

A Plan For Bible Study

by Dr. Manford G. Gutzke

Anywhere you read in the Bible is good, but Bible reading need not be haphazard. The following plan is not rigid. It can be varied but this can serve as a systematic approach. It is important to do your reading in a Bible you do not mind marking.

First, read the *Gospel of Matthew*. Pay attention to what is written about Jesus of Nazareth. Mark out in the margin the beginning and the end of any section that tells of any incident.

Put yourself in the place of the people who are written about so that you can hear the words said by Jesus of Nazareth and note what He did. Also note what the people did, and what happened.

Don't take time to figure out what is obscure to you. You can come back to that. Read on.

Second, read the *Acts of the Apostles*. Mark the beginning and the end of the account of each incident. Pay attention to the work of the Holy Spirit. It would be good to mark your Bible each time the Holy Spirit is mentioned. Do not get bogged down in the long speeches, and do not take too long with what you cannot understand.

Third, read the *Gospel of Mark*. Mark this in the same way that you marked Matthew.

Fourth, read the *Acts of the Apostles* again. This time look closely at what is written about the early Church. Also mark important names. Mark the instances of praying that are recorded.

Fifth, read the *Gospel of Luke*. Notice and mark each miracle or supernatural occurrence. Also mark each parable. Mark each instance of opposition to Jesus of Nazareth. (You may want to use 3 colors: one for "miracles," another for the "parables," and a third for "opposition.")

Sixth, read the *Acts of the Apostles* yet again. This book is so important because it is the only account of the origin of the first Christians. A person could never guess what is really true about a Christian unless he read the *Acts* carefully. This time mark each instance of opposition to the Gospel. In chapters 1-12 notice what Peter does. From chapter 13 to the end of the book notice what Paul does.

Seventh, read the *Gospel of John*. Look for figures of speech, names, or titles given to the Lord Jesus Christ, and underscore or circle each in a special color. For example, in John 1:1 underscore or circle "the Word." Do this each time this term occurs. In John 1:29 underscore or circle "the Lamb of God." Keep this up as you read through the book. I would not mark "Jesus", but mark each use of all other names, titles, etc. Also take note of each instance of anyone coming to faith or turning away from Jesus of Nazareth. Use different colors so as to mark contrast between faith and unbelief.

Eighth, read again the *Acts of the Apostles*. You will have now read each of the four Gospels, and your reading the Acts four times is a good way to get a grasp of the basic truth of WHAT a Christian really is. This time take notice of each sermon or speech. Take time to note a topic or principle idea for each. For example, what is Peter saying at Pentecost in Acts 2:14-36?

Also mark each instance of anyone coming to Christ and each instance of anyone turning away from the Gospel. Note the name of any individual and the description of any group. Use contrasting colors as you did in John.

By now you should have a good grasp of what the Bible says about Jesus of Nazareth and about the first Christians. And you will know something about these five books in the New Testament. Do not try to do all this at one time or in a few days. Plan some sort of regular schedule, such as 15 minutes a day. There is no reason why you should not know what is in the Bible. It was given for you, and such reading will strengthen your faith.

At this time you could find it very helpful to have a reliable Bible Handbook, and also a Bible

Dictionary and a Bible Atlas. I prefer a Handbook to a Commentary. A Commentary contains a scholar's explanation of what you read in the Bible, whereas a good Handbook simply gathers together for you the data and the ideas that are to be found as you read the books. Before you even try to explain the Bible it is most important that you become familiar with what is actually written. Just reading the Bible will feed your soul (Revelation 1:3).

If you are following this procedure as I have outlined it, I would now suggest that as you go on you read a book in the Old Testament and then a book in the New Testament, alternately. Start with Genesis by reading that book. Then read in a Bible Handbook about Genesis. If you have a Bible Dictionary consult it about strange words, names, places. Use your Bible Atlas to locate countries, mountains, rivers. When you have studied in this fashion to get an idea of what is actually set forth in Genesis, then read Genesis once more rapidly to tie it all together in your mind. Then read a New Testament book, alternating between a Gospel and an Epistle.

You may want to sketch an outline of the order in which you will be reading the various books of the Bible. If you are following my suggestions above, after you have finished your careful reading of the Gospels and the Acts you may have a schedule something like this, so that you will read in order: Genesis, Matthew, Exodus, Acts, Leviticus, Mark, Numbers, Romans, Deuteronomy, Luke, Joshua, I Corinthians, Judges and Ruth, John, I Samuel, II Corinthians, II Samuel, Matthew, I Kings, Galatians, and so on.

By now you will begin to recognize the major divisions of the Bible, such as the Pentateuch, the historical, the poetical, the prophetic books in the Old Testament; the Gospels, the historical (Acts), the epistles and the prophetic (Revelation) books in the New Testament. You will learn where to turn according to your interest or need. For the language of prayer read the Psalms. To understand human conduct read Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon. For closer fellowship with the Lord Jesus read the Gospels. To cultivate confidence in prayer read the Acts. To understand the life of a Christian read the epistles.

To approach reading the Bible intelligently, worship God as you read. Remember God inspired the writing of the Bible. He is the living God and He is ready to help me to understand and to believe in what I read. So when you take the Bible to read, confess your sins. Admit before God that you have not been, and you have not done, as you ought. Remember Christ Jesus died for you and is now praying for you. Remember He has given His Holy Spirit to help you to see His will and to energize you to obey Him. In so remembering, and trusting, and following by obeying His will, you will learn more and more. Thus the Bible will be "a lamp to your feet and a light on your pathway."

The Bible, What It Is

The Bible is a volume of 66 little books which tell how God will save man through His Son, Jesus Christ. These books differ in length, style, subject matter - but they agree in one central theme: The Person and the work of Jesus Christ.

