

A good read, if a long one!

The idea is to read through each book of the Bible as you would with any other book, i.e. as a whole, and let it give you its particular message. How many of the books you read one straight after the other obviously depends on you and on the books in question. Some bits are more complicated than others and there are bits none of us really understand, but that is not the point. The aim is to get the general gist of what each book is about. However little you feel you pick up this time round, you'll find that next time you turn to a passage or look up a reference, it may well be a little more meaningful and you'll begin to see how each book adds its own little bit to the overall picture.

The scheme below, off the top of my head, is intended to give a bit of variety between Old and New Testaments, but also put together some of the bits that go together – an impossible aim but still! I've added a few notes which may help you follow the meandering of a warped mind. However the notes are obviously a very succinct personal impression and are longest on the books I know best. You may well feel a particular book conveys a different message to you.

The New Testament bears witness to fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is God's Messiah and our Redeemer, and is the culmination of the story that began in...

The Old Testament which bears witness to God as author of all creation and to His active continuing involvement in history.

Lastly, any errors are mine and the good bits I got from someone else along my path! (Psalm 119.105)

Book	Notes
Gospel of John	Jesus said "I am the light of the world". John demonstrates this in his gospel and relates the signs by which he felt Christ demonstrated He is the Messiah through whom "our joy may be complete".
Genesis	In the beginning, God created Heaven and earth... In the beginning, He called Abraham into a relationship with Him ("I will be their God and they will be my people" Gen 17.8, Ex. 29.45, Jer 24.7, 31.33, 32.38, Eze 11.20, 14.11, 37.23, 37.27) i.e., God is no longer seen as the god of a particular place, but present everywhere where His people are. His plans for His people begin to unfold (Jer 29.11)
Ruth	Christ's ancestor, and a woman at that!
Luke	The life of Christ.
Acts	Continuation of Luke: the beginnings of the Church, in Jerusalem first, then Paul's missionary journeys.
Exodus	More of the history of the people of Israel and some examples to avoid as well as ones to follow
Psalms 37-59, and 120-121	From the depths of the despair to the heights of praise through patient faith in God. This is the section of the Psalms, I love most. Read the rest of the Psalms on the mornings you don't have time for more than a quick glance at a few verses. Remember this is the Hebrew hymn book. You can't read too many at once. Also: most of the Bible is "God speaking to men"; the majority of the Psalms are "Man speaking to God".
Romans	The fifth Gospel (according to a former Chaplain) Our most complete account of Paul's message: all have sinned, all need Christ (chaps 1-8) the Jews as the chosen people of God have a very special place (9-11), Christian behaviour (12-14) plans and final greetings (15-16).
Numbers	The Jews move on.
Hebrews	The scriptures of the OT opened up: see Lk 24-25-27, 24.32.
Joshua	Fought the battle of Jericho and began to occupy the land – it was quite a gradual process.
Judges	The writer on the Israelites behaviour from God's perspective.
1 John	The light and love of Christ contrasted with human behaviour. Remember the Gospel emphasised the light.
2 & 3 John	Two church problems – many of the NT letters were written to address problems in the churches; the problems persist and the solutions are still the same.
1 Samuel	More history
2 Samuel	And yet more, but we are getting to the end.
Leviticus	The law: respect God and respect your neighbour.
Galatians	Don't add to the Gospel.
Colossians	The pre-eminence of Christ and life in Christ
Philippians	Christ the purpose, the pattern, the prize, the power and provision
1 Kings	Our last history lesson and the prophets Elijah and Elisha
2 Kings	

