

Andrews University

Digital Commons @ Andrews University

Faculty Publications

1-1-1973

You Can Read Your Bible Through This Year

C. Mervyn Maxwell
Andrews University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs>



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), and the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Maxwell, C. Mervyn, "You Can Read Your Bible Through This Year" (1973). *Faculty Publications*. 3939.
<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs/3939>

This Popular Press is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.



You Can Read Your Bible Through This Year by C. Mervyn Maxwell

HAVE YOU EVER started to read your Bible through and then quit? Have you ever made a New Year's resolution to read it through in one year and then failed?

How many times have you reached the middle of Exodus or the tribal lists of the first part of Numbers and never read a chapter more?

Don't give up hope! If you will follow a few simple rules, you can certainly read your Bible through this year.

There are three common faults which keep people from reading the Bible through. They forget their

goal, they cover too little at a time, and they insist on reading the Bible through in order. So first of all remember your goal—to read the Bible through in a year.

To read the Bible through on the one-book-a-month plan would take sixty-six months or five and a half years. To read the Bible through on the basis of one verse a day would take more than a lifetime.

There are several ways to read the Bible through in a year. One of the most widely recommended is to read three chapters a day and five on Saturday or Sunday. This is a splendid method, but following it involves

some real hazards. For one thing, it can lead a person to stop in some very strange places, such as the middle of a battle in Judges or at the end of a seemingly incomprehensible prophecy in Zechariah. For another, it requires too much regularity. When following it, it is too easy to get behind, and if a person who reckons to do three chapters a day gets behind a week or two, he knows that he has to do exactly two or three times as much as he had planned to do in order to catch up, and this can be fatally discouraging. Worst of all, it leaves a person reading "chapters" instead of "the Bible."

A Book at a Time

The plan I recommend is for you to sit down right away while your enthusiasm is running high and read a few whole books of the Bible in one or two sittings each. Then as soon as you can find time to do so again, read another book or two right through. In the meantime read each day as regularly as you can for fifteen or thirty minutes as rapidly as possible.

This plan has several advantages over the three-chapters-a-day-and-five-on-Saturday plan. You start right off by getting ahead of your schedule—an experience that is most encouraging. If you later miss a few days of reading, you don't get behind and you don't get discouraged. Furthermore, by reading as much of the Bible as you can at any one time, and by reading this much rapidly, you discover values in your Bible you never find when you read it bit by bit slowly.

Is it wrong to read God's Word quickly? Of course not. Is it better to read the Bible so slowly that you stop reading it in the middle of Exodus and never read any more, or to read it more rapidly and actually cover it all?

Surprising as it may seem, you may actually get more out of the Bible by reading it rapidly than if you read it too slowly. Specialists who teach rapid reading say that the concentration required to read quickly with comprehension results in improved memory of the material read.

Try a Modern Translation

Of course, help yourself all you can. By all means consider the advantages of using one of the modern translations of the Bible. Because they are written in twentieth-century English, they are more readily understandable than the King James Version—which remains, of course, splendid for slow and careful study.

Your choice of a modern-speech version is quite broad for the New Testament, Phillips' being, of course, deservedly one of the most popular, and Goodspeed's still one of the best. For the Old Testament—and for the whole Bible, for that matter—use the Revised Standard Version. If you have already read the Bible through and are looking for a new version in which to read it through again, try Moffatt's, which, in spite of

C. Mervyn Maxwell is professor of Church History at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

some very regrettable faults, remains the most vigorous and sparkling English translation ever made.

Don't feel that you must read the Bible through chapter by chapter, in sequence. Read it book by book in any order your needs and inclinations lead you to.

You may wish to begin with the first book of the Old Testament, Genesis. It's a good place to begin, partly because it's the beginning of the Bible, partly because of the vast concept of creation which it presents, and partly because it is a book of stories.

Other "story" books include Exodus (the first half, that is), all the books from Joshua to Esther, and, in the New Testament, the Gospels and the Book of Acts. You may wish to shift to some of these historical books every now and then when you are reading the other parts of the Bible, to give yourself a change of pace. If you feel you are getting behind and your enthusiasm needs recharging, select one of the short books of the Old Testament prophets (Obadiah, Joel, Amos, Malachi) or one of the New Testament epistles (1 and 2 Thessalonians or 1, 2, and 3 John) to feel the exhilaration that comes from reading several whole books through within a short time.

