

# Bible Made Easy

## Your guide to reading and understanding the Bible in less than a year

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## Section #1: Jesus, author of life

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I'm going to get you up to speed on the Bible, and together we will read all the way through. Follow my plan; it's ten times easier than trying to read the Bible straight through on your own.

Let's get you started, and we'll fill in the blanks later.

**New to the Bible?** We're going to start with the first four chapters of Mark (roughly six pages). Let me show you how to find that:

**Phone/tablet:** You can read/listen to audio on your phone with a Bible app. I like Bible Gateway, but there are many others. In the Bible Gateway app, tap the search icon and type in "Mark 1" Tap on "Mark 1:1" Begin reading. When you get to the end of the chapter, the text will "bounce" once, and then you can scroll onto the next chapter, and so on until you finish all four chapters. You can change the translation by tapping the little box at the top right of the screen.

**Website:** BibleGateway.com. In the search bar, enter "Mark 1-4" to get the first day's reading. You can change the translation or version at the top right.

**Printed Bible:** Mark is about 4/5 of the way into the Bible—the second book of the New Testament, just after Matthew and just before Luke.<sup>1</sup>

**Which translation or version?** New to the Bible? Try The Message (MSG), or New Living Translation (NLT), or New Century Version (NCV). For more info see "Which version of the Bible should I read?" near the end of this book.

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### *Week 1: The story of Jesus*

The Bible contains four different "biographies" of Jesus. We're gonna get you through the shortest one in the next five days.

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- 1 The Bible is divided into 66 books—the first 39 make up the Old Testament, the last 27 are the New Testament. Each book is divided into chapters, and each chapter is subdivided into verses. Most, but not all, printed Bibles show the chapter and verse divisions. A chapter is usually about a page, and a verse is usually a sentence or two.

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## *Day 1: Misunderstood for doing good*

Mark 1-4 — 149 verses

Contains: John the Baptist, Jesus baptized and tempted, the first disciples, Jesus heals people and expels demons, Jesus prays alone, Jesus forgives sins, opposition to Jesus by religious leaders, Jesus befriends sinners, Jesus and fasting, a new understanding of the Sabbath, crowds follow Jesus, twelve apostles appointed, Jesus misunderstood by His family, parable of seeds and soils, other parables, Jesus calms the storm. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 0.3% finished!!

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## *Day 2: What others considered impossible...*

Mark 5-7 — 136 verses

Contains: Jesus heals the demonized man, Jesus heals a sick woman and restores a dead girl to life, Jesus is rejected at his home town, twelve disciples sent out, John the Baptist executed, 5,000 fed by Jesus, Jesus walks on water, clean and unclean food, faith of a non-Jewish woman, deaf man healed. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 0.6% finished!

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### *Day 3: Cost of following Jesus*

Mark 8-10 — 140 verses

Contains: 4,000 fed, religious leaders want proof, Jesus warns His followers about the religious leaders, blind men healed, Peter identifies Jesus as the Messiah (Christ), Jesus predicts His death, transfiguration, Jesus heals boy with seizures, greatest in the Kingdom, various teachings, Jesus welcomes the children, a rich man seeks eternal life. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 0.9% finished!

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### *Day 4: Jesus vs. the religious authorities*

Mark 11-13 — 114 verses

Contains: Jesus arrives in Jerusalem, curses a fig tree, clears the temple, challenged by the authorities; parable of evil tenant farmers; questioned on taxes; explains the resurrection; top 2 commandments; challenges authorities; poor widow's offering; Jesus predicts future. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 1.2% finished!

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## *Day 5: Death and resurrection of Jesus*

Mark 14-16 — 139 verses

Contains: Jesus anointed, Last Supper, Jesus predicts Peter's denial, Gethsemane, Judas betrays and Jesus is arrested, Sanhedrin condemns Jesus, Peter denies Jesus, Pilate orders crucifixion of Jesus, soldiers mock and crucify, Jesus dies and is buried, Jesus rises from the dead and gives instructions to His followers. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 1.5% finished!

**Congratulations!** You've finished a book of the Bible, and a very important book. Knowing the story of Jesus is key to understanding the Bible, and you've already been through one of the "biographies" of Jesus. These "biographies" are usually called "Gospels." "Gospel" means "good news."

### **Time out for the big picture!**

I'm going to help you read and understand the Bible. If you pick up a Bible and try to read it cover to cover, from Genesis through Revelation, it's probably not going to work. Here's why: You'll get bogged down, and it won't make sense.

The Bible is a collection of 66 "books" that were arranged in their present order by scholars hundreds of years ago. There's nothing inspired about the order in which they arranged these books, and the arrangement doesn't make sense to most modern readers. I don't want you to get totally lost. That's why I'm going to detour you around all that confusion, and arrange the readings in a way that will make more sense.

I will get you through all 66 books—all 1,189 chapters of the Bible, but we'll take a very different route. I've arranged the Bible into seven sections, each one centered around a person:

1. **Jesus**, Author of Life
2. **Paul**, Transformed Leader
3. **Moses**, the Man Who Built a Nation
4. **David**, the Man After God's Own heart
5. **Solomon**: Magnificence to Decline
6. **Isaiah**: A Towering Vision of God
7. **Daniel**: Rebuilding After Disaster

Each of these people will be the focus for seven weeks of reading. You'll read an average of 91 verses a day—or around three chapters—sometimes more, sometimes less.

You've already started the first seven week section . . .

### **Section One: Jesus, Author of Life**

How did Jesus of Nazareth manage to capture the imagination and direct the lives of billions of people over the last 2,000 years? You'll find your answers here, as Jesus heals the sick, raises the dead, and cuts through stale religion to show us the true heart of God. We'll meet His mother, Mary; His friends, Mary and Martha; His impulsive follower, Peter; and Judas, the man who betrayed Him; as well as Pilate, the man who sentenced Him to death. We'll see Him triumph over death to give people hope, and to give His followers a mission to transform humanity. Then we travel back in time to meet Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Jacob and Rachel. We'll take a close look at the good man Job, who suffered because he was righteous; and examine the question: Why do bad things happen to good people? We'll return to see how God made a dysfunctional family whole.

Next we're going to tackle another "biography" of Jesus, the Gospel of Luke. Luke was a physician, the only non-Jewish author of a Bible book.

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### *Day 6: Miraculous births*

Luke 1-2 — 132 verses

Contains: Angel Gabriel meets with Zechariah then with Mary, Mary visits Elizabeth, John the Baptist born, birth of Jesus, Jesus presented at the temple. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 1.7% finished!

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### *Day 7: Jesus begins His ministry*

Luke 3-5 — 121 verses,

Contains: John the Baptist, Jesus baptized, Jesus' family tree, Jesus tempted, hometown rejects Jesus, Jesus heals sick and demonized, first disciples, fasting discussion. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 2.0% finished!

