

Core
Christianity



How to Read the Bible

Andrew Menkis

The following are summarized study notes taken from the workbook ***How to Read the Bible***, written by Andrew Menkis of Sola Media Ministries. These notes are born out of this workbook in conjunction with the study class our church had in the summer of 2026. While not comprehensive, they provide a big-picture view of the content we read & discussed during our time together. May this resource be fruitful as you seek to know & love God more fully through the reading of His Word.

Soli Deo Gloria!

Joe Sousa

Pastor of Christ Alone Church

How to Read The Bible

Lesson 1 – What is The Bible?

Summary Notes

1. The Bible is diverse in its genres, authors, & times/places of writing, but it is one unified message God gives to His people.
2. In all of its unity & diversity, the Bible is the Word of God. We know what books are God's Word because they have always been recognized by God's people as such.
3. The Word of God is spiritual. Because of this truth:
 - a. The Bible authority is spiritually intrinsic; it is self-authoritative & self-attesting of its divine nature.
 - b. The Church recognizes the Bible's authority, not grants it.
4. The authoritative Word of God is over every part of our lives; what we should think, say, or do. It is the ultimate & final authority for our faith & practice.

How to Read The Bible

Lesson 2 – Understanding The Big Themes of the Bible

Summary Notes

1. **THEME: GOD.** The Bible is firstly about God. The Bible is not only about Him, but it is primarily about Him receiving glory & honor in redeeming a people for Himself.
2. **THEME: COVENANT.** In Christ, & through Scriptural & prophetic promises, God accomplishes redemption by way of making covenants with His people.
3. **THEME: LAW & GOSPEL.** The Old Testament reveals the sinfulness of man in the broken Covenant of Works by Adam & in the giving of the Law. This exposes sin & leaves us only with the hope of a Savior, Jesus Christ, Who saves us by faith in Him & His righteous works.
4. **THEMES: KINGDOM & NEW CREATION.** The Old Testament Scriptures reveal that God's covenant people have always been citizens of His kingdom. Ultimately, Christ will return to purify His holy people, making them a New Creation in His finalized, perfect kingdom, where they will be His people, & He will be their God.

How to Read The Bible

Lesson 3 – Interpretation & Application

Summary Notes

1. All of the Bible is about Jesus! This does not mean that Jesus is in every sentence or verse of the Bible, but the Word of God ultimately has a redemptive focus in its grand scheme; pointing us to what God has planned or accomplished in redeeming a people for Himself.
2. Some passages speak explicitly about Jesus, such as the Gospels & New Testament Epistles. Some passages speak prophetically about Jesus, such as Isaiah 53 & Genesis 3:15. Some passages foreshadow Jesus, such as the Genesis story of Joseph, or the long line of kings we see in Kings & Chronicles, pointing us to the One Righteous King.
3. While the Bible contains many moral exhortations & commands, we must first understand that the moral commands of God's Law are not isolated from the grace of God in Christ. Jesus is the great Law-Keeper, & He has kept every Law of God in our behalf. This means those passages point us first to Jesus, which then leads us to their moral applications.
4. Thus, we are not burdened with *do better, try harder* theology when we come across the 10 Commandments, or the commands found in the New Testament Epistles. Rather, we are covered with the comfort of God's grace, knowing we are now free to joyfully obey Him.

How to Read The Bible

Lesson 4 – Historical Books of the O.T.

