

Question: If a person has never read the Bible, how should he begin? Should he start with Genesis, the first book, and read all the way through?

I don't think reading through the Bible from beginning to end is the best approach for a beginner. Actually, the Bible is a book of books, sixty-six in all. These books are divided into two parts that we call the Old Testament (39 books) and the New Testament (27 books). These books are not arranged in chronological order. First, they are grouped according to the type of literature; then, they are arranged somewhat in chronological order within these groups. Therefore, I would propose reading to get the gist of God's message first; and then you can loop back to read the other books with a better understanding of how they relate to one another. This approach also keeps you from getting bogged down in parts of the Bible that do not seem as interesting without a basic understanding of what it is all about.

To do this, I suggest that you begin with the first book Genesis, which means "beginning." In this book you will learn of the beginning of our world as God's purposeful creation, the beginning of sin and the beginning of God's plan to redeem humankind from the guilt and power of sin. You will learn that God chose Abraham to father a nation of people through whom he would work to achieve his purpose for all people on earth. Next, read the first twenty chapters of Exodus to learn how the nation of Israel was founded and given the Ten Commandments that contain the basic moral principles for all time.

At this point, I would suggest that you turn to one of the four gospels at the beginning of the New Testament. Luke is the most comprehensive although many may prefer to read Mark first because it is the shortest of the gospels. Either Luke or Mark will provide knowledge of Jesus and his mission. The gospels connect with the Old Testament by showing that Jesus is the promised descendant of Abraham through whom all nations would be blessed.

Next, I would propose that you read the book of Acts because it will give an understanding of the work of the apostles and how God formed his church, an assembly of people who believe in Jesus, from among Israelites first and then the Gentile believers.

After reading the above, you can go back and read Deuteronomy through Nehemiah to complete the history of Israel and how God worked with them through all of their ups and downs. From that point you should read the remaining books of law (Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers), the wisdom literature (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon), the New Testament letters from Romans through Jude, the Old Testament prophets from Isaiah through Malachi, and finally Revelation as the last book of the Bible.

These suggestions do not mean you cannot benefit from reading the Bible straight through from beginning to end. You may find it helpful to purchase a One-Year Bible that gives daily readings by the calendar. Each day has an Old Testament reading along with a New Testament reading and a Psalm. One psalm a day can be helpful with any reading of the Bible.

To get the most from any reading of the Bible, I would encourage you to take time to think carefully about what you are reading. Always pray for the Lord's help with your reading and understanding of his word. Finally, keep in mind that the purpose of the Bible is not only that we know the Bible but that we come to know the God of the Bible and his son, Jesus Christ our Savior. The Bible is certainly not the easiest book to understand, especially on the first reading; but it is not beyond the ability of ordinary people. Repeated readings and contemplation of God's Word can bring an exciting adventure for a lifetime.

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