

Bible Knowledge and Ingestion: Value, Necessity, Benefits and Brief Survey of the Old and New Testaments

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Introduction

It has been well said by others that he who would escape error or heresy is the one most immersed in God's divine book, the Bible. Starting off the Christian life with a sound footing and appreciation of the entire Bible is one of the greatest blessings a person could ever have. One reason is that they are not tossed to and fro by every novelty or wind of doctrine that hits the scene (Ephesians 4:14). A second reason is that they are safeguarded from the machinations of deceitful slippery men that often harbour sinister motives, distort, extort out of or even deceive someone out of what they have, know or own. The times in which our lot falls especially calls for such diligence so that the saint spends more time in authentic Christian service rather than spending many precious hours attempting to get out of endless derailments. This paper explores the twin idea of Bible reading as well as giving a panoramic view of the entire biblical canon. To achieve these ends, this author is indebted to several sources including Carson, Ryle, James and Gresham among others.

Impediments to Bible Reading

For one to grow in their new found faith, there is need to feed upon the word of God frequently and consistently. Like new born babes, they ought to crave pure spiritual nutrients found in the milk of the word (1 Peter 2:2). That is in an ideal setting where all things functioned well and according to purpose. Unfortunately, the times in which we live are equally trying because that which attracts individuals powerfully calling for their attention is not the word of God. Different voices clamour for attention, resulting in divided attention. Depending on the mental wiring, individuals will be pulled and enticed in different directions causing needless strain, unless they have the right spiritual stamina, focus or maturity. In post-modern, high dynamic times, people seek exciting things and by that token, keep away from meticulous investigation of God's word or even much hard study. Their natural constitution naturally prefers to be entertained rather than feel inconvenienced by keeping their nose in the Bible. This is the spirit of the age

where everything is relative and nice. In a world like this, stuff must be user friendly, easy going and effortlessly grasped lest it slips into oblivion by neglect.

The Duty and Value of Bible Reading

But the Christian has a God given duty to both read and study God's word, irrespective of the circumstances. The saint ought to study the word of God for their own spiritual good so that they could easily detect error while walking in the paths of righteousness. The Christian will thus receive divine guidance that never leads them into error or destruction. By that token, the Christian must neither delegate nor relegate Bible reading not even opting to carelessly read the Scriptures given that it is not only inspired but a love letter from God. In this brisk write up, we offer some reasons and examples of why the Christian must of necessity daily read the written word of God before proceeding to undertake a brief survey of the entire Bible, both Old and New Testaments:

- Christians should read the Bible for themselves every day without fail; it builds their spiritual muscles in a decayed world. Moreover, this is a necessity and no short cuts dare be entertained. Ingesting the Holy Writ takes painstaking commitment that is required, if one desires to be a "bible moth." The Bereans in Acts 17:10 affords us an example of a noble set of people that loved and respected the scriptures unlike others in the surrounding context.
- The Bible is the map for the Christian, shedding light on more issues than one. Additionally, it is authoritative and reliable in every sense. If what is taught by men is really true, then the scriptures will clearly confirm or reject it. Scripture is the determining factor not the reverse. Armed with scripture then, we can easily detect error or verify the truth for our own protection and edification.
- Closely connected to the previous point, the Bible is the touchstone with which we must evaluate the Truth. It alone is the standard for all supposed truth. Anything above or below is to be rejected.

Impediments, Challenges and Excuses for not Reading the Bible

As earlier hinted at, many things clamour for attention and thus Bible reading is to be intentionally prioritised. Examples of detracting items include; trending and captivating new technologies (i.e. radio, smartphones, computers etc.)¹, TV or

¹ Although it needs to be qualified that these, in themselves are not necessarily evil, wrong or harmful, but can detract attention, captivate. One needs to diligently govern their hearts or attitude towards these creature comfort goods for which we are grateful to God for.

