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Conducted by  
Ian S. Davidson

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***"Which books are helpful to the Biblical student?"***

Solomon once said: ". . . of making many books there is no end: and such study is a weariness of the flesh" (Ecclesiastes 12:12). I think the study he refers to here is that of books by men. Personally, I never tire of reading or studying the word of God.

There are too many religious books around. Many of them should be ignored because they are poor in content and not helpful at all to the Biblical student. For example, I recall reading many years ago around fifty books on the Holy Spirit for a special project. I was more confused afterwards than at the beginning! A lot of these works, in my opinion, should never have seen the light of day because the authors were clueless on the subject. The sad thing is that some of them were best sellers! The Biblical student, therefore, must be very discerning in all his purchases.

It is important, I think, that every Christian possesses a good **Bible Atlas**. A knowledge of the geography of the Bible lands goes a long way to making those big names (especially in the O.T.) meaningful. Not all Biblical sites have been identified. The archaeologists face many challenges and teams are work-all the time in Israel and elsewhere to make new discoveries and thus improve our knowledge and understanding of "The Land of the Book".

It is also important to own a good **Bible Dictionary**. Subjects dealt with are Aaron and Zuzim and everything in between! Personally, I prefer the British publications and, especially, the *New Bible Dictionary*, which is also available in illustrated form. The scholarship is the best around and I like the fact that the contributor of each article is clearly identified. Sometimes you get an Anglican slant or a Presbyterian slant or whatever, but on the whole subjects are well researched and profitable to read.

**Commentaries** come in all sizes. Of course, there are individual commentaries on every book of the Bible, as well as commentaries in one volume of the whole Bible. The former are much more detailed than the latter, although not always better. The decision to purchase is very often based on one's view of the author. For example, I would not hesitate to purchase a commentary by F.F. Bruce because I know I shall get a work of erudition and edification every time. (I like writers who regard the Scripture as God's revelation. Not every Biblical commentator holds to this view.) The best-known commentaries are those by Adam Clarke and Albert Barnes, both Presbyterians. They are rather out-of-date now, but still contain tremendous material for the Bible student. *The Daily Study Bible* (of the N.T.) by Prof. William Barclay (a theologian from my home-town of Motherwell) has sold in incredible numbers throughout the world, and is as popular as ever.

Commentaries by those from a Church of Christ background still sell well in the brotherhood. Names such as J.W. McGarvey, Moses E. Lard, Robert Milligan, B.W.

Johnstone, David Lipscomb, H. Leo Boles, Guy N. Woods, George W. Dehoff and Jim McGuiggan immediately spring to mind. There are, of course, many others.

Further, **Concordances** can also prove helpful to the earnest student of the Scriptures. *Cruden's Complete Concordance* (on the Authorised Version) is still a best-seller, as is *Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, which contains about 311,000 references in the Hebrew and the Greek. There is *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* and, more recently, the *N.I.V. Exhaustive Concordance*.

It is appreciated by most that the O.T. was originally written in the Hebrew language and the N.T. in the Greek language. There are books published in these areas to assist the non-specialist. The best-known work is *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* by W.E. Vine. I must admit I use it all the time. For example, on baptism he writes: "*Baptisma*, baptism, consisting of the processes of immersion, submersion and emergence (from *bapto*, to dip) . . ." Other volumes I use are *The Englishman's Greek Concordance of the New Testament*; R.C. Trench's *Synonyms of the New Testament* and *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament*. William Barclay's *New Testament Words* is also a must for those who wish to improve their knowledge of Koine Greek.

### HISTORY AND PROPHECY

All Biblical students should have a great interest in history. After all, four-fifths of the Bible has to do with prophecy and history. Prophecy is history foretold; history is prophecy fulfilled. Personally, I like to read books on Jewish, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Egyptian, Greek and Roman history. To get started, the best thing to do is to purchase a children's book on, say, the Egyptians, and take things from there. Never begin with the detailed and profound works because they can put one off for life. It is important to grasp the outline, the basics and the terminology of any subject before moving on. I cannot stress this enough.

Roman history is one of my favourite subjects. I realised early on that that it is an important back-drop to the New Testament. After all, the apostle Paul himself was a Roman citizen and Jesus and His fellow Jews knew what it was like to live in a land under Roman occupation. I like the writings of Michael Grant on both Greek and Roman history, although I could never recommend any of his books on Christian subjects. F.F. Bruce is different altogether. For example, his *New Testament History* and *The Spreading Flame (The Rise and Progress of Christianity from its First Beginning to the Conversion of the English)* are quite brilliant and reveal a man possessed with a Himalayan range of learning. I know him quite well and miss him a great deal.

**Bible Handbooks** are good additions to anyone's religious library. I would recommend *The Lion Handbook of the Bible*; *Halley's Bible handbook*; *Handbook of Life in Bible Times* by J.A. Thompson; and *The Hodder Bible Handbook* by Unger and Larson.

### ARCHAEOLOGY

Archaeology should be a subject of interest to all disciples of Christ. Again, there are good beginner's books around to whet one's appetite. I subscribe to the *Biblical Archaeology Review*, which helps me keep pace with all the changes and developments in the Biblical Archaeological field. B.A.R. is published in America.

The works by earlier British brethren should not be overlooked, although the writings of Alexander Campbell in America have tended to overshadow them. (Incidentally, I would recommend Campbell's publications to anyone, especially his *Christian System*.) David King is probably the best-known British writer. Others include Alexander Brown, Lancelot Oliver, R.K. Francis, James Anderson, John McCartney and the controversial William Robinson. Sister Rose Payne of Reading,

England is doing a sterling work republishing some of their material. Her efforts are to be highly commended.

I could go on and on. Finally, other writers I would recommend are John R.W. Stott, Michael Green, I. Howard Marshall, Francis Schaeffer, C.S. Lewis, Tony Campolo, W. Carl Ketcherside, A.M. Hunter, Alan Millard, Kenneth Kitchen, Henry M. Morris, Donald Wiseman, Edwin Yamauchi, E.J. Young, and G. Campbell Morgan. (If I have omitted your favourite religious writer then I apologise, but an article double this size would still not do the question justice.) However I trust I have been helpful in some small way to the questioner.

(Meantime, all questions, please, to Ian S. Davidson, 21 Glen Lyon,  
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