



understanding
the Bible's teaching

A guide to Bible Reading

All Bible quotations are taken from the New King James Version (NKJV) except where another version is indicated after the text.
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A guide to Bible Reading

There are some people who have never seen the sea.

They have never scanned that broad horizon, never smelt the tang or tasted the salt spray on their lips, never experienced the crash or roar of the great breakers, the turmoil of the surf, the gentle lapping of a tranquil sea, or the quiet stillness of a flat calm. They have missed a whole dimension of life's experience. One writer put it like this:

'The Bible is like a great ocean. It has a sandy beach with shallows where even children can play safely. It has deeper parts where adults can swim. But it also has vast depths that we can never get to the bottom of.'

(A User's Guide to the Bible – Lion Press)

Like the sea, the Bible has many moods. Sometimes it thunders at us, challenging our complacency and inertia and threatening judgment to come. At other times it calms and comforts, soothing shredded nerves, offering words of comfort and hope and promising rebirth.

Yet there are many people who have never opened its pages, never even dipped a toe in the water, so to speak. Like the man who has never seen the sea, their minds have never been opened to these broad horizons, these new perspectives which the Bible presents to us. There are others who occasionally dip into its pages to read again a familiar and much-loved passage, as they might resort to an aspirin or tranquillizer in time of stress. The Bible deserves better than that – God's Word has so much to offer us if we open our minds to its message in its completeness.

But reading the Bible from cover to cover is a daunting prospect for most people. Whilst it is probably no longer than a typical 'blockbuster' novel, its qualities and the impetus to read it, are very different. A collection of

66 books of different types, some written more than three thousand years ago, springing from a very different age and culture, it presents some formidable obstacles which can quickly put off the casual reader.

The structure of the Bible

The Bible is in two parts, 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. The books were originally written on scrolls in a continuous text divided into columns. When the King James Version was translated in AD 1611 the book was divided into chapters (with a few exceptions) and then again into verses following an earlier system used in the Geneva Bible. This is a very useful method of finding our way and enables us to pinpoint a particular passage with relative ease. However, this system of breaks into chapter and verse is not always the best arrangement to retain the flow of the text. Do bear this in mind as you read and study the Bible, so that you have a complete understanding of the passage being read.

So how are you going to start? The following are a few suggestions to help you get started on your Bible reading in a sensible and structured way, which will eventually provide great rewards.

Which Bible shall I read?

Any bookshop with a decent religious section will present a bewildering array of Bibles to confuse the enquirer. The most familiar is still the **King James Version**, read and revered by many people for its outstanding literary qualities.

But the Bible is far more than great literature and there are some who, coming fresh to the Bible, will find the language of King James an insurmountable barrier to understanding or applying its message today. The **New King James Version** retains the basic sentence structure and rhythms of the King James Bible, whilst updating the language. Other new translations, such as the **New International Version**, provide an alternative. Some of these versions are listed inside the back cover.

Some translations are freer and the language is more colloquial than others. Every translation needs to be used with care and any serious Bible study will involve the use of more than one version. But for everyday reading, find a version that you understand and that you enjoy reading. As your knowledge of the Bible increases, you will become aware of the weaknesses and strengths of each version and better equipped to choose between them.

When you are choosing a Bible for yourself, think about other ways it can help you in your reading. Ideally, choose a Bible with **cross references** in the margin that will help you find quotations and parallel passages (see page 10). A good selection of **maps** will be useful and some editions will have other 'helps', such as a list of references to Christ in the Old Testament, Bible weights and measures and their current equivalents, the Jewish calendar and so on. Some Bibles even have a small **concordance** in the back, where you can look up particular words and where they occur. However you will probably find this to be an abbreviated version, and of limited value compared with a separate complete concordance (see page 13).

Think also about whether you need to carry a Bible with you and if so, choose a small Bible that will not be too heavy. For those used to carrying a computer with them, a range of Bible versions is available in electronic format, together with study aids such as concordances and lexicons. Similar software is available for smaller hand-held electronic devices like mobile phones and tablet computers.

Where do I start?