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*Week 2: Finish Luke, start Matthew*

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*Day 8: Jesus heals and teaches*

Luke 6-8 — 155 verses

Contains: Sabbath issues, Twelve chosen, blessings and curses, love for enemies, fruit test, soldier's faith, widow's son, John the Baptist, sinful woman, seed and soils parable, Jesus' family, Jesus calms storm, Jesus heals demonized man, dead girl and sick woman restored. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 2.3% finished!

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*Day 9: Miracles, mentoring, and opposition*

Luke 9-11 — 158 verses

Contains: 12 sent out, 5,000 fed, death predicted, transfiguration, boy healed, greatest, opposition, cost of discipleship, love commandment, Good Samaritan, Mary and Martha, Lord's prayer, Jesus vs. religious leaders. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 2.6% finished!



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*Day 10: Jesus teaches*

Luke 12-14 — 129 verses

Contains: Hypocrisy and riches, ready for Christ's return, division, fig tree story, Sabbath healing, more parables, weeping for Jerusalem, humility, cost of following Jesus. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 2.9% finished!

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*Day 11: Jesus puts things in perspective*

Luke 15-18 — 143 verses

Contains: Lost sheep, lost coin, lost son, street wise, rich man in hell, faith, lepers healed, return of Jesus, persistent widow, tax collector's prayer, Jesus blesses children, rich man seeks eternal life, Jesus predicts His death, blind man healed. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 3.2% finished!

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## *Day 12: Jesus vs. religious leaders*

Luke 19-21 — 133 verses

Contains: Zacchaeus, 10 servants, Jesus arrives at Jerusalem, clears temple, challenged by religious leaders; story of evil farmers; Caesar and taxes, resurrection, a question for leaders, widow's offering, Jesus predicts future. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 3.5% finished!

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## *Day 13: Death of Jesus*

Luke 22-23 — 127 verses

Contains: Judas to betray, Last Supper, Peter's denial predicted, prayer of agony, betrayed and arrested, Peter denies Jesus, trial before the council, trial before Pilate, crucifixion, death, and burial. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 3.8% finished!

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*Day 216: Solomon's many wives lead him astray*

1 Kings 11, Proverbs 15 — 76 verses

Contains: Solomon's many wives lead him into idolatry, Solomon encounters opposition, Jeroboam rebels, Solomon dies; wise sayings. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 63.0% finished!

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*Day 217: Rehoboam loses most of his kingdom*

1 Kings 12, Proverbs 16, Ecclesiastes 7 — 95 verses

Contains: Rehoboam makes a bad choice and loses most of his kingdom, Jeroboam sets up idols to replace temple worship; wise sayings; wisdom is better than folly. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 63.3% finished!

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## *Kings and prophets*

As we get further into the story, we're going to be reading about quite a number of kings and prophets. Here's a place to keep track of them. After King Solomon, the nation of Israel split into two kingdoms—the southern kingdom of Judah (loyal to the dynasty of David), and the northern kingdom of Israel (or Samaria, Ephraim) consisting of nine different dynasties.

### **United Kingdom of Israel**

- Saul<sup>5</sup> 1050-1010 BC
- David 1010-970 BC
- Solomon 970-930 BC

### **Divided Kingdom<sup>6</sup>**

#### **Southern Kingdom of Judah**

- Rehoboam 931-913 BC
- Abijah 913-911 BC
- Asa 911-870BC
- Jehoshaphat 870-848 BC
- Jehoram (or Joram) 848-841 BC
- Ahaziah 841 BC
- Athaliah<sup>7</sup> 841-835 BC

- 5 Saul's son Ish-Bosheth (or Eshbaal) reigned over the northern tribes of Israel for a few years after his father's death.
- 6 All the kings of Judah descended from David (exception: Queen Athaliah). The kings of Israel came from various dynasties.
- 7 Daughter of Queen Jezebel and King Ahab of Israel; wife of Jehoram; only queen to occupy the throne of Judah.

- Joash<sup>8</sup> 835-796 BC
- Amaziah 796-767 BC
- Uzziah (or Azariah) 767-740 BC
- Jotham 748-732 BC<sup>9</sup>
- Ahaz 732-716 BC
- Hezekiah 716-687 BC
- Manasseh 687-642BC
- Amon 642-640 BC
- Josiah 640-608 BC
- Jehoahaz 608 BC
- Jehoiakim 608-597 BC
- Jehoiachin 597 BC
- Zedekiah<sup>10</sup> 597-586 BC

### **Northern Kingdom of Israel<sup>11</sup>**

- Jeroboam I 931-910 BC
- Nadab 910-909 BC
- Baasha 909-886 BC
- Elah 886-885 BC
- Zimri 885 BC

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8 Ahaziah's son.

9 Reigned in his father's place after his father contracted leprosy.

10 Son of Josiah. Zedekiah was the last king of Judah; he was blinded and taken prisoner by the Babylonians.

11 Also called Samaria, sometimes called Ephraim.

- Omri 885-874 BC
- Ahab<sup>12</sup> 874-853 BC
- Ahaziah 853-852 BC
- Joram<sup>13</sup> 852-841 BC
- Jehu 841-814 BC
- Jehoahaz 814-798 BC
- Jehoash 798-782 BC
- Jeroboam II 782-753 BC
- Zechariah 753-752 BC
- Shallum 752 BC
- Menahem 752-742 BC
- Pekahiah 742-740 BC
- Pekah 752-732 BC<sup>14</sup>
- Hoshea 732-722 BC<sup>15</sup>

### **Prophets<sup>16</sup>**

- Samuel (Saul & David)
- Nathan (David & Solomon)
- Ahijah (Jeroboam I)

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12 Husband of Jezebel.

13 Son of Ahab.

14 Rival ruler during part of that time.

15 Last king of Israel, Assyrians invaded and took the people into captivity.

16 Each prophet's name is followed by kings they were contemporary with.

- Shemiah (Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa)
- Jehu (Baasha)
- Hanani (Asa)
- Micaiah (Omri, Ahab)
- Elijah (Omri, Ahab)
- Obadiah (Ahab)<sup>17</sup>
- Elisha (Ahab, Ahaziah, Joram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, Jehoash)
- Joel (Joash)
- Amos (Uzziah, Jeroboam II)
- Isaiah (Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah)
- Micah (Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah)
- Hosea (Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah)
- Jonah (Jehoahaz, Jehoash, Jeroboam II, Zechariah)
- Nahum (Hezekiah, Manasseh)
- Habakkuk (Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim)
- Zephaniah (Josiah)
- Jeremiah (Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah)
- Ezekiel (Zedekiah)
- Daniel (Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah)

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17 It's not clear whether the Obadiah of 1 Kings 18 is the same person who authored the book of Obadiah.

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*Week 32: Mistakes and reforms*

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*Day 218: More wise sayings and observations*

2 Chronicles 10, Proverbs 17, Ecclesiastes 8 — 64 verses

Contains: Rehoboam loses most of his kingdom; wise sayings; observations about life. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 63.6% finished!