God is invisible. He is Spirit and He deals with men in Spirit and in truth. He revealed His will to certain men whom He chose to be His servants, who should be His spokesmen to all men. These were known as "prophets." They communicated their message to other men by speaking and by writing. Their message was known as "the Word of God," and their writings were known as "The Scriptures."

The message of the prophets was not something they thought of in their own wisdom. God sent His Holy Spirit to move these men to think and to write what He wanted to reveal. (II Peter 1:21). Paul told

Timothy, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." (II Timothy 3:16).

No one knows for sure who wrote the various portions of Scripture. Nor is it known when or where they were written. They are like medicine, in that no one needs to know the name of the druggist who filled the prescription: it is the medicine that matters.

The Bible: How It Can Be Understood

The Bible reveals truth about God who is invisible. It tells the story of Creation which no man saw as it happened. It reveals truth about Spiritual beings who have never been seen by men. It describes what would be acceptable to God who is not like man, whose thoughts are not our thoughts, and whose ways are not known to man. It tells what God will do in the future which is beyond anything man has known. How can it ever be understood?

The actual plan of all the Bible tells is simple. A child could grasp the ideas set forth. But to be understood by man it must be believed. To bring the story from being a fable to a record of what is actually real, the reader must have the help of the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit so affects the willing heart that the things which are written become actual in experience. What would seem like a story of 'events which are distant or future becomes an experience in which the reader is a participant and an eye witness.

"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit" (I Corinthians 2:9-10). Jesus of Nazareth said that "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine . . ." (John 7:17).

The real meaning of the Bible will remain hidden from the consciousness of the unbelieving and the disobedient. Only the willing heart will ever know the truth.

The Bible: Whom It Is For

The Bible is a revelation of what God will do for such as believe in Him, obeying Him, and is written for men who will listen sincerely and humbly. The fact is that God will save whosoever believeth in Him. A man can only believe what he has heard and understood. In kindness and mercy God sends witnesses who will tell men what God promises. The Scriptures are given to men so that the promises of God may be known.

Since "all have sinned" the Bible is actually given for sinners. Anyone reading the Scriptures may realize his own sinfulness but also will come to know the promises of God offering salvation to souls lost in sin.

When the sinner accepts Christ he is "born again" by the Word and by the Holy Spirit. This babe in Christ needs nourishment which is given in the Scriptures. In believing response to the promises of God the Christian will grow "in grace and knowledge," becoming more and more fruitful to the glory of God.

Thus the Bible is for men; but especially for those who have believed the Gospel, who have accepted Christ and who are now serving Him.

Old Testament History

The first 17 books of the Old Testament record events that happened in history from the Creation of the World until the restoration of Israel after the captivity in Babylon. Though historical in style these books do not present a history. In the first 11 chapters of Genesis there is a broad sketch of Creation, the Fall of Man, Judgment in the Flood and the dispersion of man over the earth after the Tower of Babel. The rest of Genesis tells of four generations of the family of Abraham. After 400 years in Egypt the children of Israel were brought out to go across the desert into Canaan, which had been promised to them. This Exodus was the greatest single event in the Old Testament. After living in the land of Canaan for about 400 years in tribal fashion, God began to reveal His plan to achieve the realization of His promise of blessing given to Abraham, through His chosen Messiah who would rule as King.

The history of Israel under the kings demonstrated the failure of man, even called men with the blessing of God, to achieve perfect obedience. God promised to send one chosen by Him, called the Messiah, who would perfectly obey God and lead His people into the promised blessing.

The other books of the Old Testament were written during the time of the Kings and reveal truth about living in godly obedience and trust.

The Bible: New Testament - The Gospels And The Acts

The division of the Bible into Old Testament and New Testament is based on the fact that the history of God's revelation to man reveals that God deals with man first according to His Law, which was given to Moses on Mount Sinai in the Ten Words. This was known as the Old Covenant and proved that man could not ever satisfy the righteous demands of God's holiness by his own efforts. During the time of God's dealing with Israel He revealed that He would send a chosen Servant, the Messiah, who could deliver His people from their sins and their enemies by His own righteous life and vicarious death. On the basis of what the Messiah would do, God would deal with His people in a new way called the New Covenant.

The New Covenant was activated by the Son of God who became incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth, who lived in perfect obedience to His Father and offered Himself as a perfect Sacrifice on Calvary's Cross. After being in the grave three days He rose from the dead and showed Himself to be really alive for the space of forty days. Then He ascended into Heaven where He is now interceding for His people and from whence He will come in God's time to complete God's Plan by judging the quick and the dead and manifesting the Kingdom of God in its fullness.

The Four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, tell about the earthly career of Jesus of Nazareth. The Acts of the Apostles tell of the history of the Early Christians until the imprisonment of Paul in Rome.

The Bible: New Testament - The Epistles And The Revelation

After the pouring out of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of the believers at Pentecost, the disciples of Jesus Christ went into all the world to preach the Gospel to all nations. As persons believed the Gospel and accepted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and the Holy Spirit became operative in them according to

the New Covenant, God gave certain persons to serve Him in teaching and in shepherding the new believers. Such men were known as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Some of these wrote their messages which have been preserved as the epistles of the New Testament.

The first nine epistles are known as the Church Epistles of Paul - Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and I and II Thessalonians. In these Paul has written messages addressed to several churches as named. The next four epistles are known as the Pastoral Epistles of Paul - I and II Timothy, Titus and Philemon. In these Paul wrote to individuals as a pastor would speak to one of his flock. After this are eight epistles known as the General Epistles, the Epistles to the Hebrews, James, I and II Peter, I, II and III John, and Jude. The last book in the Bible is known as The Revelation. In these 22 epistles is to be found the fuller explanation of the operation of the New Covenant by the working of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers.