

YOU TRY IT

Observation is one of the most useful skills you can acquire. It can also be a lot of fun. Here's an exercise to try with young people. It will develop their powers of observation, and teach you a lot about the observational process.

Apart from the children's presence, arrange a group of objects on a table, such as:

- a rock
- a paperback
- a pen
- two or three seashells
- a toy car
- five crayons
- a Lego building block
- a leaf
- a magnet in the shape of a number or letter
- a multicolored scarf
- a necktie
- a toothbrush

It doesn't really matter what you select to put on the table. Just be sure they are things that the kids will recognize. And pick objects that have distinctive, interesting features, such as unique shapes or colors.

Once you've arranged the items on the table, cover them with a sheet or tablecloth. Then call the participants into the room and give each one a pencil and paper. Tell them to write down what they see on the table. Pull off the cover and reveal the objects for about sixty seconds. Then re-cover them.

Ask the children to tell you what they saw—or what they think they saw. Ask them to describe specifics, such as size, color, markings, and so forth. Make a list of their observations. Then pull the cover off the objects and show them to the group. Everyone will be amazed at what was and was not observed. They'll realize that there's a vast difference between merely seeing and carefully observing.

THERE'S NO LIMIT TO OBSERVATION

Now look at all that we've observed in this exercise. Count them, and you'll find that I've come up with at least thirty observations from Acts 1:8. (And this is only one verse. I haven't studied a paragraph, or a chapter, or even the book of Acts—just one verse.) Yet each time I come back to it, I'll see more. In fact, an assignment I give my seminary students is to list as many observations as they can from this single verse. So far they've come up with more than six hundred different ones.

Imagine what fun you could have with six hundred observations on this passage. Would you like to see Scripture with eyes like that? I'd like to help you gain that skill. I assure you, it's the essential first step in Bible study method. Come with me into the next few chapters, and I'll show you some ways to increase your powers of observation.

YOU TRY IT

Now that you've seen me observe Acts 1:8, try the process yourself. Observe the following passage, Joshua 1:8:

This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth,

but

you shall meditate on it day and night,

so that

you may be careful to do

according to all that is written in it;

for

then you will make your way prosperous,

and

then you will have success.

Remember, in Observation your main concern is, What do I see? Pay special attention to terms and grammatical structure. Also look at the context. Use a pen or pencil to record your observations in and around the text. See what you can find in this fascinating passage.

Things emerged from that old-world story which previously I should have thought impossible. Slowly but very definitely the *conviction* grew that the drama of those unforgettable weeks of human history was stranger and deeper than it seemed. It was the *strangeness* of many notable things in the story which first arrested and held my *interest*. It was only later that *the irresistible logic of their meaning* came into view. (pp. 11–12, italics added)

Can you see how involved Morison’s mind was in this Bible study process? Here was a man reading thoughtfully. He was applying the same mental process to his study of the New Testament as he did to his journalism.

Result: The book that he started out to write turned out to be “the book that refused to be written.” Instead, integrity demanded that he write *Who Moved the Stone?* instead. Published in 1930, it is still one of the best defenses of the resurrection of Christ ever produced. It’s really the story of Morison’s conversion to Christianity. Best of all, it’s a quintessential illustration of the first strategy of Bible reading: Read thoughtfully.

YOU TRY IT

Here is a project that will help you cultivate the skill of reading Scripture thoughtfully. It involves the little book of Philemon in the New Testament. Only twenty-five verses long, Philemon records Paul’s advice to an old friend whose slave, Onesimus, had run away. Onesimus encountered Paul in Rome, became a believer, and now Paul sends him back to his master with the letter in hand.

Read Philemon according to the principles of thoughtful reading. Barrage the text with questions. What can you find out about the relationships between Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus? Reconstruct the situation. What feelings might be involved? What practical considerations? What questions remain unanswered as you read this letter? What problems does it create? What issues does it speak to? Why do you think it is significant enough to be included in the Bible? What issues do we face today that this book might speak to? How would you communicate this book and the insights you gain from it to someone else?

long for you to read every verse of Scripture ten, twenty, or even thirty times.

Of course, you don't have to take a through-the-Bible-in-a-year approach. You could try reading a Psalm in the morning and a Psalm at night. That would take you through the entire Psalms almost five times in a year. Or read a chapter of Proverbs every day—the entire book every month. Or concentrate on one book for one month: a chapter of Ephesians or Galatians every day on Monday through Saturday, four times; or a chapter of 1 John every day for thirty days.

You can devise your own schedule for completing these books. Or come up with a plan of your own. The point is, devise a way to help you mark your progress. If you're a person who needs structure or who likes to achieve goals, this is a great way to read Scripture repeatedly.

YOU TRY IT

Are you convinced of the value of repeated Bible reading? Here's an exercise to dispel any lingering doubts: Read through the entire Old Testament book of Esther once a day for seven days in a row. It should take about half an hour or so each day. Use some of the suggestions in this chapter, such as reading it in different versions, reading it out loud, or perhaps even listening to it on audiocassette. Of course, you should also use the other skills of Observation I mentioned earlier. See how many new things you can see on each successive day. Make a list of your observations, or record them in your Bible. At the end of the week, see if you can reconstruct the story clearly and accurately by telling it to someone else. Also, what insights have you gained from the story?

“I’d love to.”

“Have you got some time?”

She had time to burn on that flight. So I took out one of those sickness bags (they make wonderful notepads) and wrote the six questions mentioned above: Who? What? Where? When? Why? Wherefore?

Then we went through Mark 4:35–41, the stilling of the storm. I asked her to read the passage, and then we went through the questions: Who are the people involved? What is happening in this paragraph? Where is it taking place? What time is it? Why do you think God put it in the narrative? And what difference would this make in your life?

I’ve rarely seen someone so excited. When we finished she asked me, “How is it that I’ve been a Christian now for seven years, and nobody ever taught me how to study the Bible?”

That’s a good question. But it’s really a tragedy. You see, the church today is leading people to Christ, but sometimes they are in the faith for ten, fifteen, or even twenty years without ever learning how to study the Bible. The reason? They don’t know where to begin. They don’t know how to go about it.

They are a lot like I was at that pond in Colorado—looking at the fish, but unable to land any of them for myself. That’s no big deal when you’re just on vacation. But when you are starving spiritually—and most people are—someone needs to teach you how to fish.

I suggest you try the six lures I’ve mentioned. They’ll help anyone catch the big ones.

YOU TRY IT

The six questions of selective Bible reading are especially fun when you study the stories of Scripture. Luke 24:13–35 records one of the most fascinating—the account of Jesus meeting two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus following His resurrection. Read that passage two or three times, and then probe it with the six questions presented in this chapter. Don’t forget to write down your observations.

