

# METHODS OF BIBLE STUDY

BY

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## PREFACE

THE purpose of this little book is the simple though necessary one of directing fresh attention to the value and importance of the study of the Bible itself as distinct from, or at least prior to, the study of books about the Bible. It is only too possible to know a great deal about the Bible and yet to know very little of the contents of the Bible. These chapters are intended to suggest methods of mastering the subject-matter of the Word of God, its facts and doctrines. Many more books about the Bible, books of great value, could easily have been suggested, but this might have diverted attention from the simple object of this book, the first-hand study of the Scripture.

It is hoped that Christian workers of our Churches may find herein some suggestions for a fuller knowledge of their handbook of service and for a more efficient use of their weapon of warfare, the English Bible. And if anything is found helpful to theological students, and those whose ministry has just commenced, the purpose of these papers will be more

than realised. There can be no doubt that the most powerful and fruitful ministry will ever be the ministry of those who are, like Apollos, "mighty in the Scriptures." A beloved friend, a well-known and honoured dignitary of the Church of England, who most kindly read through these chapters before publication, recently wrote to me : " Bible-teaching sermons never grow stale ; the King honours His sign-manual."

There is of course no attempt at completeness in the plan of this book. There are other methods of Bible study besides those found here, while even these may be developed in additional directions. All that is hoped is, that they may be found suggestive, and prove incentives to further study. These hints are the assimilation of study and reading from student days onwards, for the last twenty years, and represent a wide and varied indebtedness to many books, papers, and lectures. They have been delivered in substance as lectures in Oxford and London, and are now reprinted with revision from the *Life of Faith*. They are sent forth with prayer and hope, and with an ever-deepening conviction that for mature Christian life, strong character and fruitful service, nothing can possibly compare with, or make up for, daily definite study of and meditation on the Word of God.

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# METHODS OF BIBLE STUDY

## CHAPTER I

### THE BIBLE AS A WHOLE

**THE** Bible is the Word of God, the revelation of His Will to man. It follows that we ought to know this revelation, and heed its message. Knowledge demands study, earnest, faithful, patient, constant, and it is to this subject we address ourselves, with the purpose of suggesting methods of becoming better acquainted with the Sacred Scriptures.

The value of an adequate knowledge of the Bible is evident. There is intellectual profit in its information and instruction. There is moral profit in its guidance and warning. There is spiritual profit in its doctrinal and experimental truth.

We need, too, to be equipped by the Scriptures against sacerdotal excess and rationalistic defect, and in its revelation of grace and truth to obtain assurance of salvation and derive strength for service.

Knowledge, however, presupposes very much more than reading ; it calls for *study*. And not study only, but a genuine application of mind, heart and conscience to the substance and teaching of Holy Writ. We ought to realise the need and importance of as thorough and detailed knowledge of the Scriptures as our time and capacity will afford. Bible study involves hard work, because it demands *thought*. It cannot be accomplished by reading only. Bible reading is not Bible study.

It is also much easier to read books about the Bible, and it makes far less demand on our time and thought, than to study the Bible for ourselves. But the latter is at once the most essential and most profitable of our duties.

In these chapters it is proposed to suggest certain methods of study, starting with a general view of the Bible as a whole, and descending through sections and portions to the study of verses and words. In this way it will be possible to gain some idea of the fulness and variety of Bible study, and of the great enjoyment of looking at the Word of God from different standpoints.

#### THE VARIETY OF THE BIBLE.

Think of the variety of *contents*—history, theology, philosophy, poetry, counsel, aspiration, prediction. Consider the variety of *authorship*—prophet, priest,

king, annalist, apostle, evangelist. Note the variety of *circumstances*—differences of time (Moses to St John), place, country, purpose, destination. There are sixty-six books, the work of at least thirty-six authors, and covering sixteen centuries.

Our use of the Bible as one book necessarily tends to make us forget that it is not only one book, but a library, "the Divine library," with manifold variety and glory.

#### THE UNITY OF THE BIBLE.

This unity is the complement of the foregoing. The Bible, though varied, is yet one, amid all its differences of time, place, and purpose, and possesses one predominant idea. The Old Testament is the product of one country, stretching over a long period of time. The New Testament is the product of several countries, but extending over a short time. The Old is to the New as the foundation to the structure, and the New to the Old as the building to the basis. The God of Genesis and Matthew is the same, only with the two complementary aspects of transcendence and immanence. The man of Genesis and Matthew is the same, needing God and His grace. In the Old Testament we have God in Himself as supreme, and man in himself as sinner. In the New Testament we have God in Christ as Saviour, and

man in Christ as saved. "In the Old the New is concealed (latent), and in the New the Old is revealed (patent)." The Old Testament is a revelation of outward forms developing inward principles. The New is a revelation of inward principles developing outward forms. The Old Testament is a preparation of Christ for the Church, and the Church for Christ. The New is a revelation of Christ to the Church, and through the Church to the world.