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*Day 219: A prophet lies; a man of God dies*

1 Kings 13, Proverbs 18, Ecclesiastes 9 — 76 verses

Contains: A man of God prophesies against Jeroboam, an old prophet lies, the man of God dies; wise sayings and thoughts. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 63.8% finished!



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*Day 220: Rehoboam's reign*

2 Chronicles 11, Proverbs 19, Ecclesiastes 10 — 72 verses

Contains: Rehoboam's reign in Judah; wise sayings and thoughts. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 64.1% finished!

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*Day 221: Shishak attacks*

2 Chronicles 12, Psalm 74, 79, Ecclesiastes 11 — 62 verses

Contains: Rehoboam forsakes God, Shishak attacks Jerusalem, Rehoboam repents; prayers after defeat; remember the Creator when you are young. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 64.4% finished!

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*Day 222: A prayer for restoration*

Psalm 85, Proverbs 20, Ecclesiastes 12 — 58 verses

Contains: A prayer for restoration; wise sayings; remember God before old age, concluding insights. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 64.7% finished!

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*Day 223: Jeroboam's son dies as predicted*

1 Kings 14, Psalm 123, Proverbs 21 — 66 verses

Contains: Jeroboam's son dies as predicted by the prophet Ahijah, death of Jeroboam and Rehoboam; looking to God; wise sayings. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 65.0% finished!

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*Day 224: King Asa's reforms*

1 Kings 15, Psalm 89 — 87 verses

Contains: Kings Abijah and Asa of Judah, Asa's reforms, Asa's alliance with Aram (Syria), Kings Nadab and Baasha of Israel; a song about God and David. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 65.3% finished!

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*Week 33: Elijah stares down a nation*

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*Day 225: Abijah's war with Jeroboam*

2 Chronicles 13, Proverbs 22 — 52 verses

Contains: King Abijah attacks Jeroboam; wise sayings. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 65.6% finished!

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*Day 226: Asa's war against the Cushites*

2 Chronicles 14, Proverbs 23, 24 — 83 verses

Contains: Asa's war against invading Cushites; sayings of the wise. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 65.9% finished!

---

*Day 227: Ahab becomes king of Israel*

1 Kings 16, Proverbs 25 — 62 verses

Contains: Jehu's prophecy against Baasha, Zimri's revolt, Omri's rise to power, Ahab becomes king; proverbs of Solomon. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 66.2% finished!

---

*Day 228: King Asa's decline*

2 Chronicles 15, 16, Proverbs 26 — 61 verses

Contains: Asa's reforms, Asa's spiritual decline; wise sayings. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 66.5% finished!

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*Day 229: King Jehoshaphat*

2 Chronicles 17, Proverbs 27, 28 — 74 verses

Contains: King Jehoshaphat of Judah; wise sayings. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 66.8% finished!

2/3 finished with the Bible! Congratulations! Wow!

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*Day 230: Elijah and the fire of God*

1 Kings 17, 18, Proverbs 29 — 97 verses

Contains: Elijah predicts drought, ravens feed Elijah, widow at Zarephath, Obadiah meets Elijah, showdown on Mount Carmel; wise sayings. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 67.1% finished!

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*Day 231: God reassures Elijah*

Psalm 100, 1 Kings 19, Psalm 88, Proverbs 30 — 78 verses

Contains: Thanksgiving and praise; Elijah flees from Jezebel. God appears to Elijah, Elisha appointed; a prayer for deliverance; sayings of Agur. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 67.3% finished!

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*Week 34: Good people; corrupt nation*

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*Day 232: The virtuous woman*

Psalm 102, Proverbs 31, Obadiah 1 — 81 verses

Contains: A prayer for deliverance; sayings of King Lemuel, the woman of character; Obadiah's prophecy regarding Edom. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 67.6% finished!

---

*Day 233: The murder of Naboth*

1 Kings 20, 21 — 72 verses

Contains: War between Ahab and Ben-Hadad, Ahab rebuked by a prophet, Jezebel murders Naboth and Ahab seizes his vineyard. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 67.9% finished!

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*Day 234: Micaiah's remarkable vision*

1 Kings 22, 2 Chronicles 18 — 88 verses

Contains: Jehoshaphat and Ahab are deceived into attacking Ramoth Gilead despite Micaiah's prophecy, Ahab dies, Jehoshaphat's reign, King Ahaziah of Israel.

**Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 68.2% finished!

---

*Day 235: Songs about God's rule*

2 Chronicles 19, Psalm 33, 82, 95, 120 — 59 verses

Contains: Jehoshaphat rebuked, appoints judges; songs about God's rule. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 68.5% finished!



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*Day 236: A huge army defeated by God's power*

2 Chronicles 20, Psalm 2, 77 — 69 verses

Contains: God empowers Jehoshaphat to defeat a huge army, Jehoshaphat's ships destroyed because of an unholy alliance; why do the nations rage?; a cry to God when in distress. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 68.8% finished!

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*Day 237: Soldiers try to arrest Elijah*

2 Chronicles 21, 2 Kings 1, Psalm 44, 97 — 77 verses

Contains: Evil King Jehoram of Judah, God's judgment on Ahaziah, soldiers try to arrest Elijah; a prayer after defeat; a song about God's reign. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 69.1% finished!

---

*Day 238: Elijah rides to heaven*

2 Kings 2, Psalm 112, 116 — 54 verses

Contains: Elijah gets a ride to heaven, Elisha gets a double portion of Elijah's spirit, water made drinkable, young men mauled by bears after mocking Elisha; blessings for those who fear God; a song of praise. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 69.4% finished!

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*Week 35: Miracles from God*

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*Day 239: A boy restored to life*

2 Kings 3, 4, Psalm 46 — 83 verses

Contains: Elisha gives God's message to Jehoshaphat and Joram, they defeat Moab, miracle of oil, miraculous birth, boy restored to life, stew made safe to eat; God our refuge. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 69.7% finished!

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*Day 240: Naaman healed of leprosy*

2 Kings 5, Psalm 49, 111, 113 — 67 verses

Contains: Commander Naaman healed of leprosy, Gehazi's greed and curse; a song of wisdom about wealth; songs of praise. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 70.0% finished!

---

*Day 241: The unseen army of God*

2 Kings 6, Psalm 91 — 49 verses

Contains: An axhead floats, Arameans blinded, captured, released, desperate conditions during a siege; a song about God's protection. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 70.3% finished!

---

*Day 242: Miraculous end to a siege*

2 Kings 7, Psalm 126, 146 — 36 verses

Contains: The siege ends as predicted; a song about restored fortunes; trust in God, not men. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 70.6% finished!

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*Day 243: Hazael succeeds Ben-Hadad*

2 Kings 8, Psalm 75 — 40 verses

Contains: Shunammite's land given back, Hazael consults Elisha and succeeds Ben-Hadad, King Jehoram of Judah, King Ahaziah of Judah; a song about God who judges. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 70.8% finished!

---

*Day 244: Jehu takes the throne of Israel*

2 Kings 9, Psalm 96 — 50 verses

Contains: Jehu becomes king of Israel and kills the kings of Israel and Judah, as well as Jezebel; a song of worship. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 71.1% finished!