YOU TRY IT

Of all the strategies to first-rate Bible reading, prayerful reading probably requires the most cultivation. Here are three projects to help you get started:

Psalms 23

Psalms 23 may be the most famous passage in Scripture, and for good reason: It paints a beautiful picture of the tender relationship between God and one of His children. You can turn this psalm into a personal prayer by inserting your name wherever you see the first-person pronouns, “my,” “me,” or “I.”

Isaiah 40:28–31

Here’s another passage that you can make your own through prayer. Look at the tremendous promises of God in this text! Do you need Him to deliver in your experience what He offers here? Turn this passage into your own prayer, asking God to do that.

Philippians 4:8–9

Here is another set of promises—and conditions—that you can read and study prayerfully. Review Paul’s list of qualities, and ask yourself: What are some illustrations of these in my life? Then, on the basis of verse 8: What do I need to start practicing in order to know God’s peace? Talk to God about the things mentioned in these verses and your response to them. Where does He need to change you? What attitudes and thoughts do you need His help to cultivate?

YOU TRY IT

Here's a chance to stretch your creativity. See what you can do with these projects in imaginative Bible reading.

Acts 16:16–40

This is the lively account of Paul and Silas in Philippi. Carefully read and observe the events that happen in this section, and then act them out in dramatic form with your family or friends.

Psalms 19

This psalm praises the works of God and the Word of God. Observe it carefully, and then try rewriting it for a university physics or philosophy class.

1 Samuel 17

This is the epic account of David and Goliath. However, though most people know of the story, they know little of what actually happens in it. Read the chapter carefully, then rewrite it in a way that would relate to a gang of inner-city youths.

Acts 15:22–29

Luke reprints a letter that the church council at Jerusalem sent to new believers in Phoenicia and Samaria. Study the context carefully, then rewrite this passage as a fax to a new group of believers meeting downtown in your city.

YOU TRY IT

If you are not in the habit of reading the Bible meditatively, here's a suggestion to get started: Set aside a day when you can get away from your routine—no work, no interruptions, no commitments. Perhaps you have a favorite spot in the country or by the seashore, or access to a lake house. Wherever it is, find a place where you can spend several hours alone.

Devote your time to meditating on John 4:1–42, the account of Jesus visiting Samaria. Begin by asking God to help you gain insight into His Word and show you how to apply it. Then read the passage several times. Use the suggestions for repeated Bible reading in chapter 9.

Examine the sections before and after John 4 to place it in context. Then look carefully at the passage to answer such questions as: Who are the people in this story? Who were the Samaritans? Why was it unusual for Jesus to talk to this woman? What was the reaction of her neighbors? Of the disciples? What does Jesus tell them when they return? What lessons does this passage teach about telling the gospel story to others?

After you've got a grasp of the story, think about what implications it might have for you. For instance, what kinds of people do you normally stay away from? Why? How would those people respond to the gospel? Is there anything you could do or say that would help them come closer to Christ and ultimately to trust in Him? When it comes to evangelism, are you a sower or a reaper (vv. 36–38)? Or neither? With which of the characters in the story do you most identify? Why?

How did you come to faith in Christ? Who told you about Jesus? What was your response? Whom have you told about Jesus? What did you say? What was the response? Are there principles in this story that you could use the next time you tell people about Christ?

You can come up with additional questions. The goal is to chew on the Word, looking for insights, and to examine yourself, looking for ways to apply Scripture. Be sure to write down everything you observe in the passage, as well as your conclusions. And spend time in prayer. On the basis of what you've studied and meditated on, what is God telling you? What do you need to tell Him? Where do you need His resources and help? What opportunities for evangelism would you like Him to open for you?

LAW	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
Repetition	Terms or phrases used two or more times	Ps. 136 Matt. 5:21–48 Heb. 11
Specific to general, general to specific	Progression of thought from a single example to a general principle, or vice versa	Matt. 6:1–18 Acts 1:8 James 2

Adapted from an unpublished chart by John Hansel. Used by permission.

YOU TRY IT

The books of the Bible are filled with statements that express the purpose of the writers. John 20:30–31 is one of the most straightforward. Others are less obvious. But an observant reader can usually find them. Here are a number of purpose statements. Read each one carefully, then skim the rest of the book in which it is found. See how the writer accomplishes his purpose in the way he presents his material.

- Deuteronomy 1:1; 4:1; 32:44–47
- Proverbs 1:1–6
- Ecclesiastes 1:1–2; 12:13–14
- Isaiah 6:9–13
- Malachi 4:4–6
- Luke 1:1–4
- 2 Corinthians 1:8; 13:1–10
- Titus 1:5; 2:15
- 2 Peter 3:1–2
- 1 John 5:13

YOU TRY IT

Here's an idea for making a passage of Scripture your own. Turn to Numbers 13, the story of the spies sent by Moses into the Promised Land. Read the account carefully, using all of the principles we've covered so far. Then write your own paraphrase of the story. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Decide what the main point of the story is. What happens? Why is this incident significant?
2. Think about any parallels to what happens here in the history of your own family, church, or nation, or in your own life.
3. Decide on the "angle" you want to use. For instance: the report of a task force for Israel, Inc. (a business angle); a tribal council (a Native American angle); a political contest between two factions (a political or governmental angle). The point is, choose something that fits the situation and will make this incident memorable for you.
4. Rewrite the story according to the angle you have chosen. Use language that fits that motif. Make the characters sound real-to-life. Change names and places to fit the style. (See Clarence Jordan's *Cotton Patch Version of Luke* on pages 110–11.)
5. When you're finished, read your paraphrase to a friend or someone in your family.

before, during, or after Christ? How much of the Bible was complete when this material was written? In other words, how much did the writer and the people in the book know about God?

You'll probably have to use secondary sources to discover the historical context of the biblical books. I'll talk about some of those in chapter 34. For now, keep in mind that God is the God of history. He works in and through real people in the real world to accomplish His purposes. You can discover a lot about those purposes if you read His Word telescopically.

YOU TRY IT

To read a book of the Bible telescopically, you have to get the big picture. You have to start by reading synthetically, not analytically. That is, survey the terrain before you dig any holes. Get an overview of what the writer covers and especially how much space he devotes to each subject.

A good book to study in this manner is Judges. It covers the period just after Joshua's death, before Israel had a king. God raised up individual leaders, called judges, to lead the people as they settled in the Promised Land.

To gain the broad perspective, read the entire book at one sitting and make a list of who the major characters are—the judges—and where they start appearing in the text. (A key phrase is “Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord.”)

Next, create a chart that shows where each one appears in the book and how much space is given to him or her. (See chapter 25 for examples of different kinds of charts. I recommend that you develop something like the chart of Luke on page 186.)

