

## EZRA, OUR MODEL

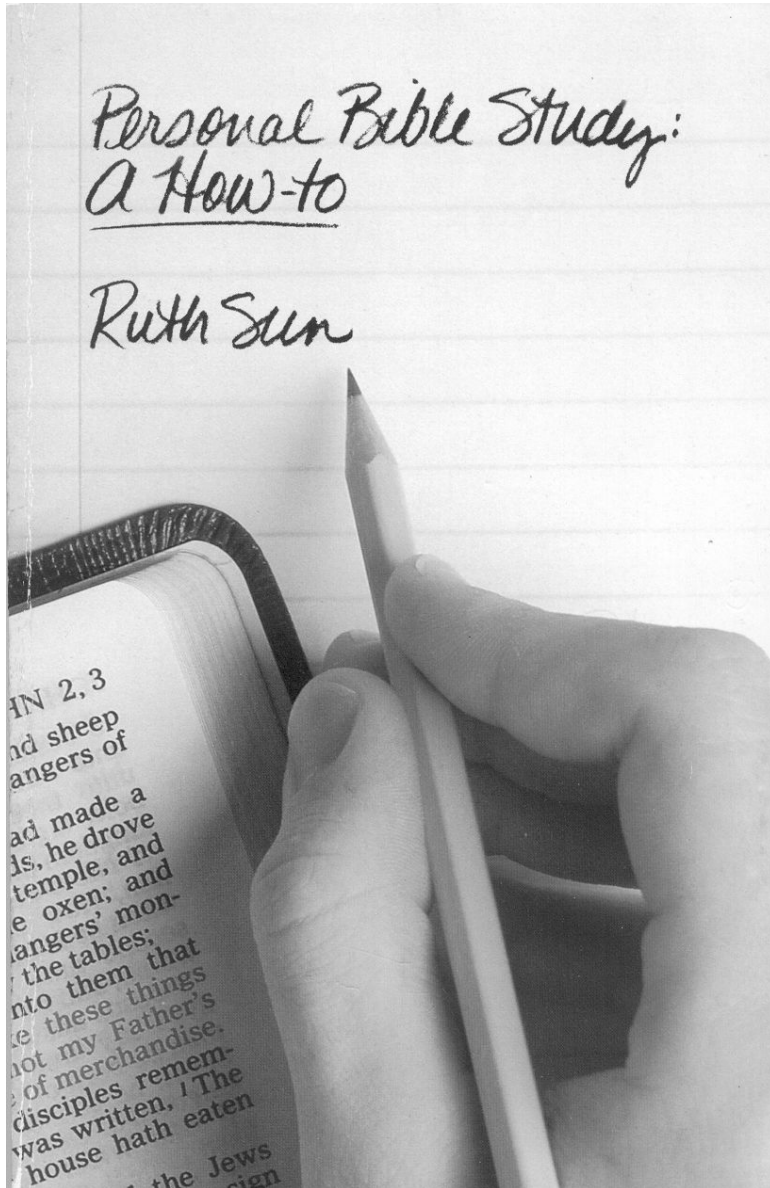
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“For Ezra had set his heart  
to study the law of the LORD,  
and to practice it,  
and to teach his statutes and ordinances in Israel” (Ezra 7:10) .

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“Ezra had set his heart”	DETERMINATION	Concern with <i>preparation</i> • Where is the Word of God in my priorities?	Inward preparation
“To study”	OBSERVATION	Concern with <i>facts</i> • What does the author actually write?	Objective study
	INTERPRETATION	Concern with <i>meaning</i> • What does the author mean?	
“To practice”	APPLICATION	Concern with <i>practice</i> • What does it mean to me here and now? • How does it touch my life?	Subjective experience
“To teach”	COMMUNICATION	Concern with <i>method</i> • How do I share? • How do I lead a Bible study?	Outward expression

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### EZRA, OUR MODEL

#### DETERMINATION

“For Ezra *had set his heart . . .*” (Ezra 7:10, italics added).

To “set one’s heart” implies a preparation of heart before the preparation of mind, an essential step in studying the Word of God. To “set” also has the idea of arranging things in priority according to their value. Ezra was convinced that the study of the Word of God should be on the top of his priority list. He was sure of it! We should also have the same conviction and make the study of the Word the object of our hearts’ desires.

Let us remember that it is impossible to truly love God and neglect His Word. As Derek Prince well points out:

Your attitude toward God’s Word is your attitude toward God Himself. You do not love God more than you love His Word. You do not obey God more than you obey His Word. You do not honor God more than you honor His Word. You do not have more room in your heart and life for God than you

have for His Word. Do you want to know how much God means to you? You can easily find out. Just ask yourself, How much does God's Word mean to me? The answer to the second question is the answer also to the first. God means as much to you as His Word means to you—just that much, and no more.<sup>1</sup>

#### Suggestions:

1. *Take an inventory.* First take an inventory of your life. As honestly as you can, answer this question: "Where is the study of the Word of God in my priorities?"
2. *Make the decisions.* Time often is the number one enemy in studying the Word of God. Remember, you will never find the time; you will have to take the time. Before you venture into this project make these decisions.
  - Determine the amount of time you can spend studying God's Word each day.
  - Determine the best time of the day for studying God's Word. Choose a time when you are fresh in body, mind, and spirit. If possible, make it the same time every day.

#### OBSERVATION

"Ezra had set his heart *to study* . . ." (Ezra 7:10, italics added).

