

Text: Wisdom for A Lifetime
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PART I - WHY READ THE BIBLE?

Lesson Objective: To explore the rewards of Bible study

I. The Purpose of This Book – Chapter 1

This chapter introduces the prominence of the Bible in the literary world, and outlines the primary obstacles toward Bible study.

A. What Are Some of the Rewards of Bible Study?

1. To open doors to experience the divine within us
2. To feel an inner resonance with the message
3. To guide us into more expansive states of consciousness.

B. What Were Two Significant Events That Gave The Bible a Lofty Status?

1. The first significant event was the invention of the printing press with its moveable type, by Johannes Gutenberg of Mainz, Germany in the 15th century. In 1455, Gutenberg and his first partner, Johann Fust, printed the first Bible known today as the Gutenberg Bible. The text of the Gutenberg Bible was the Latin Vulgate, translated by St. Jerome around 400 C.E. Prior to this invention, scribes produced books by hand. High cost and limited availability restricted book ownership to only the very rich and the religious elite.

The Gutenberg Bible was the parent of every Bible printed thereafter. In 1466 Johann Mentel of Strasbourg printed a German language Bible. By the beginning of the sixteenth century, French, English, Italian, Dutch, and other vernacular European translations emerged. The best-known English translation, the King James Version commissioned by James I in 1604, was first published in 1611.

P.S. – The Hebrew Bible, also called the Old Testament, was originally written in Hebrew, with a few portions in Aramaic. The New Testament, also called the Christian Bible, was originally written in Greek.

2. The second significant event was the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century led by Martin Luther and John Calvin, both Bible scholars in their own right. The Reformation professed that the Word of God came through the Scriptures and not necessarily from ecclesiastical authority. In the eyes of the reformers, spiritual belief and practice had to be supported with biblical Truth. By 1534 Luther had translated the Bible into his native German.

II. The Bible Is Not a Book – Chapter 2

This chapter explains the process by which the Bible was written, and the problems it creates in reading the Bible.

A. What Is the Bible?

1. The English word Bible comes from the Greek *ta biblia* which means “the books”.
2. The Bible is a collection of sixty-six books that were originally written over a period of more than a thousand years, by many unknown authors, and with a diversity of intents and purposes.
3. The Bible is inspired writing, with God as the source of the ideas, and humans as the writers, the channels through which God’s ideas are translated into words.

B. What Are the Four Literary Sources of the First Five Books of the Hebrew Bible, Also Known as the Old Testament?

1. The J writer, known as the Jahwist, used the Hebrew word Yahweh when referring to God. Jehovah, the familiar name for God, is a derivation of Yahweh. The J writer, the earlier of the four writers, lived in the southern kingdom of Judah about 950 B.C.E.
2. The E writer, or Elohist, chose the word Elohim for God. The E writer came from the northern kingdom of Israel, and had his influence on the Bible circa 850 B.C.E. Hebrew names and name places have the word El in them, connecting them to a particular aspect of God. “Elisha” means “whom God is salvation”; Bethel means “House of God.”
3. The D Writer, known as the Deuteronomic Historian, came into the picture during the reforms of Josiah, king of Judah, in 621 B.C.E. Writer’s main interest centered on the restoration of and adherence to religious law.
4. The P writer, known as the Priestly Writer, emerged from among the priesthood during the Babylonian exile around 550 B.C.E. Concerned with rituals, regulations, and traditions, the book of Leviticus is a prime example of the P writer. The P writer wrote the first creation story (2nd chapter of Genesis) hundreds of years after the J writer crafted the second story (1st chapter of Genesis).

JEDP writers used oral tradition of legends, myths, and stories as existed in all cultures as a foundation from which to build and expand their ideas. See the books of Joshua; Judges; 1st and 2nd Samuel; 1st and 2nd Kings.

C. What Are Examples of Multiple Sources of Bible Literature?

1. Three versions of the Ten Commandments: “P”, “J”, and “D” writers
2. Two versions of the Creation Story: Genesis 1:1 - 2:4; Genesis 2:5 - 3:24
3. Three writers in the Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39; 40-55; 56-66
 - a) 1st Isaiah - Chapters 1-39 are the work of the original Prophet Isaiah
 - b) 2nd Isaiah - Chapters 40-55 are the work of an unknown writer who, based on the content of his writing, lived during the period of the Babylonian exile (587-539 BCE)
 - c) 3rd Trito-Isaiah - Chapters 56-66 reveal a postexilic community in Palestine working to rebuild, after the turmoil of exile

If a story or writer had some validity or importance to the overall message of Judaism, it was included and accommodated in the text of the scriptures. Therefore, conflicting ideas and stilted writing were the direct result of this all-inclusive editorial approach, one that makes the text difficult to read.

Old Testament Scriptures are separated into three sections (39 books):

- Torah—Books of Moses: Genesis through Deuteronomy
- The Prophets—Joshua through 2nd Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel plus the twelve minor prophets
- The Writings—All other books including Psalms, Proverbs, Job, and Daniel

New Testament Scriptures are compilations of various writings, by numerous authors (twenty-seven books in all). Each book was written with a specific purpose in mind.

- The Gospels: Written to get the word out to the people, about the wondrous works and teachings of Jesus Christ.
- The Acts of the Apostles: Written to continue the gospel of Luke; the Book of Acts chronicles the history of the early Christian church.
- Paul's Epistles: Essentially letters of support to the various churches around the ancient world.
- Book of Revelation: Written by an unknown author in the latter part of the first century C.E. The Book of Revelation directed a message of hope, toward Jewish Christians living in the Roman Empire.
- New Testament: Written in an ancient form of Greek. Jesus Christ is the central figure, a universal hero.
- Old Testament: Written in Hebrew, a Semitic language. God and God's relationship to the Israelite people is the focus.

