

OVERALL PLAN OF THE COURSE

	No. of Studies	PART ONE	PART TWO	PART THREE
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OLD TESTAMENT

HISTORICAL BOOKS

Genesis 1 – 26	19	page 11		
Genesis 27 – 50	23	24		
Exodus 1 – 20	14	46		
Exodus 21 – 40	15	105		
Leviticus	20		147	
Numbers	25		163	
Deuteronomy	24		181	
Joshua	17	77		
Judges	18		198	
Ruth	2		211	
1 Samuel	23		213	
2 Samuel	18		240	
1 Kings	19		251	
2 Kings	16		271	
1 Chronicles	14			441
2 Chronicles	21			457
Ezra	7			412
Nehemiah	14			412
Esther	7			464

POETRY AND WISDOM LITERATURE

Job	21		227	
Psalms 1 – 12	7	34		
Psalms 13 – 29	14	69		
Psalms 30 – 41	14	119		
Psalms 42 – 51	7		237	
Psalms 52 – 72	14		245	
Psalms 73 – 89	14			391

OVERALL PLAN OF THE COURSE

VII

	No. of Studies	PART ONE	PART TWO	PART THREE
Psalms 90 – 106	14			420
Psalms 107 – 138	27			448
Psalms 139 – 150	8			493
Proverbs	21	87		
Ecclesiastes	7			468
Song of Solomon	7			472
PROPHETS				
Isaiah 1 – 39	21		278	
Isaiah 40 – 66	21		303	
Jeremiah 1 – 25	16			343
Jeremiah 26 – 52	19			360
Lamentations	5			371
Ezekiel 1 – 32	21			379
Ezekiel 33 – 48	14			397
Daniel	14			483
Hosea	7	62		
Joel	2			324
Amos	5	62		
Obadiah	1			335
Jonah	2			322
Micah	5	131		
Nahum	2			329
Habakkuk	4			332
Zephaniah	3			326
Haggai	2			426
Zechariah	9			428
Malachi	3			434

	No. of Studies	PART ONE	PART TWO	PART THREE
NEW TESTAMENT				
GOSPELS				
Matthew 1 – 7	10			317
Matthew 8 – 18	18			337
Matthew 19 – 28	21			354
Mark 1 – 9	19		172	
Mark 10 – 16	16		192	
Luke 1:1 – 9:56	25	3		
Luke 9:57 – 19:28	22	18		
Luke 19:29 – 24:53	16	30		
John 1 – 12	25		259	
John 13 – 21	17		278	
Acts 1:1 – 12:24	20	37		
Acts 12:25 – 28:31	34	50		
LETTERS				
Romans	28	93		
1 Corinthians	14	111		
2 Corinthians	14	123		
Galatians	7	83		
Ephesians	7		222	
Philippians	7			374
Colossians	6			408
1 & 2 Thessalonians	8	73		
1 Timothy	7	135		
2 Timothy	4	141		
Titus	3	139		
Philemon	1			411
Hebrews	21		154	
James	7			436
1 Peter	8		206	
2 Peter	5			478
1, 2, 3 John	7		298	
Jude	2			481
Revelation	28			496

SUGGESTIONS ON METHOD OF STUDY

Aim of the course

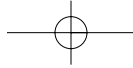
The aim of this course is to help Christians young and old in their daily study of the Word of God. It differs from other schemes which have a similar aim in a number of important respects.

- First, the whole Bible can be covered in a period of three years.
- Second, the method employed is to set a number of questions on the content, meaning and application of each passage to be studied. These are designed to encourage a personal searching of the Scriptures to discover God's particular teaching and message for the reader from each portion of his Word.
- Third, explanatory notes are reduced to an absolute minimum on the principle that the truth which we dig out for ourselves is more likely to be remembered. There is real profit and enjoyment in wrestling with a difficult passage, as the many thousands who have already used the course can testify.

The right approach

The term 'Bible study' has been used to describe this course, but it is a phrase that needs some interpreting. We must not approach the Bible merely academically, as if it were some textbook we are required to read for an examination. We read and study our Bible because this is a means appointed by God by which we can encounter him. It is vital that we seek the Lord, and desire to know his will as it applies to us. Otherwise, answering a question can become an end in itself and instead of a joyful meeting with our God, our Bible study will become either a rather boring duty, or, at best, nothing more than an intellectually absorbing pastime.

