

How Do You Read the Bible?

By Aaron Kelso

Have you ever opened the Bible, started reading, and all of a sudden gotten really confused? Does the thought of reading the Bible seem overwhelming or intimidating? Have you ever pushed it aside, thinking it's just too hard or impossible to understand? Has fear stopped you from even picking it up? Well, if you can relate to any of these statements, have comfort in knowing that you're not alone. The Bible is a challenging book, but with the help of the Spirit—with the proper guidance and knowhow—understand that it's understandable.

The Bible exists to *reveal* God and to *equip* His people to follow Him, and therefore, must be coherent. Even if a specific section, story, or verse takes a lifetime of studying to grasp, know to some extent it's understandable. The content of the Bible was and is intended to be understood. With this in mind, the purpose of this article will be to *ready you to read*—to teach you how to read the Bible **effectively**.

1. Key Definitions

a. What are we studying?

- i. Scripture: the sacred writings of Christianity contained in the Bible. We are studying who God is and how to have relationship with Him. The more we learn about God, the more we learn about ourselves.

b. What are we doing?

- i. Hermeneutics: the breaking down, interpretation, and application of Scripture. We are seeking to understand the Bible, in context, from the inside out. We leave our assumptions, traditions, and preferences at the door and do our best to draw out truth solely from the text.

2. Key Textual Understandings Before Reading

- a. The Bible is the Spirit-led and ordained (i.e. holy, set apart) Word of God.
- b. The Bible is Christ-centered, having one overarching story.
- c. The Bible contains two covenants (i.e. The Old Covenant and the New Covenant) and two

testaments (i.e. The Old Testament and the New Testament) that are equally important and complementary to one another.

- d. The Bible is a complex collection of books and letters.
 - i. Sixty-six books, at least ten thousand years of human history, forty plus authors, three languages, two ethnicities, and fourteen centuries of preparation.
- e. The Bible is *not* composed in chronological order.
- f. The Bible books were intended to be read individually from beginning to end, with the exception of Psalms and Proverbs.
- g. The Bible was originally written in Hebrew/Aramaic (OT) and Greek (NT).
- h. The Bible chapters, headers, and verse numbers are helpful but are not to be followed exclusively. They were study tools added in by men at a much later date.
- i. The Bible will *never* be understood fully out of context.

3. Key Conceptual Understandings Before Reading

- a. The Bible was written *for* you, not *to* you.
- b. The Bible *is* understandable; if it was not understandable it would be self-defeating.
 - i. A former professor of mine once said, "God would never give you something in His word that lacks understanding."
- c. The Bible is to be comprehended *first* and interpreted *last*.
- d. The Bible can be made to say *whatever* you want out of context.
- e. The Bible must *always* be accompanied by prayer.

4. Questions to Ask While Reading

- a. Location
 - i. Where is this passage located in the Bible? Is it in the Old or New Testament?
- b. Covenant
 - i. Does this passage fall under the Old or New Covenant? Is it talking about something

before or after Christ?

c. Date

i. When was this passage written? In what time period were these words composed?

d. Author/Speaker

i. Who wrote and/or is speaking through this passage?

e. Audience

i. Who was this passage written to? Who was originally listening?

f. Historical/Cultural Information

i. What historical or cultural information is needed to understand this passage?

g. Languages/Linguistics

i. What keywords or phrases are central or repeated in the passage? What form of literature is being written? Are there any words that should be understood in the original language?

h. Theme/Purpose

i. What is the theme and purpose of this passage?

i. Application

i. How is this passage to be interpreted and applied in both the original setting and ours?
What did this mean for the people who would have heard these things the first time?
What do these things mean for people today?

5. Helpful Tools/Resources

a. Books

i. Study Bibles, biblical commentaries, Bible dictionaries/encyclopedias, Bible handbooks, concordances, interlinear/parallel Bibles, and books on Christian theology.

b. Websites

i. Bible.org, GotQuestions.org, ESV.org, BibleHub.com, and BibleGateway.com.

c. Apps

- i. *Bible* by YouVersion and *Bible Study Tools* by Salem Communications.

6. Aaron's Reading Recommendations

a. Bibles

- i. *ESV Study Bible*, *NIV Study Bible*, *NIV Archaeological Study Bible*, *CSB He Reads Truth Bible*

b. Commentaries

- i. *Halley's Bible Handbook*, *Tyndale Old and New Testament Commentary Series*,
Zondervan Exegetical Commentaries on the New Testament

c. Study Tools

- i. *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, *Rose Book of Bible Charts, Maps, & Timelines*

My hope is that this article has given you much to think about and has encouraged you to read and study the Bible. Start by praying and purchasing a Study Bible (it'll have most of the answers to the above questions right below the text as you read). Ask God to be with you as you study. Remember, it's His word. He wants you to understand it. And, if you're willing, He'll guide you as you study. Blessings upon your reading!