Newspapers among others. Another subtle reason for neglecting Bible reading is familiarity (*I already read it, sort of thing...*) causing people not to hunger or thirst thinking they know everything. They are different from the person depicted in Psalm 42:1. Still others claim that they find it hard to understand the Bible, coupled with forgetfulness or even an extremely busy daily life schedule. To make ends meet, they literary have to slave it out right round the clock to the extent they scarcely have time for their own physical or spiritual wellbeing. Eventually, they decline and become spiritually malnourished suffering from dietary deficiency spiritual diseases. It is no wonder they exhibit spiritual dwarfism despite many decades of being in the faith. JC Ryle (2013), makes an issue around Bible reading in his monumental work *Practical Religion*, and for a good reason. That said, all these excuses appear legitimate in themselves but they rob one of the necessary dietary nutrients that they desperately need for proper healthy spiritual growth. As for the challenges to reading, both past and present, it may be said that some suffer serious challenges that, at times, they unduly magnify (exaggerate), such as; the cost of acquiring a Bible, limited time, not having access to a complete, full Bible (at least this was a major issue before the printing press), low literacy levels, “wrong” translation and accuracy issues among others. These, in some cases, are admittedly genuine challenges, but they certainly nibble away at one’s spiritual vitality.

Ramifications for not having a Systematic Reading Regime

If one does not master their whole Bible, then they inevitably slide into one error or other. First they become vulnerable and a natural easy target of the enemy, throwing around all manner of toxic world views. Before long, and without the least realisation, they may suddenly find themselves supporting what they once vehemently opposed! What happened? Chances are that some spiritual virus may have infected them unawares! By that token, many others slide into cultic tendencies. We could easily expand this area but resist to do so now. For now, however, we offer some key traits of cults and here they are; Cults: build an exclusive, closed separate society, isolate victims from the world around them into a sort of, self-righteousness bubble, espouse a clandestinely secret doctrine eventually substituting God. Cults can be very deadly and completely blind someone from reality. We have, in some level of detail, dealt with cults, their nature and danger in separate work to which we point our readers. For now, it needs to be emphatically stated that cults (or the occult) are especially deadly, necessitating their being kept at bay as much as possible and by all means. Once contaminated, it is near impossible to escape from their grip, unless of course, liberated by the invincible grace of God.

Motivations for reading the Bible

Now that we have demonstrated the deleterious effects of Bible reading neglect, given the above examples, it can safely be stated that a little incomplete knowledge can be very dangerous. The only safe antidote is to imbibe the truth as it is in Jesus Christ as found in the Bible. We suggest that individuals systematically read the Bible, have a copy of their own and a good accurate translation for that matter as well as a way to evaluate your progress. Christian, make it your aim to interact with those that seem to understand the Bible much better. In short, walk with the wise (Proverbs 13:20).

A Panoramic view of the Bible

Having successfully shown why and how every Christian ought to read the Bible for themselves, we now proceed to survey the entire Bible. Admittedly, this is no easy task but we shall do so with the guidance offered us by Drs Machen and Boyd in their great work *A Brief Bible History*. The work has two sections with over 38 chapters in total whose first section deals with the Old Testament (15 chapters) while the second section has 23 chapters covering the entire New Testament. Before delving into some level of detail, we offer some preliminary over view comments:

Studying the Bible, as earlier intimated in this paper, is of utmost importance because the saint is not only built up but instructed in the way of the Lord. By diligent, systematic and consistent study (using the correct hermeneutic), the saint is preserved from potential errors as well as equipped with an ability to discern whatever is being offered on the spiritual menu. It is therefore key to have a big picture view as well as some intelligible level of appreciation of what is being offered in both Testaments. A detailed study of each individual book is beyond the scope and purview of this review but what we have here is what any and every saint should know and be well acquainted with. We offer the very kernel for our information and possible growth. Moreover, it must be stated that understanding the genre, hermeneutic and exegetical processes will help immensely. It would be advisable for the Christian to understand some basic Greek or Hebrew or at the very least, be able to handle a Concordance which proves very handy. Commentaries and other writings of men are equally helpful but it is strongly advised that the Christian, in the Berean spirit (Acts 17:10), understands the scriptures for themselves² primarily before reverting to what human authorities have said. In other words, Christian, attempt to understand issues yourself before consulting others, and that, largely for confirmation purposes only.

² i.e. for their own good not the neighbor! They should own the interpretation and reading rather than having a second hand knowledge of truth.