When they pick up a good book, many people cannot resist the temptation to look at the end, at the same time, or even before they look at the beginning. When it comes to the Bible that is not a bad idea. If, for example, you read together the early chapters of Genesis and the last few chapters of Revelation, you will find the origin of sin and death (Genesis 3) and God's promise to remove both (Revelation 21.4); you will read of a new creation to replace the first (Revelation 21.1), of the rivers watering Eden and the tree of life at the beginning, a river of life and the

tree of life in the age to come (Genesis 2.10, 3.24; Revelation 22.1). The importance of Genesis as the foundation of God's plan for mankind could hardly be clearer.

But it has to be said that the Book of Revelation is not the easiest place for the new Bible reader to begin. Reading the Old and New Testaments simultaneously is definitely a good idea – the fact that they interrelate and complement each other will soon become obvious. Some editions of the New King James Version contain a plan for reading the whole Bible in a year, reading part of the Old Testament and part of the New Testament each day, starting with Genesis chapter 1 and Matthew chapter 1 respectively. The problem here is that, due to the difference in the length of each Testament, a very small section of the New Testament (often half a chapter or less), is accompanied by a large chunk of the Old Testament – often three or four chapters. Also, reading the Bible in sequence (for example the four Gospel records), is not necessarily the most interesting and productive way of reading.

A plan for daily reading

For more than 150 years the Christadelphians have used a daily reading plan known as the **'Bible Companion'**, which enables the reader to cover the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice in the course of a year. It does so with three different daily readings, two from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament (see opposite page). The Old Testament portions start with Genesis and Psalms, and then simply follow the books through in sequence. The New Testament plan starts with Matthew, but after each Gospel record, diverts to some of the later books and letters before returning to the next Gospel record and so on. Such a plan ensures a varied and interesting diet each day. The Psalms, for example, provide a perfect foil for the narrative of Genesis and the details of the Law of Moses in the subsequent books.

One of the criticisms which may be levelled at the **'Bible Companion'** is that it splits up even some of the smaller books over several days, and it is sometimes difficult to achieve the overall picture of a book's message and

What kind of writing is this?

The Bible contains many different types of literature - history, narrative, poetry, prophecy and parables etc. If a passage appears to be straightforward historical narrative, then we need to ask why it has been preserved and what we are intended to gain from it. This is how the early disciples of Jesus used the Old Testament narrative. The Apostle Paul, in looking back on some of the events which happened to Israel in the wilderness wrote: *'These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us...'* (1 Corinthians 10.11 NIV) The Apostle James tells us: *'...as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord...You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.'* (James 5.10,11 NIV)

So we need to read the Bible imaginatively and actively, placing ourselves in the position of its heroes and villains, drawing practical and spiritual guidance from the record of their lives. If a passage we are reading is poetry (and one of the advantages of a modern version is that the layout of the text will clearly distinguish between poetry and prose), then we need to be aware of the poetic imagery being used, to ask ourselves what emotional response it is designed to evoke from us and not to read it or interpret it in the same literal way that we would a historical section.

Many parts of the Bible contain prophecies about the future. It was in this way that God, through His prophets, distinguished their message from the many false prophets. Some understanding of the historical background of the prophecy will probably be essential if we are to understand how it was to be fulfilled. A **Bible Dictionary**, or one of the popular **Study Bibles** will usually provide the basic information.

Many Bible prophecies have more than one application and you may well find in your reading that a prophecy which may appear to have been fulfilled, has received an even more dramatic fulfilment in our own time. Or maybe it is telling us about something still to happen in the future – preparing us for the great climax of God's purpose with this earth.

So when we read passages like this, we need to ask ourselves some questions:

- ❖ What is the background to this passage?
- ❖ When was it given and why?
- ❖ Was it fulfilled at the time and if so, how?
- ❖ Does it have anything to teach me?
- ❖ Is there anything about the future here that I should be expecting and preparing for?
- ❖ What does it teach me about Jesus?

One of the most astonishing features of the Bible, as you get to know it, is that such an assortment of writers have a **single theme**, and that it is dominated throughout by a **single person**. The theme is God's plan for bringing salvation to sinful mankind. The person is the one man through whom that objective is being achieved – Jesus Christ. Jesus is alluded to there – in the earliest chapters of Genesis, the Law of Moses, the Psalms and the prophets, as well as being the subject of the Gospels and the Apostles' letters.

