

Learn to Read the Bible Effectively

Notes for Course Leaders

1998 edition

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These notes are intended as a guide for those leading the course “Learn to Read the Bible Effectively”. They are based on the notes and overheads produced by Br Rob Hyndman.

What’s New?

This new edition of the course differs from the original course in the following ways:

- the course has been expanded to eight sessions;
- some new material on reasons to believe the Bible has been added (including Bible prophecy and the resurrection of Jesus);
- much of the material has been rearranged to make it flow better;
- the book summaries have been rewritten and gathered into an appendix;
- the Bible words have also been gathered into an appendix for easier reference;
- maps and timelines have been added;
- a modern version is used throughout;
- some charts and illustrations have been added;
- class exercises have been added;
- homework has been added;
- the Bible reading planner has been integrated into the course.

We hope this revised course will continue to be helpful in presenting the Bible message in a simple but interesting way to those who are keen to hear it.

Notes

Each chapter of the notes corresponds to one night of the course:

- 1 Introducing the Bible
- 2 Starting to read
- 3 The origin and history of the Bible
- 4 Reasons to believe
- 5 Bible prophecy
- 6 Reading carefully
- 7 Interpreting the Bible
- 8 Bible study tools

There are also four appendices. Appendix A contains outlines of each book of the Bible. These are included for information and are not usually covered explicitly in the course. If any particular book is discussed in detail, it may be useful to refer to these summaries. Appendix B contains a glossary of Bible words. Again, we do not usually cover these explicitly during the course (but we do go through them in the follow-up course). Appendix C contains maps and Appendix D contains some timeline charts. We refer to these repeatedly to help participants build a working knowledge of the basic geography and chronology of the Bible.

Overheads

A set of about 160 overhead transparencies have been produced for use by the course leaders. Don't feel you need to use them all and feel free to supplement these with your own materials. If you develop any overhead materials which you think would be useful to other course leaders, please send them to Bethel Publications.

Materials to distribute

We normally hand out a package of materials to each course participant, including

- Course notes
- Bible
- Bible Reading Planner
- Pen and notebook
- Leaflet: "Introducing the Christadelphians"
- Information about local Christadelphian activities

The course notes can be photocopied (double-sided) and bound with comb-binding. We use a clear acetate front cover and a card back cover. Alternatively, you may wish to hand out the notes one session at a time. In this case, you can use a ring-binder. You will need to distribute all appendixes on the first evening.

It is important that all participants have the same Bible version and the same edition. This allows the course leader to give page numbers when looking up references. The notes use the NIV throughout, and so we normally provide course participants with NIV Bibles. But other versions may also be used. Since this course is to teach people to read the Bible effectively, it is important that a version is used which can be easily understood. Therefore, the King James Version is not recommended.

The Bible Reading Planners are available from the Christadelphian Office in Birmingham. The simplest way to order them is by telephone (from Australia, dial 0011 44 121 777 6328) or by fax (from Australia, dial 0015 44 121 777 6328). You will need to order these at least three months in advance to allow them to arrive by surface mail.

A sample copy of the leaflet *Introducing the Christadelphians* is enclosed. Further copies are available from Bethel Publications.

Leader(s)

The course has been run with both one and two leaders in the past. Both methods have worked well. It is important to develop a rapport with those attending. Therefore, it is best not to use more than two leaders. When two leaders are used, it is recommended that they each lead two or three short segments on each night. The leaders are crucial to the success of the course and should have good communication skills and encourage group interaction.