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*Day 245: Jehu purges Israel*

2 Kings 10, Psalm 92 — 52 verses

Contains: Jehu kills all the sons of Ahab, Jehu ends Baal worship; a Sabbath song. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 71.4% finished!

## Section #6: Isaiah: a towering vision of God

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The nation was fractured; corruption was everywhere; invading armies were gathered at the borders. If ever there was a time to lose hope, this was that time. But one man, the prophet Isaiah, saw what others had missed—a vision of God that transcended all their troubles. In these troubled times, it was easy to hate. But the prophet Jonah learned a powerful lesson about loving our enemies, and God’s willingness to embrace anyone who is willing to turn to Him.

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*Week 36: Learning about God’s heart*

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*Day 246: The hidden prince comes to power*

2 Chronicles 22, 2 Kings 11 — 55 verses

Contains: Ahaziah, Athalia, Joash. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 71.7% finished!

---

*Day 247: Joash repairs the temple*

2 Chronicles 23, 2 Kings 12 — 54 verses

Contains: Jehoiada brings Joash to power, Joash repairs the temple. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 72.0% finished!

---

*Day 248: Raised from the dead in Elisha's tomb*

2 Chronicles 24, 2 Kings 13 — 61 verses

Contains: King Joash of Judah turns to evil, Jehoahaz and then Jehoash rules Israel, Elisha instructs Jehoash, Elisha dies, a man is raised from the dead. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 72.3% finished!

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*Day 249: Return to God!*

Joel 1-3 — 52 verses

Contains: Locust swarm predicted, time to mourn and return to God, God responds, God's Spirit to be poured out, nations to be judged. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 72.6% finished!

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*Day 250: Amaziah follows the wrong god*

2 Chronicles 25, 2 Kings 14 — 59 verses

Contains: King Amaziah of Judah defeats Edom, adopts their gods, is defeated by Jehoash; Jeroboam II reigns in Israel. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 72.9% finished!



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*Day 251: Jonah learns about God's heart*

Jonah 1-4 — 48 verses

Contains: Jonah runs away from God, is thrown overboard in the storm, is swallowed by the fish, prays, gets deposited on dry ground, goes to Nineveh, brings God's message, the people repent, Jonah gets angry, God talks sense into Jonah.

**Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 73.2% finished!

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*Day 252: Judgment is coming*

Amos 1-4 — 59 verses

Contains: Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah, Israel to be judged by God, Israel to be punished. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 73.5% finished!

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*Week 37: A vision of God*

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*Day 253: Turn from evil*

Amos 5-7 — 58 verses

Contains: Turn from evil, the Day of the Lord is coming, don't be complacent or proud, Amos receives opposition. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 73.8% finished!

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*Day 254: The time is ripe*

Amos 8-9, 2 Kings 15 — 63 verses

Contains: Ripe fruit signifies the time is ripe, Israel to be punished and then restored; Kings Azariah (Uzziah) and Jotham of Judah, Kings Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah of Israel, Assyria invades. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 74.1% finished!

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*Day 255: The prophet who married a prostitute*

Hosea 1-4 — 58 verses

Contains: God tells the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute (Gomer) to signify Israel's unfaithfulness to God, God will punish Israel, Hosea reconciled to Gomer, Israel's sins. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 74.3% finished!

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*Day 256: Reaping the whirlwind*

Hosea 5-8 — 56 verses

Contains: Despite judgment, Israel refuses to change, reaps the whirlwind. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 74.6% finished!

---

*Day 257: God's love for Israel despite her sins*

Hosea 9-12 — 58 verses

Contains: Israel to be punished, God's love for Israel despite their sins. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 74.9% finished!

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*Day 258: A vision of God*

Hosea 13-14, 2 Chronicles 26, Isaiah 6 — 61 verses

Contains: God's anger, restoration follows repentance; Uzziah's military might, Uzziah oversteps his authority in the temple and is struck with leprosy; Isaiah's vision of God the year King Uzziah died. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 75.2% finished!

Whoa! You are three quarters of the way through the Bible! Way to go!

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*Day 259: Unfaithful King Ahaz*

2 Chronicles 27-28, 2 Kings 16 — 70 verses

Contains: Kings Jotham and Ahaz of Judah, Ahaz unfaithful to God, invasions in Judah; unholy alliance with Assyria. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 75.5% finished!

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*Week 38: God's holy mountain*

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*Day 260: Immanuel—a sign*

Isaiah 7, Isaiah 1 — 56 verses

Contains: God stops an invasion of Judah and offers the sign Immanuel, Israel's rebellion. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 75.8% finished!

---

*Day 261: The mountain of God*

Isaiah 2-4 — 54 verses

Contains: God's government, the Day of the Lord, sins of Judah, the branch of the Lord. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 76.1% finished!

---

*Day 262: Unto us a child is born*

Isaiah 5, 9 — 50 verses

Contains: Vineyard song, judgment coming, a son is given, God's anger. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 76.4% finished!

---

*Day 263: No harm on God's holy mountain*

Isaiah 10-12 — 56 verses

Contains: Woe to evildoers, judgment for Assyria, a remnant in Israel, no harm on God's holy mountain, song of praise. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 76.7% finished!

---

*Day 264: Judgment on Babylon and Philistia*

Isaiah 13-14 — 54 verses

Contains: Prophecies against Babylon and Philistia. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 77.0% finished!

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*Day 265: Prophecies against Moab and others*

Isaiah 15-18 — 44 verses

Contains: Prophecies against Moab, Damascus, and Cush. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 77.3% finished!

---

*Day 266: Prophecies against Egypt and others*

Isaiah 19-21 — 48 verses

Contains: Prophecies against Egypt, Cush, Babylon, Edom, Arabia. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 77.6% finished!



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*Week 39: God's triumph*

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*Day 267: God to lay waste the earth*

Isaiah 22-24 — 66 verses

Contains: Warnings from God, prophecy against Tyre, God to lay waste the earth. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 77.8% finished!

---

*Day 268: God will destroy death*

Isaiah 25-27 — 46 verses

Contains: God will destroy death, praise for God, dead will be raised, Israel to be delivered. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 78.1% finished!

---

*Day 269: God speaks against unjust rulers*

Isaiah 28-29 — 53 verses

Contains: God speaks against unjust rulers, woe to Ariel. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 78.4% finished!

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*Day 270: A king will reign in righteousness*

Isaiah 30-32 — 62 verses

Contains: Woe to the obstinate children, God longs to be gracious, God will punish oppressors, woe to those who rely on Egypt, Assyria will fall, a king will reign in righteousness, a message to complacent women. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 78.7% finished!

---

*Day 271: God is exalted even when all is chaos*

Isaiah 33-35 — 51 verses

Contains: God is exalted among the chaos, God's vengeance, Israel to be rescued.

**Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 79.0% finished!

---

*Day 272: Comfort and good news*

Isaiah 40-41 — 60 verses

Contains: Comfort, good news, and protection from an exalted God. **Your take-**

**away:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 79.3% finished!

---

*Day 273: God's gentle servant*

Isaiah 42-43 — 53 verses

Contains: God's gentle servant, blind and deaf, God's witnesses, mercy from God. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 79.6% finished!

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*Week 40: God's invitation*

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*Day 274: Idols make no sense*

Isaiah 44-45 — 53 verses

Contains: Idols make no sense, Jerusalem to be rebuilt, Cyrus predicted, Gentiles to follow God. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 79.9% finished!

---

*Day 275: Cyrus predicted*

Isaiah 46-48 — 50 verses

Contains: Babylon's inferior gods, Babylon to be destroyed, Israel stubborn, Cyrus predicted. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 80.2% finished!

---

*Day 276: Israel to be restored*

Isaiah 49-51 — 60 verses

Contains: God called me, Israel to be restored, salvation promised. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 80.5% finished!

---

*Day 277: God's suffering servant*

Isaiah 52-55 — 57 verses

Contains: Good news of deliverance, God's suffering servant to be exalted, future splendor, God's invitation. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 80.8% finished!

---

*Day 278: Justice and true fasting*

Isaiah 56-58 — 47 verses

Contains: God invites foreigners to follow Him, idolatry condemned, true fasting tied to justice. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 81.0% finished!

---

*Day 279: Good news for the downtrodden*

Isaiah 59-61 — 54 verses

Contains: Avoid sin and God will save, Jerusalem's glory, good news for the downtrodden. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 81.3% finished!

---

*Day 280: Future judgment*

Isaiah 62-65 — 67 verses

Contains: Praying for Jerusalem, God's vengeance against Israel's enemies, praise to God, prayer, judgment, new heavens and new earth. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 81.6% finished!

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*Week 41: An angel vs. an army*

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*Day 281: An exalted God helps the humble*

Isaiah 66, Micah 1-2 — 53 verses

Contains: Exalted God, help for the humble, a remnant to return, future judgment; God's judgment on His people, sorrow for oppressors, lying prophets, Israel's exiles to be gathered. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 81.9% finished!

---

*Day 282: A ruler from Bethlehem*

Micah 3-6 — 56 verses

Contains: Judgment against evil leaders and false prophets, God to take charge of the world, redemption for the oppressed, ruler from Bethlehem, putting an end to evil, God's charges against Israel. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 82.2% finished!



---

*Day 283: The fall of the northern kingdom of Israel*

Micah 7, Isaiah 8, 2 Kings 17 — 67 verses

Contains: God's compassion on Israel; Assyria to invade, trust in God; King Hoshea of Israel, northern Kingdom of Israel (Samaria) overrun by Assyria, taken into exile, and foreigners take over the land. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 82.5% finished!

---

*Day 284: Hezekiah leads the nation back to God*

2 Chronicles 29-30 — 63 verses

Contains: King Hezekiah of Judah reopens the temple, many invited to Passover, Hezekiah's prayer. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 82.8% finished!

---

*Day 285: Sennacherib invades Judah*

2 Chronicles 31, 2 Kings 18 — 67 verses

Contains: More reforms by Hezekiah, King Sennacherib of Assyria invades Judah and threatens Jerusalem. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 83.1% finished!

---

*Day 286: God's angel vs. an army*

Isaiah 36, 2 Kings 19, Isaiah 37 — 81 verses

Contains: Assyria invades Judah and threatens Jerusalem; Hezekiah pleads with God for help, Assyrians mock Israel's God, Isaiah predicts deliverance, an angel kills 185,000 Assyrian soldiers; Sennacherib murdered. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 83.4% finished!

---

*Day 287: Hezekiah's illness and healing*

2 Chronicles 32, Isaiah 38 — 55 verses

Contains: Assyrian invasion, Jerusalem's deliverance, Hezekiah's illness and healing, ambassadors from Babylon. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 83.7% finished!

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*Week 42: Repentance and reform*

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*Day 288: Messengers from Babylon*

Isaiah 39, 2 Kings 20 — 51 verses

Contains: Messengers from Babylon, Babylonian captivity predicted; Hezekiah's illness and healing. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 84.0% finished!

---

*Day 289: The fall of Assyria predicted*

Nahum 1-3 — 47 verses

Contains: God's anger against Nineveh, capital of Assyria, Nineveh to fall. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 84.3% finished!

---

*Day 290: Evil King Manasseh finally repents*

2 Kings 21, 2 Chronicles 33 — 54 verses

Contains: Evil Kings Manasseh and Amon of Judah; Manasseh repents. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 84.5% finished!

---

*Day 291: King Josiah rediscovers God's law*

2 Kings 22 — 54 verses

Contains: Good King Josiah of Judah, Hilkiah discovers God's law, the prophet Huldah. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 84.8% finished!

---

*Day 292: Josiah's reforms*

2 Chronicles 34 — 33 verses

Contains: Josiah begins his reign in Judah, God's law found, Josiah's reforms. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 85.1% finished!

---

*Day 293: Habakkuk's conversation with God*

Habakkuk 1-3 — 56 verses

Contains: Habakkuk prays to God, God's plan to use Babylon to accomplish His purposes, Habakkuk: how can You use such evil people?, God replies, Habakkuk's awe of God. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 85.4% finished!

---

*Day 294: Judgment and restoration for Judah*

Zephaniah 1-3 — 53 verses

Contains: Zephaniah predicts God's judgment against Judah, act now and repent, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, and Assyria to be destroyed, God to restore Jerusalem. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 85.7% finished!

## Section #7: Daniel: rebuilding after disaster

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Everything that could go wrong had gone wrong. The scene was almost like a post-apocalyptic world. It looked like God was finished with His people, ready to write them off as a bad investment. But in this doubtful soil, hope began to grow. Here we meet Esther, the woman who saved her people; Ezekiel, the man who saw God; Jeremiah, the prophet with God's heart; Nehemiah, the man who rebuilt Jerusalem; and Daniel, the man who saw the future.

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### *Timeline for exile and return*

#### **Exile and return**

The Babylonian captivity took place in three stages:

1. 605 BC **Daniel** and others taken to Babylon
2. 597 BC Possibly when **Ezekiel** was taken to Babylon
3. 586 BC Destruction of temple, most remaining Jews taken to Babylon

**Jeremiah** and **Ezekiel** were prophets before and immediately after the destruction of the temple in 586 BC. **Daniel** was a prophet from 605 BC to possibly 538 BC.

In 538 BC King **Cyrus** (Persia) issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to their homeland. The exiles returned to Israel in three stages:

1. 536 BC led by **Zerubbabel**
2. 457 BC led by **Ezra**
3. 445 BC led by **Nehemiah**

**Zechariah** and **Haggai** were prophets during the time of **Zerubbabel**.

The temple was rebuilt from 536 to 516 BC.

