

Scripture Study Techniques: Christian Commentaries

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The Benefits of Christian Commentaries

Easy Method

The ability to review the work of those who have come before us is one of the fastest and easiest of study methods available. During the two thousand year existence of the Christian religion, a large volume of literature has been written about the Scriptures on almost every topic possible. In the past, this could require a large library of books. In the modern electronic age, much of this same information is available on the Internet or on computer disks made specifically for the study of the Scriptures. These commentaries will give information about what a passage means and how it applies to a believer's life. When we encounter writings of one who has been given a genuine and deep understanding of Scripture, it can feel like an oasis in the desert.

New Perspectives

Reading commentaries is a wonderful way to gain new and different perspectives regarding passages of Scripture. These perspectives can provide us with ideas and directions to follow that we might not think of alone.

Emphasis on Messiah

One of the greatest benefits of Christian commentaries is the amount of materials that study the Messiah. One type of study shows how the lives of individuals like Moses or Joseph foreshadowed the life of the Messiah. Other studies can show which prophecies apply to the Messiah and specifically whether they apply to His first coming or His second coming. Other studies can look at His ancestry and the related roles of priest, prophet, and king.

The Problems of Christian Commentaries

Finding Error

Reading commentaries can be the easiest of the study methods, but it can also be the greatest source of any errors. Whether we read the early church fathers, the Protestant reformers, or modern day evangelists we should remember that we are now looking at the writings of people which comment on the Scriptures and are not the Scriptures themselves. The existence of hundreds of denominations, each with a set of doctrine or beliefs, shows that we must be cautious.

"Whenever we observe that the opinions of the fathers disagree with Scripture, we reverently bear with them and acknowledge them to be our elders. Nevertheless, we do not depart from authority of Scripture for their sake."

Martin Luther

Disagreement

What should we do when there are differing ideas and understandings of the meaning of a passage? How do we know which one is correct and which are wrong? The first thing is to determine what comes from the Scriptures and what has been added by a person or a denomination. If further clarification is needed, then it is time to use the other Scripture study techniques.

Blessing and Cursing on Mounts Gerizim and Ebal

Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; {27} A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day: {28} And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known. {29} And it shall come to pass, when the LORD thy God hath brought thee in unto the land whither thou goest to possess it, that thou shalt put the blessing upon mount Gerizim, and the curse upon mount Ebal.

Deuteronomy 11:26-29 (KJV)

The Example

The ongoing example being used in this Scripture Study series starts with Deuteronomy 11:26-32 where the Israelites are first instructed to place the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal. This event can raise many questions. The two most prominent might be "Why were they commanded to do this?" and "What impact did it have on their lives?". Through this series, we will attempt to answer these and other questions.

Commentaries on This Event

There is an amazing amount of help to be found in commentaries. The passage of Deuteronomy 11:26-32 does not provide much information about the event. The commentaries will quickly point us to other chapters in Deuteronomy (including 27:11-15, 28:1-14, 28:15-45, 30:1-3) which give additional details and instructions for this event. Commentaries will also point us towards Joshua 8:30-35 where this event takes place and is fulfilled. Commentaries can take us further all through the Scriptures and show us where the blessings and curses spoken on the mountains also come to pass.

Commentaries on Related Events

Since many commentaries can produce many perspectives, we also find many related topics being discussed. There are many things that could be related to the blessing and the cursing. One such item is Jotham's pronouncement of blessing or curse on Mount Gerizim in Judges 9:6-15. A second item is the presence of a Levitical city for the Kohathites and a city of refuge being created in this area because of their dealing with judgments. A third item is the division of Israel between Rehoboam and Jeroboam in 1 King 12. There are also many related themes regarding the location of these two mountains. While Israel occupies the

territory we can notice that here is the location of Jacob's well, the town of Shechem, and the tribe of Manasseh. When this area comes under the rule of Samaria, we find the town of Sychar. This is the same place where the Messiah met the woman at the well in John 4:3-26. Each of these topics can further our understanding of what has, is, or will happen because of this event.

The Comments

What should we do after the commentaries have shown the many possible topics and directions that are possible? The first action is to pick out what is actually relevant to the topic being studied. The second action is to read the commentaries on those sections to learn what insights to the situation are provided. At the same time, being careful to discard whatever does not align itself with Scripture.

" ... We must not think to defer our covenanting with God till we are settled in the world, or must any business put us by from minding and pursuing the one thing needful. The way to prosper is to begin with God, ... "

Matthew Henry on Joshua 8:30-35

Summary

The use of Christian commentaries, whether online or from a book, is one of the easiest methods available for gathering information about an event or passage. It can yield increased information, perspectives, and ideas for related topics. It will also usually have an emphasis on the Messiah and how the event relates to our life. As long as one is careful to discern truth from error, this is one of the richest resources available.

Todd Elder is a believer in Messiah who wants to help people understand Scripture and know the message of Salvation. For more information from the Scripture Study Techniques series, please visit my website <http://www.exploringsalvation.info> and look under 'Scripture'.

Additional Information