When you complete this exercise, you'll have an excellent start on reading the book of Judges telescopically. You'll have the big picture so that when you read the stories of the individual judges you'll have a context in which to place them.

Some other Old Testament books to read in this way are 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles.

paragraph. You've also discovered that you've got to learn to read. You've got to read Scripture better and faster, as for the first time, and just as you would a love letter. And you've been exposed to ten strategies that are guaranteed to turn you into a first-rate Bible reader.

But not only must you learn to read, you must learn what to look for. In the next few chapters, I'll give you six clues that will help you further unlock the biblical text.

YOU TRY IT

In this chapter I've worked with a paragraph, observing how Nehemiah responded to the report of Hanani and the brothers. Now it's your turn. Below is a paragraph from Paul's letter to Titus, who was a first-century pastor on the Mediterranean island of Crete.

Read the paragraph carefully, using the ten strategies to first-rate reading and paying attention to terms and grammatical structure. See what you can discover here about the lifestyle that should characterize all believers, and especially leaders.

The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. (Titus 1:5–9, NIV)

tion. In the life of David, 2 Samuel 11–12 records one of the most crucial events of David’s life—his sin with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah. Those chapters form a sort of pivot to the book. Everything before leads up to them, everything after goes down from them.

Or take Acts 2. When you study the book of Acts, you discover that chapter 2 is the pivot. It’s the one chapter without which you couldn’t have the book. Everything grows out of what happens there. It is Luke’s way of emphasizing that material.

So the first clue to look for when you come to the Scriptures is that which is emphasized. The writers have gone to great trouble to hang a sign out that says, “Hey, this is important. Pay attention.” Look for the four kinds of emphasis I’ve mentioned, and you’ll quickly catch on to what matters in the text.

YOU TRY IT

Here are two sections of Scripture that you can observe for things emphasized.

1 and 2 Samuel

Develop an overview chart of these two books showing the relative space devoted to the principle characters, Samuel, Saul, and David. (You should have developed a similar chart at the end of chapter 17, page 132. There’s a good example of the kind of chart I’m talking about at the bottom of page 186.) Which character was most important to the writer? What does that tell you about the purpose of 1 and 2 Samuel?

Acts 1:8

What is the order of the places mentioned? What relationship do these places have to each other? (We looked at this in chapter 6.) How does the order of these places in Acts 1:8 compare with the expansion of the gospel in the rest of Acts? See if you can determine the relative amount of space Dr. Luke devotes to each of these places, and the amount of time the apostles give to each one. What significance might this have for the purpose of Acts?

YOU TRY IT

Repetition is one of the most frequently used means of emphasis in the Bible. Let me suggest several projects that will help you unlock portions of the Word by looking for things repeated.

Psalm 119

In this psalm, David refers to the Word of God in every verse. Observe the psalm carefully, and catalogue all of the things that David says about Scripture.

Matthew 5:17–48

Observe how Jesus uses the formula “You have heard . . . but I say . . .” in this portion of the Sermon on the Mount. What structure does this phrase give to the passage? Why is it significant for Jesus to say this?

Arithmetic In Acts

Use a concordance to look up all of the “arithmetic” phrases in the book of Acts—numbers of people being “added” to the church, the believers “multiplying” themselves. There are even a few “divisions” and “subtractions.” Can you find them? How does Luke use these terms to describe the growth of the early church?

1 Corinthians 15:12–19

Investigate the importance of the little word *if* to Paul’s argument.

Scripture and God's blessing. Are you experiencing that effect? The real question is, are you activating the cause by delighting and meditating, as it says, in what God has said?

As you do, look for things that are emphasized, things that are repeated, and as we've seen in this chapter, things that are related.

YOU TRY IT

One of the primary goals of observation is to see relationships in the biblical text. Test your observational skills on these three passages.

Matthew 1:1–18

Most people just skip over the genealogies. They are bored by the monotonous repetition of “So-and-so begat So-and-so.” But genealogies are actually important ways that the biblical writers communicate their meaning.

Read through the list of names mentioned in Matthew 1. What relationship do these people have to Jesus? To each other? What four individuals stand out conspicuously? Why? What can you find out about the people mentioned here? Compare this list with the genealogy that Luke records (Luke 3:23–38). What is different? What is the same? What do you think Matthew's list has to do with the purpose of his book?

Amos

You'll need an atlas to discover the significance of the relationships in the Old Testament book of Amos. Find all of the places mentioned in chapters 1–4. Where does the prophet finally land in chapter 5? What's the relationship? What is Amos doing by mentioning these places in this manner?

or, “This section is different from anything else in this book.” Those are clear signals that the author is using things alike and unlike to communicate his message.

YOU TRY IT

John 11:1–46 makes an outstanding study in comparison and contrast. It’s the story of the raising of Lazarus, but he’s really just a background figure. John focuses his lens on Lazarus’s two sisters, Martha and Mary.

Read the account carefully, then consider questions such as: What was the relationship between Jesus and these two women? Are there any other texts that shed light on this question? How do the two sisters approach Jesus? How does He respond to them? What does He say? Compare and contrast the faith of these two women. How do they compare to the disciples and to the people who observed this incident?

YOU TRY IT

I've got a passage for you to try out, now that I've shown you how to observe a section. It's the parable of the soils in Matthew 13:1–23. Here's a grid chart to help you get started. It considers four questions for each of the four kinds of soil: How does Jesus describe the soil? What sort of growth took place? What were the hindrances to growth? What was the outcome, or result, of the planting?

SOILS	DESCRIPTION	GROWTH	HINDRANCES	RESULTS

They have use only to the extent that they accurately represent what is in the biblical text.

YOU TRY IT

Now that you've seen several illustrations of how to make a chart, try to construct your own chart of the book of Acts, using the suggestions given in this chapter. To get started, review chapter 6 where we looked at Acts 1:8. I pointed out that the four places mentioned—Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the earth—form an outline for the book. You might want to use that observation in organizing your material. Or, come up with your own overview. But develop a chart that summarizes the account in a way that helps you quickly grasp what is going on in Luke's book.

YOU TRY IT

A student of mine showed me the following exercise in observing the account of the Fall in Genesis 3:1–7. It’s an excellent opportunity to use all of the skills that you’ve learned in this section.

Monday

Read Genesis 3:1–7 from the perspective of the heavenly Father witnessing the sin of His children from heaven.

Tuesday

Read the account with the goal in mind of finding the most important verse in the paragraph.

Wednesday

Read it from Satan’s perspective as he tempts God’s children.

Thursday

Read with the goal in mind of determining how this passage affects your understanding of what Jesus did on the cross.

Friday

Read from the perspective of Adam and Eve as they are sinning. What was going through their minds?