Summary Notes

1. While historical narrative passages have a historically contextual meaning for the time & people to which they were originally written, they also have a purpose in God's grand scheme of redemption in Christ. We do not want to miss either in only focusing on one.
2. Often, historical passages will offer interpretive keys to help us understand either their immediate meaning or their role in redemptive history. For example, **Judges 4:9**, where Deborah tells Barak that the enemies of God will be given into the hands of a woman, is the interpretive key to communicate that God is the one saving His people, even through the great weakness or humiliation of the judges whom He raises up as saviors. This is a motif found all throughout the book of Judges.
3. Historical narratives of the O.T. do have general moral truths & principles which we can learn from, but they are not usually the reason for which the account was written. For example, in Daniel 6, the story of Daniel in the lion's den was not written so we may learn to be faithful & trust God will deliver us in our trials, although this is true & it is what happened. We more clearly see that the story of Daniel is a foreshadowing of Christ & His death, resurrection, ascension, & glorification, & the coming judgment on the wicked. This story shows God's covenant faithfulness to His people, both because God saved Daniel in the den, & because those who place their faith in Him will be saved at the last day, raised up with Christ.
4. The Law of God consists of the Moral Law, Civil/Judicial Law, & the Ceremonial Law. While the Civil & Ceremonial Laws were fulfilled in Christ, they are still relevant to the Christian today, because they are rooted in the Moral Law & still teach us how we are to live our lives morally consistent with God's Moral Law. As an example, Paul utilizes **Deuteronomy 17:6 — *On the mouth of two witnesses or three witnesses*** — to promote the 9th Commandment — ***You shall not steal*** — & **Deuteronomy 17:7 — *So you shall purge the evil from your midst*** — is cited by Paul in **1 Corinthians 5:13** to give weight to church discipline & the purity of the church.

How to Read The Bible

Lesson 5 – Poetic & Wisdom Literature

Summary Notes

1. Authors of poetry, especially Hebrew poetry, make frequent use of parallelism, using consecutive repetition to *express their message in a unique & compelling way by fully exploring an idea or truth in many different yet interconnected lines.*
2. While it may be difficult to see a unified structure in the entire book of Psalms, it is still helpful to understand the four main categories any given psalm may fall under. Some psalms may even contain several elements of the following categories:
 - a. **Praise Psalms:** Psalms that primarily praise God by describing His attributes & actions, declaring His goodness in response to the ways He has answered prayers, or exalting Him in light of His creation & what He has made.
 - b. **Lament Psalms:** Psalms of lament, that is, sorrows or grief. They usually (but not always) follow a pattern of invocation (calling or crying out to God), lament, confession of trusting in God despite the circumstances, & praise.
 - c. **Imprecatory Psalms:** Psalms asking God to judge or curse the enemies of the Psalmist & God. They are not expressing desire for personal vengeance, but rather that God's perfect justice may prevail over the wicked & their evil actions.
 - d. **Messianic Psalms:** Psalms that foreshadow & point to the promised Messiah. The Person & work of Jesus is predicted & described, teaching what is to be expected in the divine Savior. There are few Psalms that seem to be solely dedicated to this, & usually Messianic Psalms fall under other categories as well.
3. The Book of Proverbs provides the idealistic teachings concerning wisdom & life; that is, how things *ought* to be. They provide wisdom consistent with the moral law of God, but because of sin, they are not always fully experienced in life.
4. The wisdom book of Ecclesiastes helps us to see how life really is, noting how sin & death seem to rob much of the meaning out of life & labor. In fact, though, Solomon is ruminating on the outworking & consequences of his idolatry (misusing his wisdom & riches; **Ecclesiastes 1:16-18 & 2:1-11**), whereas in Proverbs he reveals the lawful outlook & consequences of obedience & hard work. Of course, reflecting on the ways of the world, Solomon concludes Ecclesiastes in **12:13-14**:

The end of the matter, all that has been heard: fear God and keep His commandments, because this is the end of the matter for all mankind. For God will bring every work to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

While it may *seem* all things are empty & pointless, God *will* reveal & judge all things.

