



How to read the Bible



• Reading through the Bible

You can read the Bible like any other book — if you read three chapters a day and five chapters on Sundays, you will get through it in a year! It is a good idea to use a modern easy-to-read version for quick reading and some people keep a bookmark in their Bible and just pick it up and continue reading when they have time. This type of reading will help you to get an overview of the Bible. You may prefer to read the Bible and other books mentioned below online or on your phone or tablet - there are lots of resources!

• Meditate on a short passage

There is great benefit in meditating on just a few verses in the Bible and pondering over the meaning of the words. Several organisations produce Bible reading notes which direct you to a short passage each day and provide brief comments to help you get the most out of it.

• In-depth study

Detailed Bible study will help you to understand its teaching more fully and will reveal many truths which will help you in your life. This kind of study needs more determination and organisation. You might choose to study a book in the Bible, a word in the Bible, a Bible character, a doctrine or other topic. These studies will take you all over the Bible as you compare one part with another. You should use a translation which follows the original language closely and the books mentioned below will be helpful too.

• Helpful books

You will find many helpful books at a Christian bookshop:

A Reference Bible has references in the margin which point to other related texts so that you can tie parts of the Bible together easily.

A Concordance is an alphabetical list of the words used in the Bible showing where they occur. Some Bibles have one included in the back which you can use like an index. An analytical concordance tells you about the original Greek or Hebrew words.

A Bible Dictionary or Encyclopaedia is an alphabetical list of Bible words and topics with explanatory articles giving useful background information.



A Bible Commentary gives valuable background information and thoughts on Bible passages, verses and individual words. It is rather like somebody explaining the Bible to you as you read it. Some commentaries are very long with many volumes.

A Bible Handbook is packed with charts, maps, articles, photographs and it contains a brief commentary on the whole Bible. This is probably the most useful book to help you start to understand the Bible.

A Study Bible is a reference Bible, a concordance, a commentary and a handbook all rolled into one. There are notes and articles on each page near the Bible text.

Original Languages — Much can be gained from reading the Bible in its original languages but not many of us are able to do that! The various types of books above will help you to reap the benefits from those who do know Hebrew and Greek.



Find out what this says!

• *Time and place*

It is good to find time each day to read part of the Bible. Many Christians have a regular quiet time which they devote to prayer and Bible study each day. You will probably find that you can spend more time over the weekend.

Settle yourself down in a quiet place and clear your mind of distractions. Pray asking God to help you understand what you read. The same Holy Spirit who inspired those who wrote the Bible can inspire you to learn from it.

• *Allow God to speak to you*

Expect God to speak to you from his Word. What does it say about:

- God — his character
- The will of God
- Jesus Christ
- Our relationship with God
- The Holy Spirit
- How to live our lives

you believe in a spirit of heavenly things.

¹³No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. ¹⁴Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned

Also:

- How can you apply the passage to your circumstances?
- Is there any guidance for your life and do you need to act on what you have read?
- You can make notes as you read and underline or highlight verses or words which make an impression on you. You can devise your own colour code for passages of different sorts.
- Try to learn any verses which you have found helpful.

English Bibles

For English-speaking people there are lots of versions of the Bible available. Some are careful translations by a team of scholars, others are free paraphrases by individuals. Some are useful for careful study, others are better for reading to get the gist of the Bible story. They can conveniently be divided into these types:

• *Word-for-Word*

These attempt to translate a word from the original Hebrew or Greek with an equivalent English word. Feature of these translations are:

- They are good for detailed Bible study.
- They can be quite formal and awkward to read.
- You feel nearer to the original language.
- You can use with Strong's concordance which enables you to quickly find which Hebrew or Greek word is being used. You can also use an *interlinear* Bible which has the actual original language under the English text.

Examples:

NASB New American Standard Bible (probably considered to be the most accurate word-for-word translation but a little old-fashioned)

KJV King James Version (traditional English Bible)

NKJV New King James Version (updated KJV)

ESV English Standard Version (a very readable and modern word-for-word translation)

• *Thought-for-Thought*

These attempt to translate the ideas more than the precise words. Some would believe that this is a better way to translate. Features of these translations are:

- They are easy to read and understand.
- Good for personal Bible study and church use.

Examples:

NIV New International Version (a very popular translation in straightforward modern English)

NLT New Living Translation (a modern translation in simple English, very readable)

• *Paraphrase*

These are loose translations for getting the general gist of the Bible. They often use modern idioms. Features of these translations are:

- They are suitable for general reading but not for close Bible study.
- Sometimes give you a new angle on a Bible passage.
- Can be fun to read.
- Sometimes more like a commentary than a translation.
- The translations are often criticised by scholars for being inaccurate.
- Best not to use as your only Bible!

Examples:

TLB The Living Bible (a personal paraphrase of the Bible)

MSG The Message (a very loose personal paraphrase)