Saturday

Read from the perspective of someone who knows nothing of the Bible or “religious” things and who is reading this passage for the first time.

know quite a bit about how to determine the content of a passage.

Remember, you looked for terms, structure, literary form, and atmosphere. You asked a series of penetrating, practical questions: who, what, where, when, why, wherefore. You looked for things that are emphasized, repeated, related, alike, unlike, and true to life.

In short, you have barraged the text with a variety of strategies aimed at answering the question, What do I see? If you have done your homework well, you have uncovered the content of the passage. In other words, you've answered the question; you know what the author is saying.

That is why I say: The more time you spend in Observation, the less time you will have to spend in Interpretation, and the more accurate will be your result. The less time you spend in Observation, the more time you will have to spend in Interpretation, and the less accurate will be your result.

So whatever you do in Observation will provide the basic content out of which you will interpret the meaning of the text.

But don't stop there. God has provided four more keys to help you unlock His Word.

YOU TRY IT

In this chapter we've looked at the first of five keys of Interpretation, content. So I want to get you started on an interpretive study that will continue through the next five chapters. The section I want you to consider is Daniel 1–2, one of the most instructive passages for a believer today, especially if you work in the marketplace.

Begin by observing the content of Daniel 1–2. Use all of the tools that I discussed earlier in the book. Remember that your work at this stage is determinative for what you will interpret later. Your observations will form the database from which you will construct the meaning of the text.

In this first look at Daniel 1–2, invest as much time as you can answering the six questions of selective reading: Who? What? Where? When? Why? And Wherefore?

work your way around until you've eaten the whole meal. Well, that's the sort of process the Bible went through, only we call it "progressive revelation." Over time, God slowly unveiled the truth of His Word.

So it's important to locate your passage in the flow of Scripture. If you're studying Noah in Genesis, then you're before the Ten Commandments, before the Sermon on the Mount, before John 3:16. In fact, Noah didn't have a scrap of biblical text to work with. So what does that tell you when you read that "Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6:8)?

One of the helpful resources you'll want to turn to as you investigate theological context is a commentary. I'll say more about commentaries in chapter 34.

YOU TRY IT

In the last chapter you began a study of Daniel 1–2 by observing the content, paying particular attention to the questions, Who? What? Where? When? Why? and Wherefore? Your observations from that exercise will give you a base of information from which you will be able to interpret the text.

Now it's time to move on to context. Since Daniel 1 begins the book, you will have to go back and read 2 Kings 24–25 and 2 Chronicles 36 to get the preceding context. Then look at the later chapters of Daniel to see what follows this section.

be found in Exodus. That means you'll need to do a concerted study of the book of Exodus to find out how he got started. You'll want to study his remarkable parents, who hid him from the pharaoh, so that ultimately he became the quintessential leader of Israel.

You'll also discover from your concordance that there's something about Moses in Acts 7. In fact, you'll find there some of the most insightful material on this man, editorialized by the Spirit. So anyone who wants to study Moses and doesn't read Acts 7 is really out of it.

Moses can also be found in Hebrews 11. In fact, he takes up more space in God's Hall of Fame than any other character. You'll find his life described from God's perspective in that passage. What does He think of him? What does He call significant in Moses' life?

I'll talk more about concordances in chapters 34 and 35. But whenever you study the Word of God, pull out the key of comparison. Keep putting things together so that you come up with a fully-orbed understanding of Scripture.

NOTE

1. R. C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 35–36.

YOU TRY IT

By now you should have looked at the content and the context of Daniel 1–2. Are you beginning to get some sense of what's going on in this story? What questions do you have as a result of your study?

Perhaps you'll answer some of them by doing a little comparison of this text with other portions of Scripture. Using a concordance, look up the following four items, each of which is crucial to understanding the passage. See how much you can learn about them from other places in Scripture:

- Daniel
- Nebuchadnezzar
- Babylon
- dreams

YOU TRY IT

How are you doing in your study of Daniel 1–2? Did you learn some useful background from your concordance study of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon, and dreams?

Now you are ready to look outside the biblical text to some extra-biblical resources, such as a Bible dictionary and a Bible handbook. You may have to check the library at your church or in your community to locate one of these. Several are listed in the back of this book under “Additional Resources.”

Using either or both of these tools, look up the four items that you’ve already studied within the biblical texts—Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon, and dreams. See what additional information you can find that sheds light on Daniel 1–2.

YOU TRY IT

Earlier you worked with a concordance in your study of Daniel 1–2, and in the last installment you consulted a Bible dictionary and a Bible handbook. Now you have two additional resources to consider—atlas and commentaries.

Find an atlas that shows Babylon at the time of Nebuchadnezzar. Where was it in relation to Israel? What modern-day country now occupies this area?

Also consult a general commentary on the Old Testament and perhaps a single-volume commentary on the book of Daniel. What questions do these resources answer for you? What additional information do they supply?

By the way, you might also want to go back to the Bible dictionary and Bible handbook to look up some additional items related to this text, such as: government in Babylon, the Chaldeans, ziggurats, Cyrus, and foods in the ancient world.

Again, Luke always has in mind the inhabited earth. What do you suppose that suggests about the purpose of his two-volume account?

Words are the basic building blocks of language. To understand any piece of literature, you have to come to terms with the author; you have to interpret his words. Concordances and Bible dictionaries are invaluable in helping you do that. However, some words have a meaning that lies beneath the surface. We call them figures of speech, and we'll look at how they work in the next chapter.

YOU TRY IT

In this last part of your study of Daniel 1–2, I want you to do two word studies that have important implications for the interpretation of this passage. The first is the word *defile*, found in Daniel 1:8:

But Daniel made up his mind that he would not *defile* himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not *defile* himself. (Italics added)

The second term is *latter days*, found in Daniel 2:28:

However, there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place in the *latter days*. This was your dream and the visions in your mind while on your bed. (Italics added)

Use a concordance to locate other uses of these words in the Bible. What can you learn from these additional texts? Then look up *defile* and *latter days* in a Bible dictionary to see what else you can discover about the meaning and significance of these terms.

10. Use the figurative sense if a literal interpretation would involve a contradiction in doctrine.

This follows from the point just made. We need to be consistent in our interpretation of Scripture and in the systems of belief that we build using Scripture.

In 1 Corinthians 3:16–17, Paul writes,

Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.

That is rather severe language. What does Paul mean by, “If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him”? Is this a threat that if a person commits suicide, he forfeits his salvation? Some have taken it that way. But not only does that compromise the context, it conflicts with the doctrine of eternal security, the teaching that God will preserve His children. Furthermore, Paul encourages us to read this passage and its context figuratively (4:6). A literal interpretation would make no sense.