How to Read The Bible

Lesson 6 – The Prophets: Isaiah-Malachi

Summary Notes

1. A prophet is a messenger of God. They:
 - a. Teach us Who God is, revealing His righteousness & justice, love & mercy.
 - b. Urge people to obey His commandments, warn of the consequences of disobedience to God.
 - c. Call people to turn from their sins & idols, repent, & turn to God in Christ.
2. There are many ***Unconditional Prophecies***. This means they will come to pass, no matter what, because they are grounded in God's unchanging & faithful character. These include prophecies concerning His covenant promises, The Day of the Lord, & Messianic prophecies.
3. ***Conditional Prophecies*** are usually either God's promises of rewards or curses based in obedience or disobedience to God's Word. These prophecies help us to understand God's Law & the importance of our obedience to Him.
4. ***Sequential Prophecies*** have multiple fulfillments. This means that these prophecies are not only meant for God's people back then, but are still applicable & prophetically directed at God's people now. For example, **Ezekiel 36:22-28** reveals God's promise to restore the exiled Israelites to their land. However, the text also makes it clear that it is promising the regenerated heart by the Holy Spirit as found in the New Covenant in Christ. This leads us to understand that just as Israel was restored to the land then, we will be brought into Christ's eternal Kingdom at His return.
5. While there are many prophecies in the Old Testament that relate to the immediate history, people, & context then, they will always point us to Christ. Jesus tells us in **Luke 24:27** that Moses & all the prophets speak of Him in the Scriptures. There are historical understandings, moral applications, & revelations of the characteristics & attributes of God to be found in the prophetic texts, but they always will point us ultimately to the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior from God's wrath, the obedient Servant in light of Israel's disobedience, & the One Who leads us into His Promised Land.

How to Read The Bible

Lesson 7 – The Gospels & Acts

Summary Notes

1. In the Old Testament, the rest of the Old Testament books summarize, comment upon, or apply the Pentateuch (Genesis-Deuteronomy). Just as the Law operates as the foundational revelation for the rest of the Old Testament, so the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, & John) are the foundational books for the rest of the New Testament.
2. The Book of Acts is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke, at least to a degree. The Gospel of Luke is expressly purposed in reporting Christ's fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures. Luke notes in **Acts 1:1** that the Gospel of Luke accounts for ***All that Jesus began to do & teach***, indicating that Acts continues to report all that Jesus continues to do & teach, through His Holy Spirit in His Church.
3. While Matthew, Mark, & Luke (the ***Synoptic Gospels***, or similar-perspective gospels) contain many of the same content, John's Gospel is unique. Most of its content is not found in any of the other gospel accounts, & seems to be, at least in part, an apologetic against Gnosticism, focusing on both the human & divine natures of Jesus.
4. Parables are a staple in the Gospels, & they are meant to hide revelation from those whose hearts are hardened against God, & to reveal spiritual truth to God's people. Parables are stories Jesus told in reaction to situations He was in or in response to what someone said.
5. Whenever we read a parable, the **first step** is to look at the context. Remember, parables are "thrown alongside" events or conversations in order to make a comparison with what is happening. **Second**, it is helpful to distinguish between significant and insignificant details. Not every detail in a parable has a hidden spiritual meaning; some details are necessary merely for the story to flow and make sense. Once you have determined which details are significant for Jesus's message, your **third task** is to figure out Jesus's main point (or, possibly, points). **Finally**, as parables are meant to create a reaction, we must ask ourselves how the point of the parable applies to our lives.
6. As an example, in the Parable of the Good Samaritan:
 - a. **Context:** A Jewish lawyer asked, ***Who is my neighbor?***
 - b. **Details:**
 - i. The man robbed was presumably Jewish, having left Jerusalem
 - ii. Religious Jews did not stop to help him
 - iii. A Samaritan, usually hostile to the Jews, & vice versa, showed super-abundant compassion & helped the man, tended his wounds, found him a place to stay, & covered the costs
 - c. **Main Point:** Our Neighbor is whoever needs our compassion
 - d. **Application:** ***Go and do likewise***. To keep the letter of the Law, we must keep the Spirit of the Law as well. It is one thing to argue that we love our neighbor until we understand who our neighbor really is. We must love whoever needs our compassion.