III. The Sacredness of Scripture - Chapter 3

This chapter delves into the importance of Scripture in religion.

A. What Is the Nature of Various World Scripture?

1. Oral and written scriptures communicated ideas to govern, guide, inspire, and direct the steps of people, toward experiencing their innate spiritual nature.
2. Ideas in the Bible are considered to be extraordinary, if not supernatural.
3. Words are imbued with authority and potency
4. The message is bestowed with a divine or holy element
5. Scripture influences behavior or cultures in significant ways

B. In What Ways Have the Scriptures Influenced the Behavior of Cultures?

1. The Jewish Passover festival is performed in commemoration of the final plague God visited upon the Egyptian people, the killing of all their firstborn, but passing over the Hebrew households.
2. An annual Sunday School Christmas Pageant is given, in which each person, animal, and element portrayed during the birth of Jesus is woven into the drama of this presentation.
3. In a court of law, the civic ritual of placing our hands on the Bible to swear that "*what you are about to say is the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help you God*" implies that many people believe that the Bible has the power to make us tell the truth.

C. What Are Some of the Great World Religions?

1. HINDUISM is the oldest of the major world religions. It has the unique status of having no founding date, nor founder. It contains hundreds of different scriptures, mostly written in Sanskrit. The *Vedas* are the most ancient of these writings, and are considered the most authoritative. One of the books from the *Vedas* are the *Upanishads*, meaning "to sit near and listen". The *Bhagavad Gita* or *The Lord's Song*, of the Hindu scriptures, is a small portion of a larger work known as the *Mahabharata*, the longest literary work in existence, and an epic poem of 100,000 stanzas.
2. BUDDHISM, like Hinduism, began on the Indian subcontinent. Siddhartha Gautama, born around 560 B.C.E. was a Hindu prince and heir to his father's throne. At twenty-nine, he left behind the luxury of the palace to find answers to life's questions. This quest for Truth led him to experience his own enlightenment. He taught throughout India for forty years. The bulk of the followers of Buddhism are from Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Indochina, China and Japan. Buddhist scriptures, as other scriptures, began as an oral tradition. In the first century B.C.E. it was written down in Pali, a derivative of Sanskrit. The first collection of writings is known as the Pali Canon. The *Dhammapada*, a book from the Pali Canon, describes the Buddhist spiritual path.

3. TAOISM is a Chinese mystical philosophy, a system of philosophical, spiritual wisdom. The *Tao Te Ching*, dating from the sixth century B.C.E., is probably the most recognized piece of literature from China, and is the fundamental scripture of the mystical Taoist religion. It teaches conformity to the Tao by unassertive action and simplicity. Philosopher, Lao Tzu is credited as the author of *Tao Te Ching*, known as *The Way*.
4. CONFUCIANISM is a “system mainly of ethical relations, defining values of family life and the administration of the state. Confucianism has a religious side with a deep reverence for Heaven and Earth, whose powers regulate the flow of nature and influence human events” – *World Scripture, A Comparative Anthology of Sacred Texts, A Project of the International Religious Foundation*. The most significant scripture of Confucianism, *The Analects of Confucius*, are accepted as Confucius’ own words.
5. ZOROASTRIANISM was once the predominant religion of Persia. Tradition says that Zoroaster, a Greek form of the Persian, Zarathustra, was born of a virgin in the latter part of the seventh century B.C.E. He rose to become a teacher. He later converted the ruler Vishtapa to his spiritual principles. These principles included a belief in one God called *Ahura Mazda* (*Ahura* means “Lord,” *Mazda* means “wisdom”), the dualism of good and evil, the prevailing power of good, and a belief in an afterlife. Zoroastrianism is an aggregation of writings called the *Avesta*, written in a number of ancient Persian dialects over the centuries.
6. ISLAM is the religious faith of Muslims, inclusive of belief in Allah as the sole deity, and Muhammad as Allah’s prophet. The sacred book of Islam is the *Qur’an* or *Koran*. The word *Qur’an* means “to be recited.” The final text of the *Qur’an* was completed prior to Muhammad’s death (632 C.E.). To traditionalist Muslims, the *Qur’an* is not translatable, as it was revealed to Muhammad in Arabic, an ancient Semitic language like Hebrew. To Muslims, the *Qur’an* is without question the Word of God. It is among the least altered or edited of any scripture.
7. JUDAISM is a religion developed among the ancient Hebrews and characterized by a belief in one transcendent God who has revealed Self to Abraham, Moses, and the Hebrew prophets. Judaism’s Bible or *Tanak* is made up of the *Law (Torah)*, the *Prophets (Nebi’im)*, and the *Writings (Ketuvim)*. The books were written over a period of more than thirteen hundred years of Jewish history.
8. CHRISTIANITY is a monotheistic religion based on the life, teachings, and miracles of Jesus of Nazareth as presented in the New Testament. It’s sacred writings is the Holy Bible, a collection of all thirty-nine (39) books in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and all twenty-seven (27) books in the Christian Bible (New Testament).
9. AMERICAN CIVIL RELIGION is thought of as the government of the United States of America that has as its holy scriptures the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. The Declaration of Independence has

a certain spiritual element to it: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness”.

