

An approach to reading the Bible

Introduction:

The Bible is first and foremost God's written word to God's world, it is a living word, ' it contains all that is necessary to salvation'.

By this I mean, that which is found in Holy Scripture reveals to humanity the means of grace and salvation, from the situation in which we find ourselves. God's free gift to all who believe and trust in Jesus of Nazareth, who through his death enabled it to be given. Without salvation humanity is damned for eternity, the acceptance of it produces nothing less than new life for eternity which begins now.

It is revealed because God chooses it to be revealed, Christianity is not a self-help organisation, and there are plenty of those around. Christianity relies upon a God who is both faithful and just and a man who is God, coming into this world to show us the way back to a forgotten and neglected Father, and an ever present Spirit who guides and strengthens us, even today.

The 66 books of The Old and New Testaments tell us this story, they reveal within their pages an honest and often blunt picture of faithfulness and unfaithfulness, of peoples lives changed and challenged by the living God. The various styles and types of literature often give a confusing picture but as you immerse yourself in God's story it's truth will emerge through the men and women, the poetry, the history, the lists and genealogies, these will begin to illuminate the pages you read and absorb. There will always be difficult passages and accounts: do not shy away from them, but neither become caught up in their eddies.

As a schedule I suggest the following, but remember there is no one path through the Bible.

A Bible reading scheme

Mark's Gospel will give you a starting point.

The Acts of the Apostles then gives the early history of the church.

A trip back to the beginning is now in order.

Genesis chapters 1 to 11 give an introduction as well as setting out the pre-history.

Then the rest of Genesis and Exodus to acquaint you with God's chosen people.

You can read the rest of the Torah/Pentateuch at this point, (being Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) but only if you enjoy lists and legal documents interspersed with narrative. Come back to it later when you see the people in need of a legal code to help hold them together as a nation, surrounded by godless nations, seeking to maintain their identity.

Joshua and Judges are lots more fun!

If you want a bit of a different outlook and historical literature isn't your bag try some of the Proverbs and Job for a change.

The story at this point will be beginning to emerge of the Living God's involvement and identification with a people who at best serve Him poorly. It continues:

Ruth, Samuel and Kings

Then the Psalms, Song of Songs/Solomon and Ecclesiastes

The nation is falling apart, which is prophesied by the great prophets, but before delving into them, pop back to Chronicles, then Isaiah, and Jeremiah.

Ezra and Nehemiah are more narrative based, then move onto and read

Ezekiel and the Minor Prophets, Daniel through to Malachi

Esther can be read in the middle of the prophets as a story of courage in a foreign land.

That covers the Old Testament, what happens between the end of the Old and the New can be found in the Apocrypha, which are other ancient works sometimes found in Bibles but not given the same authority.

Matthew is probably the best next book to read since he draws heavily from the Old Testament, writing some say for a Jewish audience.

The rest of the New Testament is composed mainly of letters or Epistles written to various churches around the Mediterranean . If your Bible has some maps why not treat yourself to a virtual tour. Acts is your reference point to a large degree.

Romans is a major letter, so I suggest reading John's gospel before hand.

James is full of good stuff if you haven't read it yet .

Finally Luke's Gospel and Revelation, or The Apocalypse of John as some call it. The first three chapters are addressed to a cross-section of churches, then it becomes visionary and classically apocalyptic . The key thing to see unless you're into unbreakable codes and interpretation is that " ...in the end God " cf. The beginning of Genesis, and the beginning of John's Gospel ; and that the Lamb wins.

If you have missed any go back or even revisit some. I find that each time I read them, the Holy Spirit shows me something new.

Enough said, enjoy.