Running the course

- It is important to assume *no* knowledge of the Bible (at least until you determine the background of everyone attending). There are often people who have *never* read the Bible, who are unaware of the two testaments, how chapters and verses work, etc. Keep it simple. It is easy to lose some people quickly by assuming they know what you are talking about.
- In the first session, it is worth getting everyone to say something about their background in Bible reading. This gets them talking about something they know (themselves) which gives them confidence to talk about other things, and it helps you pitch your remarks at the right level.
- The course is intended to be an introduction to *reading* the Bible without covering many of our distinctive doctrines. It is worth saying up-front that we will not be teaching our particular beliefs in this course. By making the course relatively “doctrine-free”, we have attracted some people who would otherwise not attend our activities for fear of being “preached at”. At the end of the course, participants are encouraged to attend follow-up activities in which the *teaching* of the Bible is explained. Of course, some doctrines will inevitably be covered simply because the relevant passages are read.
- The course is intended to be informal and interactive. Each session should be a mixture of instruction, discussion and exercises. It is good to get those attending asking questions, and discussing what they are learning. This helps them learn and concentrate. If you are having difficulty getting people to talk, give them an exercise which they have to report back to the class about. There are many such exercises throughout the notes. For example, show them an alleged contradiction and ask them to explain it. Or try arguing that Jesus didn’t rise from the dead and ask them to refute you. Show them a passage and get them to say if it is literal or figurative.
- One way of encouraging questions throughout is to ask the Christadelphians who attend to ask questions (even if they know the answers!). This helps visitors to feel more comfortable in interrupting.
- There are homework exercises at the end of each chapter. It is good to get participants to do these at home and discuss the results the following week.
- We find it useful to get everyone doing a daily Bible reading from the *Bible Reading Planner* from Week 2. Each week we spend a few minutes discussing any difficulties people may have found with the chapters read during the week.

Follow up

On the last night of the course, an evaluation sheet should be distributed. A sample copy is enclosed. A key part of this sheet is establishing an interest in future Christadelphian activities. We recommend the *Story of the Bible* Course which goes through the major events of Scripture from Genesis to the Kingdom in eight sessions. (Copies of course notes are available from Bethel Publications.) It is important that participants be invited to such a class starting within a fortnight of the end of the course.

Sample program

The following program is offered as a guide only. Every group is different and the program should be tailored as appropriate. The program assumes two leaders labelled A and B.

Session 1: Introducing the Bible

(*To bring:* course notes, Bibles, and other course materials, name tags.)

7.30 A: Introduction

- Introduce leaders, hand out course materials, ensure everyone has Bible
- Aims of course.
- Explain who Christadelphians are
- Prayer
- Course outline
- Find out background of participants

7.45 A: A unique book

7.55 B: A library of books

8.25 *Supper*

8.40 A: The Bible timeline

8.55 A: Bible geography

9.10 B: Why read the Bible?

9.15 B: Conclusion

- Summary, preview of next week, homework.

9.25 B: Prayer

Session 2: Starting to read

7.30 B: Introduction

- review of homework and last week

7.45 B: Bible Reading Planner

- Do first reading on plan. Check comprehension.

8.00 A: Preparing to read the Bible

8.10 A: Strange language

8.25 *Supper*

8.40 B: Strange customs

8.50 B: Footnotes

9.00 A: Cross references

9.15 A: Conclusion

- Summary, preview of next week, homework.

9.25 A: Prayer

Session 3: The origin and history of the Bible

(*To bring:* Apocrypha, as many different versions as possible.)

7.30 A: Introduction

- review of homework and readings from previous week

7.50 A: Inspiration and the canon of scripture

8.00 B: The Apocrypha

8.10 B: Old Testament manuscripts

8.20 B: New Testament manuscripts

8.30 *Supper*

8.45 B: The first English Bibles

8.55 A: Choosing a Bible

9.15 B: Conclusion

- Summary, preview of next week, homework.

9.25 B: Prayer

Session 4: Reasons to believe

(*To bring:* archaeological finds if available.)

7.30 B: Introduction

- review of homework and readings from previous week

7.50 A: Archaeology

8.15 A: The Bible and modern medicine

8.25 *Supper*

8.40 B: Resurrection of Jesus

9.15 A: Conclusion

- Summary, preview of next week, homework.

