

How to Study the Bible  
(Lesson 8)

Introduction:

1. Lesson 8 is the second of a 2-part study of "How to Study the New Testament."
2. The first 5 books of the New Testament are primarily historical, including:
  - a. the Gospels (Matthew - John)
  - b. Acts.
3. The remaining 22 books of the New Testament are "epistles" [letters] written to:
  - a. individual Christians -- 1&2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, 2 John, 3 John
  - b. congregations -- Romans, 1&2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1&2 Thessalonians, Revelation
  - c. general groups of Christians -- Hebrews, James, 1&2 Peter, 1 John, Jude.
4. The epistles deserve our careful attention because:
  - a. they reveal many of the great doctrines of the Bible
  - b. they contain a tremendous amount of practical information about subjects such as:
    - 1) the responsibilities of Christians
    - 2) the worship, work, and organization of the church.
5. A three-step approach is very helpful when studying the epistles.

Discussion:

- I. STEP 1: PRELIMINARY SURVEY
  - A. When studying an epistle, it is helpful to identify:
    1. the writer
    2. the person(s) addressed
    3. the general subject matter.
  - B. The writer and the person(s) being addressed are usually identified in the opening verses.
  - C. The general subject matter of an epistle can be learned from a good reference source such as a Bible dictionary.
- II. STEP 2: PREPARATION OF AN OUTLINE
  - A. The outline of an epistle shows how its material is organized: introduction, main body, and conclusion.
  - B. A brief outline of Philemon is as follows:
    1. Introduction (vs.1-3)
    2. Main body (vs.4-21)
      - a. Paul's expression of thanksgiving (vs.4-7)
      - b. Paul's appeal for Onesimus (vs.8-21)
    3. Conclusion (vs.22-25)
  - C. An outline also identifies the main subjects being covered.
  - D. Many study Bibles contain outlines for each book (ex. Royal Bible).
- III. STEP 3: DETAILED STUDY
  - A. After outlining an epistle to identify the main subjects covered, each subject must be carefully studied.
    1. To illustrate, an outline of 1 Corinthians shows that ch.15 covers "the resurrection."
    2. To learn the details, the verses in this chapter must be examined, including paragraphs, sentences, and words.
    3. A reliable commentary will be very helpful at this point.