10. MORMONISM is one of the fastest-growing religious movement in America, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or “the Mormons”. In 1823 Joseph Smith of New York State received a vision of an angel, Moroni, who directed him to some ancient gold plates buried in the ground near his home. Moroni instructed him that at the right time he would be able to translate these plates. In 1830 *The Book of Mormon* was first published, consisting of fifteen different books and covering the period of time from 600 B.C.E. to 421 C.E.
11. CHRISTIAN SCIENCE is a *religion founded in Boston by Mary Baker Eddy in 1839. It was organized under the official name of the Church of Christ, Scientist, which derives its teachings from the Scriptures, as understood by its adherents, including the practice of spiritual healing. Mary Baker Eddy became the first metaphysically based Christian religious movement in America. *Science and Health With Key to the Scriptures* was published in 1852. *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 11th Edition
12. UNITY is a spiritual movement, founded by Charles Fillmore and his wife Myrtle Fillmore. “Unity, a synthesis of all religions, embracing and embraced by all religions, distilled in the essence of Christianity, is essentially the path of goodness. It says, ‘GOD IS GOOD’ and never ceases saying it.” This quote was taken from *The Unity Way of Life*, by Marcus Bach, copyright 1962.

Charles Fillmore “adopted a new religious perspective expressed in terms of Christian theology, which included for him, mysticism, yogic practices, esoteric spirituality, idealist metaphysics, and post-Einsteinian physics”. This quote was taken from *The Essential Charles Fillmore, with commentary by James Gaither, copyright 1999*.

Out of this understanding, Charles and Myrtle Fillmore founded the Unity School of Practical Christianity, in the late eighties of the nineteenth century. One of the first prominent writers of the Unity Movement was Dr. Harriet Emily Cady, who wrote a clear set of lessons setting forth the principle of divine healing at the request of Charles Fillmore in 1894. These lessons were put into one volume that have come to be known as ‘Lessons in Truth’. ‘Lessons in Truth’ is used in Unity and other New Thought groups, including the Universal Foundation for Better Living, founded by Johnnie Coleman, June 14, 1974.

IV. Metaphysical Christianity's Biblical Heritage - Chapter 4

This chapter explains the uniqueness of the metaphysical approach toward the Bible, and chronicles the many people who contributed toward this viewpoint.

A. What Is Unique About the Metaphysical Approach to the Bible?

1. Metaphysical Christianity has an extensive biblical heritage, and fills a distinctive niche in the overall world of the Bible.
2. Traditional Christianity sees the Bible as the Absolute Word of God. The metaphysician acknowledges the Bible as inspired writing in which universal Truths are spiritually interpreted and expressed.
3. According to metaphysical Christianity, "the only begotten Son" does not exclusively refer to Jesus, but to the Christ or divine Spirit within everyone. What sets Jesus apart from the majority of the inhabitants of the earth is that he demonstrated this spiritual potential in his life.

Jesus was able to demonstrate his spiritual potential, because he intentional took quality time to commune with God. Through the practice of fervent prayer, Jesus attained the realization of the Christ Spirit within him, and the awareness of his oneness with the Christ. Unto his spiritual consciousness, all things were possible unto him. – A Metaphysician

4. Metaphysical Christianity offers an approach to Bible interpretation that speaks to the heart of the Truth seeker. The question is always, "How does the Bible story or passage apply to practical everyday life?" in a practical way that changes lives instantly upon the full realization.

B. Who Are the Writers That Have Contributed Metaphysical Viewpoints?

1. Charles Fillmore - co-founder of Unity; author of numerous metaphysical books, including *the Revealing Word* and *the Metaphysical Bible Dictionary* which provide metaphysical interpretation of scripture, names of people, places, and things in the Bible, and key numbers in the Bible
2. Elizabeth Sand Turner – *Let There Be Light; Your Hope of Glory; Be Ye Transformed* (all three books provide metaphysical interpretation for the sixty-six books of the Holy Bible). She refers to Fillmore's *Revealing Word* and *the Metaphysical Bible Dictionary* to give spiritual clarity to her work.
3. Eric Butterworth - *Discover the Power Within You; Metamortality; etc.*
4. William Cameron - *Great Dramas of the Bible*
5. Hypatia Hasbrouck - *The Trip to Bethlehem*
6. Charles Neal - *The Road to Overcoming*
7. J. Sig Paulson/Ric Dickerson - *Revelation: The Book of Unity*
8. Catherine Ponder - *The Millionaire From Nazareth*; many other books
9. Georgiana Tree West - *Prosperity's Ten Commandments*
10. Ernest C. Wilson - *The Week That Changed The World*
11. Emmett Fox - *The Sermon on the Mount*; many other books
12. George Lamsa - *The Lamsa Bible*

C. Who Are the Metaphysical Bible Teachers?

1. Francis Gable
2. Herbert Hunt
3. Ed Rabel
4. Frank Giudici
5. Paul Barrett
6. Wayne Manning
7. Sallye Taylor
8. Laura Barrett, Chairperson of Biblical Studies
9. Phinias P. Quimby, considered the founder of New Thought
10. Mary Baker Eddy
11. Emma Curtis Hopkins
12. Harriet Emilie Cady
13. Charles Fillmore, *Mysteries of Genesis, Mysteries of John*
14. Myrtle Fillmore
15. Annie Rix Militz
16. Ernest Holmes, founder of Religious Science and Science of Mind magazine
17. Malinda Cramer, co-founder of Divine Science
18. The Reverend Dr. Mary A. Tumpkin, Universal Foundation for Better Living, Inc.

PART II – ASSEMBLING THE TOOLS OF BIBLE STUDY

Lesson Objective: To outline the use of the numerous resources available to the Bible student.

V. Getting Started – Chapter 5

This chapter describes the English Bible translations currently available.

A. What Are A Few Points to Remember?

1. The Bible translation you select is the foundation upon which you will build your interpretations. It is the first step in the interpretation process.
2. Select a Bible that serves your needs as a student, and has words that speak to your soul.
3. The Bible was written in ancient languages, by many different people over hundreds of years.
4. Without an English translation, 99.9 percent of people would be unable to read the Bible.
5. The Hebrew Bible, originally written with only consonants, is read from right to left. This is unnatural for readers of English, for they read from left to right.
6. Anglo-Saxon is the language of Germanic people who invaded England during the fifth century C.E. Anglo-Saxon is the root of our modern English language.

