

that we can trust it as our guide for living in this world and for its promise of immortality in the world to come.

The Christian Age

For those who are new to the Scriptures, a formula for a basic understanding of the message would be to begin by reading the first 12 chapters of **Genesis**, then to skip to the **New Testament**. From the very name, we should conclude that this is the covenant in force today.

The first four books of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John: four accounts of the biography of Christ) give the fulfillment of prophecies in the Old Testament concerning the birth, life, teachings, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This man who was born 2,000 years ago to poor parents in a small occupied country, and who died the ignoble death of crucifixion, should never have been heard of after his death. But, today, He dominates the world, with even our calendars being dated from His birth.

Who was — and is — this mysterious person? The prophecies had said of Him, “*You are My Son. Today I have begotten You*” (Psalm 2:7; Hebrews 1:5). This One of the Godhead was “*made in all things like His brethren*” (Hebrews 2:17), taking flesh and dying as the perfect sacri-

fice for the sins that separated humanity from its Creator God.

Following your reading of the resurrection of Christ from the grave, you will read in the book of Acts of the beginning of His spiritual family, the church of Christ. Those who believed in Him as their Saviour turned away from a life of sin, confessed their belief in Him as the Son of God, were immersed in water in a likeness of his burial in the grave, and were resurrected to walk a new life in Him. The remainder of the New Testament contains instructions concerning the development of the church and the maturing of Christians in their walk with Christ.

Revelation, the Last Book of the Bible

Much of the book of Revelation is prophetic. The promise in chapters 20-22 is that Christ will return to take the faithful to live with God in a new heaven and a new earth.

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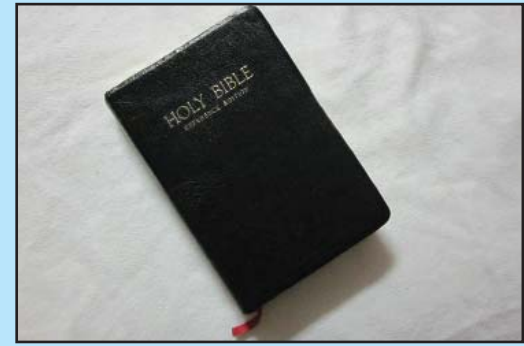
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How to Read the Bible

J.C. Choate

Have you ever read the Bible? Yes, I know that it is a big book, and that the thought of trying to read it and to understand its message is challenging. I would like to give you some information and guidelines that will simplify the process.

First, we need to establish the claim of the Bible to speak with the authority of God, directing the lives of those who read and obey it. 2

Timothy 3:16 declares: *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”*

Those who penned the Scriptures claimed to be writing by “inspiration”. The statement most often made was, *“The word of the Lord came to me ...”* (Ezekiel 18:1). The truth of this claim is proved by the fact that the entire Bible was written by about 40 men, over a period of about 1500 years, yet it is one coherent message from the first book to the last, with no contradictions. The first book, Genesis, begins with man in the paradise of God, and the last book, Revelation, ends with the restoration of man to that fellowship. This unity was achieved in spite of the fact that hardly any of the writers lived simultaneously, and most did not have access to the writings of the others.

We are instructed: *“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”* (1 Timothy 2:15).

The Old Testament and the New Testament

How do we “rightly divide” the Bible? First, we notice that there are two major parts:

the **Old Testament** and the **New Testament**. A “testament” is a will or covenant. In this case, the covenants are between God and His people.

The Patriarchal Age

The Old Testament contains 39 individual “books”, covering two major time periods in the history of the world. A brief history of the first — the Patriarchal Age — is given in the book of Genesis. During this age, God dealt directly with the fathers (patriarchs) of the families that were faithful to Him.

Genesis 1:1 says, *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”* These chapters tell of the creation of man, of his fall into sin, of his immediate descendants, and of the growth of disobedience among the peoples of the world.

We read in chapters 6-8 of the righteousness of a man named Noah, and of God’s instructions to him to build an ark so that he, his family, and representations of all animal life could be saved from the flood that would come upon the earth. Unbelievers today would say that the account of the world-wide flood is nothing but a myth. In direct contradiction to that claim, there are more than 200 flood stories in the records of ancient civilizations, scattered around the world. Even though the writers of these accounts would not have had access to

each other’s histories, there are many specific details of agreement with the biblical account.

Chapter 11 of Genesis lists an extensive “Table of Nations” corroborated by secular histories of the peoples of the world.

The Mosaic Age

In Genesis 12, we read of the covenant God made with a man of the city of Ur of Chaldea, named Abraham. The promise was made that through his descendants, all the nations of the world would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). The Israelites, as his people came to be called, were the nation through which Jesus Christ was born.

Exodus through the last book of the Old Testament — Malachi — tells not only the account of God’s dealings with Abraham’s descendants, but we find there many prophecies concerning the coming of the promised Savior, in the person of God’s Son, Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament portion of the Bible is important because it provides us with an accurate historical record of 4,000 years of God’s dealings with humanity; it helps us to understand more about the nature of God and His desires for His people; and it provides us with prophetic statements that were made hundreds of years before their fulfillment. These facts, carefully studied, prove that the Bible really is God’s word, and