have fun!

How should I study the Bible?



Here is a tried and true method: BUT YOU MUST FIND YOUR OWN

The best method to read and learn materials is to quickly skim or read the book or passage like a novel. Then study everything with care, looking up word meanings in the Greek or Hebrew. Strong’s Concordance works best for this, or Vine’s Expository Dictionary. Go through everything in this manner for the second read. Finally, read it a third time.

You do this in a regular repeating pattern that covers the entire bible. I suggest doing a book at a time. Remember, the verses and chapters were not in the original. They give us artificial breaks which can compromise our understanding.

Different categories of books

These are my classifications—just to help you



History: The Old Testament from Genesis to Psalms.

In the New Testament, the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles.



Prophecy: nearly a third of the Bible is prophecy. So you find it everywhere.

But the primary sources are: Psalms, the Prophets, Jesus in the Gospels, and Revelation. There’s also quite a bit scattered throughout Paul’s epistles.



Jesus’ life on Earth: The gospels

- ✠ **Being born of God:** Gospel of John, much of Paul, John's epistles, and Peter. This is only covered by Jesus' closest friends [Peter, James, & John] and Paul. James was killed early. The book of James was done by Jesus' brother, who didn't become a believer until after Jesus died.
- ✠ **The new life in the Messiah:** The epistles [letters] of Paul, John, and Peter.
- ✠ **The indwelling Holy Spirit:** John, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, and 1 John.
- ✠ **Practical advice on Christian living:** Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Corinthians, Colossians, Philippians, Thesalonians, Timothy, Hebrews, James, 1 John, and Peter.
- ✠ **Poetic:** Psalms, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes
- ✠ **Wisdom:** Proverbs

About prophecy

Only the Bible has fulfilled prophecy. No other religion even attempts it. Jesus fulfilled well over a hundred specific prophecies exactly. They are mentioned in nearly four hundred references.

The occult has seers and oracles, but Satan and his minions can't see into the future. They get some good guesses, but they are wrong—a lot. Remember, the Biblical penalty for false prophecy is death by stoning.

All the fulfilled prophecies have been fulfilled literally, exactly. This is why we are convinced that the prophecies about the end-times, the millennium, and heaven will be fulfilled exactly also.

If a prophecy talks about the coming King to reign in Jerusalem, it is talking about our near future. Almost certainly within the next twenty-eight years. Jesus said it would be within a generation. The longest generation talked about scripturally is 100 years—from 1948, that would be 2048. But many times, a generation is less than that.

You'll have trouble understand New Testament prophecy unless you have read Old Testament prophecy first.

What version should I use?



MY recommendation is to use many: YOU ARE LOOKING FOR TRANSLATOR CONSENSUS, ALWAYS GUIDED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

There is not a right or a wrong here. In a bit, I'll make my personal recommendation—but that's only the way I do it, personally. You will have your own preferences. Importantly, it will change throughout your life. But, there are some things you should know.

There are some good reasons why the King James Version has such an important place in Bible studies. It's actually quite remarkable, because when looked at from the outside, this seems like an archaic, confusing version. It's written in a language no longer spoken. Many of the words no longer mean the same things as they did when it was written.

There are some real reasons why there has been such a push for the new, revised versions. However, it is also true that in certain cases, things were lost in the process. That has to do with the sources which were used for translation.

Almighty God did an amazing job keeping the scriptures clear and accurate. We've been using the King James Versions [KJV] as the primary Bible of the English-speaking world since 1611—over four hundred years.

Before that, the standard Bible was the Latin Bible, usually called the Vulgate, which was the standard Bible for twelve hundred years before that. Jerome was given the commission to make a better translation by the Pope in 382 AD.

It became the *versio vulgata* (the version most commonly used) or the Vulgate. The sources Jerome used were good, and in hindsight, his translation was obviously inspired.

The newer versions come from discoveries made in the later part of the nineteenth century. Much of this was very good, and helpful. However, some of the new sources did not contain everything in the KJV. Some were compromised by liberal, critical thinking. Two of those missing pieces of copy are the woman caught in adultery, and the last parts of Mark 16. The important parts of the doctrine are solid and not changed. It's small parts, but they're important.

[A complete list of the English Translations](#)

This link is an almost overwhelming list of partial and complete translations. It has some good information. But it's not much help. Nevertheless, you do need to know reputations of the various translations. I've studied two or three dozen versions and read portions of more than that. So, I am going to give you my best understanding out of what's available.

NOTE: At the end of this chapter, I'll discuss why you'll probably change the version you use, on a fairly regular basis.