7. The first complete translation of the Bible into English was in 1382, attributed to the scholar and reformer John Wycliffe, and intended for use by the common person.
8. The next English Bible on the scene was translated by William Tyndale.
9. What set Tyndale apart from Wycliffe was not only the freshness of his translation, but also his use of Hebrew and Greek manuscripts.
10. Like Wycliffe, Tyndale felt that the only way people could understand spiritual concepts was to be able to read the Bible in their own language.
11. The first English Bible was printed on a press.
12. Tyndale completed and published the New Testament in 1525, the Pentateuch in 1530, the Book of Johan in 1531, and a revision of the New Testament in 1534.
13. Tyndale completed the translation of many other Old Testament books but was unable to publish them himself.
14. During chaotic political climate of the Protestant Reformation, Bibles were seized and burned by religious authorities, and only fragments survived.
15. In 1535, Tyndale was kidnapped, imprisoned and condemned for heresy.
16. In 1536, Tyndale was strangled and burned at the stake.
17. Nearly all English Bibles published were essentially a revision of Tyndale's brave work.
18. Scholars estimate that 7 to 90 percent of the New Testament from the King James Version is based on translations by Tyndale.
19. If Gutenberg was the father of Bible publishing, Tyndale was the father of English Bible translation.
20. Tyndale's translations contain many similarities in language structure and spelling, as today's versions.
21. Our Bibles are translations, not the original words of scribes of long ago.

B. What Are the Criteria for Choosing Bible Translations?

1. The Bible must be an actual translation of the Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic manuscripts, in order to come as close to the source of the original words as possible.
2. The Bible must be produced by more than one translator.

C. What Are the Various Recommended Bible Translations?

1. King James Version (KJV – 1611)
This version was named after the king who commissioned its development. It was known as the Authorized Version (AV), the only pre-twentieth century version of the Bible still read today. KJV provided a Bible upon which all members of the English-speaking world could agree, and has survived since its' unveiling in 1611, into today's society. It's familiarity of verse and poetry is its strong points. However, the English language has changed significantly in the last 387 years, rendering some of the text archaic to the modern reader. New manuscripts more ancient than those available to the King James translators have surfaced, revealing errors in the King James translations.

2. American Standard Version (ASV – First published in 1901)
The ASV was an American version of the English Revised Version, translated with the American reader in mind. One notable change in the ASV translation compared with the KJV was the name for God in the Old Testament. KJV used *Lord*; the ASV used *Jehovah*. *The word *Jehovah* was a European attempt to pronounce the Hebrew *YHWH* by adding vowels to it. The more acceptable pronunciation for *YHWH* IS “Yahweh.”
3. Revised Standard Version (RSV) – 1952
The RSV is a revision of the American Standard Version (ASV); Published fifty years after the ASV, the RSV benefited from the discoveries of better manuscripts such as the Dead Sea Scrolls and improved translation techniques. Significant change was the reinstatement of *Lord* for *Jehovah* as the Hebrew word for God in keeping with the KJV and early Greek and Latin translations of the Old Testament.
4. The Jerusalem Bible – 1966
The result of Protestant and Catholic scholars rival to translate the Bible into English; Originally begun by French Dominican scholars in Jerusalem; It is a fresh, modern English translation from ancient manuscripts, and is the one most often read by non-Catholics. It is the only English Bible that translates the Hebrew word for God *YHWH*, AS *Yahweh*. Two revisions: 1973 and 1985. Douay-Rheims Bible followed the Wycliffe tradition of translating the Bible from the Latin Vulgate. Contains many errors and is a uniquely latinized rendering. Over time many of the errors were corrected, although it still lacked the accuracy of a translation based on original biblical languages and manuscripts. It remained the official English Bible of the Catholic Church well into the twentieth century. In 1940, the Catholic Church authorized a translation by Msgr. Ronald A. Knox which was based on the Latin Vulgate. In 1963-1965, the Vatican Council changed the biblical climate for the better by recognizing the validity and superiority of manuscripts other than the Latin Vulgate. In 1970, The New American Bible was published.
5. New English Bible (NEB) – 1970
NEB was not a remake of the KJV, but a whole new translation. It was a result of the need for a Bible written in contemporary English language, free from the antiquated language of the KJV. It originally begun in the Church of Scotland in 1946 and developed by a team of scholars from other denominations and organizations throughout the British Isles and representatives from the Catholic Church. In 1961 the New Testament was published, followed by the Old Testament and Apocrypha in 1970. Its English is basic, modern, and understandable.
6. New American Standard Bible (NASB) – 1971
NASB is a revision of the ASV, and the product of the Lockman Foundation of La Habra, California, publisher of the Amplified Bible (1965). More up-to-date manuscripts written in contemporary English.

