

Synthetic Bible Studies

Containing an outline study of every book of the Bible
with suggestions for Sermons, Addresses and
Bible Expositions

By

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INTRODUCTION BY THE AUTHOR

We are to engage in what is called the synthetic study of the Bible, which means, as we use the term, the study of the Bible as a whole, and each book of the Bible as a whole, and as seen in its relation to the other books. The word "*synthesis*" has the opposite meaning - "*analysis*." When we analyze a subject we take it apart and consider it in its various elements, but when we synthesize it we put it together and consider it as a whole, which is what we are now about to do in a certain sense with the Word of GOD.

The Value of the Plan

The value of the plan may be illustrated in different ways.

Suppose you were about to study history, you would find it desirable to read first an outline of the world's history, a small book, but one which would give you almost at a glance a survey of the whole field. The impression might be dim, but you would feel a satisfaction in knowing that your eye had swept the horizon, and that afterwards everything you saw would be within those limits. Then you would take up in their order each of the three great divisions of history, ancient, medieval and modern, and study or read them more particularly. Following this you would concentrate your attention on one division, multiplying the books read, but limiting the range of thought and focusing the mind upon some special period or nation. It is thus you would become a master of the subject.

Suppose it were geography instead of history. You would first look at a globe, or map of the world, and after that single, all-including glimpse, you could more intelligently consider the

hemispheres, continents and states, and ultimately the mountain ranges, rivers and lakes. It would be tedious and difficult were you to begin the other way and work backwards, and yet that is the method many employ in Bible study, accounting in great measure for their lukewarmness in it and the meager results.

I have read of an English mountain climber who, whenever exploring a new region, always ascends the highest summit first. He thus gathers a bird's-eye view of the whole section, and can pursue the investigation of the lower levels with an understanding of their relativity that strengthens his grasp of the situation with every movement he makes.

That plan needs to be applied for successful Bible study. Let us use the telescope first and the microscope afterwards.

What It Has Done

Just to interest you a little more and get you lovingly wedded to the idea, let me tell you some of the results this plan of Bible study has wrought.

You will forgive a personal allusion, I trust. It is now many long years since the HOLY SPIRIT impressed it upon my attention in answer to prayer for light upon the subject. The whole story would not be uninteresting were there time to tell it, but I can only say that from that day to this the blessing that has followed me has been like the mountain stream that increases as it flows towards the great ocean.

First there came a strengthening of conviction as to the infallibility of the Bible - every part of it, and this was followed by a deepening of my own inner spiritual life, then a broadening of my mental vision so that I came to have an interest in the pursuit of related studies such as never before, and finally a lightening of my labors in the ministry that made previous drudgery a present delight.

Oh, how easy it is to get sermons, and how rich, and helpful and attractive they are to both sinners and saints when you know how to find them in the Bible!

Here is a hint surely not only to pastors and evangelists, but Christian workers of all classes who have religious talks and addresses to make, and public meetings to conduct. How glad you are to do it, but how difficult and unsatisfactory the work seems! How you long to get hold of the Word of GOD in such a way as to put yourself and others at ease in engaging in such service!

Shortly after applying this method of Bible study in my own case I began to experiment on others, some theological students who were under my care, with like blessed results. Then the plan became introduced to different Bible institutes and at least one theological seminary. Here two classes of minds were met; those with a university training and others with scarcely more than a common school education, but the effect was the same in both cases, and now not only hundreds but thousands of such students, some of them in the uttermost part of the earth, are praising GOD for having revealed to them His Word in this simple way.

Out of these institute classes gradually grew popular evening classes in different parts of our

country and Great Britain. In several instances these have reached a membership of 1,000 to 2,000 or more, held weekly both summer and winter, with a sustained interest and enthusiasm.

How To Do the Work

The first thing expected of you is that you will read the Scripture covered by lesson assigned.

Little can be gained in any kind of Bible study without this, and especially under the present plan. Its great advantage lies in getting the people to read the Bible for themselves. You are not asked to memorize what you read, or tax your energies in any other way than by the simple reading. Let the task be made in that respect just as easy and pleasant as possible.

The second rule is, read the Scripture lesson continuously.

By this I mean two things.

In the first place, always read the lesson through at a single sitting. Do not read part of it now, and part some other time, but if it be possible read it all at once.

In the second place, do not be influenced by the Bible chapters and verses when you read. They are valuable for reference, but often hinder in other respects in getting at the mind of the writer. This rule is necessary to be observed with great particularity, since it is only by the continuous reading of a given book that we can grasp the central line of thought, the pivotal idea, which is so essential to the understanding of the others related to it.

The third rule is, read the lesson repeatedly.

Even if it is needful to read it more rapidly than you would otherwise wish to do, for the present purpose it is better to read it several times rapidly than only once slowly. You will appreciate the reason for this better as we proceed, but just now please take it on faith. The first time you go over the lesson in this way you may see nothing in it that your mind takes hold of in the way of an outline, but the next time you will see a little, and the next more, and so on till the complete outline stands out clearly before you. By GOD's blessing this will demonstrate what you can yourselves do in mastering His Word, and it will greatly increase your sense of spiritual power and joy.

The fourth rule is, read the lesson independently.

Do not go to the commentary and Bible "help" for assistance till you have finished the lesson yourself. This is not to depreciate such assistance but to emphasize what was said above. To master the Bible you must begin by getting your own individual impression of the contents or outline of each book. This, even if out of the way, is better for a learner than the ready made impression of some one else who is nearer correct. The drill of changing and qualifying what you obtained is of great value in the end. Moreover, you will not fall so wide of the mark as you may imagine. You will be delightfully surprised at your success.

The last rule, but not the least by any means, is to read the lesson prayerfully.

There are two reasons for this:

In the first place, the Bible can not be studied "just like any other book," because it is unlike every other book in the world. It is GOD's own Book. The HOLY SPIRIT wrote it through holy men of old (II Peter 1:21), and its Author is its only true and safe interpreter. Coleridge said: "The Bible without the HOLY SPIRIT is a sun-dial by moonlight," and a greater than he said: **"We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God"** (I Corinthians 2:12).

But then the other reason is this:

- do we not desire our Bible study to be something more than a feast of intellect?
- do we not desire Him whom our soul loveth to tell us where He feeds His flock, where He maketh them to rest at noon? (Song of Solomon 1:7).
- do we not wish to lie down in the green pastures and be led beside the still waters?
- do we not desire a rich blessing in our souls?

But how can this be without the power of the HOLY GHOST through the Word, and how shall we obtain this power except as we ask? (Luke 11:13).

Cultivate prayer, I beseech you. Punctuate the reading of every book, and chapter and verse with it if you would have this study to be a real delight.

James M. Gray