

HIKING THROUGH THE BIBLE

INTRODUCTION

A. Assumptions:

- 1 that God intends all Christians to be partners together with his Spirit and with one another in the continuing ministry and mission of Jesus, God's Messiah, until he returns;
- 2 that being biblically literate is vitally important for anyone, in any age, to participating wisely in Jesus' enterprise, which is, itself, biblically-guided;
- 3 that biblical literacy also engenders personal and corporate Christian spiritual maturation;
- 4 that God's Spirit was vitally involved with God's people in producing the biblical account of God's self-revelation to them, and through them to all humanity;
- 5 that the same Holy Spirit continues in every age to enable humans to discover proper interpretations and applications of the Bible;
- 6 that we humans learn more deeply and permanently inductively than deductively;
- 7 and that questions are important means for focusing the inductive learning process on the relevant data.

B. Goal:

To co-operate with God's Spirit in his process of helping ordinary Christian become personally more biblically literate in order to foster their spiritual growth, ministry development and mission involvement.

A. Characteristics of This Study Guide:

- 1 Inductive: discovery through open ended questions;
- 2 Zetetic: guided by observational, interpretive and applicational questions, but always asking WHY?
- 3 Suitable for either individuals or groups: but works best when individuals share their findings with colleagues periodically;
- 4 Chronological: arranged following the Bible's own view of historical order, rather than according to its types of literature, the history of its authorization or its process of development;
- 5 Canonical: recognized by God's people as having been inspired by God's Spirit;
- 6 Adjustable pace: proceed at your or your group's chosen speed;

- 7 Age flexible: appropriate for anyone who can read English at a high school level;
- 8 Faithful to the original languages: e.g., YHWH, Messiah;
- 9 Generically Christian: preferring biblical to dogmatic categories, ones that every Christians should appreciate;
- 10 Pertinent aids included: an introduction and analysis of each book, cross references (for parallels, theme development and alternative perspectives) and occasional notes to clarify some things not made clear in many English translations;
- 11 Supplemented occasionally by the trek coordinator: with basic background information and orienteering skills;
- 12 Cumulative: each of 12 trails follows and builds upon the previous ones to traverse the entire biblical text;
- 13 Interpretively balanced: sensitive to context, grammar, history, genre, figures of speech, etc.;
- 14 Practice oriented: seeking to foster Christian discipleship, mission, ministry and spirituality for individuals and congregations;
- 15 Relational: always concerned about the participant's relationships to God, oneself, others and God's world;
- 16 Evangelical: balancing Scripture's authority with Christian experience, rather than with reason, tradition or culture;
- 17 Logically inclusive: preferring "both-and" to "either-or" thinking, e.g., both God and humans minister together.

D. Acknowledgements:

The author first experienced the power of zetetic [question-directed], inductive Bible Study as a student and a staff member of the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship (Canada). The idea of developing a chronologically-ordered, zetetic, biblical study program for Christian laypeople was inspired by personal use of two Inter-Varsity individual Bible Study programs: Alan M. Stibbs' Search the Scriptures [IVF: London, 5th ed. 1967] and Carol Adney's This Morning With God [IVP; Downers Grove, 1968]. The first edition was generated in 12 modules from 1988 to 1992 for the spiritual and ministry development the laity of Woodbridge Presbyterian Church, Woodbridge Ontario, Canada. Twenty-some years later in my retirement, I have been revising it in light of my own and friends' use of it. For background information I have been indebted to many sources over the years, but recently especially to The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [Ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley et al.'s 4 vol., 3rd Rev. Ed., Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1979-1988] and William S. La Sor's et al's Old Testament Survey [Eerdmans: Grand Rapids,

1981], in order to update my extensive biblical training at Fuller Theological Seminary in the early 1960s. Last, but far from least, I must acknowledge the constructively critical and editorial advice of my theologically and biblically educated wife, Margaret.