Very well then, what makes up the Bible? How different or similar is it with the Jewish Hebrew Bible? Why is the Bible different from other writings like the Qur'an? Although these are equally critical and important areas of enquiry, we narrow our focus on what the Bible is composed of and what we can learn. For comparison studies, we leave for readers to further explore that avenue. For now, we focus on giving a synopsis of the entire Bible, albeit, by Testaments. Here we go!

The Old Testament

The Old Testament commences with the creation account of how God created the world, the fall, the various covenants and a promised messiah (Genesis 1:1; 3:15). Things degenerate with time with evil spreading all over the globe. The once pure creation experiences a fall with deep ramifications on both humans and creation in general. This sin infestation results in a universal flood that purges the world of a sinful generation leaving only Noah and his immediate family. The giants and, eventually, the Tower of Babel take the centre stage of scripture in a progressive narrative. We may say that throughout the Old Testament, we have a story of God dealing with a chosen nation called Israel in the various manoeuvres and experiences. We have the Patriarchs, the Judges and Kings ranging from Abram to Moses and beyond. Abram is called from the East, leaves his native land and makes a covenant with him (Genesis 12). His native land is given to idolatry but God calls him and later promises to make him a great nation. Thinking of it, it certainly took great faith to abandon his familiar environment, step out and to follow a deity he had never known before. Abram the Hebrew, travels around with his nephew Lot and later separates with him, after ugly tensions among their workmen. Abram, later Abraham, has a son whom he nearly sacrifices but God provides a lamb. He is *Jehovah Jireh*. This is probably the first time we hear about sacrifices in the Bible after Abel and Cain, although Noah offered a sacrifice (Genesis 8:20). Abraham's successor, Isaac, would marry and have two sons, Esau and Jacob. God pleases to bless Jacob, although he subtly 'grabbed' the blessing through trickery. Jacob would eventually have twelve sons with one of them taken into slavery in Egypt. This same slave, Joseph would become mighty in the Egyptian nation and eventually save the clan. The clan moves to Egypt and stays there over 430 years before Moses comes along to their rescue. On and on goes the Old Testament. In between, it is a time of disobedience, sin, idolatry, return to the Lord, discipline and finally the exiling of the nation beginning with the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC and the southern Kingdom in 586 BC when the Temple is destroyed. During the exile, we have Daniel who takes on a big job in Babylon and perhaps influences the Babylonian or Persian authorities to be lenient on the Children of Israel. Nehemiah takes the lead in mobilising the children of Israel to rebuild the walls and the temple. With much opposition, the walls are built in 52 days but the Temple takes much longer for various reasons. The Jews appear reluctant while some remain lingering in exile before Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi come along

to encourage the nation to be serious and build the Temple of the Lord. After 46 years of delays, rebukes, encouragements and sensitization, the Jews complete the task and worship in the Temple resumes. The Temple is very central to Jewish worship and identity. The Jews are allowed to return to their land but much later come under the domain of the Romans. The Old Testament ends with a prophecy of the deliverer to come who would free the proud Jewish nation. For a space of 400 years³, no fresh prophecy or revelation comes forth and in between we have the rebellion of the Maccabeus and patriotic Jews who would not stomach oppression. John comes as a forerunner to the Lord Jesus and preaches repentance. Although his account is recorded in the New Testament gospel accounts, in our view, John is really an Old Testament Prophet, or at least one that connects the Old to the New, though others opine that the New Testament actually begins when Christ has the Lord's supper. Still others posit that it commences in the Book of Acts. Varied ideas arise all the time but for our purposes, John is an Old Testament herald.