**Esther** became queen in 478 BC during the reign of **Xerxes** (Persia)

The walls of Jerusalem were destroyed again in 466 BC.

**Nehemiah** returned to rebuild the walls in 445 BC under King **Artaxerxes I** (Persia)

**Malachi** was the last prophet of the Old Testament. He was contemporary with **Nehemiah**.

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*Week 43: Daniel, advisor to the king*

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*Day 295: The call of Jeremiah*

2 Chronicles 35, Jeremiah 1-2 — 82 verses

Contains: King Josiah celebrates Passover, Josiah's death; God to Jeremiah: You're not too young, be fearless, Israel's sin and unfaithfulness. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 86.0% finished!



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*Day 296: Daniel, a captive in Babylon, stands firm*

2 Kings 23, 2 Chronicles 36, 2 Kings 24, Daniel 1 — 101 verses

Contains: Josiah's reforms and his death, first Jehoahaz then Jeoiakim, then Jeoiachin, then Zedekiah become kings of Judah, Babylon invades, temple destroyed, much later Cyrus allows exiles to return, Daniel taken to Babylon where he vows not to defile himself. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 86.3% finished!

---

*Day 297: Daniel explains Nebuchadnezzar's dream*

Daniel 2, Jeremiah 3, 4 — 105 verses

Contains: Daniel gains honor by interpreting King Nebuchadnezzar's dream; corruption in Israel, judgment coming to Judah, Jeremiah weeps for God's people. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 86.6% finished!

---

*Day 342: Nehemiah's reforms*

Nehemiah 13, Malachi 1-2 — 62 verses

Contains: Nehemiah's reforms; God's love for Israel, people's failure to honor God, warning to priests, need for faithfulness. **Your takeaway:**

Finished! Congratulations! You are already 99.7% finished!

---

*Day 343: "I am sending Elijah..."*

Malachi 3-4 — 30 verses

Contains: God will return to judge, tithes and offerings, serving God, promise of Elijah, hearts of the fathers. **Your takeaway:**

Congratulations! You are 100% finished reading the Bible!

You did it! So glad you stuck with it and powered through. Now that you've been through the Bible once, your next time through will be so much easier because you'll be able to connect the dots.

## A guide to making sense of the Bible

Portions of the Bible are straightforward and easy to understand. But other passages are difficult, problematic, and sometimes even shocking. How do you unravel those difficult passages?

Let me give you some basic tools.

**1. Give preference to what you know to be true.** Always interpret an unclear passage in light of a clear passage. For example, the Bible says God is love (1 John 4:8). That's pretty easy to understand. Love is God's defining characteristic. So, when we come to Genesis 22 where God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, did God suddenly become unloving? Did He become bloodthirsty? Not at all. If you read the whole Bible you see that God never had any intention of Abraham killing Isaac, and, in fact, God detests child sacrifice. So when we try to understand Genesis 22, we start with a given: God is love. So we can ask the question: Why would God (who is love) ask Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac? If we don't know God is love, then we can come up with all kinds of WRONG answers. (Like God is petty, or bloodthirsty, or God needs to be appeased, or whatever—all of which are not true.) But if we know God is love, then we can start coming up with better answers: God was bringing out the best in Abraham; God was showcasing Abraham's faith as an example for succeeding generations; God was giving us a picture of the resurrection; God was helping us understand how Jesus died in our place just like the ram in Genesis 22 died in Isaac's place.

**2. Study the context.** That means several things:

**a. Who is the passage talking to?** For example, in 2 Kings 9-11, God called Jehu to destroy the house of Ahab and execute the false religious leaders. He has given you no such instruction. In ancient times, Israelites were instructed to present animal sacrifices to the Lord. Again, you have been given no such instruction.

**b. What do the surrounding verses say?** For example, Ephesians 2:8-9 are often quoted to show that good works aren't necessary for salvation. But people sometimes neglect to look at Ephesians 2:10 which makes it clear that good works are very important to God. Romans 7:14-24 is sometimes quoted

as a way of explaining the struggles Christians have with sin. But that passage was never meant to be taken alone; it must be considered within the context of Romans 6-8. At minimum, always read the entire chapter, and it is better to read the entire book when trying to understand a problem passage.

c. **How does this passage fit into the major themes of scripture?** This is why it is important to be a lifelong student of the Bible. The more you read the Bible, and the more you get to know the heart of God, the more certain themes will stand out and help you make sense of passages that might be unclear. For example, it's clear that God's eye is always on the most vulnerable person in a given situation. God is always looking for ways to protect the weak, the needy, the vulnerable. It's clear that our world is messed up, but God is fixing things. It's clear that we have a problem with evil in this world, but God is working to deal with that problem in a way that preserves our ability to make good choices out of love for God. It's clear that when we hurt, God hurts. These are all examples of major themes of the Bible, and they help guide our understanding.

In fact, one of the best ways to make sense of problem passages is to keep reading. The more times you read the Bible, the more questions about individual passages tend to resolve themselves.

d. **What is the historical and cultural context?** Many of the laws of Moses, for example, were directed at an ancient agricultural society. Animal sacrifice was deeply meaningful in that culture; much less meaningful today. The health and sanitation regulations made sense given the times; today modern understanding of medicine, microbiology, and related disciplines give us a new perspective.

The historical and cultural context can key to interpreting very puzzling passages. For example, in Deuteronomy 23:1 we are told that castrated men were not allowed to "enter the assembly of the Lord." At first glance, that seems bizarre. But here's where an understanding of the culture helps. In ancient times, many parents would castrate their baby boys in order to turn them into male prostitutes at the shrines of false gods. They did this as a way to try to gain the favor of those false gods. In this passage, God was making it clear that He was putting a stop to this barbaric practice.

Another example: In Deuteronomy 22:28-29, we are told that if a man rapes a virgin who is not engaged, that he is required to marry her (after paying her father a fine) and can never divorce her. In our culture, that is unthinkable. But in the culture of the day, men were financially responsible for women, and a woman without a husband, father, or son to support her could be destitute. A man typically refused to marry a woman who was not a virgin. So rape was not just a horrible violation of a person, it was also an economic death sentence. The law was saying: If you're going to sleep with this woman, you are financially responsible for her for the rest of your life. People living in this culture understood that. For example, after Tamar was raped by her brother Amnon (2 Samuel 13), Tamar begged him NOT to send her away (verse 16). With all of this in mind, however, there is another provision in the law (Exodus 22:16-17) that gave a woman's father the right to refuse this type of marriage arrangement, so there appears to be a way out if that was desired.

**3. Use Bible study aids.** Commentaries give you a chapter-by-chapter or verse-by-verse idea of how Bible scholars understand the passage you are studying. They are not, of course, inspired, and some are better than others, but they do give you a second opinion on the passage you're studying. Interlinear translations place the words in the original languages (Greek for the New Testament, Hebrew for the Old Testament) next to the English word. Lexicons and Bible dictionaries give you the meaning of different words, particularly the meaning of the word in the original language. Much of the Bible is anchored in time and place, so Bible atlases and encyclopedias give you a perspective of what that can mean for the passage. Concordances originally served to allow you to do a word search through the Bible, but with online searches available at sites like BibleGateway.com that function is not as necessary. However, concordances can give you rich insights into the meaning of different words and how they are used in different contexts. These Bible study aids are available as books you can purchase and/or as online resources available for free or at a price. You might get recommendations from your pastor or other Christian friends as to which Bible study aids might be right for you.

