

Bible For Beginners

- I. This study assumes that the individual has a regenerated spiritual nature to enable understanding. **JOH 8:43, 47 c/w 1CO 2:14.**
- A. Do not conflate spiritual death with spiritual immaturity which lacks understanding. **ACT 8:30-31 c/w LUK 24:45.**
 - B. Knowledge and understanding are progressive. **PRO 4:18.**
 - C. Even an unregenerate man can derive some benefit from reading Scripture inasmuch as it can acquaint him with what motivates spiritually-minded men, with historical information, with things that concur with what he knows naturally, with literary and poetic excellency, even with the mechanisms of basic religion. **MAT 23:23.**
- II. The issue of authority is paramount: does man have authority over Scripture or does Scripture have authority over man? Is an institution infallible or is Scripture infallible?
- A. “The text of Scripture must not be fused with the mind of the interpreter, whether that of church or individual. It is to stand over us. Denial of clarity reflects a refusal to be bound by Scripture and a determination to follow one’s own inclinations. Whenever a church or a theologian takes it upon himself to define truth without reference to the objective authority of God’s word, he becomes demonically solipsistic. The Roman Catholic and liberal Protestant theologies are not so far apart as they seem at first glance. In one case the papal ego and, in the other, the theologian’s are the lights which lighten Scripture. In each case something human is placed above Scripture. It is vital, therefore, for them to hold to the obscurity of Scripture, lest its truth should break forth and challenge the interposed human authority. We have no right at all to place anything above God’s Word. These ‘Bibles to the second power’ do not exist.” (Pinnock, Clark; *Biblical Revelation*, pp. 99-100)
 - B. Jesus rebuked religious leaders who had assumed authority over Scripture as having *taken away the key of knowledge*. **LUK 11:52.**
 - C. The gospels show us that Jesus always argued from Scripture, not from tradition nor even from famous men of old (secular or ecclesial). **MAT 21:42; 22:29; JOH 10:35.**
 - D. Paul, upon conversion, abandoned tradition (**GAL 1:14**) and thereafter always brought matters back to the authority of Scripture. **ROM 4:3; GAL 4:30.**
 - E. There is an important principle of ruling and being ruled that this issue speaks to.
 - 1. Those who rule by law must be subject to the same law, and those who are ruled are therefore not only bound by that law but empowered by it as a check against error or overreach of power.
 - 2. In a secular sense, an informed citizenry is necessary for the preservation of liberty and order.
 - a. “If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be.” (Thomas Jefferson)
 - b. This is particularly true of the supreme law of the land: a citizenry that is well-acquainted with the nation’s foundational law is best equipped to check usurpations of authority and spurn double-standards at law or a dual-class citizenry.
 - 3. In a spiritual/ecclesial sense, the average saint with the scriptures is able to check his teacher/leader with the same law the teacher/leader is supposed to represent. **ACT 17:10-11.**
 - a. A church system which is regulated by Scripture empowers all who are in it.
 - b. A church system which discourages its adherents’ utility of Scripture by contrast establishes a rule by the elite who presume themselves above

challenge. **HOS 4:6 c/w JOH 7:45-49; 9:30-34.**

4. Depending on others to do your thinking for you may be easier than thinking for yourself but it is also a path of bondage.
5. Avoid the assumption that the Bible is too difficult to understand. **2PE 3:15-16.**
 - a. God's children have His spirit for knowing. **1CO 2:12; 1JO 2:20.**
 - b. Some, not all things are hard to be understood.
 - c. Peter does not say they are impossible to be understood.
 - d. The difficult portions are particularly difficult for the unlearned, so build your understanding from the plain portions. Spiritual milk is best for spiritual infants, not spiritual meat. **1PE 2:2 c/w HEB 5:12-14.**
 - e. The most common obstacles to understanding the scriptures are lack of effort and discipline, pride which resists God and the fear of man.
 - f. Reading analysis tests have shown that the KJV Bible is written at a fifth grade level. With a basic grasp of grammar and a good dictionary to define terms, the average believer can gain much profit.

