

Getting Started with Bible Study

January 8 2023

The Bible is a fascinating book. It is full of life lessons and spiritual insights, but it is much more for a Christian. We believe it comes from God and reveals his will for our lives. The challenge is in learning to interpret the Bible.

There is a blessing for anyone who reads the Bible. If you are new to Bible study, try reading the book of Proverbs in the Old Testament or the Gospel of Luke in the New, but if you truly want to understand God's revelation, you'll need to roll up your sleeves and learn how to study the Bible.

Historically, there have been many different methods - some good and some, well, not so good. So, for example, the ancient Jewish people interpreted God's Word using four different approaches. The first is simply the literal method: "It means what it says." That reminds me of the old adult Bible studies where the teacher would read a verse and then ask the class to comment. After a long, awkward pause, someone would pipe up, "It says what it means, and it means what it says." Fair enough.

The second method the Jewish people call *midrash*. "This is just like that." We use this approach with stories. We look for parallels between that event and our current situation and conclude, "If I do that, then this will happen to me too!"



The third approach is a little more complicated. The Bible is full of prophecies, and the *peshar* method says, "This is the fulfillment of that." The Apostle Paul warns, "In the later days people will be lovers of self ..." Since we can look around and see selfish people, then the *peshar* method concludes, "These must be the last days!"

Finally, there is an *allegorical* approach. This method teaches that in addition to the literal meaning of Scripture, there is a figurative meaning. Thus both Jews and Christians have taught the wonderful love poem, Song of Songs, isn't really a celebration of the love between a groom and

his bride. Instead, they say it is an allegory about the love between God and Israel (or Christ and the Church). This was the dominant method of biblical interpretation in Alexandria under Clement and Origen and into the middle ages. Unfortunately, the allegorical approach allowed people to twist the clear meaning of Scripture into whatever flight of fancy they chose.

No book is more important than the Bible, so it should come as no surprise there have been major battles over how to interpret it. However, there is something worse and that is not reading the Bible at all!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the initials 'JH'.

Daily Bible Reading Week One

Four great beginnings can describe the texts for our Daily Bible Readings this week. We started in Genesis chapter 1 on Sunday, January 1 which is all about *the beginning of the world* and we will continue reading through Genesis 7 on Saturday.

The second series of readings span Ezra chapter 1 through Ezra chapter 7. This is the new beginning for Israel as they return from Babylonian Captivity. Jeremiah prophesied this would happen after 70 years in captivity. I like to visualize dates by putting them into modern terms. Imagine if the fall of Jerusalem occurred in 1953. That would put Ezra chapter 1 in 2023. For those of us who can remember back that far, it wasn't that long ago was it? Still, if we had lived in Babylon for 70 years, it might be hard to pack up and return wouldn't it? Which group do you identify with? Those who

eagerly returned to Israel, or those who remained behind in Babylon?

Our third series of readings began with Matthew chapter one. We traced the family tree with all those hard names in the first half of the chapter, but then our hearts were warmed by the story of the baby in the manger. What stood out to you as you continued reading chapters 2 through 7? Wow! We saw Jesus tempted. (What did you learn about dealing with temptation from the example of Jesus?) Then we listened to the greatest sermon ever preached: the Sermon on the Mount. Did anything stand out to you?

My favorite series this week was reading Acts chapters 1 - 7. I love the story of the disciples gathered in the Upper Room and then spilling out into the street at the coming of the Holy Spirit. Peter's sermon in chapter two is as masterful as it is moving.

As I read the Book of Acts, I highlight every occurrence of the

Holy Spirit. (There are 45.) I think that is the best way to learn about the Spirit and his work. Doing that led me to write my second book, *The Wind from the Shadows*. The Holy Spirit never draws attention to himself. He is always pointing to Jesus.

As you read, be sure to keep a notebook nearby. Write down any questions. Note any lessons and special thoughts you observe. You will come to treasure your reflections, and we can share them with each other.

Finally, a note of encouragement. Sometimes we fall behind in our readings. That's why we have the printed reading schedule. (Thanks to Greg Swango and Donna Bingamon!) If you find yourself falling behind, just skip to today's reading and catch up later. Don't let Satan discourage you. The blessings will still flow and you can catch up when things slow down. Just keep reading!

Read the Bible Through in a Year!
by Robert Murray M'Cheyne
(Sundays listed in BOLD)

JANUARY *"This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" (Mt. 17:5).*

___ 01	Gen. 1	Matt. 1	Ezra 1	Acts 1
___ 02	Gen. 2	Matt. 2	Ezra 2	Acts 2
___ 03	Gen. 3	Matt. 3	Ezra 3	Acts 3
___ 04	Gen. 4	Matt. 4	Ezra 4	Acts 4
___ 05	Gen. 5	Matt. 5	Ezra 5	Acts 5
___ 06	Gen. 6	Matt. 6	Ezra 6	Acts 6
___ 07	Gen. 7	Matt. 7	Ezra 7	Acts 7