9.25 A: Prayer

Session 5: Bible prophecy

7.30 A: Introduction

- review of homework and readings from previous week

7.50 B: Prophecies about Israel

8.15 A: Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones

8.25 *Supper*

8.40 A: Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones (continued)

8.50 B: Vision of world empires

9.15 A: Conclusion

- Summary, preview of next week, homework.

9.25 A: Prayer

Session 6: Reading carefully

7.30 B: Introduction

- review of homework and readings from previous week

7.50 A: Internal consistency

8.25 *Supper*

8.40 B: Contradictions?

9.05 A: Bible echoes

9.15 A: Conclusion

- Summary, preview of next week, homework.

9.25 A: Prayer

Session 7: Interpreting the Bible

7.30 A: Introduction

- review of homework and readings from previous week

7.50 B: The Bible interprets itself

8.05 B: Why the Bible is difficult to read

8.15 A: Literary styles (part 1)

8.25 *Supper*

8.40 B: Literary styles (part 2)

8.55 A: Literal and figurative language

9.05 A: Basic principles for interpreting the Bible

9.15 B: Conclusion

- Summary, preview of next week, homework.

9.25 B: Prayer

Session 8: Bible study tools

(*To bring:* concordances, lexicons, Bible dictionaries, computer with Bible software.)

7.30 B: Introduction

- review of homework and readings from previous week

7.50 A: Bible dictionaries and concordances

8.05 A: Commentaries

8.15 B: Concordances

8.25 *Supper*

8.40 A: Topical Bibles

8.45 A: Lexicons

9.00 B: Computer Bibles

9.15 A: Conclusion

- Summary
- evaluation sheet and registration form for next course

9.25 A: Prayer

Comments on selected exercises

Session 1

Test yourself This is intended to be an ice-breaker. Everyone should know the answers to at least some of these questions.

The Bible timeline Point out that the dates of some key Bible people are easily remembered: Adam 4000, Abraham 2000, David 1000, Jesus 0. Also note that the first 2000 years are covered in just 11 chapters of Genesis.

Session 2

Genesis 1 Some of these questions are difficult, and may lead to debate in the group (including Christadelphians). Try to avoid the class becoming distracted by the details of creation. The aim of the questions is to encourage people to think carefully about what they read, and to form the habit of searching for more information. It is not necessary to find answers to them all immediately. This can be an opportunity to teach people to write down unanswered questions.

Session 3

Paraphrase the beatitudes If you have time to do this activity, it is a good opportunity to discuss some basic Bible teaching such as “the meek shall inherit the earth”.

Session 4

Some theories to explain it away You can argue in favour of each of these theories and asked the class to refute your arguments. This can be very successful in getting them to think through the issues, and helps cement their faith in the resurrection.

Session 5

Luke 1:30–33 This is a good opportunity to teach “interpreting scripture with scripture”, and to mention the return of Jesus.

Session 6

Can you explain these?

- Sacrifice or not? This is a common Hebrew idiom which can be read “I desire mercy and not *only* sacrifice.”
- Did Saul inquire of the Lord? He made some half-hearted inquiries of God, but did not diligently seek him.
- Which country? This is an example of a copyist error (the NIV corrects the mistake). The Hebrew for 2 Samuel 8:13 reads “men of Aram”. In Hebrew there are no vowels, so Aram is RM and Edom is DM. The R and D are almost the same in Hebrew except for a tiny stroke. Apparently a copyist mistook the D for an R. The parallel passage in 1 Chronicles 18:12 is correct.
- How did Judas die? Both records are correct. He may have hung himself, and several weeks later his bloated and decayed body fell and his intestines spilled out.

More contradictions If you are game, ask them if there are any apparent contradictions that bother them. Then attempt to answer them, or promise to do so the following week.

In the wilderness Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Elijah, David, Jesus, Paul. In most cases, the time in the wilderness was very humbling and taught the person not to rely on their own strength but on God. It also provided them with the opportunity to dedicate themselves to God's service without the distraction of daily life.

Session 7

Prophecy Pick a prophecy and get them to apply the three recommended questions on page 70.

