



READING THE BIBLE

PRODUCED BY THE NOVA SCOTIA CHRISTADELPHIANS WWW.CHRISTADELPHIANS.NS.CA

The Bible is a book that has influenced the whole course of history. It continues to influence millions of people today. It is the book in which God speaks to you.

But it is a book that many people find hard to read. It can be frustrating, confusing, boring or simply overwhelming. In this reading program, we will consider how to read the Bible effectively, so that its ancient message is exciting and relevant today.

Introducing the Bible

The Bible is the world's best seller. Between 1815 and 1975 it is estimated that about 2,500 million Bibles were printed. Each year approximately 100 million Bibles or parts of the Bible are distributed.

It also holds the record for being translated into more languages than any other book. At the end of 1993, the whole Bible had been translated into 337 languages and at least one book of the Bible had been translated into 2062 languages. This means that almost any person on earth can have access to the Bible.

The Bible has endured thousands of years of copying by hand, yet appears to have remained almost unchanged. It has been burned, banned and outlawed many times, yet it has survived.

The word "bible" comes from the Greek word *biblos* meaning "writings". It is a book containing a collection of 66 books—39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament.

Most of the books of the Bible are divided into chapters. Each chapter is then divided into verses. This helps us to find a particular section easily. When we write Genesis 1:2, we mean that the section will be found in the book of Genesis, chapter 1 and verse 2. One or two books have only one chapter, so Jude 4 means the 4th verse of the book of Jude.

The Bible was written over a period of 1600 years by over 40 writers including kings, peasants, doctors, fishermen, princes, herdsmen, poets, labourers, rich and poor, educated and uneducated. These authors lived in ten different countries and wrote in three different languages.

Although the writers were divided by class, period, language, country and disposition, there is wonderful harmony in all they wrote. This is because they all wrote by **divine inspiration**.

The *Old Testament* tells of events from the creation of man to about 400 years before Jesus Christ was born. It tells a story related particularly to the people of Israel. The *New Testament* records God working with people through his son, Jesus Christ. In the *New Testament* it becomes clear that God's promises are to all people, not just to the Israelites.

The Bible is a book of amazing diversity: you will find enchanting history, beautiful poetry, remarkable prophecies, great wisdom, simple proverbs and difficult teaching.

The Bible contains quite a lot of information about when events happened. When archaeological information is also taken into account, a fairly detailed chronology of the Bible can be obtained from about the time of Abraham. Before Abraham, there is insufficient information to accurately date any event.

The historical events in the *Old Testament* cover a period of several thousand years. The *New Testament* covers a much shorter time period of about 100 years.

What is inspiration?

Inspiration means "God-breathed". God spoke to men who then recorded *His* words, not their own. For example:

2 Samuel 23:1-2 *"Now these are the last words of David. Thus says David the son of Jesse; Thus says the man raised up on high. The anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel: The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue."*

2 Timothy 3:16-17 *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."*

TIP 1

Find a translation you are comfortable with.

General Suggestions and Guidelines

- The literal (word-for-word) versions are the most accurate renditions of God's Word and include the least amount of translational bias.
- Since the literal versions are the most accurate, they are usually the best for Bible study.
- The *King James Version* is linked to more study aids (such as *Strong's* and *Young's Concordances*) than any other English Version.
- Because of their modern literary style, many of the less literal versions can be easier to read and understand. However, because these versions do not always follow the original text, some times what is easier to understand is only what the translator thought a passage meant.
- Study Bibles do not encourage personal study, since the "study" has already been done by someone else. They are best used as bookshelf references.
- It is helpful to include both literal and less literal translations on your bookshelf.
- It is best to stay with a single version for most of your reading and study (this aids in memorization).

When choosing your main Bible, look for:

- durable binding
- cross-references
- wide margins
(for your personal notes)

Translations of the Bible

The Bible was not originally written in English. It was written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. The original languages were translated into English by various scholars through time. However, since it was humans and not God who did the translating, there is always the possibility of error and bias.

A brief history of the English Bible

From the early Middle Ages until the Reformation of the sixteenth century, the Latin Vulgate was the official Bible of the Church. This was unfortunate, since only a few educated people could read Latin. Thus the Bible was a closed book to the majority of people.

The later Medieval period, however, saw the production of several partial translations into Old English (Anglo-Saxon). The first full translation of the Bible in our language was the Middle English translation of John Wycliffe in 1382. Because Wycliffe's translation was produced before the invention of the printing press, very few copies of the translation circulated.

It was not until the time of William Tyndale in the Reformation that the Bible was translated into English from the original languages of Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. From Tyndale's translation work at the beginning of the sixteenth century to the translation of the King James Version early in the seventeenth century, several English versions were produced:

- 1525 Tyndale's New Testament
- 1535 The Coverdale Bible
- 1539 The Great Bible
- 1560 The Geneva Bible
- 1568 The Bishop's Bible
- 1611 The King James Version

The King James Version reigned dominant until well into the twentieth century, and still remains popular. Whereas almost all English translations from Tyndale to the American Standard Version tended to be literal, the twentieth century saw the rise of other less literal forms of translation.

