

If You Have Never Studied the Bible Before, This Is For You!

A special WELCOME to those of you who have never studied the Bible before! Your decision to get involved in Bible study may be one of the most important decisions you will ever make! The Bible is the best-selling book of all time--and one that has influenced Western civilization more than any other book in the world. But even more importantly, The Bible can do something for you and for your life that no other book can do. It can

- give you wisdom that leads to salvation (2 Timothy 3:15)
- give you success in all areas of life (Psalm 1:3)
- strengthen you in time of grief (Psalm 119:28, 50)
- give you real liberty (Psalm 119:45)
- give you more insight than your teachers (Psalm 119:99)
- give you great peace (Psalm 119:165 and John 14:27)

and much, much more!

SOME IMPORTANT THINGS FOR YOU TO REMEMBER

1. **Don't become discouraged in Bible study!** You may feel that everyone else understands the Bible better than you do, but there are many others who are beginners. We all have to start somewhere, so don't become discouraged. Hang in there! Work hard and answer the questions to the best of your ability. If you can't understand some, leave them blank or ask your leader for help. Be sure to get your leader's phone number so you can call her if you have a need.
2. **Accept the challenge of a little bit of hard work.** Don't give up easily! Nothing is ever achieved that is worthwhile in life without putting in some effort.
3. **If you don't understand something that is said in the group, ask!** People may use terminology that is unfamiliar. Feel free to ask! Probably some others don't know, either, but they may be afraid to ask, and you're not! We love questions! Really, the only "dumb" question is the one you *don't* ask!
4. **Don't feel that you are in competition with others in your group.** You are all in there to learn together. Many times a person who is new at Bible study will have fresh insights that a more experienced person misses or overlooks.
5. **Avoid pat answers.** As much as possible, study the Bible with an open, unprejudiced mind. Take things simply. Don't look for a lot of deep, hidden, or mystical meanings.
6. **If there are things that bother you about your discussion group, please be frank with your group leader.** She wants your honest criticisms and suggestions.
7. **Avoid commentaries.** A Bible commentary is an attempt to explain and interpret some portion of the Bible. These may seem helpful to you, but commentaries can color your thinking before you have had time to think through your *own* opinions, and we would rather have *your* thinking--not someone else's.

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Some Basic Facts About the Bible

The Bible is divided into two main sections: the Old Testament, which comes first, and the New Testament. Events of the Old Testament took place and were written before the birth of Jesus Christ. The New Testament begins about the time of Christ's birth and continues to about 90 or 100 A.D.

What is a "book" of the Bible? When people talk about studying a "book" of the Bible, they are referring to one of the 66 books or sections into which the Bible is divided. If a question refers you to a book of the Bible and you have difficulty finding it, turn to the alphabetical list of books of the Bible at the front of your Bible which shows the page number where each begins. You can purchase tabs for your Bible that make it easier to find books of the Bible quickly. In time, you may find it helpful to memorize the books of the Bible in order. That will make finding them even easier.

What does a notation like "John 17:3" mean? Since the Bible is divided into many sections called "books," a reference such as **John 17:3** can be found by turning to the book of John, looking first for chapter 17, then for verse 3. A reference to **I John 1:9** is to another book of the Bible known as "First John", found near the back of the Bible, chapter 1, verse 9. If the reference shows only one number like this: **Jude 9** or **Obadiah 5**, it means that particular book of the Bible has only one chapter. The number then refers to the *verse* in that chapter.

Why are there many different Bible translations? The original language of the Old Testament was mostly Hebrew; the original language of the New Testament was Greek. Modern translations try to put the original languages into words that accurately reveal the original meanings intended by the writers of Scripture. As language changes, newer translations may help us better understand the Bible.

Which Bible translation shall I use? Women in the study use different translations. That is a decision that you can make. You may wish to ask your minister or a respected Christian friend. Many people find it valuable to use two translations, such as the New King James Version (NKJV) and the New American Standard Version (NASB), or a translation and a paraphrase, such as the English Standard Version (ESV) and the New Living Translation (NLT). Choose at least one Bible that is truly a translation, not a paraphrase, since translations more accurately reflect the language of the original Bible. The wording of the questions we use mostly reflects the *New American Standard Version (NASB)*, an accurate, modern translation, although other versions of the Bible are taken into account. If you are buying a new Bible, it is helpful to choose one with cross-references to other Bible verses and room for you to jot down your own notes. **It is best to choose a Bible that does *not* have a lot of commentary *telling you what to believe***, since commentaries are not infallible and may prejudice your own thinking and interpreting.

What is a "concordance"? A concordance is a type of word index. You may have one at the back of the Bible you use. It can help you find verses in the Bible where a certain word is used. Ask your leader about concordances or Bible software that can help you find words in the Bible.

Will a Bible dictionary help me? A Bible dictionary can help you learn meanings of key words such as *apostle*, *grace*, or *holiness*. It can also give information about some of the people, places, and terms mentioned in the Bible. If you do not own one, they are available, put out by different authors and publishers, at any local Christian book store. They are completely optional.

So...Best wishes on your exciting new venture into Bible discovery!