KJV, NKJV, and MEV

The best reputation remains the KJV, but like I said many words have changed their meaning. Plus, the archaic language is difficult to read for many. So, I recommend having access to one or more of the three above: the King James Version, the New King James Version, and the Modern English Version. The NKJV and MEV are modern updates of the KJV with the goal of retaining what was available in the KJV. I'm currently using the MEV.

NASB — New American Standard Bible

This version has the reputation of being the “most accurate”. I used it from the early 1990s until 2015 or so. I still

like it a lot. It's not as easily readable, but it's very clear. It is accurate. The cross references often contain the literal meaning of words, which I find very helpful.

AB — Amplified Bible

A greatly expanded version of the American Standard.

It's very hard to read, but it's helpful in getting a better perspective on what is being said. Very few use it as their normal version.

RSV — Revised Standard Version

This version is commonly despised, but it's what I began with. It's literal. It has some good insights. It reads well. But it uses some source materials which eliminate some things. So, I still love it, but I always use it with a parallel version to make sure important things are not missing.

The NRSV, or the new revision of the RSV, is a result of liberal forces and has some real problems. I tried it but I couldn't use it.

NLT — New Living Translation

The original Living Bible was not a translation but a paraphrase. It was what a man paraphrased to his children and grandchildren to make it easier to understand. The original was skewed strongly toward evangelical doctrine.

The new translation has solved some of that. It is very easy to read. Personally, I don't trust it, and always use it in parallel comparison to make sure it's accurate. I still find it skewed doctrinally.

NIV — New International Version

This used to be a very popular translation. They got involved with politically correct usage of gender in the more recent versions, among other things. The original 1978 NIV was pretty good. But I would not recommend the newer versions, at all. Like the RSV, it uses sources which cut out parts of the scripture.

ESV — English Standard Version

This is a revision of the RSV. It's OK, I guess. I actually found it dry and boring.

My recommendation

I would start with the NKJV. If you do not like that, try the MEV. The NASB is also excellent.

I mentioned before that you should be changing versions over the years. This is simply a practical thing. You need to have a Bible you can underline, and make notes. After many years, for me that's about five years for most it's closer to fifteen years, you will discover that you know your version of the Bible so well that you form habitual understandings of the meaning. Your Bible studies tend to get a little boring because you've read it all so often. New insights are rare.

At this point, a new version can really help you regain some of the excitement of discovery.

The page layout

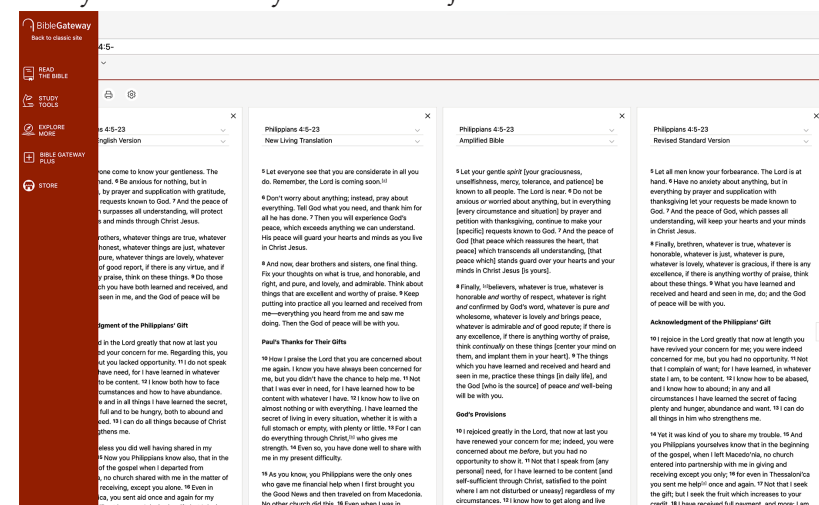
As a book designer, you will find that a single column layout will be easier to read and mark up. Problem is, single column layouts are rare. The International Inductive Study Bible has an excellent layout and comes in NASB and ESV currently. I recommend the NASB. It was my main teaching bible for two decades. If NKJV or MEV were offered...