III. Here are some considerations and recommendations for beginners in the Bible.

- A. Scripture is your necessary spiritual food (**MAT 4:4**) and your soul needs nutrition. Read!
- B. Obtain a good quality KJV Bible like a Cambridge which has center-column cross-references. The references are not perfect but they can be very helpful in comparing scripture with scripture, per **1CO 2:13.**
 1. A good concordance or Bible program is helpful to look up words and find texts.
 2. Keep a good non-bleeding fine-tipped pen handy to jot references and notes down.
- C. Assume that God wants you to know and understand Scripture which reveals Him through Jesus Christ, Who is the Central Person of Scripture and history. **JOH 5:39.**
- D. Isolate yourself unto God for a little while each day for meditation. **PSA 1:1-2; 119:15.**
 1. Desire plays a key role. **PSA 19:7-10.**
 2. God knows your heart and will give you what you desire in reward or in judgment. **PSA 37:4; 2TH 2:10-12.**
- E. Believe that you are reading God's words or they will not have the effect they should have on your spiritual life. **2TI 3:16-17 c/w 1TH 2:13.**
- F. Wisdom is something that must be sought and asked for, so pray and dig in. **JAM 1:5-6; PRO 2:1-5.**
- G. Fear God since this is the beginning of wisdom, knowledge and understanding. **PRO 1:7; 9:10.**
 1. This healthy fear is a hatred of evil. **PRO 8:13.**
 2. Sin is a barrier to understanding (**1PE 2:1-2**) so repent of *known* sin and be ready to repent of *ignorant* sin as it is brought to your attention.
- H. The Bible consists of 66 books and epistles (letters) in two major divisions: the Old Testament (39 books) and the New Testament (27 books and letters).
 1. The O.T. consists of the Pentateuch/Books of Moses (**GEN to DEU**), the historical books (**JOS to EST**), the Writings (**JOB to SON**), and the Prophets (**ISA to MAL**).
 2. The N.T. consists of the four gospels which are the record of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ (**MAT to JOH**), the **Acts of the Apostles** of Jesus Christ, the epistles/letters of the apostles (**ROM to JUDE**) and the **Book of Revelation**.
 3. The O.T. is Christ *veiled*; the N.T. is Christ *revealed*.
 4. The N.T. is the clearer, superior revelation from God; the O.T. must be interpreted according to the explanations given of it in the N.T. **2PE 1:19-21; 1JO 4:6.**
 5. Another way to describe the two testaments is that the O.T. is the Mosaic Covenant

- and the N.T. is the Messianic Covenant.
- a. The *message* of the Mosaic Covenant is “do and live” righteousness. **ROM 10:5.**
 - b. The *message* of the Messianic Covenant is “Christ did, you live.” **GAL 2:20-21.**
- I. Read **GEN 1-11** and accept it as historical narrative. It sets forth creation, the entrance of sin by Adam, and a worldwide flood which wiped out everyone except Noah and his family.
 1. It establishes the proper pattern of marriage.
 2. It establishes morality.
 3. It establishes the need for clothing.
 4. It establishes cosmology, geology, anthropology, biology and paleontology, etc.
 5. If you can’t believe what God tells you of earthly things, on what basis can you believe what He tells you of heavenly things? **JOH 3:12.**
 - J. Read the four N.T. gospels which set forth the arrival, ministry, sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Pay attention to the things He stressed, and the O.T. scriptures He related to Himself and put to use for every dialogue with disciples and detractors. This is where your cross-references will come in handy.
 1. Matthew, Mark and Luke are the *synoptic* gospels. They give accounts of the events from the same basic point of view.
 2. John’s gospel is special in that it concentrates on the Deity and High Priestly work of Christ.
 3. Matthew basically presents Christ the Davidic King with a genealogy from Abraham to whom the promise of the Christ was first dedicated to a bloodline. **MAT 1:1-17.**
 4. Luke basically presents Christ the Son of Man with a genealogy all the way back to Adam. **LUK 3:23-38.**
 5. John basically presents Christ as the God-Man with a Divine genealogy. **JOH 1:1-3, 14.**
 6. Mark basically presents Christ as the prophesied Servant (**ISA 42:1**), his gospel beginning with Christ’s public ministry. The genealogies of servants were not typically recorded and Mark gives no genealogy.
 - K. Go back and read the rest of **Genesis**, then **Exodus** (where the Law Covenant was given to Israel). Then read through the rest of the New Testament, but do not get hung up on difficult figurative and prophetic portions like the Book of Revelation. Let the plain information lay the groundwork for good understanding and build upon that.
 - L. Pay particular attention to the Pauline epistles. Above all writers of Scripture, Paul has the clearest understanding of the *mystery of God in Christ* and sets forth the best example of how to live as a Christian. **PHIL 3:17; 4:9.**
 1. Paul had a special ministry to the Gentiles as their apostle and his epistles reflect that fact. **ROM 11:13.**
 2. The other apostles were unto the Jews/circumcision (**GAL 2:7-8**) and this distinction is helpful when reading the epistles.
 3. The evidence is best that Paul authored the **Book of Hebrews** and he was certainly qualified for the work. **2TH 3:17-18 c/w HEB 13:25; 2:3-4; 2PE 3:15-16.**
 - M. Read the rest of the five books of Moses (**LEV to DEU**) and **Joshua**. Don’t get hung up on the fine details of the Mosaic religious system with its many sacrifices and offerings. You may safely conclude that they have been satisfied by the offering of Jesus Christ as God’s appointed sacrifice for sin. **HEB 9:23-28.**