YOU TRY IT

Here’s a chance to try your hand at “figuring out the figurative.” Read and study Psalm 139, one of the most profound and intimate of all the psalms. It is filled with figurative language. Use the principles covered in this chapter to interpret what David is talking about. Refer to the list on the next page, “Figures of Speech,” for additional help in recognizing and understanding David’s imagery. (By the way, don’t forget to start with the step of Observation.)

YOU TRY IT

There is a direct correlation between meditation and memorization. The more Scripture you memorize, the more you'll have to meditate on.

Unfortunately, Bible memorization has frequently received a bad press. Actually, memorization itself has received a bad press. Many of us can remember grade school, where we were forced to memorize mindless facts and figures in subjects such as history and arithmetic. Once we graduated from that exercise, we swore we'd never do it again!

But if God promises to bless our lives as the result of meditation (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1), and if meditation is dependent on memorization, then perhaps we'd better take a second look. I've recommended the "Topical Memory System" published by the Navigators. But here's a little exercise to get you started. Memorize Psalm 100 (NIV):

A psalm. For giving thanks.

¹Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.

²Worship the LORD with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.

³Know that the LORD is God.

It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

⁴Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.

⁵For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.

This psalm is only five verses long. It's a great psalm to meditate on, because it lifts up your heart in joy before the Lord. It confidently affirms God's faithful character. Here are some suggestions:

1. Read and study the psalm using Observation and Interpretation.
2. Read the psalm repeatedly, using the NIV translation above.
3. Concentrate on memorizing one verse at a time, over several days.
For instance, the first day, memorize verse 1. Read it several times.

Then repeat it to yourself several times. After an hour or so, see if you can remember it. Continue to review it throughout the day. Then the next day, tackle verse 2 in the same manner, only repeat verse 1 in addition to verse 2. Keep adding verses throughout the week.

4. Repeat what you have memorized out loud to a friend or family member. Have the person check the passage to make sure you have it down word-perfect!
5. If you have the talent, put the psalm to music and sing it. (Most of the psalms were originally sung, not read.)
6. Keep reviewing the psalm in your mind over the next few weeks, until you are certain that it is lodged in your brain.

there's a habit you need to start cultivating. Whatever it is, the Spirit uses Scripture to promote changes in your life.

Are you open to such change? Are you prepared to take on His challenges? I guarantee that if you approach God's Word with any degree of honesty and teachability, the Spirit won't let you go away disappointed.

YOU TRY IT

The nine questions listed in this chapter are ones that you should make a habit of asking every time you come to the Word of God. But I want to give you a little practice in using them on a lengthy section from the gospel by Luke.

Beginning in 14:25 and continuing through 17:10, Jesus gives a series of parables and instructions. The key to understanding the context is to observe that three groups of people are listening to Jesus—great multitudes (14:25) that include numerous ne'er-do-wells (15:1), the disciples (16:1; 17:1), and the Pharisees (16:14). Use the skills of Observation and Interpretation that we've looked at to understand this portion of the New Testament. Then answer the nine questions, based on the text:

1. Is there an example for me to follow?
2. Is there a sin to avoid?
3. Is there a promise to claim?
4. Is there a prayer to repeat?
5. Is there a command to obey?
6. Is there a condition to meet?
7. Is there a verse to memorize?
8. Is there an error to mark?
9. Is there a challenge to face?

YOU TRY IT

One of the pressing issues for Christians in the first century was whether they could eat meat sacrificed to idols (see pages 241–42). Paul devotes an entire chapter to this topic in Romans 14. But unless we understand the cultural context and why this issue was so controversial, we'll never understand or apply that portion of Scripture. So I want to give you a project to develop your skills in this regard. Once you understand what was going on in first-century Rome, you'll appreciate why Paul included this material and what significance it has for us today.

Start by reading and studying Romans 14. Use all of the observational tools outlined earlier. Don't jump into interpretation until you've bombarded the text with a barrage of observational questions.

When you're ready to start interpreting, the two most useful exercises will probably be comparison and consultation. Compare Romans 14 with other passages in the Bible dealing with this issue, such as 1 Corinthians 8. Use a concordance to find out as much as you can about the place that idols occupied in the minds of these first Christians.

For consultation, you'll want to find a good summary of Roman religion and the worship of gods and goddesses. Historian Will Durant gives a concise overview of life in the Roman Empire in *Caesar and Christ* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944). Your local library will be able to suggest additional sources.

As you work with the biblical text and the secondary sources, build a database of information on first-century Roman culture, using the kinds of questions listed in this chapter. If you do a thorough study, so that you could drop into Rome in about A.D. 60 and feel right at home, you'll see why the issue of meat sacrificed to idols caused so much trouble in the early church. You'll also be able to recognize the parallels to our own society and where Romans 14 might apply today.

YOU TRY IT

The ability to state principles from Scripture is one of the most powerful skills you can develop in terms of Application. It will enable you to relate the Word of God to nearly any situation you face. However, learning to do so takes a bit of practice. You can't just come up with something that makes sense to you and then bless it with the preface, "The Bible says . . ."

No, crafting useful and accurate principles requires accurate understanding of the text and perceptive insight into our own context. Here are several questions to help you develop and apply biblically sound principles.

1. What can you discover about the original context in which this passage was written and applied?
2. Given that original context, what does this text mean?
3. What fundamental, universal truths are presented in this passage?
4. Can you state that truth in a simple sentence or two, a statement that anyone could understand?
5. What issues in your own culture and your own situation does this truth address?
6. What are the implications of this principle when applied to your life and the world around you? What changes does it require? What values does it reinforce? What difference does it make?

Now use these questions to state applicational principles from three passages of Scripture: Proverbs 24:30–34; John 13:1–17; and Hebrews 10:19–25.

YOU TRY IT

Let me ask you the question I posed at the beginning of this chapter. Maybe you've identified an area of your life that needs substantial change. Perhaps you even know what steps you need to take. But the issue is, Where are you going to begin? How are you going to translate good intentions into life-changing action?

I want to challenge you to come up with one aspect of your life that needs to change, based on your study of God's Word. Then go through the three-step process outlined in this chapter to come up with an action plan for change.

As I say, this is my personal challenge to you. Remember that the aim of Bible study is to produce Christlike change in your life. Here's where that must happen. If you've come this far, follow through with the application of the Word to your life. Let it make a difference.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BIBLES

The Amplified Bible. Translated by France Siewert, this resource “amplifies” the message of the biblical texts by giving several synonyms for the major words, so that the various shades of meaning can be seen.

The Contemporary English Version (CEV). Produced in 1995 by the American Bible Society, the CEV is a translation, not a paraphrase, produced in common English language. It is especially a strong version for younger readers and those for whom English is a second language.