While it is true that in our study of the Bible we must use our minds, employing all the intellectual faculties which God has given us, our primary requirement is not intellectual but spiritual. The Bible itself declares: 'The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned' (1 Cor. 2:14). Similarly, our Lord reveals in one of his prayers that the things of God are often hidden from those whom men reckon wise, and revealed to those he calls 'little children' (Matt. 11:25, 26). Our



approach to God's Word must be wholly without pride and self-confidence. We should begin with a humble acknowledgment of our dependence upon God, and a prayer that his Holy Spirit will open our blind eyes and give us spiritual discernment and understanding.

At the same time we must remember that God has been pleased to reveal his truth in documents written originally in ancient languages and in a particular historical environment. Consequently full discovery of all that God has to say to us through them demands diligent study involving patient and persistent enquiry and the use of all proper available aids to understanding. Bible study ought to be regarded, therefore, as demanding the serious and concentrated exercise of all one's intellectual powers. God rewards those who seek in order to find.

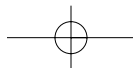
The time required

Those who originally planned *Search the Scriptures* had in mind people who would give at least twenty minutes a day to their personal Bible study. But experience over many years has shown that to get the maximum amount of help from the course rather longer than this may be required. Without it, prayerful meditation on the passage, which is a necessary preliminary to answering the questions, may well get curtailed. Those with little time to give would therefore be well advised to seek some slightly less demanding scheme as an aid to their Bible study.¹ But for those who can set aside, say, half an hour a day, experience has shown that this course can be of immense spiritual benefit. In addition, the question and answer method provides valuable practical training in how to study the Bible for oneself.

Arrangement

The full course can be completed in exactly three years by anyone who will keep at it and do the study each day without fail. This is the challenge it presents. But it is intended to act as a servant, not as a task-master, to assist rather than to discourage. Obviously, illness or a change in circumstances may necessitate a change in routine. Others may find that they benefit by a move to another Bible study method for short periods. The important thing is to keep constantly before one's mind the aim of completing a personal study of the whole Bible, even

¹ For example, the Bible study series, Bible 101 (IVP)



if it takes longer than the recommended three years.

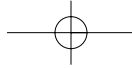
The order in which it is suggested that the books of the Bible should be studied has been worked out with some care. There are both deliberate sequence and planned variety. Except where other considerations have demanded some different arrangement, Old Testament books are studied in their historical order. Since, however, 1 and 2 Kings are studied as part of this historical sequence, 1 and 2 Chronicles are inserted towards the end of the course as a final review of the history of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

Only where the study of a book occupies more than four weeks has its study been subdivided into sections to be taken with intervals in between. Studies that occupy the first year have been chosen to help the beginner. They contain, for instance, a much larger proportion of New Testament reading than is possible in the remainder of the course.

Those who are accustomed to reading only a short passage of Scripture each day may find the length of some of the Old Testament allocations rather forbidding. But there is much to be said for the practice of reading large sections (and even whole books) at a sitting. After all, this is what we usually do when reading for study or pleasure. With the time available, the detailed study of particular verses is less important than a broad, general acquaintance with the contents and main spiritual truths of the passage.

One big advantage of a course of this kind is that it can so easily be adapted to suit individual needs. For example, if the order of study recommended is not what the reader wants, it can very easily be altered. Again, the larger books of the Bible, which in this course are divided into sections, can, if preferred, be read without interruption in their entirety. Cross references are provided from the end of one section to the beginning of the next to make this simpler. If, on the other hand, it is preferred to break the books down into even smaller sections for the sake of variety, there is nothing to prevent the course being adapted in this way. Another suggestion is that readers may wish to increase the amount of New Testament study they do in the later stages of the course by turning again to some of the books studied in Part One. This will lengthen the time taken to complete the course but some may well decide that other considerations are more important.

To make this easier, the books are listed in their biblical order on pp. vi, vii and viii with the total number of studies allocated to each and the page where each section begins. But any deviation from the



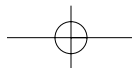
prescribed order ought not to be allowed to interfere with the ultimate aim of completing for oneself a study of the whole Bible.

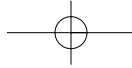
A checklist on which each book or section can be ticked when completed appears at the beginning of each of the three parts and each individual study can also be ticked as it is done, in the small 'boxes' provided for the purpose.

