

Bible Study Plan

Read to Remember-Retain to Teach

The Bible is the single most important book to read and understand in this lifetime. Yet, few would say that they actually know the “Greatest Story Ever Told” as well as their chosen career, favorite pastime, or favorite movie. So, let’s map out a Bible Study Plan that is going to be user friendly, logical, and especially retentive such that you will be able to teach the Good News to others.

Learning and memory are improved by many different methods, with simple *repetition* being the most familiar to anyone who has ever taken an exam. Multiple modalities, desire, goal orientation, and receptivity are important as well. Of all the pearls to retention, however, it is proper **sequencing** that provides the crucial element for learning complex concepts. Sequencing clears the two biggest hurdles: where to start, and when to read the hard stuff. Most people who are reading this may have already tried to read the Bible, but did not finish or get the most out of it because of one of these obstacles. Knowing what NOT to read early is as important as where to start, because the confusion caused by improper sequencing is the primary reason people lose momentum and quit early. The order in which the works of the Old and New Testament were placed in the Bible was never meant to facilitate the left to right reading of a book, as they predate books by centuries; they were simply organized by length, in four distinct sections, to facilitate the easy referencing of scrolls. Thus, a reading plan needs to take this library concept into account and study the 73 books of the Bible with an early, middle and late approach; that will give us an understanding of all of them.

The *First Wave*, so to speak, must read easily, define Jesus thoroughly, and lay out the chronology of the story. Thus, the Gospels should dominate the introduction, as should a careful and thorough reading of *Genesis*, the foundation of nearly everything. This chronological approach can be termed “horizontal” learning because it provides a skeletal framework upon which to later deepen with more complex texts. This First Wave is the foundational books that includes all 4 Gospels and the chronologic Historical Books of both the Old and New Testaments.

The Second Wave should then be the books that deepen our understanding of the story, “vertical” learning per se. There is a great deal said at crucial times by certain writers that give us a deeper and more elaborate understanding of Jesus. These texts include all of the New Testament Epistles, letters by the Apostles that explain Jesus more thoroughly, and the longer prophetic texts of the Old Testament, specifically *Isaiah*, *Jeremiah*, *Ezekiel*, and *Daniel*, which are considered the Major Prophets because of the length of their books.

The Third Wave should include those works that will still further tighten one’s understanding of the story by bringing in specialized and more succinct works. *Revelation* is best read later-or last, when its numerous scriptural references are quickly and readily grasped. *Leviticus*, the laws of the ancient Israelites, can be very confusing if read early, but knowing that the boy Jesus read it first, and quoted it often, will greatly add to the texture of The Story. The 12 works of the Minor Prophets, many of which are very short, will also be readily understood when they are placed in context.

Lastly, the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament: *Job, Psalms, Proverbs, etc.* can be read at any time during your study. Just as *John's* Gospel is read throughout the 3 year cycle of *Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, so too can *Psalms* and *Proverbs* be read at any time the Spirit so moves. Here are all the books of the Bible listed in a sequence that will get you started, keep you going, and prevent you from stopping-until you understand it all. Take your time, use a strong Catholic commentary, and learn the Word that you may teach it to others.

FIRST WAVE, IN SEQUENTIAL ORDER:

Begin “horizontal”, left to right, in order to establish the storyline and provide a framework upon which to build. Gospels first and early, melded into the chronological works to maximize our understanding of Jesus and establish the outline.

1. JOHN: Get to know Jesus from the eyewitness to the Crucifixion and the Empty Tomb
2. Genesis: Foundations for nearly everything: Creation, Fall, Abraham, Israel
3. MATTHEW: Jesus as the fulfillment of OT prophecy, the Sermon on the Mount
4. Exodus: Moses leads the people out of slavery in Egypt, 10 commandments
5. Numbers: Israel's lack of faith results in wandering in the desert for 40 years
6. Joshua: Moses' successor, Joshua, conquers most of the Promised Land
7. Judges: The stories of Deborah, Gideon, Ehud, Samson & Delilah
8. 1 Samuel: Samuel the Judge, David and Goliath
9. 2 Samuel: David the King of Israel, Ark of the Covenant brought to Jerusalem
10. MARK: The story of Jesus as told to John Mark, a disciple of Peter
11. 1 Kings: King Solomon, the son of David, the great prophet Elijah
12. 2 Kings: Elisha the prophet, the Northern Tribes fall to Assyria, Judah into exile in Babylon
13. Ezra: Return to Judah after seventy years of exile in Babylon
14. Nehemiah: Nehemiah goes to Jerusalem to lead the rebuilding
15. 1 Maccabees: After Alexander, the culture is now Greek, Jewish rebellion, Hanukkah
16. LUKE: Adds nativity stories, only non-Jewish author who writes to a non-Jewish audience
17. Acts of the Apostles: First generation of Christians, Peter and Paul