The Cotton Patch Version of Luke and Acts and The Cotton Patch Version of Paul's Epistles. In the late '60s, Clarence Jordan of Koinonia Farm in Americus, Georgia, produced these lively paraphrases because, he said, “we need to have the good news come to us not only in our own tongue but in our own time.” By giving a “Southern drawl” to these New Testament texts, Jordan enables the reader to feel personally involved. Read these if you want a fresh perspective.

The English Standard Version (ESV). This version, endorsed by several conservative Christian leaders, provides an “essentially literal” yet literarily graceful translation. Popular among those in Reformed traditions, this version draws from its predecessor, the Revised Standard Version. Excellent for both personal study and public reading.

The Good News Bible: Today’s English Version. This translation of the United Bible Societies “seeks to state clearly and accurately the meaning of the original texts in words and forms that are widely accepted by people who use English as a means of communication.” It’s a good version to use for reading long passages of narrative, though not as useful for intensive analysis of individual verses and words. A good Bible for young people and those for whom English is a second language.

The Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB). Holman Bible Publishers, the oldest Bible publisher in America, assembled an international, interdenominational team of a hundred scholars, editors, stylists, and proofreaders, all of whom were committed to biblical inerrancy, to provide a Bible based on an “optimal equivalence” style of translation. Very popular within the Southern Baptist denomination, the HCSB offers another modern translation in clear English that includes a more literal approach.

The King James Version (KJV). The classic translation of 1611, this is also known as The Authorized Version, though it was never formally authorized by any ecclesiastical body. The KJV has a richness of language that is hard to beat, especially in the psalms.

The Life Application Bible. One of the most popular study Bibles available, the *Life Application Bible* combines insightful scholarship with relevant application for the everyday reader. With helpful book introductions and reference resources, students will obtain an everyday person’s perspective for top-level communication.

The Living Bible. This excellent and popular paraphrase came about when author Ken Taylor began rewriting portions of the Bible in a way that his children could understand. Like *The Good News Bible*, it uses simple, plain English and is good for overview and repeated reading.

The Message. *The Message* is Eugene Peterson's unique paraphrase of Scripture, particularly insightful in the Psalms and Prophets. Available in several styles, it is intended as an introduction to the Bible for those without a Bible background or as a fresh rendition for those seeking a renewed perspective.

Nave's Topical Bible. Have you ever wished that you could read back-to-back all of the major passages on a topic? Orville Nave has reorganized the Bible in just that manner. He gives verses on more than 20,000 topics and subtopics, arranged alphabetically. This volume can be a timesaver.

The New American Standard Bible (NASB). This is one of my favorites for a study Bible. It is one of the most accurate English translations, though for that reason it sounds a bit wooden in places. Excellent for the steps of Observation and Interpretation.

The New Bible in Pictures for Little Eyes. Ken Taylor's classic paraphrase puts Bible stories in language that young children can understand. It makes extensive use of a question-and-answer style of telling the story, so that children are engaged in the narrative. This colorful volume is a great way to get children started in the Word.

The New English Translation (NET). As the Internet boom emerged, a group of the top evangelical seminary and college professors committed to provide an online Bible translation free of charge to the general public. With over 60,000 notes and extensive comments on ancient culture and language, the NET Bible provides a wealth of resources to the serious Bible student. Accessible at www.bible.org.

The New International Version (NIV). The product of a broad-based coalition of translators, the NIV aims at a marriage between accuracy and clarity. It is one of the more readable translations.

The New Life Version (NLV). Available since 1969, it continues to be one of the most readable and most understandable Bibles without sacrificing accuracy. It is not a paraphrase, but basic English for those with reading difficulty or younger readers.

The New Living Translation (NLT). In 1996, a broad range of evangelical scholars were gathered to provide an improved version of Ken Taylor's *Living Bible*. The result has been an excellent translation based on the goal of setting out to render the message of the original texts of Scripture into clear, contemporary English.

The New King James Version (NKJV). The NKJV was produced “to preserve the original intended purity of the King James Version in its communication of God’s Word to man.” If you like the King James but struggle with its Elizabethan English, this is a very helpful translation.

The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). The NRSV updates the RSV, based on linguistic and archaeological developments such as the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls in the 1940s. Its English is clear and is noteworthy for its attempt at gender-neutral renderings.

The New Testament in Modern English (Revised Edition). This paraphrase by J. B. Phillips is one of my favorites. It is extremely readable and lively, excellent for getting a preliminary overview of a book.

The Revised Standard Version (RSV). Published in 1952 by the National Council of Churches, the RSV gained its title from the fact that it revised *The American Standard Version* of 1901, which in turn was a revision of the King James. This translation will be familiar to many in the mainline denominations. It is not a bad piece of work, but there are now better translations available.

The Ryrie Study Bible, expanded edition. With over 2 million copies in print, the Ryrie Study Bible has equipped a generation of Bible students and teachers with over 10,000 practical and historical notes and a wealth of theological insights. Now expanded with new sections covering church history, the history of the Bible, and Bible doctrine summaries, this resource offers an amazing array of uses for personal use and in-depth teaching.

The Scofield Reference Bible. C. I. Scofield was a turn-of-the-century pastor, teacher, writer, and lecturer who wanted to “facilitate the study and intelligent use of the Bible.” To that end, he packaged a comprehensive system

of footnotes, cross-references, headings, and other helps with the biblical text. The result was an enormously popular volume that has become the grandfather of study Bibles. The Scofield Bible is synonymous with dispensational theology, the theological system he used to interpret Scripture.

The Thompson Chain-Reference Study Bible. A classic for Bible students, the Thompson Chain Reference system contains over 100,000 topical references in over 8,000 chain topics, helping make detailed topical study and teaching preparation higher in quality and efficiency. This popular study Bible is also known for its excellent archaeological supplements, charts, diagrams, and illustrations.

Today's New International Version (TNIV). A 2005 revision of the highly popular NIV text, the TNIV is based on advancements in biblical scholarship, clarity, and gender accuracy to engage the 18- to 34- year-old age segment with the mystery and wonder of the Bible.

Tomie dePaola's Book of Bible Stories. An internationally known illustrator of more than two hundred children's books, Tomie dePaola lends his inimitable style to this fine collection of Bible stories for children. The text is the NIV translation, and the illustrations are in color. This is an excellent way to help your children to start reading Scripture.

BOOKS AND ARTICLES

Mortimer Adler and Mark Van Doren, *How to Read a Book.* This is a classic that you can't afford not to read (see pages 68–69). Adler covers the rules of reading various kinds of literature. You'll approach Bible study from an altogether different perspective after reading this guide.

E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible.* As I pointed out in chapter 36, figurative language can trip up the uninformed reader. Bullinger simplifies things by giving a comprehensive overview of the kinds of figures used in Scripture. Turn to this useful, 1,100-page guide if you find yourself mystified by biblical imagery.

Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. A nineteenth-century Oxford scholar, Edersheim devoted seven uninterrupted years to researching the Jewish culture of Jesus' day. Though this work is not light reading, it is accessible to the average person. If you are studying the gospels, his information and insights prove invaluable. This was originally published as two volumes; Eerdmans has reprinted it in one.

Norman Lewis, *How to Read Better and Faster, 4th edition*. This is a superb workbook for upgrading your reading skills. Filled with exercises to improve reading speed and comprehension, it makes a good companion to Adler's *How to Read a Book*.

Leland Ryken, *The Literature of the Bible*. A professor of English at Wheaton College, Ryken (who consulted on the ESV) has probably done more than anyone else to make modern-day Bible students aware of the literary dimensions of Scripture. This book will change the way you look at the Bible by introducing you to the crucial importance of genre.

CONCORDANCES

Most major Bible translations (such as the RSV, NRSV, NIV, NAS, NKJV) have their own concordances. If you can't find one for the version you are using, check with the publisher. Most translations are also online with a concordance keyword search at www.biblegateway.com.

The NKJV MacArthur Topical Bible. This work includes over 100,000 passages, 20,000 topics, all cross-referenced with subheadings for an enormous wealth of material for topical searching.

Nelson Phrase Concordance of the Bible. This interesting volume from Thomas Nelson Publishers is a twist on the concordance genre. Rather than list individual words, it gives you Bible phrases keyed to five major translations. That can be a timesaver when you are searching for a phrase rather than an individual word.

The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible. The work of James Strong, this and Young's are the two concordances that Bible students

have traditionally used. However, if you are using a modern translation, you need to find a concordance for that version (Thomas Nelson, 1990).

Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible. Robert Young's one-volume commentary is one of the classic reference works of Bible study.

What Does the Bible Say About . . . The Ultimate A to Z Resource. A modernized phrase "concordance" offering a unique approach, this A-to-Z guide includes several contemporary topical listings such as "ecology" and "bottom line." Users will find it most helpful for illustrative purposes and unearthing details on current event topics.

Wordsearch Computer Bible. This is a "turbocharged" concordance that will appeal to you if you have a computer. It allows you to search for up to nine words and phrases simultaneously. Wordsearch can be a tremendous timesaver. It heralds a new generation of Bible study tools based on electronic technology. Available for both MS-DOS and Macintosh.

BIBLE DICTIONARIES

An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words. The product of W. E. Vine's lifetime work, this dictionary is extremely valuable for word studies. Vine lists the English words (from the KJV and RSV), and gives the Greek words from which they are translated. He comments on the usages to explain their meanings in context.

The Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded. *The Holman Bible Dictionary* edited by Trent C. Butler has become one of the best-selling Bible reference tools since its publication in 1991. This updated and expanded version includes over 700 full-color graphics, excellent articles, summaries, and easy-to-read Bible maps.

Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary. This fine reference work was edited by Herbert Lockyer, known for his "all" studies, such as *All the Men of the Bible*, *All the Miracles of the Bible*, and *All the Occupations of the Bible*. Written in simple, readable English, the articles include four-color photographs.

The New Bible Dictionary (Revised). This excellent reference, originally edited by J. D. Douglas, was revised in 1980. It is really an encyclopedia of biblical studies, and includes illustrations, genealogical tables, maps, plans, and other information that brings the text alive.

The New Unger's Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded. With over 67,000 entries and 1,400 pages of research, including color photography, comprehensive Bible land maps, and detailed essays, this updated classic is a must for serious Bible students.

The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary (Revised). Edited by Wheaton scholar Merrill Tenney, this volume contains the expertise of more than sixty-five contributors. It offers information on the biographical, chronological, geographical, and historical context of the biblical subjects.

BIBLE HANDBOOKS

The Book of Life. This twenty-four-volume set by Gil Beers is ideal for young people. Featuring color illustrations and photographs, it takes the reader through the entire Bible in a captivating, informative way. It includes the entire NIV translation in large print and a comprehensive index for quick reference. If you have children or grandchildren, I recommend this encyclopedic resource as an outstanding gift.

Eerdmans Handbook to the Bible. Edited by David Alexander, this 680-page work is illustrated in color. It's an excellent one-volume reference work on the background of the biblical world.

Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties. Gleason Archer deals with the apparent contradictions in Scripture. If you come across something that puzzles you, turn to this book for insight and background information.

Halley's Bible Handbook. It was Henry Halley's conviction that everyone ought to read the Bible daily, and to that end he put together *Halley's Bible Handbook* as an introduction to the Scriptures. It's a useful, compact pocket guide to biblical studies.

The Handbook of Bible Application (for the Life Application Bible). This handbook, by Neil Wilson and the editors of the *Life Application Bible*, provides excellent topical summaries and outlines on hundreds of issues both ancient and contemporary. With extensive cross-referencing and citations of multiple translations, this book serves as a great application and support resource for personal and group Bible study preparation.

The Handbook of Life in Bible Times. This concise work by J. A. Thompson includes both color illustrations and maps.

The MacArthur Bible Handbook. An excellent yet concise work, John MacArthur's handbook includes the fundamental facts about each book, its context, author, theme and purpose, its contribution to the Bible as a whole, a detailed outline of the book, and how Christ is presented. It also offers numerous charts, maps, graphs, and reading plans on key topics.

The New Unger's Bible Handbook. Completely revised with Gary Larson, this new version includes 750 pages providing detailed entries, hundreds of full-color illustrations, photographs, maps, diagrams, and charts, making it one of the most comprehensive single volumes available today.

The World of the Bible. A. S. Van Der Woude and others have put together a fine encyclopedia on the history and culture of the biblical world. This makes a terrific background study for understanding the context of biblical passages.

What the Bible Is All About: Bible Handbook. An updated version of the classic work by Henrietta Mears, this completely updated and revised handbook features excellent outreach articles, selected readings, and short book overviews to open each chapter, a helpful glossary, several Bible reading plans, and new maps and charts.

BIBLE SOFTWARE

Accordance. A premier, Mac-only Bible software tool, Accordance is preferred by many Bible scholars and teachers for its extensive language tools. In

addition, Accordance provides the only digital source for many reference books and ancient works (www.accordancebible.com).

Bibleworks. Bibleworks 7.0 provides an extensive array of over 112 Bible translations in thirty languages, fourteen original language texts with eighteen morphology databases, twelve Greek lexicons and dictionaries, five Hebrew lexicons and dictionaries, plus thirty practical reference works. Tightly focused on language study, this software offers excellent diagramming and lexical tools with unending uses for serious Bible study (www.bibleworks.com).

e-Sword. E-Sword is a free, downloadable Bible study software resource used by over four million people around the world. It includes searches, dictionaries, backgrounds, and maps in an extremely user-friendly format (www.e-sword.net).