**4. Read the same passage in several translations.** With Bible apps and online Bibles, it has become increasingly easy to read the same passage in multiple translations. This is a great thing because it allows you to get a sense for how different Bible scholars understood the meaning of the original pas-

sage. No single translation is 100% inspired, but some are better than others for certain purposes. By reading a variety of translations, you get a richer sense of the meaning of the original. As a footnote to this, try out audio versions as well. Sometimes listening to scripture on audio will give you a better sense as to the flow of thought in the passage. Portions of the Bible are also available in video; these too can be helpful.

5. **Ask the Author.** Last, but certainly not least, ask the Author. While no, you can't ask the human author of the Bible book you are studying, the Person who inspired the human author is available right here, right now. God's Holy Spirit is happy to give God's children insight into passages when they are eager to honor God with their lives.

## 7 reasons I choose Jesus

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### **#1. Jesus fixes things that are broken**

I start here: Jesus understands that the world is messed up and He is doing something about it. In John 11, we find Jesus at the grave of his friend Lazarus. In a few moments, Jesus will raise him from the dead. But, before He does, He pauses and weeps. Why? There can be only one explanation. Jesus cares. He feels our hurt. He knows things aren't as they should be.

In Luke 7, Jesus stops a funeral procession, addresses the mother of the young man who died and says, "Don't cry." A moment later, He commands the young man to stand up. Life returns; the funeral turns into a dance of celebration. In Christianity, we have a God who is capable of fixing every- thing that has gone wrong. We have a leader, Jesus Christ, who has sent out His followers to begin the process of setting things right.

In the Christian Bible, we find a God who is, among other things, angry (Romans 1). God is angry at everything that messes up our lives. That is a great comfort to me. You and I live in a world where little children are sold into sexual slavery, where innocent people are tortured, where people starve because governments are corrupt. God has reason to be angry. If He wasn't angry, I would be concerned. Anger is the appropriate response to injustice. It comes before justice. Without anger, there would be no setting things right.

But if God were only angry, we would be sunk. Who wants to live in a universe where God is always and only angry? I don't. It's good to know that God is happy. He feels good about Himself, about His plans. Jesus hung out with friends. They laughed together. God has fun. The fruit of God's Spirit is joy and peace. God laughs. He's supremely confident in His ability to run the universe, to set things right, to punish those who are intent on opposing Him.

### **#2. Our choices have consequences**

Jesus does present a God to whom we are personally accountable. At some point, each of us must stand before God and answer for how we chose to live

our lives. Our choices have consequences. Many people don't like that. I think that's why many are so eager to construct a worldview where God isn't needed. How well are we doing with that? Not so good, in my opinion.

The Darwinism that makes God unnecessary and irrelevant by replacing Him with natural selection creates a nightmarish universe where might makes right and the gang with the most power wins the struggle for survival. There is no resolution for the endless grief humanity has suffered because suffering is inherent to the process of natural selection, a system where you survive at the expense of those who don't. It invites and feeds Nazism, genocide and every other form of disregard for the weak, the old, the sick, the needy. In Darwinism, sooner or later you need to grow up and face this bleak reality: You have no value; you are merely a chemical accident, a blip on the radar screen of time, another poor schmuck just trying to eat before you get eaten.

If you dispense with the Creator, then you also have the dizzying intellectual problem of nothing creating something, of the natural being somehow supernatural, of the universe creating itself—a magic trick that it cannot now repeat. You have the statistical absurdity of atoms lining up in the exact sequence to form DNA, RNA, proteins and all the essential moving parts of the simplest cell possible. That's sort of like guessing on your first try all the passwords to get into all the databases of the CIA, the FBI and the NSA. (Good luck!) Then, to keep things moving, you have naturalistic evolution which involves up to millions of base pairs of DNA magically re-arranging themselves in not only one creature, but also, at the same time, in another creature of the opposite sex. Those creatures must find each other, mate, produce offspring who also mate and create a population that doesn't get eaten by all their competitors. This needs to happen not just once, but millions of times. Could it happen? Sure, anything is conceivable. But it seems just as likely that you will find yourself, when you take your next breath, sitting on the surface of Mars.

I prefer to live in a world where our choices have meaning. I prefer to live in a world where it is wrong to rape an innocent child, where it is right to care for the sick, where Someone notices, Someone cares, Someone validates good choices, where bad choices have consequences, where values transcend the chaos of our individual lives and catch up with us in the end.



### **#3. Christianity is the statistical best bet**

If you had to bet on a religion, where would you put your money? Christianity seems to me to be the statistical best bet. If there is a God smart enough to create the universe and if He has requirements, then it logically follows that He would be smart enough to find a way to communicate His requirements to a significant portion of the human race. Therefore, it seems like a reasonable bet that some portion of the human race has figured out the God question. If there is a God, and if He does have a following here on earth, then statistically the best bets would be Christianity (33% of the earth's population), Islam (21%) and Hinduism (14%). (Only 8% of the earth's population does not believe in a God.)

Let's look at our choices. Christianity is more established worldwide. Islam is a latecomer on the scene with Mohammad dating from 570 AD. We have to ask why God would wait so long in history to make Himself known. Christianity per se starts at about 30 AD, but shares its roots with Judaism going back to Abraham (2000 BC), and, according to the Bible, to the very beginning. Although Hindu roots go back 3000 BC to the birth of Krishna, Hinduism is localized around India and hasn't had much success elsewhere. We would think God is interested in more than just the Indian subcontinent. Christianity has had the most success, spreading to every continent. Islam comes in second. Historically, Islam has spread through conquest. Yes, Christianity has had some conquest conversions, but gentle persuasion accounts for most of its success.

### **#4. Christians have paid the price for their faith**

Christians have validated their faith by their sacrifices. There is considerable antipathy against Christians and Jews in nearly every culture and nation. Why? If there really is an unseen battle between good and evil as the Christian religion teaches, and if Christians and Jews really are the people of God, then this universal hatred for them begins to make sense. On the flip side, over 100 million Christians have paid with their lives for their faith. That kind of dedication captures one's attention. Why would they be willing to make this supreme sacrifice? In radical Islam, the Muslim martyr dies killing. But in radical Christianity, the Christian martyr dies caring.

### **#5. All religions are not the same**

You must make a choice. The idea that all religions teach basically the same thing isn't true. They teach mutually contradictory tenets. Some of their teachings may overlap, but to embrace one you will need to reject others. Which one should you embrace?