The New Testament

The New Testament opens with the Jews still under the colonization of the Romans that have established an elaborate structure of command, rules, and regulations, though they seem to respect Jewish worship and rites. The Jews are weary, frustrated, tired of paying taxes, deeply resenting allegiance to this foreign overbearing power. Consequently, they can hardly wait for the long awaited Messiah to show up. Herod is King and firmly in control when he is told that another King is born (about 4 BC) in the world as prophesied in the Hebrew scriptures (Matthew 2:1-12). He is troubled and instructs the Magi to make a meticulous search for the child so that he too may pay homage. This is clearly a lie because he intends³ to slaughter the child so that He remains the sole ruler. In the providence of God, the baby is preserved and later returns to live in Nazareth, a little obscure town in Palestine. From then on, we hear or read very little about the boy Jesus except for the Jerusalem encounter with the Teachers of the Law when he was twelve. Other than that, all the facts are veiled from our view⁴ until Jesus comes along to be baptised, is tempted by the devil and subsequently commences his three year public Ministry. Jesus rises from obscurity to popularity which alarms the religious leaders until they find a way of having him crucified to the cross as a criminal. And yet, their actions actually fulfil God's design in that Jesus actually dies to save His people (AD 26-30). The death is actually a sacrifice that secures redemption for God's people. The curse that came on Adam in Genesis 3 is removed, hence redemption and access into the presence of God is now open. Jesus is buried but on the third day rises to meet His disciples before ascending to Heaven promising to be with His people to the very end. He gives them a commission and departs to the father. The Holy Spirit comes upon the Church in Acts 2 which inaugurates the physical Church in

³ During the Intertestamental period.

⁴ Some style this period *the silent years*.

the sense we know it, though arguably had been there all along, albeit, veiled. At this stage, Peter, James and other Apostles are at Jerusalem though Philip and some disciples go beyond the bounds of Jerusalem. Many trying things and miraculous deliverances occur as the church progresses with thousands getting saved. The church continues to spread though initially specifically for the Jews but the Cornelius encounter in Chapter 10 and other events open up the possibility of the Gentiles being engrafted into the commonwealth of Israel. Much debate ensues around this question which is finally resolved at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Later saints equally wrestle with this problem including Paul with his colleagues, Silas, Timothy and Titus. The epistles highlight only a tiny bit around the magnitude of this problem, though evidently vexing. Around Acts 13 however, Saul, who later becomes Paul begins to take the centre stage. Having been converted in Acts 9, Paul of Tarsus, grows from strength to strength and influence as Barnabas takes him around. Later however, they sharply differ and Paul heads out as the apostle to the Gentiles while Peter and probably Barnabas, focus on the Jews (Acts 15:36; Galatians 2:1-10). God does many mighty things through the life of Paul as he travels around Asia, preaching and teaching the everlasting gospel. He is treated as a criminal, a fugitive and confuser⁵ of the known world but this bond slave of Christ perseveres and presses on, pounding away, as it were, the good news until finally He is arrested and put under house arrest (Acts 28). It appears he was released for a while and later rearrested which eventually leads to His death⁶. Having laboured, established churches, written many epistles and been a crusader for truth, this giant of the faith (though feeble and unimpressive in appearance) eventually lays down his life as hinted at in 2 Timothy 4 (beheaded about AD 68 under Nero's reign). The book of Acts however closes with Paul under house arrest but able to freely preach and teach⁷. The other apostles do their part winning souls though their lives end in different ways. Most die violent deaths while others die of natural causes. Tradition has it that Paul himself was beheaded while Peter was crucified upside down (Forbush 1967). John was one of the last disciples⁸ to die and thus writes the three letters and Revelation from the island of Patmos. The Revelation is rather difficult to understand given its prophetic and apocalyptic nature. Daniel and Revelation appear connected and many attempts have been made to reconcile as well as link them. Other books of interest are Hebrews whose author is unknown but the substance of its message opens up Christology much, while James rebukes the fruitless Christian. Peter recounts the experiences he had with the Lord a long way back, as a means to establish the faith of God's elect scattered all over the world (I Peter 1:1). Jude would refer to past events as well as point to the future epochs and occurrences in the spiritual realm, some of which have not been preserved or recorded in the scriptures. This presented problems for the Church in earlier days.

⁵ Or disturber

⁶ In which time it is believed he penned the Prison Epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, Philemon and Colossians

⁷ As mentioned earlier.

⁸ If not the last, according to John Fox.

Conclusion

Possessing an intelligible knowledge and mastery of the entire campus of scripture is of immense value to the Christian. It gives stability as settles one in the faith. Additionally, this grants one an ability to navigate their way across the scripture forest from Genesis right through to Revelation. The lazy Christian does themselves great harm if they selectively study or at best possess a partial incomplete scattered knowledge of the Bible. In the end this is dangerous and proves to their own undoing. Christian, read the Bible for yourself, Amen!

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