

Profitable Bible Study (Part 2)

by Bryan Gibson

The Bible is a very profitable book (2 Timothy 3:16-17), but only with proper study. We just scratched the surface in part one, so let's look at some more things that will make Bible study more profitable for you.

Distinguish between the two testaments or covenants—the old and the new. The new is a “better covenant” (Hebrews 7:22), “established on better promises” (Hebrews 8:6). It came into effect when Christ died (Hebrews 9:15-17). Clearly, it is this testament (will, law) that we are subject to today (1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 6:2). Don't make the same mistake that so many others have made—don't look for authority for religious practices in the old covenant, one that has now become “obsolete” (Hebrews 8:13).

Don't neglect the Old Testament, though, because it still has great practical value. Here's a quick look at just some of its benefits. 1. It will greatly enhance your understanding of the New Testament. 2. You will better appreciate God's eternal plan, because you'll see it unfold right before your eyes. 3. It will strengthen your faith when you read its many prophecies, and then see their fulfillment in the New Testament. 4. The examples—both individuals and nations—will teach you lessons you'll never forget, and hopefully save you from the mistakes of previous generations. 5. You will benefit greatly from the timeless wisdom found in such books as Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. Study the Old Testament—pretty soon you'll have some other points to add to this list.

Be careful how you handle all the figurative language in the Bible. Does it make sense to you that exactly 144,000 will be saved, and that this number will only include male virgins? That's what you've got—if you take Revelation 14:1-4 literally. It's amazing how some can easily pick out figurative language in just about every other source, except the Bible. Consider the context in which it is said—that's rule number one. If a literal interpretation sounds ridiculous, it probably is. If a literal interpretation contradicts other plain passages, you know you're on the wrong track. Learn to appreciate figurative language, because it makes the point in a very vivid, memorable way. Just make sure you get the right point.

When looking for good examples to follow, don't forget about the local churches described in the New Testament. They were taught the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42), or the doctrine of Christ, so whatever they did in terms of organization, work, and worship, that's our pattern to follow today.

When studying the above subject, make sure you distinguish between responsibilities assigned to the local church, and those assigned to individuals within the church. The New Testament makes a distinction (1 Timothy 5:16), and so should you. Similarly, make sure you see the difference between what should be done “in church,” or in the assembly, and what should be done “at home” (1 Corinthians 11:17-34; 14:34-35). Failure to do these two things is why so many local churches no longer resemble New Testament churches.