7. Today's English Version (TEV) – 1976
TEV is known as the Good News Bible; a modern English translation published by the American Bible Society; written in modern contemporary language with no ties to KJV; in the encounter between David and Goliath, it uses language similar to “trash-talk” done on the streets; contains conversational tone and direct style, with numerous line drawings interspersed throughout the text.
8. New International Version (NIV) – 1978
NIV was completed in 1978; over a hundred scholars from around the English-speaking world were involved; sponsored by the New York International Bible Society; published in the United States by the Zondervan Corporation of Grand Rapids, Michigan with sales over into the millions; straightforward, intelligible language.
9. New King James Version (NKJV) – 1982
NKJV is an update of the KJV (1881-1885), utilizing the latest manuscripts to correct the major deficiencies of the KJV while maintaining much of the originals literary flavor. Current word usage was employed to make passages more understandable, when necessary. Example: Changes in Corinthians 13 from “tinkling cymbal” to “clanging cymbal”, and from “charity” to “love”. ‘Agape’ is the Greek word for spiritual love. Today the word charity means something entirely different than it did in 1611.
10. New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) – 1989
The NRSV is a 1980's update of the RSV. It utilizes Hebrew and Greek manuscripts unavailable to the RSV translators, including a more expanded use of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The NRSV completely eliminates the archaic speech of the KJV and ASV. It also eliminates masculine-oriented in favor of gender-inclusive language where the original writers likely meant to include both sexes in the passages.
11. Revised English Bible (REB) – 1989
REB contains practically all improvements of the NRSV with some significant differences. It eliminates archaic pronouns such as *thy*, *thee*, *thou*, and uses gender-inclusive language where appropriate and feasible.
Summary --- NRSV and REB have similar intent and styles of revisions. Both were published in the same year, made thousands of modifications to text, and were attractive to modern, socially aware Bible readers.
12. Contemporary English Version (CEV) – 1995
Published by the American Bible Society, translated with the reader and listener in mind. For readability, archaic, awkward, obsolete, and sexist language were completely eliminated. “The result (of their work) is an English text that is enjoyable and easily understood by the vast majority of English speakers, regardless of their religious or educational background.”

13. The Jewish Publication Society of America – 1963 to 1982

Note: They published their original English translation of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) in 1917. An updated version in three volumes came later: in 1963 the TORAH (Law), included the first five books of Moses; in 1978 the NEVI'IM (Prophets), included Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the 12 Minor Prophets; in 1982 the KHETUVIM (Writings), included the remaining books of the Hebrew Scriptures. They used recent advances in biblical scholarship to smoothly render the idiomatic nature of Hebrew text into an understandable English.

14. Other Bibles – Recommended because they often bring a fresh, new perspective when comparing them with other versions. They are also interesting reading.

Phillips Modern English Bible - 1947 to 1972.

Contemporary language based on ancient manuscripts; but translated by one person.

The Lamsa Bible - 1957.

Claims to be based on the Aramaic language; not a Hebrew or Greek manuscript. Other Bible scholars claim that Peshitta is a Syriac language.

The Living Bible (TLB) – 1971.

Also known as *The Book and The Way*. It is paraphrased. Using today's terminology is not a translation.

The Reader's Digest Bible - 1982.

Paraphrased as a book condensation to provide shorter and easier reading; Old Testament 50 percent shorter; New Testament 25 percent shorter; the entire Bible is 40 percent shorter; verse numbers have been removed.

15. Future English Translations - As long as the English language changes, new manuscripts are discovered, better translation methods are developed, and people still want to read the Bible, then new translations will be published.

16. Bible Editions - A good edition can make a Bible more useful, inviting, and encouraging, to its readers. Easy to read print size, explanatory study notes, understandable translation, are all valuable features to look for when choosing a good Bible edition.

17. Selecting a Good Study Bible - Check to see if the Bible translation is on the recommended list, and is acceptable to your literary taste. Determine if the print is large enough to read easily. Read through its introductory pages for information regarding the edition and translation. Look for study helps, notes, maps, and other references. Check your intuition to see if the Bible you are examining feels right for you, before you choose to purchase it.

18. Audio & Videocassette Bible - Scripture is not limited to the printed word alone. Complete Bibles are on audiocassette tape for visually impaired and for relaxing and listening, or while you drive. Bibles are also available in Braille and CD for the hearing impaired.
19. Computer Bible - Available on computer format such as DOS, Macintosh, Windows and CD-ROM software. Available on the internet by a variety of organizations and/or Bible Institutes.
20. Summary - From ancient manuscripts to computer software, from Anglo-Saxon to modern English, the Bible has come a long way in its evolutionary journey and availability to the general public and students for study and enjoyment purposes.

VI. MAKING A BIBLE STUDY TOOL KIT - CHAPTER 6

This chapter explains the function of Bible concordances, dictionaries, commentaries, atlases, and handbooks in Bible study.

A. What Are Recommended Books to Include in a Bible Study Tool Kit?

1. Bible Concordance - a book of words from the Bible organized with specific scriptural references to help one to locate Bible verses, and find words, passages, and subjects in the Bible. It is recommended that Bible Concordances be compatible with your version of the Bible
2. Different Versions of the Bible - See Glossary in 'Wisdom for a Lifetime'.
3. Other Bibles - See Glossary in 'Wisdom for a Lifetime'.
4. Bible Dictionary – to help one understand words, names, and places in the Bible. It will also help explain the meaning of biblical passages in detail.
5. Bible Commentary - to help one understand individual Bible verses, Bible stories, and Biblical books. It will also provide in-depth, scholastically sound information about what's really going on in each verse, chapter, and book of the Bible. Although subject to the interpretive bent of their authors, some contain theological viewpoints that may differ from yours.
6. Bible Atlas – to locate cities, rivers, valleys, and mountains of the Bible
7. Bible Handbook – to help one obtain general Bible information, understand Bible history, grasp religious terminology, and propose possible interpretations

B. What Are Other Helpful Books to Include in a Bible Study Tool Kit?

Bible picture books --- Bible pronunciation guides --- Bible stories ---
Bible study group guides --- Bible textbooks --- Black Bible Commentaries ---
Profiles of Bible characters --- Roget's Thesaurus of the Bible
Women's Bible commentaries --- Works of Josephus

VII. CLOSE TO THE SOURCE - CHAPTER 7

This chapter identifies ways that show how biblical knowledge can be enhanced by a familiarity with the Bible's original languages.

