

UBS GUIDELINES FOR STUDY BIBLES (MAY 1992)

STUDY BIBLES¹

1 DEFINITION AND PURPOSE

- 1.1 For the purposes of these Guidelines, a study Bible is defined as a Bible published by one or more national Bible Societies, and containing, in addition to standard readers' helps, further helps intended to enable readers to understand more fully, and practically to apply for themselves, the meaning of the biblical text (see also 3.1).
- 1.2 Study Bibles, like other Bible Society publications, exclude doctrinal note and comment. "Doctrinal" in this context is understood to refer to contentious theological and denominational issues. Study Bibles accordingly should not include material which imposes post-biblical doctrinal formulations, expresses the distinctive tenets of a particular denomination or theological tendency, or prescribes any specific contemporary application. The study materials, however, should be written so as to allow the readers to discover applications to their own situations.
- 1.3 Study Bibles should reflect the broadest possible consensus among biblical scholars and in the believing community. Where no such consensus exists, various views may be concisely presented, only if relevant to the intended readers.
- 1.4 Bible Society study Bibles may be seen as an extension of the principle of functional equivalence in the sense that the study materials make explicit the implicit information needed for understanding the text. Such information could include linguistic, cultural, historical and geographical information which would have shaped the response of the original readers.

2 READERSHIP

- 2.1 To discover the felt needs of the intended readers, it is necessary to carry out market research before a study Bible project commences, and *progressively* to field test the material before final publication. The results of the research, while always open to reassessment in the light of fresh data, should guide the publishers and authors of the study Bible throughout the project.
- 2.2 It is however recognized that no study Bible can meet all the intended readers' felt needs: either because of limitations of space (a study Bible is normally a one-volume

¹ Otherwise known as annotated Bibles, Bibles with study notes, "explained" Bibles etc. In these Guidelines, wherever the context permits, the expression "Study Bible" is used to include all scriptures with study materials, not only complete Bibles.

publication); or because readers' felt needs conflict with Bible Society principles (compare 1.2) or because readers ask questions requiring information which is not available, or guidance which is best given personally.

- 2.3 Conversely, it is sometimes necessary to provide information (for example, on alternative readings) of which the intended readers are not in a position to feel the need, but which will enhance their understanding of the text,
- 2.4 In many language areas, it may be possible to publish only one study Bible. Most current study Bibles are intended for local church leaders, and similar educated but not theologically trained Christians. It is however possible to envisage a study Bible for new Christians and new Bible readers. Each publisher should define the intended readership in the light of the local situation, the number and scope of similar publications available, and its own constitution. Each publisher should then define the [general] terms of reference for each project in consideration of these factors.

3 PARTICIPANTS

3.1 Publisher

- 3.1.1 By definition (see 1.1) the publisher is normally a national Bible Society, represented by its board and by its chief executive officer. As with all Bible Society publications, it is the publisher's responsibility to initiate a study Bible project; to appoint and if necessary dismiss authors, editor, and any other participants; to review and, if necessary, in consultation with the author, modify the manuscript; to make appropriate financial arrangements; to approve publication; and to ensure effective promotion and distribution.
- 3.1.2 In exceptional circumstances, one national Bible Society may undertake publication on behalf of and in consultation with one or more other Bible Societies; or it may publish jointly with a non-Bible Society publisher. In such circumstances, it is recommended that adherence to the present Guidelines be maintained as closely as possible.

3.2 Authors and editor

- 3.2.1 The authors of study Bible material should be competent in their respective areas, but should be chosen primarily for their ability to communicate with the intended readers.
- 3.2.2 Wherever possible, the authors should work as a team, with periodic meetings, under the coordination of an editor. If the editor is not a UBS or national Bible Society translation officer, such a translation officer should give technical guidance to the project, and should recommend publication to the publisher.
- 3.2.3 The authors should agree with the editor at the beginning of the project about the procedures to be followed, the general scope and style of the material, and deadlines for the various stages of the work.

- 3.2.4 The editor is responsible, in the name of the publishing Society and under the general direction of its General or Executive Secretary, for commissioning authors, ensuring consistency of scope, style and presentation, and maintaining steady progress towards the planned publication date.