Ezra had set his heart to study the Word of God. To

be sure, studying requires time and concentration. Studying the Word involves two steps, *observation* and *interpretation*. Observe this order always! Interpretation must be based on observation.

Observation is a careful searching for facts with the intent to find out what the author actually says. That requires more than just physical sight, it requires a mental awareness of what we see and read.

In observing an *action* (or a narrative) passage, ask basic questions, such as:

- *Who?*—people, identity
- *What?*—event, reaction, result
- *When?*—time, date, season
- *Where?*—geographical location
- *Why?*—cause, reason
- *How?*—method

In observing a *thought* (or logical) passage, take notice of:

- *Literary form*—poetry? prose? dialogue?
- *Words and phrases*—key words or phrases? recurring words? unfamiliar words?
- *Expression*—idiomatic expression? figures of speech?
- *Grammar*—verb? noun? pronoun? conjunction? command? question?

- *Structure of paragraphs*—how are they related to each other? to the chapter? Are there contrasts? comparisons?

Insignificant as they might appear, these questions enable us to see things as they really are. They are also keys to the mastery of the content. Remember, correct interpretation depends upon accurate observation.

**Suggestions:**

1. Read the passage over and over again. Don't assume you have seen everything in the passage with the first reading. If you would read it over carefully, you may be surprised to find how little you saw before.
2. Use pencil and paper. Make it a habit to study the Bible with pen in hand. Systematically record your observations as you read. This will enable you: 1) to grasp what you read, 2) to see the structure of the passage, and 3) to notice the train of thought.

#### INTERPRETATION

Whenever there is communication, verbal or written, there is interpretation whether or not we are aware of it. We are not aware of the presence of interpretation when the material is familiar to us because it takes place spontaneously. But it becomes obvious in the case of difficult material, such as the literary work of the past,

because the process of our understanding has been broken. Frequently, a gap seems to develop between the material and us—a distance between the author and reader. Therefore, interpretation is needed to bridge the gap or remove the distance, thus making the strange material understandable.

Interpretation involves an effort to discover the intended meaning of the author. That is done with the help of some guidelines. To determine what the author meant when the passage was written, two basic questions must be raised:

1. What did the author mean by this word, phrase, or clause?  
How did his first readers understand it?
2. What does this word, phrase, or clause imply?

Make sure we do not read twentieth-century ideas into the text and make the author say what he did not intend to say. The best way to avoid misunderstanding the author is to project ourselves back into the author's day. Try to put yourself in his shoes and think his thoughts. Remember, relevant application depends on sound and correct interpretation.

**Suggestions:**

1. Study tools: an unabridged English dictionary, Bible dictionaries and commentaries, and a concordance are most helpful.

## 2. Word study.

- a. Get all the meanings listed in the dictionary, including the root meaning.
- b. Tentatively decide on the meaning that best fits this particular context.
- c. Check to see how the word is used in other passages, especially by the same author. Use a concordance.
- d. Determine the meaning of the word in the text under study. Consult good commentaries to make sure your interpretation is accurate.

## APPLICATION

“For Ezra had set his heart to study . . . and *to practice it*” (Ezra 7:10, italics added).

Ezra did not study the Word simply for the sake of studying, but he studied it with a view to practice the truth. The book of Ezra, indeed, bears witness to that fact. By applying the law of the Lord, Ezra brought about the transformation of the national life of Israel, which resulted in unprecedented revival.

Let us keep in mind that the Bible was not written primarily for our information, but for our transformation. In writing to Timothy, the apostle Paul stated clearly the nature and the purpose of the Bible. He said, “The whole Bible was given to us by inspiration from God and useful to teach us what is true and to

make us realize what is wrong in our lives; it straightens us out and helps us to do what is right . . .” (2 Timothy 3:16, TLB).\* According to this verse, the four-fold purpose of the Bible is:

- *To teach us what is true.* So, as we read we ask ourselves, Is there any new light about God? Christ? the Holy Spirit? Satan?
- *To make us realize what is wrong in our lives.* Then ask, Is there a specific sin God wants me to confess and to forsake?
- *To straighten out our lives.* Then ask, Is there a good example God wants me to follow? Is there a bad example to avoid?
- *To help us do what is right.* Then ask, Is there a command I should obey? a promise I may claim?

The apostle James also reminds us, “And remember, it is a message to obey, not just to listen to, so don’t fool yourself” (1:22, TLB). In other words, Bible study calls for action. Without application Bible study will be a meaningless activity. Therefore, we must take time to think through thoroughly the personal application. Ask yourself the following questions:

1. What biblical principle (s) do I find in this passage? (Principles may be stated explicitly or only implied in the text.)

\**The Living Bible.*

2. How can I apply the newly found principle (s) to my daily life?
3. What change in my life must be made in the light of what I learned?

**Suggestions:**

Keep a notebook. Put down: 1) date, 2) Scripture references, 3) biblical principle (s) , 4) the decision or commitment you have made before the Lord. Be very specific! and 5) Keep a prayer record of God's answers to your prayers.

In short, "Apply yourself wholly to the Bible; apply the Bible wholly to yourself" (Bengel).

**COMMUNICATION**

"For Ezra had set his heart to study . . . and to practice . . . and to *teach*" (Ezra 7:10, italics added).

Consult chapter 5, "How to Lead a Group Bible Study-Discussion."

**NOTE**

1. Derek Prince, *Foundations for Faith*, Foundation Series: Book I (Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.: Derek Prince Publications, 1965-66), p. 20.