Session 8

Concordance exercises Give plenty of time for this. You will need to spend time teaching some people how to use the concordance.

Satan Again, most people will need assistance. Resist the temptation to say too much about Satan. The idea that the word simply means "adversary" and can even be applied to God will raise plenty of questions in their minds without any further comments.

Computer bible If you have the facilities, demonstrate a computer Bible.

Solutions to homework

Session 1

1. Matthew is in the New Testament. It is a gospel.
2. John taught repentance. The people responded with confession and baptism.
3. Isaiah is in the Old Testament. It is one of the books of the major prophets.
4. Matthew is quoting from Isaiah 40:3. John was the voice calling in the desert. He was preparing the people for Jesus. Matthew quotes from the Septuagint (Greek version of the Old Testament). The translation of Isaiah we have is based on the Masoretic text (Hebrew version of the Old Testament).

Session 2

1. In Ruth, we find references to gleaning, winnowing, lying at someone's feet, the kinsman-redeemer, sealing agreements by exchanging sandals, sitting in the gate, etc.
2. Herod executed John because he had criticized Herod's relationship with his brother's wife. The Queen of the South was the Queen of Sheba who visited Solomon.

Session 3

1. Discuss the responses of participants. Discuss what is important in a translation.
2. Again, lead a discussion about the versions which participants have used.

Session 4

1. There are many possible answers here. For example, Thomas wouldn't believe, Mary Magdalene didn't recognize him, and so on.
2. The grave clothes would not have been neatly folded if his body was stolen.
3. The locked doors suggest the disciples were still in doubt. His wounded hands and side seem to have convinced them.
4. Jesus apparently walked through a locked door.
5. The hope of eternal life depends on Jesus being alive. Without his resurrection, there would be no hope for our resurrection.

Session 5

1. (a) The whole image is broken in pieces because it is the end of all kingdoms of men.
(b) The kingdom of God fills the whole earth, is never to be destroyed, will "endure forever", and is not crafted by human hands.
(c) The dream showed Nebuchadnezzar the temporary nature of his own glory; it gave Daniel and his friends hope while in exile, and led to their promotion; it gives us hope for the future and demonstrates the power of God.
2. (a) Taken out of nations, brought back to own land.
(b) Made clean, given new heart, moved to obey God.

- (c) The first list is parallel with the first stage of the valley of dry bones prophecy (when the bones come together). The second list is parallel with the second stage of the valley of dry bones prophecy (when the breath enters the dead bodies).

Session 6

1. They could have been two different speeches told to different audiences in different places. Or the level place could have been on the mountain.
2. David had no sword and they could not find a suit of armour which fitted him. Both were made of iron which was scarce in Israel due to the monopoly exercised by the Philistines.
3.
 - We are not told that the angels were singing or that they were in the sky.
 - We are not told how many wise men there were. We are not told they were kings.
 - We are not told that the wise men went to Bethlehem (although they were sent there from Jerusalem).
 - The wise men appear to have seen Jesus many months after the shepherds.
 - They found Jesus in a house, not a stable.

Session 7

1. (a) Israel was complaining and felt that God did not see their distress. Isaiah's reply was that God is able to deliver and restore his people if they will wait in faith for him to act. They are to trust him and draw strength from him.
 - (b) v31 is different.
2. (a) We are told (v1) that it is about aging, yet the imagery refers to birds, trees, grasshoppers, bowls, etc.
 - (b) It is an allegory of aging.
 - (c) v2 eyes dim.
 - v3 limbs tremble, few teeth, eyes dim.
 - v4 deaf, trouble sleeping
 - v5 fear, white hair, stiff movements, going to grave.
 - v6 various images of death

Session 8

1. 1:5,22; 2:38,41; 8:12,13,16,36,38; 9:18; 10:37,47,48; 11:16; 13:24; 16:15,33; 18:8,25; 19:3,4,5; 22:16.
2. adult, full immersion, after period of instruction.