Christ is the key to the whole Bible, and it is He who gives it its spiritual and historical unity. The following sevenfold unity, covering the whole Bible, has been suggested, and is well worth consideration :

1. Genesis to Deuteronomy—*Revelation.*
2. Joshua to Esther—*Preparation.*
3. Job to Song of Solomon—*Aspiration.*
4. Isaiah to Malachi—*Expectation.*
5. Matthew to John—*Manifestation.*
6. Acts to Epistles—*Realisation.*
7. Revelation—*Culmination.*

Of course these are only to be understood quite generally, but they are sufficiently accurate to reveal the essential unity.

The two elements of marvellous variety and still more marvellous unity are complementary truths which will convey their own deep impressions of the Divine origin and inspiration to every earnest

thinker. How is it possible that sixty-six books, written almost independently of one another, extending over nearly two thousand years, and under all possible variety of circumstance, can have nothing in any part that contradicts what is found elsewhere? Human skill could not effect it. "This thing is from Me," saith the Lord.

With such a wonderful unity existing in the Divine Library of sixty-six books, it is not surprising to find in it another remarkable feature which follows from the variety and unity already considered.

THE SYMMETRY OF THE BIBLE.

This symmetry is characteristic both of its literary structure and of its spiritual teaching. The shortest expression of it is that in the Old Testament we have Moses and the Prophets, and in the New Testament Christ and His Apostles. Amplifying this, we notice that both the Old and New Testaments are capable of a simple fivefold division :

<i>Old Testament.</i>	<i>New Testament.</i>
Pentateuch (5).	Gospels (4).
Historical Books (12).	Acts (1).
Poetical Books (5).	Pauline Epistles (14).
Major Prophets (5).	General Epistles (7).
Minor Prophets (12).	Revelation (1).

Extending this somewhat further, we may notice

that the Pentateuch is to the Old Testament what the Gospels are to the New, the foundation on which all else rests, and it may be regarded as generally correct to say that the Pentateuch and Gospels are books of the Revelation of God to man, and that the rest of the Old and New Testaments are books of the Realisation of that Revelation in man. Consider this as regards the Old Testament in tabular form :—

1. Revelation. (Pentateuch.) God to His People.
2. Realisation. (Rest of O. T.) God in His People.
  - (a) In Outward Expression. Historical books.
  - (b) In Inward Experience. Poetical books.
  - (c) In Onward Expectation. Prophetical books.

The above is only the shortest possible statement to show clearly the symmetry ; but it could be amplified under each division to give more definite indications of the same beauty. For example, it has been pointed out that in the poetical books we have three attitudes or aspects of life—Devotion (Psalms), Wisdom (Job, Prov., Eccl.), and Fellowship (Solomon's Song); and that in the three wisdom books we have—"Piety without prosperity" (Job), "Piety and prosperity" (Prov.), and "Prosperity without piety" (Eccl.). These are only two instances of the fulness and beauty of the Old Testament revelation.

Taking the New Testament in the same way, we have—

1. Revelation. (Gospels.) Christ to His Church.
2. Realisation. (Rest of N. T.) Christ in His Church.
  - (a) In Outward Expression. (History) Acts.
  - (b) In Inward Experience. (Doctrine) Epistles.
  - (c) In Onward Expectation. (Prophecy) Revelation.

These, again, may be easily amplified so as to reveal further beauties, as, for example, in the various aspects of Christ's person seen in the Epistles, or the various phases of Christian truth and life.

Another way of looking at this subject is to think of the two Testaments as two buildings, and then to consider—

1. The Historical Foundation. (Past.)
  - (a) O. T. Pentateuch and Historical.
  - (b) N. T. Gospels and Acts.
2. The Spiritual Construction. (Present.)
  - (a) O. T. Poetical Books.
  - (b) N. T. Epistles.
3. The Prophetic Completion. (Future.)
  - (a) O. T. Prophets.
  - (b) N. T. Revelation.

Again, we may regard the Old and New Testaments as complementary, and take as their

keywords respectively, Preparation and Revelation.

**I. Old Testament. Preparation—**

**(a) For Christ.**

(1) In History.

(2) In Type.

(3) In Prophecy.

**(b) For the Church.**

(1) In the Need of Salvation.

(2) In the Need of Worship.

(3) In the Need of Obedience.

**2. New Testament. Revelation—**

**(a) Of Christ.**

(1) In His Person.

(2) In His Work.

(3) In His Kingdom.

**(b) Of the Church.**

(1) In its Life.

(2) In its Service.

(3) In its Hope.

The foregoing considerations are only suggestive and indicative of further possibilities. Valuable help will be found in Dr. Monro Gibson's little book on *The Unity and Symmetry of the Bible* (Hodder & Stoughton), and in Dr. Dunning's *Normal Studies* (Sunday School Union).

It is impossible to over-estimate the value of this broad outlook on the Bible as a whole. It keeps

us from narrowness of view and "scrappiness" of knowledge. It serves moreover to inspire us with the glory, the greatness and the grandeur of God's Revelation in Christ and of His Purposes of Redemption in Christ. Let us take large views of the Word of God, and then "new beauties" we shall see and "still increasing light."