

PROMOTING INSIGHTFUL BIBLE STUDY

Through the Abundant Life Bible Amplifier Series

Exciting and challenging study of the Bible should be the goal of every Seventh-day Adventist school. Yet Bible study classes often fall short in that very attribute. It is all too easy to talk *about* the Bible to our students or have them read *about* it rather than leading them to study the Bible itself.

A new series of study aids on the Bible is being published by Pacific Press to bridge the gap between stated ideals about Bible study and what actually takes place in the classroom.

Personal Exploration

Unlike so many books that merely discuss the Bible, the Abundant Life Bible Amplifier volumes seek to provide students with a firsthand encounter with the Bible. Thus, the first section on each portion of Scripture is called “Getting Into the Word.” The instructional aim of this section is to involve students in a *personal* study of the Bible passage under consideration.

“Getting Into the Word” not only has students read the message carefully; it also helps them develop skills in using Bible study tools. Thus, each student is introduced to the use and contributions of concordances, marginal references, and

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maps of the Middle East. In addition, students are introduced to the ways that Bible dictionaries can provide background information about Scripture.

The goal is to make students proficient in using simple Bible study tools. They thus learn *how to study* the Bible for themselves, not just to rely on the explorations of their teachers or the “experts” on the topic.

The “Getting Into the Word” section assumes that students have certain minimal Bible study tools available in their classrooms, such as a Bible with maps and marginal cross-references, a concordance, and a Bible dictionary. While a *Cruden’s Concordance* is adequate for these exercises, the *NIV Exhaustive Concordance* (edited by E. W. Goodrick and J. R. Kohlenberger) is highly recommended. It is not only a more adequate concordance, but it is also based on the Bible version being used in the series. Of course, Young’s *Analytical Concordance* and *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance* are also a great improvement over Cruden’s to help with the “Getting Into the Word” exercises. The *SDA Bible Dictionary* or its equivalent (such as *The New Bible Dictionary*) is also recommended for classroom use with the series.

A typical exercise in a “Getting Into the Word” section is to assign selected Bible passages to be read through carefully at least twice. It then asks questions and/or makes assignments.

BY GEORGE R. KNIGHT

For example, part of the “Getting Into the Word” component for Matthew 1 reads:

1. *Would you start a book with a genealogy? Why do you think Matthew began his Gospel that way? In particular, according to verses 1 and 17, what is he*

encourage students to (1) look more carefully at Scripture in terms of the structure and meaning of the passage under consideration, (2) analyze the passage, and (3) compare it with other parts of the Bible. This gets students thinking about the

“revelation” to many Bible students.

Expert Explanation

The second component for each biblical passage is entitled “Exploring the Word.” Whereas “Getting Into the Word”

BIBLE STUDY

seeking to prove by his genealogy?

2. *Read the genealogy of Jesus in Luke 3:23-38. In what ways are Matthew’s and Luke’s genealogies alike, and how do they differ? In particular, note the earliest (in terms of history) name in each genealogy. Why do Matthew and Luke start the ancestry of Jesus with different men? What might that say about the differing audiences of their Gospels?*

3. *What four women (excluding Mary) do you find in Matthew’s genealogy? List them on a piece of paper. Now, through the use of a concordance and/or your Bible’s marginal cross-references, see what you can discover about these women in the rest of the Bible. In particular, what kind of people were they? What were their racial backgrounds? What were their professions or ethical experiences?*

4. *Was it common for Jews to include women in their genealogies? In answering that question, you may want to examine such Old Testament genealogies as those found in Genesis 10 and Ezra 2. Why do you think Matthew included the particular women he selected, rather than people like Sarah, Rebekah, or Rachel?*

5. *As you read verses 18 to 25, pick out the text that you believe comes closest to stating the mission of Jesus. What connection, if any, do you think there might be between that text and the four women listed in Matthew’s genealogy?*

The aim of such exercises is not only to help students get used to using Bible tools in their study. They also seek to

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Bible and its meaning; they wrestle with the ideas of the Bible *before* they read human comments on the text.

Of course, the Bible does not contain all the information that might be of value to students of God’s Word. Thus, readings in a good Bible dictionary may prove helpful. One example of such an exercise from the “Getting Into the Word” section for Matthew 2 is a request to look up Herod the Great in a Bible dictionary. The next question asks how this assignment helped the reader to better understand Matthew 2. Herod’s extra-biblical history throws a great deal of light on the biblical portrayal of his attitude toward the purported new king of the Jews. This information will come as an insightful

involved students in personal Bible exploration, this component explains the passage just studied. This is the traditional role of the commentary, but it occurs only after the student has personally grappled with the passage. Because of the explanatory nature of “Exploring the Word,” it makes up the bulk of each volume.