The Great Ideas

As you read God's Word, ask God to help you find the great ideas, the larger message, which each book contains. Reduce each book to a thumbnail sketch, a single phrase if possible; then see what this central theme or concept means to you. After all, as an ancient rabbi said centuries ago, *it isn't how often you go through the Bible that counts, but how often the Bible goes through you.*

Genesis may strike you, surprisingly, as a farmer's book, a story about countryfolk. It tells of men (Isaac and Jacob) who fall in love with beautiful girls (Rebecca and Rachel), of cowboys who quarrel, and of women who worry about having babies. Cattlemen fight city men, and a misunderstood lad (Joseph) grows up to make good in the big city. Even the story of creation is, in part, an account of how farm animals came into existence, and the story of Noah tells how cows and sheep were preserved in the ark during the Flood.

Exodus has remarkably different characteristics. If Genesis sometimes jogs along on a donkey with a wisp of straw in its mouth, Exodus smashes into history in dust and glory. Through twenty chapters God first declares His name in a flaming shrub that doesn't burn up, demonstrates His power in plagues and miracles, and thunders His authority from the top of Mount Sinai. There is a dramatic all-or-nothingness about the book. All the water in Egypt turns to blood, all the cattle die, all the host of Pharaoh drown. The sky turns yellow as the hail approaches, there is a grinding roar of locusts, and by the gray light of dawn bloated bodies of Egyptians are cast out dead upon the shore. Then all at once, as you pass into the second half of Exodus, the God of the thunderhead becomes the God of hooks and

sockets, of ribbons and underwear, and of "fine-twined linen dyed red."

Groans, Tears, and Sobs

As you read on, every other book in the Bible presents its own distinctive experience. Job groans, reasons, and is rewarded. Solomon repents and advises. Nahum denounces, Jeremiah weeps, and Hosea sobs.

The New Testament books have their own characteristics, too. In Matthew, Jesus recasts the law of Moses; in Mark He rushes "straightway" from one miracle to another; in John He reasons quietly with individuals and argues endlessly with crowds. Galatians says that justification comes only through believing. Hebrews says, "Hold on! Don't give up; have faith!"

Revelation is a many-sided book. From one standpoint it is a reverent astronaut soaring into the yet-to-be. Again, it is the book about the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. In the midst of all the woes and troubles of the world, the saints are called to remember that Jesus still sits upon the throne keeping watch above His own. And the Book of Revelation is a book of songs, the hymnbook of the New Testament, just as Psalms is the hymnbook of the Old.

As you read your Bible, ask what aspect of God each book portrays. There is so much to be known about God; and each Bible writer, even under inspiration, can express only those aspects of Him which he has been permitted to see. If the God of Exodus is first of all a God of judgment, power, and glory, He is also a God who cares for individuals and little things, too. His eye is on baby Moses in the bulrushes, and He

leads His people out of Egypt with a mighty arm. And the God of the second half of Exodus is not so much a God of detail as a great Architect, a superb Artist, Designer of the Tabernacle and its ark.

Many Ways

There are many ways to get acquainted with a great national park. One way is to ride around it in a glass-roofed bus with a park ranger for a guide. Another is to camp for a week or two every year in a different location. Or one can take a hiking trip around the park, or even spend a whole summer studying the intricacies of life in a single lily pond.

Just so, there are many ways to get acquainted with your Bible. You can camp in the Gospels, or hike intensively through the prophets, or examine the lily pond of some fascinating Bible topic, verse by verse.

But this year you're going to drive through the National Park of your Bible with God's Spirit as your guide, taking in the glorious sweep of its incomparable peaks and waters—the ever-changing mirror lake of the Psalms, the majestic peaks of Isaiah, the dominating and awe-inspiring lookout of the Gospels, the rushing falls of Acts, and at last the exciting yet mysteriously comforting cascade of Revelation.

Many moments of real pleasure, many great new thoughts, a much richer conception of our heavenly Father, will be yours—if you will read your Bible. And you can read it through this year if you remember your goal, read as rapidly as you can with comprehension, and prayerfully seek for the great ideas each book contains. 2