Bible Gateway — biblegateway.com

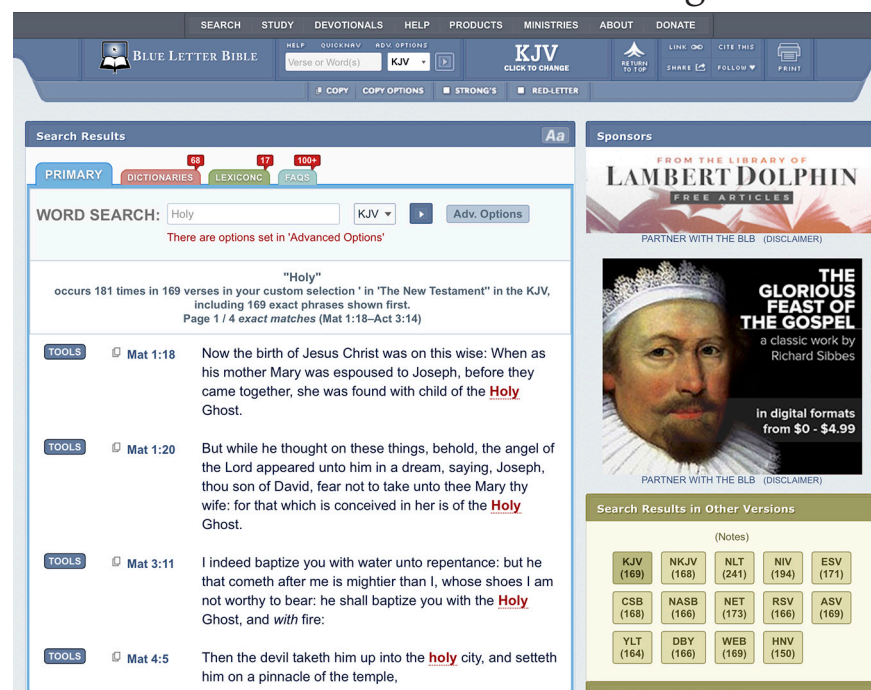
For an online bible, on a computer, this is hard to beat. They have dozens of versions. And you can show as many parallel versions as your computer has the power to display. As you can see in the screen capture on the next page, having four versions parallel is no problem at all on my iMac.

It has powerful search capabilities. It lists all the copyright provisions, so you can use it legally in your writings. It has some commentaries and resources. But, it's not real good for that. For access to the normal study tools like Strong's

Concordance, Vine's dictionary, Greek and Hebrew lexicons, and all of that, the Blue Letter bible is better. Most of those study tools are keyed to the KJV.



Blue Letter Bible — blueletterbible.org



The Blue Letter Bible is a more advanced tool, but it is excellent. No longer do I have to do serious Bible study at a large table to make room for all the various versions, concordances, dictionaries, maps, and all the rest.

Strong's Concordance

A concordance lists all the words in the Bible and tells you where you can find them. The words in Strong's have numerical keys to included Hebrew and Greek dictionaries, so you can find out what the original languages really meant.

Vine's Expository Dictionary

This was originally only for the New Testament. It doesn't cover all the words. But it goes into a lot more depth about what was originally meant in all the places that word was used. The newer ones include the Old Testament.

If your bible does not have good maps, you'll want to find a source for that.

Mobile versions

YouBible

This is an excellent app for your cell phone or tablet. You have your choice of many versions. It offers built-in sharing tools for your social media friends. Plus, it's very fast. It is extremely popular around the world.

Basic advice

Start with a NKJV, MEV, or NASB bible. Get one with the bells and whistles you want.

Study Bibles

Be careful of study bibles.

They are amazing. However, they offer so much that simply reading scripture becomes difficult. Go to a bookstore and hold one in your hand. Ask your friends and see what

they are using. In some of them, there will only be a dozen verses per page, and the rest is commentary. They can become overwhelming, and less than helpful

NOTE: Plus study Bibles are all about people talking about the Bible. I've already talked about the dangers of that. A lot of denominational doctrine slides in here. In addition, I have never seen study Bible commentary that was anointed like scripture is.

This is why I find the NASB Inductive Study Bible works the best. It has wonderful maps and illustrations. The commentary is very limited. The cross-references are very good. There is a lot of room for notes and your own personal cross references.

Reading versions

I have found that a simple Bible designed for reading, with no bells and whistles gives me a good break from the constant analysis. But that's after years using study bibles.

Leather covers are important

You will be using your bible hard. It will wear out. A hardcover version is only good for a few months before it starts falling apart. Bonded leather covers may last a couple of years. Some of the new synthetic leather covers feel good in the hand and seem to last well. A genuine leather cover can last decades, and it's a beautiful object..

Christian Book Distributors — christianbook.com

This is basically our Amazon type of resource for Christian books. They have the widest variety and the lowest cost for Bibles in almost all cases. Incredible sales are common. They mainly work through catalogs, but their website is pretty good. It used to be that a yearly \$5 membership offered some benefits. I don't know if that's true anymore, as I rarely read paper books now.

NOTE: CBD's ebooks still use their own ereader software, as far as I know. It is not nearly as good as Apple Books or even Kindle