A note on the prophets	<p>They were all utterly convinced of their calling – they had God's word to proclaim. Certainly, they preach judgement for sin (often horrible and violent – but that violent sin is still with us in human behaviour today) but never without also proclaiming God's mercy on those who repent. So don't be put off by the violence of old – it is still with us – and the answer – the mercy of God for those who repent – is still the only solution.</p> <p>In general the prophets spoke at three levels: (a) God's message for their day, (b) they spoke of the coming Messiah, (c) they speak to us.</p>
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Book	Notes
Hosea	God's unending love seen in His relationship with His people which is compared to that of a husband with an unfaithful wife.
Habakkuk	<p>Why do the righteous suffer?</p> <p>God's reply: Look and see (1.5). The righteous will live through their faith(2.4) Habakkuk's response "I will rejoice in God my saviour, whatever the circumstances" (3.17-18)</p> <p>A first approach to the problem of suffering which Job treats at greater length. The closer we get to God the greater our perception of his glory and his loving care. Compare Job 40-42.</p>
Amos	Try replacing the nations which Amos cites in his opening survey with modern situations, eg 1.3 Serb atrocities, 1.6 Nazi displacement of the Jews, 1.22 Arab Israeli Conflict or Catholic protestant divide in Northern Ireland.
Joel, Obadiah	Two more prophets.
Jonah	You'll have a whale of a time with this one: the message is that God cares for all his creation.
James	A practical sermon on Christian behaviour and standards.
Micah, Nahum and Zephaniah	Three short prophets.
Isaiah	<i>Par excellence</i> , the prophet of the Redeemer.
Ephesians	Various church problems
Jeremiah	The prophet in exile
Lamentations	A lament as the name suggests
Ezekiel	The prophet of the restoration and the Spirit being outpoured.
Haggai	Rebuild
Zechariah	Rebuild
Malachi	Repent and be blessed.
Matthew	The Gospel of prophecy fulfilled, albeit a little oddly
Deuteronomy	The 2 nd giving of the law.
1Chronicles	Revise your history
2Chronicles	
1Corinthians	Church problems
2Corinthians	
Ezra	The return of the Exiles
Esther	A woman's courage.
1 Thessalonians	Church problems
2 Thessalonians	
Nehemiah	Re-establishment in the land after the exile
Proverbs	Pithy sayings – you could break this up as with the Psalms

Ecclesiastes	The futility of man without God.
Song of Songs	A love song, extolling life in all its fullness!
Job	The problem of suffering discussed at great length – a demonstration of how insensitive and misguided people can be (not to say long-winded) but in the end God rewards faith. The answer to the question lies in our deepening appreciation of God. Cf. Habakkuk. Chapters 1&2 remind us that there is a battle behind the scenes of which we are often unaware (cf. Eph 6.12)
Daniel	A prophet in exile and prophecies of the end times.
1 Peter	Christian behaviour
2 Peter	Looks forward to the second coming of Christ
Mark	The basic Gospel
1 Timothy	The pastoral epistles – advice to Timothy who was taking on a position of leadership in the Church and to Titus
2 Timothy	
Titus	
Philemon	A call to exercise Christian forgiveness
Jude	Beware of godless men and persevere in faith.
Revelation	The conclusion – letters of upbraiding and exhortation to the seven churches followed by visions on the end times when Christ will establish His rule.

Prophets in Bible order

Isaiah	740-680	Pre-exile*
Jeremiah	627-580	Pre & during exile
Ezekiel	592-70	Exile
Daniel	605-536	Pre (or Post if later)*
Hosea	755-710	Pre-exile
Joel	835	Pre-exile
Amos	760-753	Pre-exile
Obadiah	586-537	
Micah	735-710	Pre-exile
Nahum	660	Pre-exile
Habakkuk	607	Pre-exile
Zephaniah	630	Pre-exile
Haggai	520	Post-exile
Zechariah	520-518 & 486-464	Post-exile
Malachi	462-425	Post-exile

Some significant dates

Fall of Samaria	722
Fall of Jerusalem and Exile	587
1 st Deportation	597
2 nd Deportation	587
3 rd Deportation	582

* There is a right roaring argument over the date of Daniel and over Isaiah. Me, I'm simple and I take them at face value!

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