One of the key questions to ask yourself as you read a particular passage of the Bible is this: 'Does it tell me anything about Jesus?' Often of course the answer will seem to be 'No' – but as you explore the Bible more and more, you will find the answer is often 'Yes'. As you learn more about Jesus, for example his feelings as depicted in the Psalms (which fill out the often sparse account of the Gospel records), you will come closer to him and become better equipped to imitate his outstanding qualities in your life.

Unanswered questions

Having set yourself a series of questions, don't worry if many of the answers escape you. It is the experience of all Bible students, that as their knowledge of the Bible increases, the number of unanswered and unanswerable questions increases as well. Bible reading and study is not an intellectual diversion. The Bible was never designed simply to satisfy

human curiosity. Whatever problems your reading of God's Word may pose, we believe they are nothing compared with the clarity, simplicity and certainty of God's plan which it reveals.

Listening to God every day

One Bible student wrote this:

'The very best way to study the Bible is simply to read it daily with close attention and with prayer to see the light which shines from its pages, to meditate upon it, and to continue to read it until somehow it works itself, its words, its expressions, its teaching, its habits of thought and its presentation of God and His Christ into the very warp and woof of one's being.' (Dr Howard A Kelley)

Follow that advice and you will find out what the Psalmist meant, and you will be able to pray with him when he said:

**'Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light for my path... Your
statutes are forever right; give
me understanding that I may
live.'**

(Psalm 119.105,144 NIV)

BIBLE STUDY TOOLS

Introduction

When you start to read the Bible you will soon realise that this is no ordinary book. Its claim to be the inspired Word of God becomes self-evident as you turn its pages. This being the case you will want to dig below the surface to get a better understanding of what God is communicating to those who take the trouble to listen to Him. The words of Solomon are relevant here:

‘It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings.’ (Proverbs 25.2 NIV)

The study of the Bible is uniquely rewarding and worthwhile. As with the study of any topic, you can approach this at various levels and this section will provide a guide on various tools available to us today.

Cross references

When selecting your Bible ensure that it has a good system of cross references and if possible additional study notes too (see the example shown in the Appendix on page 20).

There are various systems used for cross references, but in principle you will find a small prefix letter alongside a word. In the margin (or in the footnotes) this letter will be repeated with a further reference or references which can be looked up where the subject is also mentioned or clarified. For example, this may be a parallel record in the Gospels, where the same event is recorded by another writer. Alternatively, it may be another reference to the subject e.g. the promise to David, as shown in the example on the next page.

Read the notes about the cross reference system for your Bible; they will normally be at the front of your Bible and will enable you to gain the best advantage from that particular system.

...well stricken
 ...angel answering
 ...I am ^s Gabriel,
 ...the presence of
 ...sent to speak
 ...to shew thee
 ...thou shalt be
 ...to speak,
 ...these things
 ...because thou
 ...words, which
 ...their season.
 ...waited for
 ...wondered that
 ...in the temple.
 ...came out, he
 ...to them: and
 ...he had seen
 ...people: for ^c he
 ...them, and re-
 ...ness.
 ...to pass, that, as
 ...days of his ^e minis-
 ...accomplished, he
 ...own house.
 ...those days his
 ...conceived, and

^o ver. 12.
^p ch. 7. 27.
 Mal. 3. 1.
 Mat. xi. 10.
 Mark i. 2.
^q Cp.
 Gen. 17. 17.
^r Acts 7. 46.
 Heb. 4. 16.
 Cp. ver. 28.
^s Is. 7. 14.
 Mat. i. 21,
 25.
^t ver. 26.
 Dan. 8. 16
 & 9. 21.
^u ch. 2. 21.
 Cp.
 Mat. i. 21.
^v Mat. 18. 10.
^w ver. 35, 76.
 ch. 6. 35.
 Mark 5. 7.
 Acts 7. 48.
^x Ezek. 3. 26.
^y ver. 69.
 2 Sam. 7. 11.
 Ps. 132. 11.
 Is. 9. 6, 7.
 Jer. 23. 5.
 Rev. 3. 7.
^z Dan. 2. 44.
 Mic. 4. 7.
 John 12. 34.
 Heb. 1. 8.
 Rev. 11. 15.
^{aa} Mat. i. 18.
^{ab} Cp. ver. 62.
^{ac} 2 Kin. 11. 5.
^{ad} Phil. 2. 17.
^{ae} Mat. 14. 33.