Buddhism blames all our problems on ambitions. Give up all your desires and achieve Nirvana. I say, if you give up all your desires, you cease to be human. If I need to choose between God as a noble silence (Buddhism) and God as a loving Father (Christianity), I'll take the Father any day of the week. I like having a God I can talk to, and One who just might talk to me.

Hinduism teaches reincarnation, a try, try again religion where you never consciously face the consequences of your choices. That goes completely against my concept of justice.

Islam means "submission." God is judge. Absolute obedience is required. No relationship is possible. If you're good enough, you earn your way to paradise. But how do you know if you're good enough? Even the best person has faults. Why are one person's faults tolerated and the next person's are not? I don't see a remedy for the flaws that infect every human being on the planet.

Agnostics remind me of the person who refused to buy homeowners insurance because he had never seen a house burn down before.

Christianity offers grace. Christianity is founded on the premise that God loves humans so much that He became a human, that as a human He suffered and died to demonstrate how much He cares about us, and that He came back to life to demonstrate His power over death. The followers of Jesus Christ are taught that we don't get connected to God because we do good, but rather we do good because we are connected with God. This paradigm shift empowers even the most grievous offender to find personal restoration and a relationship with a personal-infinite God.

### **#6. Christianity is the only verifiable religion**

Richard Morgan was born in Lansing, Iowa around 1932. He grew up in Cottage Grove, Wisconsin where he worked in the construction trade. In 1965, he

started a ministry as an itinerant preacher with an amazing gift of healing, working almost exclusively in Dane County, Wisconsin and Allamakee County, Iowa. At a public funeral in DeForest, Wisconsin, he walked up to a coffin and raised a young man from the dead. He also raised from the dead the daughter of the mayor of Dane, Wisconsin. Everybody knows Leo of Star Valley, Wisconsin (south of Viroqua). Richard raised him from the dead, after he was already in the grave—dead for four days. All this didn't go over good with the powers in Iowa and Wisconsin. Under Governor Hughes, Richard was arrested, tried on trumped up charges, and executed by lethal injection. But three days after his execution, Richard came back from the dead and was seen by 500 people in Allamakee County, most of whom are still alive. A group of his fans watched as Richard left this earth and ascended into heaven.

Everything in the preceding paragraph is fiction. (Any resemblance between these fictitious characters and any living person is purely coincidental.) It's false. It never happened. But suppose I claimed it was true. How hard would it be for you to prove that I was wrong? A good investigative journalist could debunk everything in that paragraph in a day.

This is what makes Christianity unique. Change Richard's name to Jesus, change the locations and personalities, and you have the four Gospels. Christianity was birthed from a series of events—events that happened within the lifetime of its early adherents. Christianity is based on a series of events that either happened or didn't happen. If someone wanted to stop Christianity—and, believe me, people have wanted to stop Christianity ever since it started—all that person would need to do is some fact checking.

But here's the problem. When Christianity's opponents checked the facts, they turned out to be true. A good example of this is found in Acts 4. A miracle takes place. By Christ's power, Peter heals a man who couldn't walk. It happened at one of the busiest intersections in the city. Dozens, maybe hundreds of people saw it. They knew the man. He had been a regular there, begging for a handout since he couldn't walk or work. But now he was healed. Supernaturally.

What do the opponents of Christianity do? They pull into a huddle and say, "What can we do? An extraordinary miracle has taken place, and we cannot deny it." The events are irrefutable, but the opponents are unmoved.

Christianity was birthed from a series of events that could easily be verified or debunked when Christianity began. What about the other religions? Muhammad claimed to have a private encounter with God. Can that be verified? No. We can't prove that it did or didn't happen. Michael Patton writes,

"Buddhism and Hinduism are not historic faiths, meaning they don't have central claims of events in time and space which believers are called upon to investigate. You either adopt their philosophy or you don't. There is no objective way to test them. Run through every religion that you know of and you will find this to be the case: Either it does not give historic details to the central event, the event does not carry any worldview-changing significance, or there are no historic events which form the foundation of the faith." (Michael Patton, "Christianity, the World's Most Falsifiable Religion," <http://credohouse.org/blog/christianity-the-worlds-most-falsifiable-religion>, 7-8-2013, accessed 5-2-2016.)

### **#7. Things go better with God**

Life works better God's way. If you carefully read books on success, personal growth, fulfillment, business growth and so on, you find Biblical principles restated again and again. No wonder that nations with a strong Christian heritage are typically much wealthier than nations with little or no Christian heritage.

Christianity promises a powerful afterlife. The promise of eternal life, fully conscious, self-actualized, total fulfillment, in a community of people whom you love and who love you, in relationship with God Himself is an awesome promise. If only 10% of it were true, it would be far too good to miss.

If the benefits don't sway you, consider this: It's far too dangerous not to choose Jesus Christ. Christianity emphasizes a real, conscious and certain meeting with God that will take place for all of us at which time we will be assigned an eternal destiny, heaven or hell. We may not like the idea of hell, but if there's any chance—even a 1/100th of 1% chance that hell is real, then we need to take steps to avoid it. Think about it. We don't expect our houses to burn down or our cars to be stolen, but we buy insurance anyway, just in case. The descriptions provided by those who claim to have visited hell are far too

terrible to ignore. Better to make peace with God and avoid hell, than to avoid the issue and find yourself trapped in an eternal nightmare.

That's how I slice the pie.

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## About the author

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Author Dwight Clough

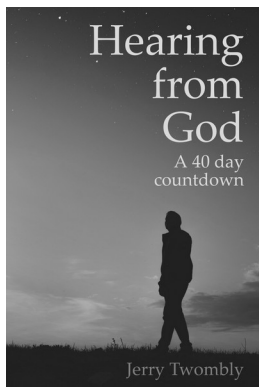
Dwight Clough is the author of over 20 books including *What It Means to Follow Jesus*, *The Man from Sun Prairie*, *Rethinking Our War on Poverty*, *Spiritual Self Defense*, *How to Write and Publish Your First Book*, *The Gift of Transformation*, *The Easy Bible*, *Dove for President*, *Amazing Faith*, *Rediscover God*, *Weathering Storms*, *The Tyrannosaurus Who Wanted to Be a Vegetarian*, and *A Beautiful Christmas*. He is a lifelong Bible student and a graduate of Moody Bible Institute. Dwight teaches online courses in forgiving others and personal transformation. He ghostwrites, edits, and publishes books for Christian authors.

He is currently working on a documentary addressing the question: How do we solve poverty? (Visit [WeWillEndPoverty.com](http://WeWillEndPoverty.com) for more information.)

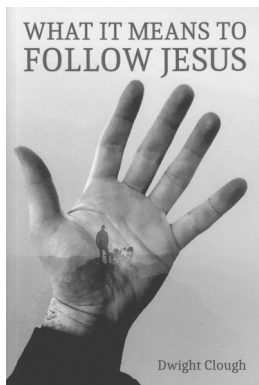
Dwight has been married to Kim since 1978. The two have four young adult children.

For more information, visit [DwightClough.com](http://DwightClough.com)

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