

Scriptures and Doctrine :: Suggestions re Bible Reading**Suggestions re Bible Reading - posted by TJB (), on: 2015/7/2 15:00**

HIS PASTURE

HINTS ON THE READING OF GOD'S WORD

Spiritual Food

He feeds among the lilies
The flock for which He bled,
In fields of Holy Scripture
His hungry sheep are fed.
'Tis there His truth eternal
Shall satisfy my mind
And show me my Beloved
For whom my heart has pined.

Several times in the Scriptures God's people are called "the sheep of His pasture" (Psalm 74:1; 79:13; 100:3; Jeremiah 23:1). It is not just the flock of His pasture, but the sheep. This shows us that our divine Shepherd is concerned to feed each one of His people. Each of us needs to be fed. But what are we to understand by "His pasture"? It is not "pastures", God has only one "pasture". There is not a number of alternatives to choose from. There is only one place where His sheep can safely feed. His pasture is the fertile field of Holy Scripture. If you are feeding elsewhere, you are feeding in the wrong place on the wrong food. Therefore, the Christian who lives on scraps of Scriptures quoted in daily devotionals and sermons is going to be undernourished. If God has provided His whole Word for us in our own language, it is because He wants us to read it for our spiritual nourishment and growth. (Deuteronomy 8:3; 1 Peter 2:2).

It may be asked, "Who is the Bible for, who is it addressed to?" Basically, the Bible meets us as lost sheep (Isaiah 53:6), and once we are saved from our sins, addresses us as "His sheep", who hear His voice and follow Him (John 10:27). The Bible paints a true portrait of us, and shows us how God sees us in heart and life. But it also brings the remedy for sin and guilt, not only leading us to repentance, but leading us to Christ. Robert Chapman wrote, "The threatenings of God's Word are designed to discourage men from their wickedness, and to drive them out of all refuges of lies to the Saviour. For the utterly self-condemned sinner there is nothing but encouragement in the whole compass of the Bible".

Once we have come to the "Shepherd and Bishop of our souls" (1 Peter 2:25), the Bible speaks to us not only as His sheep but as His servants. Notice how often the psalmist describes himself as "Thy servant" as he thanks God for His Word and prays for understanding in Psalm 119. Even the book of Revelation is only intended for the Lord's servants (see 1:1; 22:6). This teaches us that we should approach His Word in a spirit of submission, with a desire to know Him and His will for our lives.

It is no mere coincidence that both God's Book and God's Son are called "the Word". An old hymn says "The written and the living Word in all things are the same". There is certainly a very close connection between our attitude towards our Bibles and our attitude towards the Lord Jesus. Chapman says again, "A child of God who neglects the Scriptures cannot make it his business to please the Lord of glory: cannot make Him Lord of the conscience, the ruler of the heart, the joy, portion, and treasure of the soul".

Studying and Reading

The Christian's life must include these three elements: Bible reading, Prayer, and Bible study. D. L. Moody puts it like this: "When I read the Bible - God talks to me. When I pray - I talk to God. When I study the Bible - I prepare myself to talk to others. Philip Green, a man who read through the Bible over 500 times in 28 years, comments on this, "This distinction and order must not be forgotten. Daily Bible reading a set number of pages daily should be done while you are alone - GOD TALKS TO YOU as you read His Word. Do not share your reading time with anyone but God. You are not having devotions - you are reading the Bible through! We all easily understand the second - I look up and TALK TO GOD. The third, *œstudy*, is another thing separate from the first two. I have read articles and books on Bible reading only to find

that the author falls into the old trap - he talks five sentences on reading the Bible and twenty five on study. This is wrong - he said he was talking about reading the Bible - he was not! You must not run reading and study together because they do not mix. You will go overboard on "study" and neglect reading. All three should and must be done without neglecting the others if you want a balanced life in God. As a college teacher, I was told you were not prepared to teach any text book until you have read it several times through. How are you going to study or teach any book you have not read? Let us read the Bible through - start today!"