Unlike the *SDA Bible Commentary* series, the Amplifier volumes do not provide a verse-by-verse treatment. Rather, “Exploring the Word” components set forth the major *themes* in the various sections of each biblical book as they flow out of each Bible writer’s presentation. Whereas verse-by-verse commentaries have their uses and advantages, too often the flow of the biblical argument is lost in the minutia of the bits and pieces that explain the text. Thus, the verse-by-verse analysis and the broader, more contextual approach of the Amplifier volumes should be seen as complementary rather than as being in competition.

In “Exploring the Word,” the various Amplifier authors develop many of the issues raised in the “Getting Into the Word” exercises. In so doing, they bring the insights of scholarship into the discussion, further enriching the reader’s understanding of the biblical passage.

Application of Biblical Principles and Further Study

The third component for each biblical passage is “Applying the Word.” This section aims to have the student answer

questions that apply the lessons of each passage to daily life.

The fourth component, “Researching the Word,” is for those students who want to delve more deeply into texts or the history behind them. It will require more advanced Bible study tools than “Getting Into the Word” exercises. An exhaustive concordance and a verse-by-verse Bible commentary (such as the *SDA Bible Commentary*) will be needed for some of the exercises in this section.

The final component of each chapter is a list of recommendations for “Further Study of the Word.” Because of the advanced nature of the last two components in each Amplifier chapter, they are optional and have been developed for those who desire to further explore the text or the history behind it.

Educational Uses

The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier volumes are arranged to form a natural curriculum for the study of every portion of Scripture. Thus, they have several obvious uses for teachers and students.

The first is to provide structure, exercises, and discussion points for classroom study of the Bible. Not only will the teacher find substantial content for class discussion that is presented at a level easily understood by older students, but each volume also provides numerous opportunities for teaching about the use of Bible-study tools. All too often Bible teachers, in their desire to teach the truths of the Bible, have failed to help pupils grow into lifelong Bible students.

A second educational use of the Amplifier volumes is providing individual study projects for students who need more challenging work to keep them productively engaged or who for one reason or another desire or need to explore some portion of the Bible.

A third use is as a resource for teacher preparation—both in terms of content and providing guidelines for lesson out-

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lines. Beyond those professional and cognitive uses, the devotional usage of the Amplifier volumes should not be overlooked.

When completed, the Abundant Life Bible Amplifier will consist of at least 40 volumes that will cover the entire Bible in approximately 10,000 pages. The plan is to release four volumes per year for 10 years. Whereas several shorter books of the Bible will be combined in one volume, at least three (Revelation, Isaiah, and Psalms) will probably need two volumes each.

The Initial Volumes

The first four volumes have been on

the market since the spring of 1994. They are:

- *Exodus: God Creates a People*, by Jon L. Dybdahl, an Old Testament scholar and director of the Institute of World Mission at Andrews University.

- *Matthew: The Gospel of the Kingdom*, by George R. Knight,

professor of church history at Andrews University and general editor of the Amplifier series.

- *Timothy and Titus: Counsel to Young Pastors for Struggling Churches*, by Charles E. Bradford, retired president of the North American Division of SDA and a man who has functioned as a Paul to many young Timothys and Tituses.

- *Hebrews: Full Assurance for Christians Today*, by William G. Johnsson, editor of the *Adventist Review* and a New Testament scholar who has specialized in this Epistle.

Forthcoming volumes will include commentaries on Daniel by Bill Shea; the Gospel of John by Jon Paulien; Peter and Jude by Robert Johnston; Romans by John Brunt; Joshua by Roy Adams; the books of Samuel by Alden Thompson; Ezekiel by Robert McIver; James by Pedrito Maynard-Reid; and Esther, Ezra, and Nehemiah by Angel Rodriguez.

Each volume in the series is being published in both a hardback binding (\$17.95) and a less-expensive paperback (\$12.95) version. The hardback has the obvious advantage of durability and permanence—an important item of consideration for schools. There is a 20 percent discount for those who purchase all four of the initial volumes.

The volumes may be purchased through an Adventist Book Center, ordered through your local bookstore, or by calling (800) 765-6955. ☞

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