...hast ^v found favour with God.
 31 And, behold, ^rthou shalt
 conceive in thy womb, and
 bring forth a son, and ^t shalt
 call his name JESUS.
 32 He shall be great, and shall
 be called the Son of ^x the High-
 est: and the Lord God shall
 give unto him ^z the throne of
 his father David:
 33 And he shall reign over
 the house of Jacob ^a for ever;
 and of his kingdom there shall
 be no end.
 34 Then said Mary unto the
 angel, How shall this be, seeing
 I know not a man?
 35 And the angel answered
 and said unto her, ^b The Holy
 Ghost shall come upon thee,
 and the power of the Highest
 shall overshadow thee: there-
 fore also that holy thing which
 shall be born of thee shall be
 called ^f the Son of God.
 36 And, behold, thy ^g cousin
 Elisabeth, she hath also con-
 ceived a son in her old age:
 and this is the sixth month with

Enlarged view of a Bible (King James) with centre margin cross references

Sometimes there will be a long list of references and if followed you will effectively construct a 'chain of passages' all relating to the same theme or idea. This is why this system is often referred to as 'chain references'. If you are really serious about a topic then you should make notes as you proceed so that you can bring some order to your study and make a summary of the points covered at the end. If you are confident with your results you may wish to make notes in your Bible and some Bibles have a wide margin or blank pages to allow for this. If you decide to mark your Bible or highlight key passages, choose a suitable pen or pencil that does not penetrate to the other side of the paper.

Parallel records

Some sections of the Bible contain details of the same incident by a different writer. Details may vary slightly between these passages but this does not imply an error in the record because all Scripture is inspired (2 Timothy 3. 16). Some Bibles have these passages marked at the top of a section. Often comparing these passages will improve our understanding of the biblical record.

Luke chapter 6 verses 46-49, for example, is a parable Jesus used teaching us the wisdom of using a firm foundation for the things we do in life. Luke tells us that one man built on a rock and the other built without a foundation. Now if you turn to the parallel passage in **Matthew chapter 7 verses 24-29**, clearly we have the same parable but Matthew tells us that the foolish man built his house on the sand. Comparison of the records clarifies this part of the teaching of Jesus, which demonstrates that building on sand is not a very sensible thing to do!

There are many other examples like this in the gospels and also in the books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles where one record is complemented by the other.

When selecting a Bible, look for one with these parallel records noted at the beginning of each section; this will be of great help in your Bible study.

The Concordance

A concordance is an invaluable tool for Bible study. It contains a list of all the words in alphabetical sequence and under each word you will find a list of all the places where the word can be found. A concordance has to be related to a particular version of the Bible, as translators will have used different words for the original Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek text.

An example of an entry in a concordance is shown on the next page and this is from a concordance published by Dr. Robert Young in 1879. You will see that often the word has an introduction or definition and there may be a short summary too.

BAPTIST —

Definition

1. *One that baptizes, βαπτιστής baptistēs.*

- Matt. 3. 1 In those days came John the Baptist
11. 11 a greater than John the Baptist
11. 12 And from the days of John the Baptist
14. 2 This is John the Baptist; he is risen
14. 8 Give me here John Baptist's head
16. 14 Some . . . John the Baptist: some, Elias
17. 13 he spake unto them of John the Baptist
Mark 6. 24 she said, The head of John the [Baptist]
6. 25 give me . . . the head of John the Baptist
8. 28 they answered, John the Baptist
Luke 7. 20 John Baptist hath sent us unto thee
7. 28 a greater prophet than John [the Baptist]
7. 33 John the Baptist came neither eating
9. 19 They answering said, John the Baptist