A Significant Comma

but the question arises - how do I go about reading a book of over 1200 pages? When I was saved over 40 years ago, it took me some time to establish the habit of reading Scripture, and older believers offered little help. Perhaps they had never formed the habit themselves? After a while the biography of Robert Murray McCheyne came into my hands. This godly man declared: "All my ideas of peace and joy are linked in with my Bible, and I would not give the hours of secret converse with it for all the other hours I spend in this world". McCheyne designed a system of Bible reading based on the calendar, which is still widely used and often printed in Bibles. It helps the reader to read through the whole Bible in a year, the Psalms and New Testament twice. I used this for a while, but on the one hand found it too rigid, so that when illness or travel interrupted the reading it was hard to catch up again. On the other hand, it was too restrictive. There were days when more Scripture could have been read, but the tendency was, having read the daily portions, to put the Bible down and read something else.

This led me to try to devise other systems. Often seeking to take advantage of the tremendous variety of literature found in the Bible, by jumping around between the Old and New Testaments. I will not risk bewildering the reader by giving examples of my inventions! Suffice it to say that in the end none of these systems made Scripture reading any easier or more satisfying. But please - if you are happy with the system you use, it is not my intention to discourage you!

It was really the comma at the end of Acts 21 which convinced me of the need to just read through the Bible! I went on to notice that many chapters begin with "AND" or some other conjunction. Even some books begin in this way. Does God really want us to keep from getting bored with His Word by interrupting Him in mid-sentence in order to read something "more interesting" or have more variety? I finally came to see that simply reading through the Bible according to the order in which God in His providence has placed the books was indeed the best way. It gives a panoramic view of God's dealings with mankind from the creation to the eternal glory, and at the same time an ever deepening impression of the riches of His grace and the wonder of His presence.

Starting and Establishing the Habit

But again the question arises: how can I keep on reading through a book of over 1200 pages? First of all it is a great encouragement to learn that many godly men and women have read repeatedly through the Scriptures, often several times a year. I am sure Robert McCheyne would not have been satisfied with his own system of once a year! That was just to get people started. George Müller has left on record that in just the last 25 years of his life he read the Bible through 100 times - 4 times per year, and that every time it was more precious.

Most have had the experience of starting to read Genesis in January but never getting beyond Leviticus. Perhaps you have done this several times! It is all a question of planning and purpose. Philip Green, mentioned above, wrote a helpful and challenging booklet back in the 1970's (still available on the internet) in which he shows the importance of reading a fixed number of pages during a certain period of time each day. I found it helpful to see the need to determine the number of PAGES rather than chapters or verses. Chapters vary between 2 and 176 verses, and verses too can consist of anything between 2 and over 70 words! Pages, however, always contain more or less the same amount of text, and therefore if you can read five pages in 30 minutes each day (really a very slow reading rate) you will have read right through a Bible with 1200 pages in 240 days (8 months). A Bible with large type helps to read more with less fatigue. Reading 10 pages per day it takes 120 days (4 months), 15 pages per day - 80 days (less than 3 months). 20 pages per day - 60 days (2 months)! 30 pages per day - the whole Bible is read in 40 days! The number of pages must be considered the MINIMUM for each day. You can always read more! If you feel your attention has wandered, don't worry! No need to reread it - just read on! If you are reading 10 or more pages per day, you will soon be back there again!

It is just a question of planning and discipline. Like any other skill, reading improves with practice. As the powers of concentration increase and as you become more familiar with the text through repeated readings, it will become less and less a duty to be performed and more and more a delight to be enjoyed. But we must stress again the importance of distinguishing between reading and study. Someone has described reading the Scriptures as the "hearing side of prayer". God is

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speaking to us in His Word. This is not the time to look up commentaries, etc. If you come across something you need to clarify or want to study, just make a note of it and come back to it during your study time. When reading, just read! Let God speak through His Word without the interference of commentators! It is His pasture. He does not want us to reorganize it or edit it, but just feed there on the food He has provided. He knows what we need! - "that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

Reading God's Word in a spirit of prayer,
Pondering His ways and His glories so fair;
Making His purpose the rule of our life,
Seeking His wisdom to guard us from strife:
Manna from heaven is ours here on earth,
Food for the nature we have through new birth!