Requirements

- (1) A Bible: The course is based in general upon the New International Version of the Bible, and can naturally be used with this alone. There will be occasions when other translations may be helpful to the study of the passage; and there are, of course, numerous other versions of the Bible or New Testament available today. While care should be taken in their use (sometimes they are paraphrases rather than translations), they can often throw light on a passage that might otherwise be somewhat obscure.
- (2) A notebook: This can be used both for rough notes made during the study each day and also for writing up more carefully those findings that are felt to be of more permanent value. Some have found it wise to leave the recording of these notes to a later time when the value of the daily discoveries can be seen in perspective. In the initial thrill of discovery all sorts of things may be thought to be of great and lasting worth which will not appear quite so relevant a week later. The majority, will probably not have time to come back to each study in this way. A good loose-leaf book can serve for both purposes.
- (3) Other aids to Bible study: A Bible and a notebook are the only two essential requirements, but the following reference books can be recommended as useful aids to Bible study.
 - (a) *The New Bible Commentary* (21st Century Edition).² A one-volume commentary on the whole Bible. Some explanatory notes and a certain amount of background information are provided in the course, but to have a commentary available for reference can be very valuable. If time is limited, however, such helps should be used only sparingly. What is discovered

² IVP UK, Leicester; IVP USA, Downers Grove. See also the Tyndale Commentaries on individual books.





personally from a study of the Bible will mean far more than what is read hurriedly in a commentary.

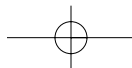
- (b) *The New Bible Dictionary* (3rd Edition).³ This contains a great deal of useful information concerning places, customs and the meaning of words and ideas. Again, care must be taken to see that the time set apart for personal study is not replaced by reading some of the fascinating facts recorded in the Dictionary! On the other hand, such a reference work can be a very helpful supplement to the study of the Bible.

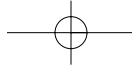
Procedure

What follows is put forward merely as a suggestion for those starting the course. After a while, each individual will naturally wish to make their own adaptations of this procedure as seem best to them in the light of their experience.

- 1 Begin with prayer along the lines previously suggested.
- 2 Read the portion of Scripture appointed for study. It is best not to read the questions before reading the Bible passage itself. Knowing what the questions are may mean that one's interest becomes limited too soon to those particular points.
- 3 Read the questions and any notes on the passage. Think about the passage in the light of the questions asked. Then try to work out the answer to these: they will be found a useful aid to concentration.
- 4 Write answers to the questions in the notebook. The users of the course are strongly advised to discipline themselves to do this, and not just to pass over the questions with a vague idea that they have been answered. Greatest profit will be derived from actually committing to paper what has been discovered from the passage. At the same time it is possible to be too dependent on the questions. Especially in the larger Old Testament sections the questions set obviously do not exhaust the meaning of the passage. The reader may even feel that at times they miss what is

³ IVP UK, Leicester; IVP USA, Downers Grove.





to them the main point of the passage or jump to application too quickly. Fair enough! If readers find themselves wanting to formulate their own lines of enquiry instead of being tied to the questions set, one of the aims of the course is being achieved.

Some users of the course may wonder at times whether their answer to a question is in fact the one intended! This does not really matter provided that scriptural teaching is being better understood. But where other Scripture references are provided for comparison these will often indicate the kind of answer expected. It is better to concentrate first on getting an answer from the verses set for study, and to leave the references to other scriptures until that has been done. The temptation to study the cross references rather than the passage set must be avoided. It can also be helpful to have a weekly review of the ground covered, and of the outstanding truths that have been learnt or more fully appreciated.

Some people may find that all this gives them too much to do in the time they have allocated to Bible study. In that case an attempt could be made to adapt the course so that only one question is dealt with each day, concentrating on the one that seems likely to be the most profitable. Then move on to the next study. To do otherwise means that the course may well take six years or even longer to complete. When it is only occasionally that one finds there is not enough time to finish, it may well be possible to complete the study later in the day or at the weekend, while the reading is still comparatively fresh in the mind.

Where more than two questions are provided for the same study, the third (or fourth) question is to be regarded as an optional extra; or as an alternative to the first two; or for possible use when the same Bible passage is studied later. One of the advantages of a course of this kind is that it can be used repeatedly.

- 5 Use the passage as a basis for worship and praise. Pray over the lessons learnt. There will be some particular thought (or thoughts) that is God's word to you for the day. Seek to discover it, and then in prayer relate it practically to your own life. Remember that God's inspired Word has been given to us for an essentially practical purpose; to teach us, to rebuke us, to correct us, to train us in righteousness, and to make us spiritually mature and thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

