

## THE ROLE OF THE BIBLE IN BIBLE STUDY

By Eli Bernard

The title of this page sounds a little silly, doesn't it? However, how many of your class members actually bring and read their own Bible in "Bible Study". In churches across America, the answer is "not many." But perhaps that shouldn't come as a surprise.

In 1981, as I was working on my master's degree, I had a class where the textbook cost in excess of \$35. We used one chapter of the book early on in the semester and then never referred to it again. No one in the class brought their copy of the text book after the third week in class. Why carry that weight around if we weren't going to use it?

I had another class where - and I'm not making this up - the instructor read to us every session. He had written his own text for the class - a full 2" ring binder notebook, of which we all had purchased a copy. Beginning on the second class meeting, he read the text of the chapter to us in class time. The futility of this was painfully obvious, as our homework assignment had been to read that same chapter.

That's the way it went for the entire semester. If our homework was to read chapter 3, then on the following class meeting, the professor would read chapter 3 to us. I know of no one that read past chapter 3 for homework or brought their books to class. We knew the instructor would do all the work for us at the next class meeting.

Bible Study materials are important. They help provide a balanced plan for Bible

Study. They can provide information and insight into the understanding of scripture. But they are not the Bible.

Though they are good and helpful things, no one who develops these materials would begin to wish that they would take the place of the Bible. They are tools to help us know, and know about, our God. They can be very useful in preparing for Bible Study.

In 2 Kings 18:4, we see that the Israelites were burning incense - an act of worship - to the bronze serpent. King Hezekiah destroyed the bronze serpent that was used to preserve the lives of the Israelites on their wilderness journey.!

Destroying it was right in God's eyes. You see, the serpent was supposed to be a tool - something used in the wilderness journey to remind God's people where to look in times of trouble. It was a visible reminder and physical presence to motivate obedience.

It was never intended to be the source. It was merely a resource. But when God's people made the resource the source, it was destroyed.

Commentaries, quarterlies, and books do not have the power to change lives. God's word does.

Keep the source the source.

But in too many cases, like the first class above, the real text book is never used, so the class members stop bringing it. In other cases, the class on Sunday morning is just a repeat of the lesson material that was read the week before class. In both of these situations, the real text book is missing and the passion for learning is gone.

If the facilitator does not involve the class members in actively reading God's word, they will see little need to carry God's Word - anywhere. But, if members of the Bible study group can be lead to discover God's Word for themselves, then the Facilitator has done a great work.

People who discover truth are motivated to discover more. The Bible Study facilitator, by leading the class to read and discover for themselves, can actually help motivate believers to spend more time in the Word outside of Sunday morning, and thereby, empower those in the class to carry God's Word with them everywhere.