A. How Can We Enhance Our Biblical Knowledge?

1. Seek the most authentic sources of information and instruction.
2. Read and listen to those who, through their own efforts, have touched and embraced the heights of divine consciousness.
3. Be willing to gain knowledge of foreign languages, especially Hebrew and Greek.
4. Realize the necessity of using specialized tools such as lexicons, parallel Bibles, and *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, to enter the hidden, inside, secret world of the Bible.
5. Learn how to investigate the various definitions of individual Hebrew and Greek words through a process biblical scholars call "exegesis."

B. What Do We Know About Biblical Languages and Manuscripts?

1. The Hebrew and Greek languages are among the most ancient in existence. The beginnings of these languages can be traced back over three millennia and are still spoken today by people on the soil where they originated.
2. Differences in language content and style exist between biblical books, even within the same language due to variations in language that occurred over the time the books were written as well as the multitudinous nature of biblical authorship.
3. There are no original biblical manuscripts. There are copies of copies of the originals. This copying procedure has had its human element. Scribes made simple copying mistakes, as well as edited the grammar and words when they felt that could improve upon the text. This fact brings up the question regarding the integrity of the scriptures. However, the fact that the Bible speaks to so many people at a deep spiritual level is testimony to its potency and character. The Bible's integrity, validity, and deep spiritual potency and character are matters of faith.
4. Ancient Hebrew and Greek are the principal languages of the biblical manuscripts—both languages have distinctly different roots, but have coexisted in the history and composition of the Bible over the centuries.
5. Hebrew, a Semitic language, is written from the right to the left and originally had only consonants. Vowels and other marks were added during the Middle Ages by the Masoretes to aid in the pronunciation and grammar.

6. The Masoretic Text (MT), on which most translations of the Old Testament are based, was the only known Old Testament manuscript until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The oldest Mt manuscripts date to the tenth-eleventh century C.E.
7. During the 4th century B.C.E., the Macedonian general , Alexander the Great, conquered the lands of the Middle East including Palestine. For centuries thereafter, Greek came into common use by people throughout the ancient world. After his conquest of Egypt in 331 B.C.E., Alexander founded the city of Alexandria, which bears his name. Many Jews immigrated to Alexandria, and formed a distinct community within the city. Although they maintained their Jewish religious identity, Greek culture and language entered into their lifestyle. Many eventually lost their ability to express themselves in their native Hebrew. Their inability to understand Hebrew probably led to the first translation of the Old Testament known today as the Septuagint. Supposedly, seventy-two scholars spent seventy-two days completing the translation; hence, the name *Septuagint* means seventy. LXX (the Roman numeral for seventy) is often used by scholars, when referring to the Septuagint.
8. The Septuagint was the earliest translation of the Old Testament used by Greek-speaking Jews. It was the version of the Old Testament quoted by New Testament authors. It was the Old Testament translation of early Greek-speaking Christians. Copies of it were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls dating to the second century B.C.E. Most books of the Apocrypha come from it, and it is more than a thousand years older than the Masoretic Text. It is used by many Bible translators. It is a natural bridge between the Old and New Testaments.
9. Greek is a member of the Indo-European family of languages, as are English and most European languages. It is written from left to right and uses its own alphabet. Thousands of copies of the Greek New Testament have been produced over the centuries, many differing in content. One of the earliest Greek New Testaments was published, by the 16th century Dutch scholar Erasmus. His Greek New Testament became the source material for Tyndale's English translation.
10. The Hebrew Masoretic Text, Greek Septuagint, and Greek New Testaments comprise the main sources of material for the Bible.
11. In 1947, a group of Bedouins ventures into the hills northwest of the Dead Sea into an area called Qumran. While searching for a lost animal, they discovered a cave that contained jars housing ancient leather scrolls. Many of them were taken to a merchant in Bethlehem. Eventually they ended up in the hands of scholars who were able to date them to the 2nd century B.C.E. Following the Arab-Israeli war of 1947-49, excavations at other caves in the vicinity of Qumran produced hundreds of additional scrolls. The Dead Sea Scrolls are over a thousand years older than the oldest known Masoretic text.

12. The scrolls consist of: Complete copies of fragments of nearly every book of the Hebrew Bible; Apocryphal and non-canonical writings; Scriptural commentaries; Sectarian writings for use by the community. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls was a complete book of Isaiah. These scrolls have enable historians to look into the life and mind of the ancient Essenes. They have also enabled modern Bible translators to confirm the accuracy of the manuscripts already in use, as well as offer alternative meanings. Their discovery placed humanity an entire millennium closer to the source of the Bible's original words.

PART III - INTERPRETING THE BIBLE FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Lesson Objective: To explore various methods of deriving practical benefit from Bible study.

VIII. Everyone Interprets the Bible – Chapter 8

This chapter reveals the many levels we interpret the Bible and life in general.

A. Why Is It That We Do Not All Interpret the Bible in the Same Way?

1. We all put our own unique spin on life's meaning, and alter that spin throughout our lives.
2. We all interpret the Bible using our own individual frames of reference, our own self-styled rose-colored glasses. It is our interpretations that make the Bible come alive and have meaning for us!
3. We do not always see life in a strictly straight-ahead, prosaic, word-for-word manner uninfluenced by the ideas of others void of any personal interpretation.
4. Human beings have a multidimensional nature. No single explanation of life is possible for all people.
5. We all experience selective perception, forming mental images through the lens of our past experiences and beliefs.

B. What Are the Lenses Through Which We Interpret the Bible and Life?

1. Factual - When we interpret the Bible factually, we are attempting to determine if what we are reading actually happened. We are looking for evidence to support our beliefs. Bible facts are primarily judgment calls or best intelligent guess as to their authenticity.
2. Historical - History is the presentation of factual accounts of human experiences. The Bible was not written as a history book in the modern sense of the word. Biblical writers wrote history, but with the aim of promoting a certain religious viewpoint. They wrote a biased history. As a result, many stories were apparently exaggerations to support

their religious purposes. The Bible, therefore, is a pseudo-historical book that tells the epic story of God's chosen people and how God worked through them to bring it all about. The biblical writers wrote to instill in their readers and listeners a sense of importance and magnificence regarding their spiritual origins. Along the way, they took some literary license in telling their tales.