2. *To baptize, βαπτίζω baptizō.*

- Mark 6. 14 That John the Baptist was risen from

BAPTIZE, to —

*To consecrate (by pouring out on, or putting into),
βαπτίζω baptizō.*

**Original
Greek**

- Matt. 3. 11 I indeed baptize . . . he shall baptize you
Mark 1. 4 John did baptize in the wilderness
1. 8 I . . . have baptized . . . he shall baptize you
Luke 3. 16 I indeed baptize you with water; but
3. 16 he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost
John 1. 25 Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not
1. 26 John answered . . . I baptize with water
1. 33 he that sent me to baptize with water
1. 33 the same is he which baptizeth with the
3. 22 there he tarried with them, and baptized
3. 26 behold, the same baptizeth, and all (men)
4. 1 Jesus made and baptized more disciples
4. 2 Though Jesus himself baptized not, but
10. 40 went . . . where John at first baptized
Acts 1. 5 John truly baptized with water
8. 38 they went down . . . and he baptized him
11. 16 John indeed baptized with water; but
9. 4 John verily baptized with the baptism of
1 Co. 1. 14 I thank God . . . I baptized none of you
1. 15 Lest any should say that I had baptized
1. 16 I baptized also . . . household of Stephanas
1. 16 I know not whether I baptized any other
1. 17 Christ sent me not to baptize, but to

BAPTIZED, to be —

To baptize, βαπτίζω baptizō.

References

- Matt. 3. 6 And were baptized of him in Jordan
3. 13 Then cometh Jesus . . . to be baptized of
3. 14 I have need to be baptized of thee, and
3. 16 Jesus, when he was baptized, went up
20. 22 and to be baptized with the baptism
20. 22 that I am baptized with? They say unto
20. 23 and be baptized with the baptism
20. 23 that I am baptized with
Mark 1. 5 and were all baptized of him in the
1. 9 and was baptized of John in Jordan
10. 38 and be baptized with the baptism
10. 38 that I am baptized with? And they said
10. 39 with the baptism that I am baptized
10. 39 withal shall ye be baptized; but to sit
16. 16 [He that believeth and is baptized shall]

A page from Young's Concordance showing references to Baptist etc
(based on the King James Version)

The really useful concordances will have the original Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek alongside each word and this can open up a new dimension in Bible study. There are a variety of concordances available today – these are the ones in common use:

- Cruden** – Not exhaustive, but a useful starting point (based on the KJV)
- Young** – Exhaustive in that every word in the KJV is covered
- Strong** – This is unique in that Strong assigns a number to each word in the KJV (also available with the NIV) This has been used to great effect in the construction of computer-based concordances (see page 15)

Whichever concordance you use, read the introductory notes so that you can understand how it is structured and therefore use it to the best advantage in your study. The concordance is similar to a dictionary and is very useful for looking up a passage where you can remember a few significant words, for example: ***'I am the light of the world'***. You may want to find this passage in your Bible but are not sure where to look. It is a well known phrase of Jesus so it has to be in one of the Gospels, but which of the four and where? Clearly it could take a long time to find this by just turning the pages of your Bible, but if you look up *'light'* or *'world'* you will find a list and quickly see that the reference you want is John chapter 8 verse 12.

You will also see other references where the same word occurs – in our example it also occurs in John chapter 9 verse 5. The key here is to pick a significant word, not the common words *'I'*, *'am'*, *'the'*, or *'of'*.

In addition to finding passages, a concordance becomes an even more powerful tool when looking at the words used in the original text. You do not have to be a Hebrew or Greek scholar to appreciate this aspect! To illustrate this, look at the example where, after his resurrection, Jesus is with the disciples and questions Peter's love for him. This should be read in the light of Peter's repeated denial of Jesus at his trial (see for example Matthew 26. 69-75).

‘So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, **lovest thou me** more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that **I love thee**. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, **lovest thou me?** He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that **I love thee**. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, **lovest thou me?** Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that **I love thee**. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.’

(John 21. 15-17 KJV)

If we look up the word ‘love’ in Young’s Concordance we will find that the Greek words used by Jesus and Peter in John’s record are different:

John ch.21	Jesus	Peter
Verse 15	<i>Agapao</i>	<i>Phileo</i>
Verse 16	<i>Agapao</i>	<i>Phileo</i>
Verse 17	<i>Phileo</i>	<i>Phileo</i>

The Greeks used different words for ‘love’ and they each had different shades of meaning:

- ❖ **‘Agapao’** is the highest form of love, one where self is sacrificed for the other person.
- ❖ **‘Phileo’** simply means to be a friend.