How to Read The Bible

Lesson 8 – Understanding The Epistles

Summary Notes

1. Just like other genres, epistles (or letters), have a contextual (often personal) circumstance for their purpose. We should not think of approaching them as textbooks or historical narratives, although they often teach us various doctrinal principles & give insight to the history & chronology of biblical events.
2. Because they are letters, they should be read as such; reading them from beginning to end, as initially intended, will give great understanding of the scope of the letter. Smaller portions can be read, of course, as long as context is sought.
3. Historical context is not always given within the letters, because it did not need to be explained to those whom it was written to. We must, to a degree, seek to understand the time period's cultural & historical context to better grasp certain portions of the epistles.
4. When studying doctrines from the epistles, we must understand that a certain doctrine or biblical truth will not always be fully explained within the single letter being read. We should look at the other epistles, as well as the rest of Scripture, to come to a fuller understanding of it.
5. The New Testament Epistles summarize, comment upon, or further explain & apply the redemptive work of Christ that is found in the Gospels.

How to Read The Bible

Lesson 9 – Understanding Revelation

Summary Notes

1. First & foremost, the Book of Revelation is about the revealing of the Lord Jesus Christ in the history of redemption & the culmination of the ages at His Second Coming.
2. Many seek to understand Revelation by assuming it is being *fulfilled* in our present time, or soon will. Almost every generation has thought theirs was the generation in which Christ was returning. We must be careful to not allow our circumstances to dictate our interpretation of God's Word.
3. While there are various models of interpreting Revelation, the model that says Revelation is seven cyclical sections (each section retells the story of redemption culminating in Christ's return), seems to break down in seeing a logical & even grammatical continuity between some of these sections; most notably in the last few.

*The author, Andrew Menkis, argues this model in the book. In class, we discussed why his model does not seem to be the most viable option for interpreting Revelation. Some of these isolated cycles seem to not be so isolated from the ones that follow directly after. Instead of seeing them as repetitive retellings of Christ's work & return, they seem to flow more naturally together (again, at least some of them). For example, cycles 5-7 (p. 90-91), which cover **Revelation 17:1-22:5**, seem very clearly to tell a linear story, rather than isolated retellings of the same story. There are transitions, narrative development, & very clear climax (Revelation 19:11-19; the Second Coming of Christ in all its glory).

4. While we may not be clear on how we interpret the book of Revelation, or how it has played or will play out historically, what we do know is that it reveals the wrath of God against all sin, executing His judgment in its fullness, & that Christ comes back for His people & ushers them into His New Creation, where we will be His people & He will be our God.
5. While Genesis tells of the beginning of redemptive history in Christ, Revelation brings everything to completion. We are restored into fellowship with God, even better than Adam & Eve had in the Garden; there are twelve trees of life as opposed to the single one in the Garden of Eden that we were cast away from; we enter into a new & better Creation than we find in Genesis 1-3; & Jesus is the better Temple than was built by Israel. God brings all things poetically & justly to its conclusion in the return of Jesus.

*We all say with the Apostle John:
Amen. Come Lord Jesus.*

How to Read The Bible

Lesson 10 – Reading The Bible

Summary Notes

1. The Word of God is the spiritual sustenance we need for both our physical & spiritual lives. Like a tree planted by streams of water, so must we plant ourselves in the Word, that we may be fed daily by it to grow in godliness & love for the Lord. While we must be mindful of establishing routines & reading habits to cultivate regular feeding from God's Word, at the same time, we must not become legalistic regarding when or how long we are to be in the Word.
2. Practical helps, like quiet study areas, reading times that best suit your schedule & attention to reading, & even encouragement partners, will help facilitate better reading habits & routines.
3. There are many resources that will aid us in our reading & understanding of the Bible. While almost all of these can be found within our Church Library for free use, the following noted resources are general recommendations.
 - a. Study Bibles: ESV Study Bible; Reformation Study Bible
 - b. Commentaries: Reformed Expository Commentary Series; Romans Commentary by Douglas Moo (NICNT Series)
 - c. Bible Survey Books: Baker Pocket Guide to the Bible; Halley's Bible Handbook
 - d. Theological or Biblical Dictionaries/Encyclopedias: Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible; Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms by Richard Muller
 - e. Systematic Theologies: Institutes of the Christian Religion by John Calvin; Foundations of the Christian Faith by James Boice; Biblical Doctrine by John MacArthur
 - f. Trustworthy Christian Websites: Ligonier.org; CoreChristianity.com; Desiring God.org; gty.org