3. **Dramatic** - The Bible accurately depicts the human condition. The characters were real people, with very human problems, faults, and reactions. Their humanity is often what makes them approachable, touchable, and not all that unlike you and I. To interpret the Bible from the dramatic level requires that we get in touch with our own humanity. Put self in the character's place, and see if you find yourself relating to any of them. Explore your reactions to their circumstances. Use your imagination. The original biblical story has a factual dimension to it. It reads like an eye witness account. The biblical stories have all the drama and emotion of a television screenplay. They are also about real people who had the good fortune of having details of their lives written down for us to read and connect to emotionally thousands of years later.
4. **Comedic** – As in the case of the dramatic, the comedic interpretive lens calls for us to see Bible characters as real-life people and, in the same breath, examine our own humanness. If we are willing to look with an eye for humor, the Bible can provide us with as much material for situation comedies as it does soap operas. Be aware, not all characters and stories in the Bible have comedic potential. You will have to experiment with the comedic interpretive lens a bit, until it begins to work for you.
5. **Literary** – Along with having good drama and humor, the Bible is also good literature. To read the Bible through the literary lens (not to be confused with literal), we must become discriminating readers. We are looking for good stories, poetry. Anything that reads well. Typically, poetry, with its more artistic quality, is more enjoyable to read than prose. These books stand out as some of the best literature in the Bible: Job, Esther, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Luke, and The Acts of the Apostles. Our choice of English translation can make a significant difference in the way the Bible reads. The Bible as literature involves some decision making on our part. We must first select the book or passage that we are interested in reading. Second, we must consider which translation(s) to use. Both are a matter of personal preference.
6. **Moral** - Like it or not, morality has become a matter of interpretation. We all determine those issues that are of moral importance to us. Despite the great variance of moral viewpoints, most people have a natural, basic sense of morality that transcends denominational, cultural, and generational lines. This morality is composed of those

universal spiritual values held in common among the religious traditions of the world. Some of these values include courage, forgiveness, honesty, kindness, patience, and many others. We instinctively know whether our thoughts, words, and actions are in harmony with, or counter to, universally held principles. Our conscience reminds us when we are not in harmony. The Golden Rule is an excellent biblical example of a commonly accepted moral precept: "Do to others as you would have them do to you. This rule embodies many universal spiritual values, especially compassion, kindness, and love. If we expect others to treat us a certain way, we must act in kind. When we behave without regard to the Golden Rule, our conscience nags at us from within until we correct our attitude and behavior. The moral interpretive lens allows us to delve into the inner world of our own conscience, values and ideals. Through this lens we can locate and interpret those Bible verses that reaffirm what we already hold to be morally true for us and/or inspire us to new beliefs. The moral of a passage or story can be explained by asking the questions: What is there to learn? What universal spiritual values are being taught? How can values work in simplifying the living of my life? How has my life become difficult and challenging when I ignore them? We are looking for the precept behind the words. Suggestion: begin your study using this interpretive lens with the Ten Commandments, the Book of Proverbs, and Jesus' parables.

7. Allegorical – allegory is a normal and important element of human thinking and speech. Whenever we attempt to explain the meaning of something symbolically rather than directly, we are using an allegory. Allegories cannot be understood literally, but always imply a meaning other than the obvious. The biblical writers made extensive use of allegory in communicating ideas. Many were employed to relate ethical, etiological and moral teachings to the reader. Jesus' parables are allegorical, full of symbolic characters and objects, each having a greater scope beyond the surface story. We find the use of allegories in both the Old and New Testaments. Through the use of the allegorical interpretive lens, we are searching for basic life truths beyond the concrete elements of the story. As with other lenses, not all Bible verses can be interpreted allegorically. Look for passages that contain imagery, parables, poetry, song, or ones that are not easily understood in a plain, logical sense.
8. Prophetic - Prophetic vision has always been a part of the human experience. Through an inner sight, people have seen images of potential futures. In some cases, these prophecies have been literal, directly corresponding to future events. Prophecy often involves the interpretation of imagery that is highly symbolic in nature. When we view the Bible through the prophetic interpretive lens, we always must be mindful of the primary audience of its oracles. Our task as Bible students is to intelligently discern whether the prophecies are distinctly

ancient, universally applicable, or point to our era. Once we determine the answer, we can use our own intuitive deciphering faculty to unlock the messages of the ancient writings and convert them into usable present-day information.

9. Metaphysical - Metaphysical describes the realm of existence beyond what we can perceive through our external senses, in other words—the spiritual. The metaphysical interpretive lens is the most important of all. All the tools of Bible study, all the interpretive lenses are at our disposal for a singular purpose, that of interpreting the Bible metaphysically. The metaphysical Bible interpretation allows us to embrace scripture at our spiritual core, at that place where we ask the question: Who am I? In the process, we discover that the Bible is a story about our spiritual destiny, an inward journey into the soul of humanity.

IX. THE UNIQUENESS OF METAPHYSICAL INTERPRETATION - CHAPTER 9

This chapter demonstrates how to perform basic metaphysical Bible interpretation.