It is important to have your own Bible so that you can become familiar with it, write your own notes in it, and have it available when you have time to read. Before you choose one you may want to check out what is available at your local library or if you have access to the internet there are several sites with online Bibles.

The four main types of translation:

WORD FOR WORD

This is when each word in the original language is translated to mean what it would literally mean in English. The only words added are those which would make the English grammatically correct and these usually appear in italics. Some examples are:

- King James or Authorised Version (KJV or AV)
- American Standard Version (ASV)
- Revised Standard Version (RSV)
- New American Standard Bible (NASB)
- New King James Version (NKJV)
- New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)
- English Standard Version (ESV)

Psalm 23:1-4 in the KJV:

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

THOUGHT FOR THOUGHT

This is when instead of translating each word literally, it is translated phrase by phrase. It attempts to correct the problems with the word for word translations when up against idioms or other ways of saying things that don't make sense in English. The translators attempt to interpret what the author was trying to say. Some examples are:

- Contemporary English Version (CEV)
- Good News Bible/Today's English Version (GNB/TEV)
- The New English Bible (NEB)
- New Living Translation (NLT)

Psalm 23:1-4 from the CEV:

You, LORD, are my shepherd. I will never be in need. You let me rest in fields of green grass. You lead me to streams of peaceful water, and you refresh my life. You are true to your name, and you lead me along the right paths. I may walk through valleys as dark as death, but I won't be afraid. You are with me, and your shepherd's rod makes me feel safe.

WORD FOR WORD AND THOUGHT FOR THOUGHT BLENDS

These are obviously a combination of the previous two and the translators decide when to use which

method. Some examples are:

- The New International Version (NIV)
- The Jerusalem Bible (JB)
- The New Jerusalem Bible (NJB)
- The Revised English Bible (REB)

Psalm 23:1-4 in the NIV:

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

PARAPHRASE

This method does not necessarily pay any attention to the original language and often is from one English translation to another. The translator becomes the interpreter. Some examples are:

- J.B. Phillips
- The Living Bible

Psalm 23:1-4 in the Living Bible:

Because the Lord is my Shepherd, I have everything I need! He lets me rest in the meadow grass and leads me beside the quiet streams. He gives me new strength. He helps me do what honors him the most. Even when walking through the dark valley of death I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me, guarding, guiding all the way.

Choosing a Translation

There are many different translations available, but because we are all different, you may find one more acceptable than another. However, as already mentioned, some translations reflect the original text more closely than others. If you have a choice we would recommend those versions which reflect the original text as faithfully as possible.

Textual Layout

This means how the text is arranged on the page. A Bible with good textual layout:

- prints the text in natural paragraphs (instead of having each verse a separate paragraph);
- includes subheadings so the reader can see the natural breaks in the text;
- prints the poetic parts of the Bible in natural stanzas rather than as prose or in the artificial verse divisions;
- gives lists of names or places in columns instead of as prose.

Why the Bible can be hard to read

If you find the Bible hard to understand in places, it's probably because it is meant to be profound! Once we accept this fact and realize that God has a purpose in this, then frustration turns to challenge. Millions of readers work the Sunday crossword puzzle. How many spend a few minutes of time to unlock the puzzles of Scripture?

Remember this:

Proverbs 25:2 *"It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter."*

Jesus often spoke in parables (stories that have a hidden meaning) and his disciples questioned this in Matthew 13:10. His answer reveals that making an effort to understand brings about a separation process:

"Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given."

Those who wish to know will seek and find and those who don't care will not seek and therefore will not find.

How does one gain understanding?

Pray.

Set aside time to read each day.
Read slowly and carefully.

Why is reading the Bible important?

The importance of Bible reading is summed up in 2 Timothy 3:15-17:

"ALL SCRIPTURE makes one wise for salvation, and is profitable for: doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

How to start...

We recommend that you set aside at least fifteen minutes daily to read from the Bible.

An example is given us of the Bereans in the book of Acts who were *"more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so"* (Acts 17:11).

The people of Israel were to begin and end their day with prayer and meditation with God during the daily and evening sacrifice; this provides a good example for us.

There are many different Bible reading plans available. We have provided a list of readings to go with each lesson. They will introduce you briefly to most of the books of the Bible. At the end of this plan you may wish to try a Bible Reading Plan that is structured to take a person through the whole Bible in a year.

The Books of the Bible

The "canon" of Scripture is an authoritative list of books accepted as Holy Scripture (*kanon* is a Greek word that means "rule" or "standard"). The Bible is divided into two Testaments, the Old and the New.

