

BIBLE OVERVIEW

The Bible is arguably the most important book in all world history. It has fostered three great religions and some of the world's greatest art. More books have been written about it than any other written work. For Christians, the Bible is God's Word.

But the Bible is also a daunting book for most young people. It's long, for one thing, written a long time ago (2-3 thousand years), and is composed of at least 66 separate books. Since even scholars continually argue about interpretations of many of its parts, how is one to know what it really means?

It's important, then, to give prospective readers some clear and simple overview, basic reading guides, and a way to approach individual books. Two things seem necessary; one an attitude and the other basic understanding. In the first place, it is important to approach the Bible as one would a communication of love from a beloved parent or friend. Love, mercy and good intentions are behind even its harshest words. Secondly, understand the Bible needs to be read differently depending on what part you are reading: Old or New Testament, story, poetry, laws and instructions, or what is meant to be universal teaching.

We think having an overview of the Bible in terms of thematic keys to each book is important. The overall theme of the Bible or Holy Scripture is love: God's creation and recovery of a beloved world (see John 3: 16). The Bible is a Great Story, a big story containing many stories. Our stories and God's story come together in the Bible. To help get the picture of this unfolding story—and its subplots—the following outline is offered. It is meant as an aid to one's own reading and study as well as for teaching others. (We suggest printing this out using button in upper left. Try some fun drills with cheers of 5, 12, 5, 5, 12 for the Old Testament, and 4, 21, 1 for the New. Then add names of books by sections, and then themes. In an amazingly quick time, people will have a sense of the whole Bible.)

THEMATIC KEY WORDS OF BIBLE BOOKS

(OT: 5 Law; 12 History, 5 Poetic, 5 Major Prophets, 12 Minor Prophets = 39)

Genesis = Beginnings

Exodus = Redemption & Law

Leviticus = Worship & Holiness

Numbers = Wilderness Wanderings

Deuteronomy = Law Reviewed (just as Chronicles replays Kings and John, the Synoptics)

Joshua = Victory & Settlement

Judges = Defeat & Deliverance

Ruth = Redemption Story

1 Samuel = Man's King (Saul)

2 Samuel = God's King (David)

1 Kings = Israel's Height & Division (Solomon, Judah / Israel's kings)

2 Kings = Israel's Corruption & Captivity

1 Chronicles = Rise of Judah (David)

2 Chronicles = Height & Decline of Judah (Revivals: Solomon and his successors)

Ezra = Temple & Reforms

Nehemiah = Rebuilding Walls

Esther = God's Woman

Job = Suffering

Psalms = Hymns and Praise

Proverbs = Wisdom

Ecclesiastes = Vanity under the Sun

Song of Songs = Love

Isaiah = Good News (bad news first)

Jeremiah = Bad News (with precious gems—rich verses—along way)

Lamentations = Protest (crying out; youth today need to lament)

Ezekiel = Glory of the Lord (Visions, The Word of the Lord)

Daniel = Kingdoms

Hosea = Unconditional Love

Joel = Plagues

Amos = Social Judgment

Obadiah = Doom & Deliverance (Essau & Jacob; Edom/Petra & Zion)

Jonah = Mercy (for Nineveh)

Micah = Justice (Thy Kingdom Come)

Nahum = Nineveh's Doom

Habakkuk = "Why, God?"

Zephaniah = Punishment & Restoration

Haggai = Resettlement and God's House

Zechariah = Messiah & Kingdom

Malachi = Final Rebukes

[Don't forget Apochrypha: Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach, Prayer of Manasseh, Song of Three Young Men, etc.]

New Testament Books

(NT: 4 Gospels, 1 History, 21 Letters, 1 Prophecy = 27)

Matthew = Christ as King

Mark = Christ as Strong Servant

Luke = Christ as Perfect Human

John = Christ as Son of God

Acts = Church History

The continued Acts of Christ and of the Holy Spirit through Apostles

Romans = Salvation (or Gospel, or Righteousness)

1 Corinthians = Church Problems

2 Corinthians = Apostolic Authority

Galatians = Faith in Christ

Ephesians = Believers in Christ (The Body of Christ)

Philippians = Unity in Christ

Colossians = Christ in Believers (Christ the Head of the Body)

1 Thessalonians = Christ's Coming

2 Thessalonians = End of the Age

1 Timothy = Church Truth & Order

2 Timothy = Pastoral Character (Christian Leadership)

Titus = Good Works

Philemon = Redemption Story (NT version of social responsibility)

Hebrews = Christ is Better (superiority of the New Covenant)

James = True Religion

1 Peter = Suffering Hope

2 Peter = Endurance (to the End)

1 John = Assurance & Incarnate Love

2 John = Truth and Love

3 John = Hospitality

Jude = Dangerous Teachings

Revelation (or) End Times (The Bible story's—and history's—conclusion)

The Apocalypse (Malachi/OT ends with word “curse.”)

The Apocalypse/NT ends with word “grace.”)

[Note: Be sure to differentiate the genre of the books above. You must read poetry, story, law, ceremonial instructions, Old Testament prophecy and instructions, the words of Jesus Christ and the teachings of the Apostle Paul in different ways. In awe and devotion, we should read the Bible first of all as a love letter and great story from the God who created and cares for us. In humility we rely on the Church (holy traditions and the Body of Christ around us, along with the illumination of the Holy Spirit, to understand and apply the message of the Bible. Finally, adapt and change the themes given above to suit yourself and your situation, and then go on to develop simple and memorable thematic outlines for each book.]

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What prompts you to read, study, or teach the Bible?
2. What has helped you the most in doing so?
3. What difficulties have you had in any of these endeavors? Where could you go for further understanding or skill?
4. What in the above might be of help to you?
5. What would you change in the approach or outline above?
6. How do you see using this article and outline most immediately?

IMPLICATIONS

1. Being as important as it is to world civilizations generally, general ignorance of the Bible and its not being included in so many school curricula are a shame. Educated people globally ought to know something about the Bible—as they should about great literary and religious works of the West, Asia, Africa and all global regions.

2. The major churches of the Christian faith are now all teaching the importance of Scriptural study. Young people need to have a basis and source for their growing faith.

3. Overviews, drills, and discussions with enthusiasm and affirmation are appreciated by most young people.

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