A. What Is Meant By the Term Metaphysical?

1. Metaphysical is defined as: “*of or relating to the transcendent or to a reality beyond what is perceptible to the senses*”. – Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, Eleventh Edition
2. Regarding the metaphysical interpretation of the Bible, it is nothing new. For millennia, mystics and metaphysically minded people have looked into the scriptures and have seen a spiritual dimension and meaning beyond conventional understanding. Their discoveries nourished their souls and encouraged them in their pursuit of God awareness. When individual awareness transcends the physical (material world) to embrace spiritual reality at the core of one’s Self, redemption occurs.
3. Metaphysically speaking, redemption, for an example, is not so much a matter of pleasing God through specific actions, but of simply changing one’s mind or consciousness. Where traditional religion sees God and humanity as separate items – one perfect, the other flawed – the metaphysically minded person views the two as inseparable and intertwined. Through the redemption of consciousness, one no longer perceives a division between God and humanity, but instead, sees oneself as a direct and perfect expression of God. The spiritual character of humanity remains constant, only individual awareness and

perception change. The metaphysical Christian is committed to spiritual practices, namely, regular prayer, meditation, study, and personal reflection. For them, the redemption of consciousness is an ongoing process, because they know that it leads to a more permanent awareness of God's presence.

The function of the mind in creation is another aspect of metaphysics. This understanding is based on the law of mind action. Poetically put: *Thoughts held in mind produce after their kind*. These two factors, the innate divinity / goodness of humanity, and the law of mind action, are fundamental to the metaphysical outlook. We are to keep these ideas at the forefront of our mind as we study the Bible through the metaphysical interpretive lens.

B. What Is the Four-Step Process of Metaphysical Bible Interpretation?

1. Select, read, and study the Scripture.
2. Identify the key words and phrases.
3. Develop Interpretations for the words.
4. Allow the metaphysical meaning to emerge.

C. How Do We Use the Four-Step Process?

1. Select the passages to be studied. Read the passage(s) several times. Consult a Bible dictionary for general information on distinctive or unfamiliar words. Consult Bible commentaries and handbooks for historical and scholastic information on the biblical book, chapter, and verses. Consult a Bible atlas to determine the location of the biblical event.
2. Scan the passage for those verses and words that you feel are most important to the meaning of the story line, or are unique in character, listed in the order they appear in the text.
3. Consult the *Metaphysical Bible Dictionary* for suggested interpretations of proper names, name places, and special words. Consult an English dictionary and a thesaurus for the meaning of synonyms for common words. Use *Strong's Concordance's* Hebrew and Greek dictionaries to obtain exegetical information on selected words. Consider how the words represent states of consciousness.

4. Study, pray, and meditate on the overall story and the individual words interpreted in STEP THREE. Consult metaphysical interpretation books that interpret the selected passage(s). Think about how these states of consciousness might correspond to events in your life. Utilize the many interpretive lenses. Explore common metaphysical themes. Apply your own innate creative intelligence – look at the story from many vantage points and perspectives. Remember, the metaphysical interpretive lens has an allegorical, psychological, and spiritual dimension. Ask yourself what jumps out at you about the passage? What clicks in you when you read it? Look for the personal, spiritual dimension that rises to the surface of your mind. Finally, write down your interpretation as soon as it is revealed to you.
5. One of the biggest problems in reading the Bible is that the events took place in an era far removed from our own. There is a way to make the Bible appear more real to us. We accomplish this by modernizing the Bible. Imagine that the biblical story you are reading actually took place in your own time. Bring the ancient figures forward to today, as if they lived right next door. Use aspects and characteristics of our own time to update the people, places, objects and language. This helps to make the biblical story appear more real and less a legend of the distant past.

X. OBTAINING THE MOST FROM YOUR BIBLE – Chapter 10

This chapter focuses on relating the Bible to specific personal needs and offers additional tips for succeeding at Bible study.

A. What Can We Do to Make the Bible More Real for Us?

1. The events in the Bible took place in an era far removed from our own. For many people, the distance of time has reduced the Bible's relevancy. There is a way to make the Bible appear more real to us. We accomplish this by modernizing the Bible. Imagine that the biblical story you are reading actually took place in your own time. Bring the ancient figures forward to today, as if they lived next door to you. Use aspects and characteristics of our own time to update the people, places, objects, and language. This will help to make the biblical story appear more real, and less a legend of the distant past.
2. When you modernize a story, embellish it enough to make it feel as up-to-date as possible. Have fun while you are doing it. Let your creativity run loose. Hold in mind, however, not every story can be successfully modernized.

3. Separating the wheat from the chaff, the usable and interesting from the impractical and boring, is one of the jobs of a Bible student. If the ultimate purpose of Bible study is to uncover practical, life changing meaning, spiritual meaning, from the Bible, then we must discern what is wheat and what is not.
4. It is you, the Bible student, who must judge the veracity and authority of the scriptures for yourself and not someone else. To question the Bible is not to show disrespect for it, but to prayerfully discern its value. Therefore, prayerfully select those passages from the Bible that call forth the highest and best in you. If you happen to disagree with what you read, it is okay!
5. Remember, the Bible was written by human beings just like you and I. Their written words reflect their personal opinions, and were intended for the people of their time. To understand original intent, we must ask some basic questions. Who were the authors? To whom is the writing directed? What is the likely underlying motivation for the writing? What message did the writers intend for their audience to comprehend? One way of dealing with disturbing or puzzling Bible passages is to consult other versions and translations.
6. Most metaphysical Christians, depending upon their individual needs, often focus their attention on specific topics such as divine order, enlightenment, guidance, healing, inner peace, prosperity, protection, relationships, and so forth. A better understanding and application of these teachings in one's life can be enhanced by biblical study. When we read the Bible through the interpretive lens of one of these subjects, we are employing thematic Bible interpretation.

B. What Are Some Suggested Bible Study Tips?

1. Reading the Bible from cover to cover.
2. Read a condensed Bible.
3. Take courses in Bible study.
4. Read the Bible devotionally.
5. Meditate on Bible verses.
6. Join a Bible Study Group.
7. Read the motel Bible.
8. Play Bible Games.
9. Go on-line with the Bible.