- N. Then go back and read some N.T. books.
1. The **Acts of the Apostles** deserves attention since it details the apostles' work under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in establishing N.T. order and spreading the gospel everywhere (**ACT 1:8**). It also sets forth the important transition of the kingdom program of God from the believing remnant of the Jews to the believing Gentiles via Paul's ministry. **ACT 13:46**.
 2. The **Book of Hebrews** presents the superiority of Jesus Christ over everything and is the best explanation of Moses' writings.
- O. The books of **Joshua** to **Esther** are the books of Israel's history with its important characters like the prophet Samuel (who anointed Israel's first king and also David), David (the first king of the line which leads to Christ and the prolific writer of many psalms), and wise Solomon (the royal son of David who wrote the books of **Proverbs**, **Ecclesiastes**, **Song of Solomon**).
- P. **The Book of Job** is an amazing account of one man's troubles by the permission of God. Think you're too good to have to undergo trouble in this life? This book says otherwise, and Job's trial of patience in affliction is proverbial for us. **JAM 5:10-11**.
- Q. The **Psalms** are filled with words of comfort and prophecies of Christ and were generally sung or read in worship.
1. David was a frequent writer of the psalms but not the only writer.
 2. Many psalms are specifically titled as David's but not all of his are so titled. For example, **PSA 2** is not titled as David's but **ACT 4:25-26** declares that he wrote it. Similarly, compare untitled **PSA 95** with **HEB 4:7**.
- R. Solomon was exceeding wise (**MAT 12:42**) and his writings (especially **Proverbs**) give the best odds for winning at life and successful child-training.
- S. The rest of the O.T. (**ISA** to **MAL**) are the major and minor prophets whose ministries coordinated with Israel's history and who prophesied of Christ.
1. Some of their writings are relatively easy to interpret but some are difficult. Don't sweat the details of the difficult writings. Your N.T. will give you the big picture of what they were driving at and will sometimes plainly explain them.
 2. **Isaiah** is the most prolific in prophecies of Christ, so much so that Paul refers to his work as *the gospel*. **ROM 10:15-16**.
 - a. There is a notable curiosity about this Book of Isaiah which so richly prophecies of Christ.
 - b. It has 66 chapters, even as the Bible has 66 books.
 - c. **ISA 1:2** has God speaking to heaven and earth, even as He did in Genesis, the first book of Scripture.
 - d. **ISA 66:22** speaks of the *new heavens and new earth*, even as does the 66th book of Scripture. **REV 21:1**.
 - e. **ISA 40:3** is a prophecy of the beginning of the gospel era (**MAR 1:1-3**), in accord with the division of the 39 books of the O.T. and the beginning of the N.T. which consists of 27 books.
 - f. Considering that Jesus said that the *scriptures* testified of Him (**JOH 5:39**) and the Book of Isaiah doing so prolifically with such a curious numbering of chapters and thematic layout, it is as if God was implying the correct canon of Scripture should be $39 + 27 = 66$ books, and that other books some might add to the O.T. canon would be inappropriate.
 - g. NOTE: This is only interesting, not authoritative.
- T. The **Book of the Revelation** can be very instructive but not without a solid basis in the clear statements of other apostolic writings.

1. The first three chapters consist of letters/epistles given by Jesus Christ to seven churches in Asia. There is no need to spiritualize these letters or use them as some type of secretive outline of history to come as if their real message is allegorical.
 2. It is interesting that by the time of the writing of this book, the Divine emphasis has obviously shifted away from Israel unto the Gentiles, and this roughly accords with the fact that God had intended to wrap up His dealings with Israel by time of the destruction of their city and sanctuary/temple. **DAN 9:24-27.**
 3. From Chapter 4 to the end of the Book, there are a series of challenging visions that appear to be recapitulating prophetic outlines from various perspectives. Read, but don't sweat if you can't figure it all out: you will be like most everyone else in that department.
- U. There is a decided emphasis on the availability of Scripture and the duty of individuals to familiarize themselves with it.
1. Israel was to be well-acquainted with Scripture. **DEU 6:6-9; JOS 1:8; ROM 3:1-2.**
 2. Delight and meditation in the law was expected. **PSA 1:1-2; 119:97-99; ISA 34:16.**
 3. Ignorance of the written law was denounced. **HOS 8:12.**
 4. Jesus stressed seeking and reading. **JOH 5:39; LUK 10:26.**
 5. The written things are for certainty and learning. **LUK 1:3-4; ROM 15:4.**
 6. Noble hearers check their scriptures. **ACT 17:11.**
 7. We are to grow in knowledge and give answers. **HEB 5:12-14; 1PE 3:15.**
 8. Start young. **2TI 3:15.**
 9. "For what saith the scripture?..." (**ROM 4:3**).
 10. The Biblical model of religion is not to blindly subjugate oneself to the dictates of a professional class but to be individually self-informed to help, check and challenge the professional class.
 - a. It is a sad thing that human nature would prefer bondage to a lie which tells them they are better off ignorant of the truth.
 - b. Moses preferred a knowledgeable people. **NUM 11:27-29.**
- V. Remember:
1. Jesus Christ is the central and ultimate message of Scripture. Scripture will never glorify any other human to be on par with Him. **JOH 5:39; COL 1:9-10.**
 2. The N.T. governs and explains the O.T.
 3. Plain statements govern difficult statements.
 4. The N.T. is the superfood of the Christian diet, especially the Pauline epistles.
 5. Let none (including your own sinful nature) con you into thinking that you will only confuse yourself by reading the Bible, especially the N.T.
 6. There is so much "low-hanging fruit" in the Bible that you will be amply nourished even though you couldn't reach the tallest branches.
 7. Set your heart to understand and God will bless the effort. **DAN 10:12; JOH 7:17; HEB 11:6.**
 8. Read, and understand. **EPH 3:4.**