In J.B. Phillips translation this detail comes out quite clearly, where Phillips uses two different words in this passage:

‘When they had finished breakfast Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these others?” “Yes, Lord,” he replied, “you know that I am your friend.” “Then feed my lambs,” returned Jesus. Then he said for the second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

“Yes, Lord”, returned Peter. “You know that I am your friend.” “Then care for my sheep,” replied Jesus. Then for the third time, Jesus spoke to him and said, “Simon, son of John, are you my friend?” Peter was deeply hurt because Jesus’ third question to him was “are you my friend?”, and he said, “Lord, You know everything. You know that I am your friend!” “Then feed my sheep,” Jesus said to him.’

(John 21. 15-17 J B Phillips)

This illustrates very clearly how you can look at a passage to find the original word in Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek. You can also see where else the word is used and what English words have been selected in the translation.

You will find that not all translations are consistent and you can start to decide for yourself if there is a better English word to help in the understanding of a passage. By comparing different translations or versions, you will often see these possible variations which will help in your understanding of the Scriptures.

Some concordances contain **lexicons** which can be useful as they are dictionaries and indexes to parallel passages. They show all the meanings of the original Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic words and the number of times each occurs in the Bible. Read the notes relating to your concordance as this will explain the structure of the lexicon and how best to use it.

The computer-based concordance

Many people who have access to a computer appreciate how powerful a tool this can be, particularly in carrying out functions such as searches. There are a number of programs available which can be installed on your computer enabling you to look up passages quickly or search for a particular word. Many of these are linked to Strong’s numbering system and this makes them very useful.

Strong allocates a unique number to every Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek word in the original text of the KJV/NIV. Regardless of how this word was

Computer-based Bible – search on ‘church’ (Gk. *Ecclesia*)

The screenshot displays a Bible search interface with two main windows. The left window, titled '(AV) (1/79) <church> [Search Bible]', shows search results for the word 'church' in the King James Version (KJV). The results include:

- Mt 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my **church**; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.
- Mt 18:17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the **church**; but if he neglect to hear the **church**, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.
- Ac 2:47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the **church** daily such as should be saved.
- Ac 5:11 And great fear came upon all the **church**, and upon as many as heard these things.
- Ac 7:38 This is he, that was in the **church** in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and *with* our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us:
- Ac 8:1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the **church** which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except

The right window, titled '(Online Bible Greek Lexicon) (1577) [Greek Lexicon] ...', shows the details for the Strong's number 1577. The entry is:

1577 εκκλησια ekklesia ek-klay-see'-ah
 from a compound of 1537 and a derivative of 2564; TDNT-3:501,394; n f
 AV-church 115, assembly 3; 118

- 1) a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place, an assembly
 - 1a) an assembly of the people convened at the public place of the council for the purpose of deliberating
 - 1b) the assembly of the Israelites
 - 1c) any gathering or throng of men assembled by chance, tumultuously
 - 1d) in a Christian sense
 - 1d1) an assembly of Christians gathered for worship in a religious meeting
 - 1d2) a company of Christians, or of those who, hoping for eternal salvation through Jesus Christ, observe their own religious rites, hold their own religious meetings, and manage their own

This example from the Online Bible, based on the KJV, has the results of the search on 'church' on the left and in the box on the right the details of the Strong's number (# 1577).

translated, with a computer you can search using that unique number. A list of all passages using the same original word will then appear.

If the program can display the Strong's numbers for any passage being viewed, this is very useful. You can then access the meaning of the original word according to Strong's Concordance (see the example on the facing page). Additionally in this type of program you can base your search on a phrase; this is an advantage over a paper concordance which is limited to looking for one word at a time.

Many such programs will also give you access to other Bible versions and so by a simple 'click' you can see how a passage is translated in an alternative version. Some programs have Bibles in other languages, which can also be useful. As with most computer programs you will also be able to copy and paste passages into another word processing program such as MS Word or Linux.

Context - context - context!

When looking up passages, the serious student will always consider the context. It is easy to take a verse or part of a verse and quote it in support of a particular belief. This is not what Bible study is about! By looking at the passage in which the verse appears you will get a balanced view of what is written.

The whole purpose of this booklet is to help you find out what the Bible actually teaches. Always approach your study with an open mind and be prepared to have your ideas challenged by what you find. The Bereans of New Testament times are an example in this respect:

'Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.' (Acts 17 .11 NIV)

The Internet

For those with access to a computer connected to the Internet there is an almost bewildering array of sites which have information on Bible topics.