Ilumina. Unlike the other products listed here, Ilumina focuses on visually presenting the Bible, including professional animations of key Bible stories, amazing interactive timelines and maps, along with video clips from the Bible land with expert commentary (www.ilumina.com).

Logos. The largest developer of Bible software and a worldwide leader in multilingual electronic publishing, Logos partners with more than 100 publishers to make more than 5,000 electronic Bible study resources available to customers around the world (www.logos.com).

Olivetree.com. This Bible software company offers eighty electronic translations of the Bible as well as commentaries, dictionaries, devotionals, eBooks, and the Strong's numbering system that can be utilized on your handheld computer (PDA) for portable learning and communication (www.olivetree.com).

Other Bible Software Resources. Christianbook.com's software category provides a large assortment of Bible software items, including software versions of many reference works listed in this section (such as the Expositor's Bible Commentaries) for those preferring digital resources (www.christianbook.com).

ATLASES

An Introduction to Bible Geography (Revised). This little paperback is a brief primer on Bible lands by Howard Vos, offering a dozen articles on regions in the Near East. If you've never studied the geography of the Bible, this would be a good place to start.

Baker's Bible Atlas. This atlas gives you the tools to reconstruct the scenes of history, containing excellent full-color maps and color photographs. Additional chapters trace the ongoing history of Bible lands, emphasizing the work of modern archaeologists.

Biblemaps.com. This CD-rom resource provides over 150 Bible maps that can be used in Powerpoint-like presentations, class notes, and personal study to visually communicate digitally (www.biblemaps.com).

Holman Bible Atlas. Thomas Brisco's atlas features hundreds of color photos and maps that show you the land, sites, and archaeology of the entire biblical world. A special addition is the chronological focus, noting every time period from the Patriarchs to A.D. 300.

Kregel Bible Atlas. A brief, amazing combination of photography and geography edited by Tim Dowley, noting several features of daily life in Bible times along with corresponding photographs and insightful notes.

The Macmillan Bible Atlas. Two Jewish scholars put together this outstanding atlas, one of the most accurate in existence. It features 262 maps and commentary on the religious, military, and economic aspects of the biblical world.

The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands. Barry Beitzel has created a beautiful presentation of the geography and terrain of biblical lands. He includes not only maps, but pictures and diagrams illustrating features of the Near Eastern world that affect our understanding of Scripture.

Sundaysoftware.com. This online resource offers two distinct Bible mapping software products, including maps with clickable interactive maps with zoom in and zoom out features (www.sundaysoftware.com).

The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Atlas. Edited by E. M. Blailock, this 491-page atlas is one of my favorites, because in the center are maps with overlays to do comparison studies of the changing geography.

COMMENTARIES

Ancient Christian Commentary Series. This creative series by InterVarsity Press collects the viewpoints of several Christian leaders throughout church history, providing a tremendous wealth of quotes and observations in one location.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary. Produced by a number of faculty at Dallas Theological Seminary, this two-volume set gives a sound introduction to the books of the Bible. Based on the NIV translation, it discusses matters such as authorship, recipients, date, theme, and purpose for each book.

The Expositor's Bible Commentary. This twelve-volume series by Frank Gaebelein offers a fine commentary on the biblical passages. If you have access to a theological library, consult this resource as a guide to your interpretive studies.

Galatians: The Charter of Christian Liberty. This is the only commentary on a single book of the Bible that I want to mention. Written by Merrill Tenney, this work is particularly instructive because it approaches Galatians using ten different methods of Bible study. If you want to learn from one of the masters, study the book of Galatians using this commentary as a guide.

The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible. This is a handy tool to have because editor Charles Laymon has packaged the articles into a single volume.

The MacArthur New Testament Commentary. A growing series of 25-plus volumes provides a lifetime of Bible study on the New Testament. For pastors and communicators, these commentaries offer extensive cross-references, historical, cultural, and language notes, and teaching outlines for a wide variety of uses.

OTHER RESOURCES

Biblical Archaeology Review. Published every other month by the nonprofit Biblical Archaeology Society, this periodical reports on archaeological findings and research that affect biblical studies. The articles are written at a level that anyone can understand. Back issues are especially helpful for researching subjects you are studying in Scripture (www.biblicalarchaeology.org).

The Great Age of Man Series. Time-Life Books has put together a series on the great civilizations in history, including *Ancient Egypt*, *Classical Greece*, and *Imperial Rome*. Although the editors take a thoroughly secular approach to their subjects, the material is presented extremely well and offers a general background to some of the cultural and historical aspects of the biblical account. The pictures are especially helpful (www.timelife.com).

The National Geographic Magazine. Don't forget this popular publication of the National Geographic Society. From time to time it features articles on places and topics related to Near Eastern and biblical studies. The photography alone is worth the price of a subscription (www.nationalgeographic.com).

“The Topical Memory System.” Produced by the Navigators, this set of flash cards will help you memorize portions of Scripture. It's a handy tool to carry with you and gives instruction on how to memorize (www.navpress.com).

Walk Thru the Bible's “Keyword Learning System.” A set of flash cards to help you memorize the names of the books of the Bible. Each card has the name of the book, a memory device called a “keyword,” and a brief overview of the book's content (www.walkthru.org).

ONLINE BIBLE STUDY RESOURCES

The Ankerberg Theological Research Institute. This media organization includes over 2,000 free articles on various aspects of Bible study, apologetics,

and comparative religions, including excellent audio and video content on contemporary biblical issues (www.johnnankerberg.org).

Bible.org. Includes over 40,000 pages of Bible study materials, including the NET Bible text and complete notes (www.bible.org).

Biblegateway.com. Published by Gospel Communications International, this resource provides searchable texts of twenty-one English translations and several foreign language Bibles, including some in audio format (www.biblegateway.com).

Desiring God.org. The media ministry of John Piper, offering twenty-six years of sermon transcripts and dozens of additional Bible study tools (www.desiringgod.org).

Grace to You. John MacArthur's media ministry, with hundreds of message transcripts, articles, and Bible study notes based on over thirty years of sermons (www.gty.org).

HeLives.com. Started by Dallas Seminary graduate and webmaster Tim Kimmel, HeLives.com gives users several high-quality multimedia Bible resources, such as its popular "Flash Thru the Bible" files on Jonah, Hosea, and Ephesians (www.helives.com).

Probe Ministries. An abundance of resources with 1200+ articles and biblical perspectives, including the ability to hear the Probe Radio program through real-time streaming or podcast (www.probe.org).