

Manuscript Discovery:

ΡΑΣΩΧΑ ΕΝ ΑΡΤΟΥΣ ΕΙΝΑ ΦΑΓΩΣΙΝ
ΟΥΤΟΙ ΤΟΥΤΟ ΔΕ ΕΒΑΛΕΝ ΠΙΣΤΩ
ΑΥΤΟΝ ΑΥΤΟΣ ΓΑΡ ΗΔΕ ΤΗ ΗΜΕΛΛΕΝ
ΠΟΙΕΙΝ ΑΠΕΚΡΙΘΗ ΟΥΤΑ ΔΥΤΩ ΟΦΙ
ΛΙΤΙ ΠΡΟΣ ΔΙΑΚΟΣΙΩΝ ΔΗΡΙΩΝ ΑΡ
ΤΟΙΟΥ ΚΑΡΚΟΥΣΙΝ ΑΥΤΟ ΤΟΙΝΑ
ΕΚΑΣΤΟΣ ΒΡΑΧΥΤΙ ΛΑΒΗΛΕ ΓΕΙΝ
ΤΩΤΙΣ ΕΚΤΩΝ ΜΑΘΗΤΩΝ ΑΥΤΩ
ΑΝΔΡΕΑ ΣΟΔΑ ΕΛΦΟΣ

The Why? and How?

ΤΕΤΡΟΥ ΕΣΤΙΝ ΠΝΑΡΙΟΝ ΩΣΤΕ ΝΑ
ΕΧΕΙ ΠΕΝΤΕ ΑΡΤΟΥΣ ΚΡΙΘΙΝΟΥΣ
ΚΑΙ ΔΥΟ ΨΑΡΙΑ ΑΛΛΑ ΤΙΣ ΕΣΤΙΝ ΤΑ
ΤΑ ΕΙΣΤΟΣ ΟΥΤΟΥΣ ΕΙΠΕΝ ΟΥΝ ΟΙΣ
ΠΟΙΗΣΑΤΑΙ ΤΟΥΣ ΑΝΟΥΣ ΑΝΙ ΑΠΕ
ΣΙΝ ΗΝ ΔΕ ΧΟΡΤΟΣ ΠΟΛΥΣ ΕΝΙ
ΤΩ ΤΟΙΝΑ ΑΝΕΤΕΣΑΝ ΟΥΝ ΑΝ
ΔΡΕΣ ΤΟΝ ΑΡΙΘΜΟΝ ΩΣΤΕ ΠΝΑ
ΡΙΣ ΧΙΛΙΑΙ ΕΛΑΒΕΝ ΟΥΝ ΤΟΥΣ
ΟΙΣ ΕΙΣ ΚΑΙ ΕΥΧΑΡΙΣΤΗΣΑΣ ΕΒΑ
ΛΕΝ ΟΙΣ Ο ΑΝΙ

Reading the Bible is not simply an intellectual exercise. We read it because through it, God wants us to know him and love him. Never lose sight of this aim - Bible study is only ever a means to an end. Or is Judgement day a theological exam?

Why MD?

The Manuscript Discovery method is not particularly new or radical. It is more a way of getting back to basics. Its aim is to help people read the Bible for themselves in a deep and personal way.

The Principles

1 The Bible was written to be understood.

Is the Bible too hard for the average person to understand? It was written to be read and understood, and was not written to be difficult. Conversely, it is not necessarily easy! Remember Jesus' urging to seek in order to find.

It was written by real people for real people about issues that affect us all. It may not be possible to understand every part of every book, but the basic messages of the Bible are fairly clear. After studying a passage carefully, you'll have a 90% grasp of the text - which is more than enough for our purpose of learning more of God's character, and following Him.

If we read with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and desire to learn there is no reason why our understanding should not be deepened significantly.

The upheaval of Europe at the Reformation concerned this point:

John Wycliffe (1328-1384) "All Christians should seek to read and understand the Bible in their own language, just as Jesus Christ gave the gospel out of his own mouth."

William Tyndale (1494-1536) to a learned cleric; of his aim to translate the Bible into English. "If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the scripture than thou dost."

So with MD we go straight to the text and read it. We expect to be able to make sense of it, once we have worked at it. Other aids for reading it, such as commentaries, we leave until we have a fair understanding for ourselves. We must use the Bible as our primary resource; not as a reference to back up our favourite commentary.

2 Use basic reading methods

•Study whole books. Each book is a unity. They were written as separate documents, by a particular writers for particular purposes. We cannot properly understand a part of a book without seeing how it fits in with the rest. We need the whole picture, not just jigsaw peices. If we read the Bible bit by bit, we tend to jump to conclusions, to speculate about the meaning because passages do not give us enough information to answer the questions we ask of it. If we read the whole book, we can refer to other parts of it to help us see what is meant. That is, we can look at how a particular issue is dealt with through the book as a whole. Then we can understand better what a small part is saying.

The original Greek and Hebrew texts have no divisions, punctuation, not even a space between the words! Hebrew doesn't even have vowels! Be aware that the Bible you usually use, the layout is editorial comment only. Especially note that paragraphs and subheadings are editorial comment only 20 years old - in documents 2000 and more years old. So feel free to disregard or even disagree with them!

