

How to Read and Understand the Bible

Reading the Bible can be very intimidating. Even folks who don't believe in God find that what the Bible says can be very disturbing, challenging and powerful. It has been said that if you are going to know anything, you have to start by knowing God. If you truly want to understand yourself, you have to know something about God. And if you want to know God, you need to read His book, which is the Bible.

The Bible is a collection of books; it's better understood as a library. Each of the 66 books has a purpose, but they all contain the same theme. They are related but each book of the Bible can be read by itself without reading the others around it. The 66 books do fit into a beautiful mosaic, but each book has its own individual beauty. The single theme of the Bible is that God created Man in His image, Man sinned and God has been actively dealing with man's sin so that His people will be with Him in Heaven one day, all to show how great He is.

For someone who has not spent much time reading or studying the Bible, there is a better way to read it than the typical "Start at the beginning" philosophy. The Bible is arranged in a certain order; the books are grouped by type instead of by when they were written. Each group has a purpose, and they contribute to the overall understanding of God, but the groupings are done just to organize the material.

Old Testament

Books of the Law	Genesis – Deuteronomy
History of Israel	Joshua – Ester
Wisdom Writings	Job – Song of Solomon
Prophets to Israel	Jeremiah – Malachi

New Testament

Gospels	Matthew – John
History of early church	Acts
Letters to the early church	Romans – Jude
Final Judgment	Revelation

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Reading Plan

Kind of like picking food from a buffet, you can pick books out of the different groups, then go back and get different books from these same groups. Use this menu to help you get started. There are books in the Old Testament that you should read along the way too. The most important thing is to stay with it. You can read parts of the books and skip around from book to book if you need to, just keep reading!

Gospels – Start with Luke or John. Read one gospel, then read some of the letters then another gospel until you read them all!

Letters – Ephesians, James, Philippians, I John (the letter, not the gospel) are good to start.

Hebrews and Romans are the two toughest letters to understand, save them for later. *Chapter 8 of Romans can be read stand-alone; it is probably the pinnacle of the New Testament.

Read Acts to get some background on how the church grew after Jesus was crucified and resurrected.

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How Do I Start

To begin understanding God, you don't have to start at Genesis to read the Bible. The New Testament **gospels** or the **letters** are the better place to begin. The Gospels tell the story of Jesus on the earth from 4 different perspectives. The letters contain explanations about God's plans and what the sacrifice of Jesus really means to His followers. It's best to start here, then work backwards into the history.

Old Testament Starter Books

Psalms – These are the songs of the people of Israel. They deal with our emotions; loneliness, persecution, depression, joy, hope, triumph. Read them as you feel these emotions yourself.

Proverbs – They are bits and pieces of wisdom from God written so that that we have guidelines in the practical areas of life.

Deuteronomy is a good summary of God's dealing with Israel as He gives His law to them.

Re-read the books, don't stop at one pass. Each time you read it, something new will be seen!

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