SECOND WAVE, ANY ORDER

The Second Wave is meant to deepen understanding. It does so by delving into longer works that more fully elaborate crucial events. This deeper exposure makes these works more “vertical” in orientation, they can be read in any order:

Deuteronomy: Moses’ farewell address after wandering in the desert with the Israelites for 40 years

Ruth: During the time of the Judges, Ruth marries Boaz, the great grandfather of David

Isaiah: Foretold judgment on Judah, but a Messiah will come to save the people

Jeremiah: Promised God would institute a New Covenant with his people

Ezekiel: Writing in exile in Babylon, he has visions of heavenly worship, apocalyptic writing style

Daniel: Vision of the Son of Man, who is given everlasting dominion over all, Lion’s Den

Romans: Review of Salvation History and how it prepared the world for Jesus

1 Corinthians: Celebrating the liturgy, explains the body and blood of Christ

2 Corinthians: Paul defends himself to the Corinthians

Galatians: Restates that Christians do not have to follow all of the ancient Laws of Moses

Ephesians: One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, One God and Father of us all

Philippians: I can do all things in Him who strengthens me

Colossians: All things were created through Him and for Him. He is the Head of the Body, the Church

1 Thessalonians: This is the will of God, your sanctification. The coming of the Lord

2 Thessalonians: Hold fast to what you have been taught, beware of false teachers

1 Timothy: Instructions to his friend on how to lead. Fight the good fight of the Faith

2 Timothy: I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the Faith

Titus: A letter to his friend who was left behind in Crete, instructions on how to lead

Philemon: Letter entreating Philemon to take back his runaway slave and treat him as a brother

Hebrews: Long essay on how the Old Testament foreshadowed Jesus Christ

James: Faith apart from works is dead, tame the tongue for it blesses and curses

1 Peter: Always be prepared to make a defense for the hope within you, The Ark of Noah prefigures the Church

2 Peter: Beware of false teachers, with the Lord one day is as a thousand years

1 John: God is Love, this is what he has promised us, Eternal Life

2 John: Speaks out against Docetism, those who claimed that Jesus was not really a man in the flesh

3 John: No greater joy can I have than this, to hear that my children follow the Truth

Jude: Judgment against false teachers, references half a dozen Old Testament events

THIRD WAVE, ANY ORDER

The Third and Final Wave is for texts that will continue to deepen understanding with very specialized or especially succinct works. Many of these books are difficult to comprehend without sufficient background, but very rich now after already establishing both breadth and depth. Many of these are significant for singular prophecies that were to be fulfilled in Jesus, further “tightening” your grasp of the Gospel.

Leviticus: Details the ancient laws of ritual purity

1,2 Chronicles: Same history as Samuel and Kings, with a theological emphasis

Tobit: Tobit is aided by Archangel Raphael

Judith: Judith saves the Israelites from the Assyrians

Esther: An Israelite woman in Exile becomes Queen of Persia and saves her people

2 Maccabees: Similar events as 1 Maccabees, emphasizes blood martyrdom

Lamentations: Poems written by Jeremiah about the destruction of Jerusalem

Baruch: Message of hope to the Israelites in Exile

Hosea: Compares Israel to an adulterous wife, promises God will still redeem them

Joel: Promise to send the Holy Spirit, Peter refers to his prophecy at the Pentecost in Acts

Amos: Judgment against the enemies of Israel, but worse against Israel itself

Obadiah: Judgment against Edom, the descendants of Esau

Jonah: reluctant prophet, Jesus refers to him directly

Micah: Promises a Prince of Peace will come from the town of Bethlehem

Nahum: Warns that Jerusalem will suffer the same fate as Nineveh, destruction

Habakkuk: Says the advancing Babylonians are God’s instruments to punish Judah

Zephaniah: Describes the Day of the Lord when all will be judged

Haggai: Urged the people to rebuild their temple after the Exile

Zechariah: Promised a King and Savior would come, riding on a donkey

Malachi: Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of Hosts

Revelation: History ends, Satan cast into the lake of fire forever, a new Heaven and Earth where God is the light

ANYTIME, ANY ORDER

These works can be read at any time in any order. As ancient Wisdom, they will beautifully synthesize The Story.

Job: Ancient text discussing why bad things happen to good people, suffering motif leads down the ages to the Cross

Psalms: 150 songs and poems, many attributed to David

Proverbs: Wise sayings, many attributed to Solomon

Ecclesiastes: There is a season and a time for every matter under heaven

Song of Songs: A love poem, represents the Love of God for His people

Wisdom of Solomon: Salvation history as guided by wisdom herself

Sirach: More review of salvations history, specifically teaches how to live life well

References:

Catholic Scripture Study International *Holy Bible*, St. Benedict Press, Charlotte North Carolina
The Bible at a Glance, Faith Charts by Scott Hahn, Our Sunday Visitor, Huntington, Indiana

Read John’s Gospel This Week!

Start Genesis Next Week...take it slow with commentary. God Bless!