The concordance referred to in the last section, can be accessed on some sites (see for example www.biblegateway.com). By typing in any topic to your preferred search engine (eg Google) you will be inundated with information from web sites across the world.

Caution: One of the problems with the Internet is that anyone can provide information and this may not always be reliable. There are some very serious doctrinal errors in circulation and so treat all information with caution and ensure that it is in harmony with what the Bible teaches.

This of course applies to anything produced by men and women; it is only the original text of the Bible itself that stands up to the claim of infallibility. However, there are some good sites with information, maps and photographs that will enhance your Bible study, if you are able to use this tool.

Reference books

Today there are many thousands of books available to Bible students. In addition to the Concordance which is a must for the serious Bible student, there are Bible Dictionaries, Bible Encyclopedias, Bible Atlases and Bible Commentaries. A useful introduction to the different books of the Bible is 'Books of the Bible' by J. H. Broughton (available from The Dawn Book Supply – address on inside back cover).

Summary

The Bible is a unique book and as you delve deeper into it you will be fascinated by what you find. However, you must bear in mind that God has preserved His Word so that we may find out about Him and His Son. Bible study should not just be to increase our knowledge of the Bible but to influence us as individuals so that we grow to love God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who was sent as the Saviour of the world.

Select a good Study Bible which you are comfortable with. Arm yourself with some of the useful tools mentioned in this booklet and then set about your study in a systematic way. Choose a suitable time for your

study, when you are in the best frame of mind and able to concentrate. Some people are at their best early in the morning when they are fresh. Others prefer to work in the evening. Before you commence, offer a short prayer to ask God to guide you in your study. It is His Word and undoubtedly He will be pleased with those who take the time and trouble to study it. As He says:

'...to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.' (Isaiah 66.2 KJV)

Make notes as you go and do not expect to get the answers to all your questions immediately. Get into the habit of noting down your questions and in time many will be answered. Some Bible students have been studying God's Word all their lives and find they can still learn more! This shows what a unique book the Bible is.

The Dawn Christadelphians publish a magazine '**LIGHT on a new world**' and are willing to send this anywhere in the world (free of charge). It has articles of exposition and general interest which will help you to understand aspects of God's Word. The Christadelphians are always pleased to help people who have a genuine interest in God and His Word. Many ecclesias (Greek for churches, see Page 16) throughout the world give regular talks and hold Bible study sessions or seminars. These are aimed at helping you to read the Bible effectively for yourself, so why not contact them? The publishers would be pleased to provide details of your nearest contact.

Finally, we hope this booklet will help you in your study of God's Word. May He bless you and give you a deeper understanding of the Divine plan centred in His son, the Lord Jesus Christ who, in a prayer to his Father said:

'...this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.'

(John 17. 3 NIV)