E. Abbreviations for the Biblical Books:

Old Testament:

Gn = Genesis	2 Ch = 2 Chronicles	Dn = Daniel
Ex = Exodus	Ez = Ezra	Ho = Hosea
Lv = Leviticus	Ne = Nehemiah	Jl = Joel
Nu = Numbers	Est = Esther	Am = Amos
Dt = Deuteronomy	Jb = Job	Ob = Obadiah
is = Joshua	Ps = Psalms	Jo = Jonah
Ju = Judges	Pr = Proverbs	Mi = Micah
Ru = Ruth	Ec = Ecclesiastes	Na = Nahum
1 S = 1 Samuel	SS = Song of Solomon	Hb = Habakkuk
2S = 2 Samuel	Is = Isaiah	Zp = Zephaniah
I K = 1 Kings	Jr = Jeremiah	Hg = Haggai
2 K = 2 Kings	Lm = Lamentations	Ze = Zechariah
1 Ch = 1 Chronicles	Ek = Ezekiel	MI = Malachi

New Testament:

Mt = Matthew	Ep = Ephesians	He = Hebrews
Mk = Mark	Ph = Philippians	Ja = James I
Lk — Luke	Cl = Colossians	P = I Peter
Jn = John	I Th = 1 Thessalonians	2P = 2 Peter
Ac = Acts	2 Th = 2 Thessalonians	1 Jn = 1 John
Ro = Romans	I Ti = 1 Timothy	2 Jn = 2 John
1 Co = 1 Corinthians	2 Ti = 2 Timothy	3 Jn = 3 John
2 Co = 2 Corinthians	Tt = Titus	Jd = Jude
Ga = Galatians	Phm = Philemon	Rv = Revelation

F. Instructions:

General:

1. Each of the 12 trails that make up the whole chronological tour through the Bible, is composed of a chronological series of sections which are grouped in segments of 7 sections each. At a regular pace one segment of 7 sections would be covered in a week. Faster and slower paces can compress or expand the time to traverse each segment, and thus each trail. Ideally, to gain a chronological overview of the whole Bible, it is best to start at the beginning, trail I section 1, and proceed section by section through each of the trails to the last section of trail XII. Nevertheless, there is still much value in hiking any one of the trails for its own sake. In so doing, again it is best to proceed through all the sections of that trail in order to appreciate the continuity and the historical chronology of that era.
2. At the beginning of each trail an important comprehensive question is asked. Each hiker is to gather and record data throughout the hike to attempt to write a biblical answer to this question by the end of the trail. Although each subsequent trail has its own comprehensive question, some hikers may wish to continue gathering information to obtain a fuller biblical answer to the question from a previous trail. Hikers may also wish to pose their own general questions to gather data on while hiking along. However, if you find little information for your own questions, it may be that they aren't the sort of questions that God thinks it is important to answer (Ac 1:60).
3. In the trail guide for each section you will usually find many small questions grouped in about 5 numbered paragraphs rather than a few omnibus questions. This is to help you easily engage a sub-section or issue gradually, rather than be puzzled by a too general question. It is best to follow each of these series of small questions in order. If some of these small questions appear irrelevant to you at first, then skip them for the moment, but be ready to come back to them if or when they become pertinent. Not every mind follows exactly the same track.
4. The questions are intended to direct your attention to observing, interpreting and applying the substance and phenomena of the biblical text before you. If they lead you away from that, then ignore the questions or modify them so that they serve their purpose better. Whatever type of question you are addressing, focus on the details and patterns of the immediate biblical data. Always ask the question, why would you say that? Cross references in brackets () are not meant to lead you away from the text at hand, but to suggest a larger biblical context that might illuminate the data before you. Therefore, don't let them waylay you. Some questions will be much easier to answer than others. Some don't have only one possible correct answer, but which one would you opt for, and why? Some questions deliberately call for your speculation in order to get you thinking about things. Don't avoid them simply because they make you feel uneasy. They are intended for your own good. Remember that you have the Spirit of truth (in 16:13; 1 Co 12:3) as your reliable spiritual guide. Some questions that are asked may not even seem answerable at all, and perhaps some really are not. Flag those that seem to fall into this last category, and report them to your trek coordinator. Report also any questions that seem to be irrelevant or purely rhetorical. Write down your own further questions about the text and your insights into its meaning to share with your cadre and the trek coordinator.
5. If you fall behind the pace set by your learning cadre, what should you do? There are several options. You may try very hard to work through all the sections and questions that you are behind on before the next rendezvous time. That, however, might engender burn out. You might try to persuade your cadre to slow up a little, but that may not be possible. It might be best to skim-read the intervening sections and their questions, jotting down in passing a few rough answers to some of the questions. Then you can join your cadre at its next rendezvous, be able to understand its discussion and even be ready to try to proceed

