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## *Study Bibles*

I love books and have quite a collection of them. I am not a book collector so there is nothing particularly valuable, I just like books. I especially like Bibles and have a fairly good collection of them. I prefer Bibles by World Publishing with genuine leather covers (which are getting harder to come by as time goes on). So, I spend a good bit of time in book stores, secular and religious, looking at what is on the shelves that might be of interest. Over the past twenty to thirty years there has been a definite shift in the quality and workmanship in Bibles. Bonded leather is almost the exclusive offering of the “better” covers. Hard back and soft-cover Bibles have become more numerous as well and these probably won’t last very long at all when used as they should be. One of the more interesting developments is in the special interest and study Bibles that are being published. Over the years I have pretty much avoided purchasing study Bibles, mostly due to the added cost, but also because of the content. I have shared my opinion with others for years that one has to be careful when selecting a “study Bible” because the helps that are contained in the volume may not be that helpful. Years ago a good study Bible was one that had a concordance in the back, a moderate dictionary and a set of maps. Today, as one turns the pages of most Bibles that are intended to enhance and guide one’s exploration of the scriptures, it is not uncommon to see that the actual text of God’s word has been relegated to fifty percent or less of each page and the remaining area dedicated to the helps. It is not unusual to see the text interrupted at intervals for an entire page of additional materials to assist the reader. There are study Bibles on the shelf that are very good. These are those which contain more objective materials such as the dictionary and maps that I mentioned above. The trend however has been to use the sale of Bibles to showcase and promote doctrines that the Bible does not condone nor teach. There are special interest Bibles that I have seen for almost every group and problem. There are Bibles for recovering alcoholics, teens and others. I have recently seen Bibles that are for other more controversial minorities. As I have looked

through some of these I find that the “helps” are similar to what one hears in many liberal denominations today. Teen edition Bibles for example, are filled with hypothetical “what if” problem solving scenarios dealing with social issues and family problems as well overcoming such things as peer pressure. I have read through Bibles such as those for the Hispanic communities that deal with issues that are related to cultural bias and problems that are specific to them. There are Bibles for veterans, Bibles for singles and those dealing with almost any other life situation that you can imagine. I see a problem with this however. The “helps” that I have seen in some of these newer editions are really a showcase for the social counseling and problem solving that we might get from Oprah or Dr. Phil. Most of the time I have seen doctrines taught that are contrary to the teachings of the scriptures. One edition that I read through had detailed exercises to help explore and determine one’s special purpose and divine element within. All that sounds very good and may indeed be helpful in some way but the ideas promoted don’t appear in the scriptures. In my opinion the Bible is a “study” book period. There is a need for understanding in some respects and I will concede that a good dictionary is indispensable for understanding some things particularly from the King James Version of the scriptures. Aside from more objective helps, and a good teacher who really knows what they are talking about for the harder questions, there is no reason for anything else. I am a firm believer that God revealed His word and had it recorded in a such a way that if we are determined, and exercise the ability to reason, we can understand what he wants us to do without doctoral level theological guidance. Unfortunately too many folks just want someone else to do the work of studying for them and tell them what to do. How many people will lose their souls because the study Bible didn’t live up to it’s name.

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