APPENDIX - Typical page of an NIV Study Bible

<p><i>The Genealogy of Jesus</i></p>	<p>1411</p>	<p>MATTHEW 1:19</p>
<p>1:1-17pp—Lk 3:23-38 1:3-6pp—Ru 4:18-22 1:7-11pp—1Ch 3:10-17</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Ch. 1</p> <p>1 ^a2Sa 7:12-16; Isa 9:6-7; 11:1; Jer 23:5-6; Mt 9:27; Lk 1:32, 69; Rev 22:16; ^bGe 22:18; Gal 3:16</p> <p>2 ^cGe 21:3, 12; ^dGe 25:26; ^eGe 29:35; 49:10</p> <p>3 ^fGe 38:27-30</p> <p>5 ^gHeb 11:31</p> <p>6 ^h1Sa 16:1; 17:12; ⁱ2Sa 12:24</p> <p>10 ^j2Ki 20:21</p> <p>11 ^k2Ki 24:14-16; Jer 27:20; 40:1; Da 1:1-2</p> <p>12 ^l1Ch 3:17; ^m1Ch 3:19; Est 3:2</p> <p>16 ⁿLk 1:27; ^oMt 27:17</p> <p>18 ^pLk 1:35</p> <p>19 ^qDt 24:1</p>	<p>Amon the father of Josiah, ¹¹and Josiah the father of Jeconiah^a and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.^k</p> <p>¹²After the exile to Babylon: Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,^l Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,^m ¹³Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, Abiud the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, ¹⁴Azor the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Akim, Akim the father of Eliud, ¹⁵Eliud the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, ¹⁶and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary,ⁿ of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.^o</p> <p>¹⁷Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ.^b</p>
<p>1 A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David,^a the son of Abraham:^b</p> <p>²Abraham was the father of Isaac,^c Isaac the father of Jacob,^d Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,^e Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,^f Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,^g Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David.^h</p> <p>David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,ⁱ Solomon the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asa, Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram, Jehoram the father of Uzziah, Uzziah the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,^j Manasseh the father of Amon,</p>	<p><i>The Birth of Jesus Christ</i></p> <p>¹⁸This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.^o ¹⁹Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce^q her quietly.</p> <p>^a // That is, Jehoiachin; also in verse 12 ^b // Or <i>Messiah</i>. "The Christ" (Greek) and "the Messiah" (Hebrew) both mean "the Anointed One".</p>	
<p>1:1-16 For a comparison of Matthew's genealogy with Luke's see note on Lk 3:23-38. The types of people mentioned in this genealogy reveal the broad scope of those who make up the people of God as well as the genealogy of Jesus.</p> <p>1:1 <i>the son of David</i>. A Messianic title (see note on 9:27) found several times in this Gospel (in 1:20 it is not a Messianic title), <i>the son of Abraham</i>. Because Matthew was writing to Jews, it was important to identify Jesus in this way.</p> <p>1:4 <i>Amminadab</i>. Father-in-law of Aaron (Ex 6:23).</p> <p>1:5 <i>Rahab</i>. See Jos 2. Since quite a long time had elapsed between Rahab and David and because of Matthew's desire for systematic organization (see note on v. 17), many of the generations between these two ancestors were assumed, but not listed, by Matthew.</p> <p>1:8 <i>Jehoram the father</i>. Matthew calls Jehoram the father of Uzziah, but from 2Ch 21:4-26:23 it is clear that, again, several generations were assumed (Ahaziah, Joash and Amaziah) and that "father" is used in the sense of "forefather".</p> <p>1:11 <i>Josiah the father</i>. Similarly (see note on v. 8), Josiah is called the father of Jeconiah (i.e., Jehoiachin; see NIV text note), whereas he was actually the father of Jehoiakim and the grandfather of Jehoiachin (2Ch 36:1-9).</p> <p>1:12 <i>Shealtiel the father</i>. Actually the grandfather of</p>	<p>Zerubbabel (1Ch 3:17-18).</p> <p>1:16 Matthew does not say that Joseph was the father of Jesus but only that he was the husband of Mary and that Jesus was born of her. In this genealogy Matthew shows that, although Jesus is not the physical son of Joseph, he is the legal son and therefore a descendant of David.</p> <p>1:17 <i>fourteen generations . . . fourteen . . . fourteen</i>. These divisions reflect two characteristics of Matthew's Gospel: (1) an apparent fondness for numbers and (2) concern for systematic arrangement. The number 14 may have been chosen because it is twice seven (the number of completeness) and/or because it is the numerical value of the name David (see note on Rev 13:18). For the practice of telescoping genealogies to achieve the desired number of names see introduction to 1 Chronicles: Genealogies.</p> <p>1:18 <i>pledged to be married</i>. There were no sexual relations during a Jewish betrothal period, but it was a much more binding relationship than a modern engagement and could be broken only by divorce (see v. 19). In Dt 22:24 a betrothed woman is called a "wife", though the preceding verse speaks of her as being "pledged to be married". Matthew uses the terms "husband" (v. 19) and "wife" (v. 24) of Joseph and Mary before they were married.</p> <p>1:19 <i>righteous</i>. To Jews this meant being zealous in keeping the law. <i>divorce her quietly</i>. He would sign the</p>	

BIBLE ABBREVIATIONS

There are various versions of the Scriptures published by many different organisations. The following lists some of these versions and the common abbreviations in use:

King James (Authorised) Version	KJV
Revised Version	RV
Revised Standard Version	RSV
New King James Version	NKJV
New English Bible	NEB
New International Version	NIV
English Standard Version	ESV

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