4. THE TRANSLATION

- 4.1 The content of additional study Bible material will partly depend on the type of translation used as the study Bible's base text and the standard readers' helps which accompany that translation. It is usually unsatisfactory to link study Bible material with a translation other than that for which it was originally intended. If for exceptional reasons this is done, the additional material should be thoroughly revised.
- 4.2 Study Bibles should preferably be based on a common language or other functional/dynamic equivalent translation. This procedure has the following advantages:
- 1) A maximum of semantic content is clearly expressed in the text, thereby reducing the number of explanations required in the additional material.
 - 2) Use of such a translation will encourage readers to study whole sections of the text, rather than concentrating exclusively on individual words.
- 4.3 Where such a translation is used, it is sometimes appropriate to give a literal translation in the notes, so as to bring out formal or structural features of the original text.
- 4.4 Where, for special reasons, a study Bible is based on a formal correspondence or traditional translation, the additional material should attempt to bring out elements of meaning obscured by the translation.
- 4.5 It is sometimes advantageous to combine the preparation of additional material with *recommendations to the publisher* for the revision of the text of the translation.

5. ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

5.1 General

- 5.1.1 It is assumed that a study Bible will include standard UBS categories of reader's helps; namely, introductions; alternative readings; alternative renderings; explanation of proper names, plays on words, historical backgrounds, and cultural differences; cross references; and section headings.
- 5.1.2 Study Bibles contain further relevant background material, such as information of a linguistic, literary, historical, cultural, sociological, and religious nature readily available to the original readers, but not to the intended readers of the study Bible. Much of this

information may be more concisely and attractively given in the form of graphic features such as maps, tables, and illustrations

5.1.3 Study Bible material should not repeat or rephrase the text,

5.1.4 Homiletical language should be avoided, but study material should allow the text to reach the mind, heart and will.

5.2 Old Testament and New Testament

5.2.1 Study Bible material should allow each part of the Bible to speak with its own distinctive voice (see also 5.3).

5.2.2 Where an Old Testament text is specifically quoted or alluded to in the New Testament, the reader of the Old Testament text should be concisely informed of that fact, and additional help given as necessary in a note on the corresponding New Testament text. The same procedure would apply to passages in the deuterocanonical/ apocryphal books of the Old Testament alluded to in the New.

5.2.3 Help should be given in understanding inconsistencies in the text, within a view of biblical teaching as a diverse but coherent and developing whole. Where necessary for this purpose, cross-reference may be made from one text to another text which complements or supersedes the first. A New Testament meaning should not, however, be imposed on an Old Testament text.

5.2.4 Authors of study materials on the deuterocanonical/apocryphal books of the Old Testament should bear in mind their differing status in various Christian communities, and the sensitiveness on this issue of some segments of the Christian public.

5.3 Introductions

5.3.1 An introduction to the whole Bible may discuss, in a factual and non-prescriptive manner, the Bible's special religious value, and views of its inspiration and of the canon. It may also include suggestions on how to use a study Bible.

5.3.2 Introductions to the Old and New Testaments may outline their respective geographical, historical and cultural settings.

5.3.3 Introductions to groups of books (for example, in the Old Testament, to the narrative, prophetic, and wisdom books; in the New Testament, to the gospels and letters) should mention general literary aspects which may be unfamiliar to the intended readers.

5.3.4 Introductions to individual books should as far as possible cover all the major relevant questions on which the intended readers are likely to want or need supplementary

information, especially on the genre of each book, and its place within the biblical tradition.

5.3.5 Introductions to sections may be used to indicate the central theme or structure of the passage.

5.4 Notes

5.4.1 There should always be a clear link between a note and the text to which it refers.

5.4.2 Notes on particular terms should normally be contextual rather than lexical; that is, they should be related to the meaning of a term in a specific context.

5.4.3 Additional references to ancient versions should be avoided unless they are likely to reflect an original reading or a significant interpretation of it, or are required by the tradition of the intended readers.

5.4.4 It may be necessary to give the meaning of biblical metaphors, where this is not clear in the text.

5.4.5 Notes should wherever possible appear on the same page as the text to which they refer.

5.4.6 Notes should not normally exceed an average of 25% of the printed page.²

² This restriction would not apply to computerized hypertext study Bibles, in which the screen would display the biblical text, and additional information could be called up at the reader's choice.