with them at their pace. However, note well the parts of the trail that you have traversed so lightly, so that you can return to them sometime later for a more thorough inspection. Otherwise, your understanding of God's self-revelation to his people in that era will remain rather uneven.

6. To start your biblical hike, find and set aside a quiet place, free from interruptions, a special place to meet God, the Holy Spirit, through his scriptures. You will need a surface to write on and a place to keep your hiking materials together. Try to set aside a regular time period to hike. That may be hard at first, but it can help you develop a devotional study discipline that will last long after you've finished the trail. You may need to adjust the time you spend hiking according to the difficulty of the terrain in the section before you. If only a set time is available, some sections may be covered less carefully than others. Since the slower sections usually have more important features to observe, interpret and apply, it is worthwhile to note them and go back later to complete that section.

Particular:

1. Open each working session with prayer, asking God's Spirit to open your heart and mind to understand and welcome what he helped write long ago for your own encouragement (Ro 15:4; I Co 10:11) and equipping (2 Ti 3:16) as a Christian. But don't close the prayer. Leave the prayer channel wide open, so that you can talk to God about what you are reading and thinking throughout the study.
2. Next rapidly read the entire scriptural passage assigned for that section. To be able to read more rapidly and to gain a clear idea of the general thrust of the passage, it would be advisable to do this preliminary reading using one of the modern "dynamic", i.e., thought-by-thought, translations, e.g., Today's English Version [The Good News Bible], the New English Bible, the Revised English Bible, the New International Version, the Jerusalem Bible, etc.
3. Using the question sheet for that section, work through each group of questions one sub-question at a time, jotting down your own answers in your personal journal, so that you can remember what you are finding later for your own benefit or to share some of it with your cadre at its next rendezvous. Don't try to guess at or repeat what you think might be the traditional or orthodox answers to the questions. That won't help you learn much. Neither will simply citing the notes in a study Bible, even when they are pertinent and correct. If you adopt what they suggest as your answer, then you are taking responsibility for their being correct! It's your own observations, interpretations and applications that the Spirit of God facilitates that you should note down. Try to stick to answers that seem suggested to you by the Spirit interacting as you wrestle with the text itself. If you later share answers with your cadre that have little or no link to the text at hand, they may well wonder how you found that what they didn't. How will you answer their query?
4. If you want to look at the details of the text more closely, consult a contemporary word-by-word translation, e.g., the Revised Standard Version, the New Revised Standard Version, the New American Standard Bible, the New King James Version, etc.
5. Throughout the entire study, pay careful attention to the names for God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit that are employed in the passage before you. What is the significance of the names being used here? Remember, that in most of the modern English translations Yahweh, [YHWH] the personal name for God in the Old Testament, is commonly rendered by "the LORD" [unless a footnote indicates an alternative rendering], to distinguish it from the title "the Lord". In the New Testament, English translations confusingly make no such distinction, even in quotations from the Old Testament. It is usually clear from the immediate context

exactly who is meant by the ambiguous title "the lord" in the New Testament, even if the additional clues in the Greek idiom are not evident in translations.

6. Before you conclude a particular study period, pause for a moment of quiet meditation on what you are learning, especially on what seems new to you or now needs to be applied. Then conclude your open prayer with appropriate responses to God.
7. Be prepared to share some of what you have been finding with your learning cadre at its next rendezvous.
8. If you get lost or confused on the trail feel free to consult the trail coordinator, Don Freeman, at 705-749-3290.