•Look for the writer's overall purpose. Read the book and find out why you think the writer wrote it. Look for clues as to -

Who is it from?

Who is it to? What is their situation?

Why? What issues does it address?

Keep these questions at the back of your mind always: formulating some answers will help you understand why some material is there (and maybe some is not!) and the overall meaning of the book. And then understanding the meaning will help you understand the writer's purpose.

•Look for structural aspects. How does it start? How does it end? Is there a climax? Is there a turning point? Are conclusions drawn? Do the parts build on each other? Do they explain each other? Contrast with each other?

•Note the type of writing. Is it history, commentary, argument, vision, poetry, quotation, literal, metaphorical? Who is it written for? What knowledge does it assume?

3 Learn for yourself (with help)

MD challenges you to make your Bible knowledge part of yourself, not just information fed in. It is more likely to be assimilated because you have seen the difficulties and worked them through yourself. Leaders will

resist the temptation to answer questions for you, and will refer you back to the text as much as possible. Besides, there is no guarantee they'll be right.

The group in which you work will provide checks to possible heretical ideas! And stimulate you to see far more than you would have done on your own. Especially as each of you must justify your ideas from the text alone as your authority.

4 It requires effort

While the Bible was written to be understood, the answers don't necessarily come easily. It requires effort and perseverance. However, the rewards are well worth it.

Method

MD is a layered approach to reading. It starts with a broad overview and works down to the specific. With each reading, you go in a bit deeper. It takes the same amount of time as the usual method. The difference is that usually, we look at chapter 1, then chapter 2, etc., to build up an understanding of a book. In MD we look at the whole, first time impressionistically, then a bit more carefully, then more carefully again, etc. It's from overview to detail, rather than the reverse.

1 First Reading. Read quickly, looking for impressions. Don't even have a pen in your hand! Read as you would a novel for the first time. Don't examine the details, or try to answer questions. Try to shut out preconceived ideas and read as if all the concepts are new.

2 Second Reading. This reading is similar to the first, but a bit more in depth. You can mark the text by underlining or questioning. However, only raise questions; don't attempt to answer them. Look for issues, recurring ideas, questions, oddities and anything that would bear further investigation.

3 Structure. Examining the structure is part of trying to get a feel for the book as a whole. Look for how parts relate to each other; what material belongs together, what is separate. Are there distinct sections? Are there connections between sections? Does the way the book is arranged suggest the writer's purpose? Is there some rhyme or reason to the way the book is organised, or is it randomly put together?

The purpose of this exercise is to help you come to better grips with the contents of the material. We don't have the original writer's first draft - so we don't have an inflexible answer which we expect you to get perfectly right. Everybody's answers are helpful to the whole group.

Finding a careful or neat structure is more important in some books (and for some people) than others. However, I think it is a useful exercise to do this step, at whatever level is most helpful to you. Some hints are -

- choose big blocks of material, not simply paragraphs.
- try to give each block a title.
- don't let yourself get bogged down, or look for subtleties that may not be there.

Each group member should report on his/her structure to the whole group. Again, don't get bogged down. This step is to serve your understanding - don't be a slave to it. Flowing on from this report, have a group discussion on what more you've found out from the text. What themes, ideas or questions would you like to follow up? What do key words mean?

4 Themes. Do some research on a theme that interests you, looking at the whole text. If indecisive about choosing a subject, a study on what the passage teaches you of God's character will never fail! It is often a good idea for the whole group to look at one theme together before moving to individual work.

When you have chosen your theme, go through the manuscript and find all the relevant material. Then ask questions about the issues, and answer them from the text, eg. if your theme is the character of God, you could ask, 'Is God loving?' Answer this question from the material you have found in the text. Always use the text to support your conclusions. Test your ideas to see if they are true for the whole text.

5 Application. The primary application is the doing of the study! You've learnt that you can yourself learn more about God - without a middle man. Consequently you can have more confidence in approaching him on your own. Knowing Him more, you can more deeply love him, respect him, honour and serve him.

MD is a Bible study method. With MD we are trying to understand a particular book of the Bible, rather than talking about ourselves. However, it is very important that we go on from there and see how the Bible teaching affects our lives. Either at the end of studying the book, or

as you go, talk about the application of your new understanding to your relationships with God and with others, and how God wants us to live.

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Front Cover Illustration

Papyrus Bodmer II (P⁶⁶), Page 34: John 6:5-11

from Encountering New Testament Manuscripts; Jack Finegan, SPCK.

The text says (in part) of the manuscript, that the "sigma which appears at the beginning of Line 11 is superfluous, and is so indicated in the transcription. It looks, however, as if the scribe himself may have tried to erase the mistaken letter. In Line 16 οι (the) was omitted, and then written in above the line. In Line 18 the letter e is written in above the word πεντακισχιλιοι (five thousand), evidently to make a familiar variant spelling of χιλιοι as χειλιοι."

It shal greatlie helpe ye
to understonde Scripture,
if yow marke
not onelie that whyche
is wrytten or spoken,
but of whome,
with what wordes,
at what tyme,
where,
and to what intente,
in what circumstaunces,
consyderynge what goeth
before and what folweth,

John Wycliffe

