

Bite Size Bible Study

Bible Study #187

By Pastor Lee

How does one go about studying the Bible? This is a question I have pondered for decades. What is the right way? How do I get the full meaning from the passage? Is the story true or is it just telling me a truth through a made up story? All of these things and more I have wondered about most of my life.

I started reading the bible when I was in late Grammar School. Then I just read it, clicked off that I had read that section and promptly forgot it. My goal was to read as much as I was assigned by my Sunday school teacher. That probably was not a bad start for a beginner like me.

But over the years I have found better ways of reading and studying the Bible. I would like to share some of the ways I study now, but these ways are not the only ones and may or may not work for you.

I have learned that there is always a surface story, but there are generally subplots to each story. Sometime they are easy to spot, other times it requires a real archeological dig.

I usually start with the obvious story – the one on the surface that can't be missed.

But to dig deeper we need to ask questions like:

- What are the details?
- Who are the people and or nations involved?
- Are there hints of references to previous stories, places and people?
- Is it poetry? {Newer translations will show this}.
- Is it prose? {words and phrases that form sentences and paragraphs}
- Is it a letter? {To whom? Who are they? Who is writing? For what reason is he writing?}
- Are there parts that seem to be weird or over the top or impossible?
- Is there a right answer to the story? {Actually this is the wrong question – there may be many right answers}
- How am I limiting my understanding?

I read it, question it, analyze it, interrogate it, argue with it, speculate about it, challenge it, question it, poke at it – then smile and dance to it's rhythm. God is ok with this and is delighted that you would engage His teachings.

Let's see how this works (it will not be complete or include all of the above for lack of space).

Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade. The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, "How long will you

keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

John 10:22-30 NIV

What are the details?

Jesus is in the temple, He is there for a festival, He is being questioned about whether He is the Messiah.

Are there hints of references to previous stories, places and people?

What is the *Feast of Dedication*?

Who is posing the questions?

Where is *Solomon's Colonnade*? Why is it important?

What are the "Works" Jesus is referring to?

Why the reference to sheep?

Who are the sheep? Hint: Sheep follow a leader.

Is there a right answer to the story?

Is there only one answer to the questions above?

These and hundreds of other questions could be asked about this short passage. To really dig into the meanings is the challenge.

The way we can do this is to look at references such as:

- Footnotes in Study Bibles
- Other translations of the Bible
- Commentaries
- Dictionaries of Biblical Sites and Imagery
- Maps and site images can be found on the Internet
- Books on Jewish culture
- Books on Stories of the Bible by trusted authors
- Trusted Internet sites such as GCI, Christian Colleges, etc.
- There is also good information on YouTube, *but be careful; there are some really strange answers as well.* Stick with the trusted sites.

This list can become endless pursuit, but the rewards are also endless.

As you can see the depth to which one can dive seems endless. Time and your endurance will dictate how deep you will dive into any individual scripture. The rewards are great, but they take a type of dedication that is not for everyone.