

Dear Brothers and Sisters at CBC,

Merry Christmas and happy New Year! It is with a great amount of satisfaction that I give to you the Bible reading plan for 2023. While a daily devotional in God's word is not all that we need, it is certainly foundational for the Christian life. The central reality of the Christian is God – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We are meant to live in fellowship with God; this is our purpose, this is our privilege, this is our destiny. Scripture and prayer are core disciplines for the life God works within us that we then work out: *“work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose”* (Philippians 2:12,13).

I wanted to explain this plan and some of its nuances. First a brief explanation. You will be reading 4 chapters a day, 7 days a week. This will take you through the entire Bible once and Psalms, Proverbs, Matthew, Acts, Romans, and Hebrews twice. There are a few instances when you will read 3 chapters and a few when you will read 5. Most notably I tried not to break up the discourses in the book of Job so the schedule is a little uneven there.

Now for a deeper explanation! The first column simply takes you through all the Psalms and Proverbs twice in the course of the year. The Psalms are the historic prayer and praise book of Scripture and reading a Psalm 300 days of the year will deepen your prayer life and worship. Proverbs is wisdom, much of it in bite size nuggets, and who couldn't use a regular dose of wisdom?

The second column is the New Testament reading. It is one chapter a day for the year and it is presented in canonical order, that is, in the order you find in your Bible. The New Testament is completed as of September 17<sup>th</sup> so I added Matthew, Acts, Romans and Hebrews a second time to maintain the New Testament reading up to December 11<sup>th</sup>. Then to focus on Christmas I added selections from Isaiah and Luke to end the year.

The third column is the Old Testament, minus Psalms and Proverbs which are read separately in the first column. The Old Testament readings need the most explanation. I have chosen to follow the Jewish canonical ordering of: **Law – Prophets – Writings**. This was the ordering that Jesus himself would have known. The exact order I have chosen is slightly different than the standard Jewish canonical order and I found it in [Dominion and Dynasty: A theology of the Hebrew Bible](#) by Stephen Dempster.

The flow of the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh) begins with the **Law** (Pentateuch; 5 books of Moses) which establishes God's covenant relationship with Israel. Israel's pre-history, including creation, the flood, and the Patriarchs is included within the Pentateuch.

The story then continues with what are called the **Former Prophets** (Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings) which give the history from entering the land of Canaan according to God's promise and power to being expelled from that same land also by God's promise and power. Within that story is also the story of Israel's kingship and God's promise of a dynasty to David. It should be noted that the story of the **Former Prophets** concludes with a touch of hope in the midst of tragedy – Jehoiachin, king of Judah, is released from prison while still in exile (2 Kings 25:27-30; Cf. Jeremiah 52:31-34). This hints that the story of God and his people is not yet over, that the promises to Abraham and David have not been abandoned.

The storyline next turns to the **Latter Prophets** - the ones we usually think of when we think of the prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the 12 “minor” prophets. “Minor” refers to their length, not their content. Many of the prophets are closely connected with the exile: some in anticipation (ex: Isaiah, Habakkuk), some in the moment (ex: Jeremiah, Ezekiel) and some in the restoration (ex: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi). The exile is central to the story as Israel was unfaithful to the covenant despite

God's patience and calls for repentance. The exile itself was an act of covenant faithfulness by God; however, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is still the *"compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness"* (Exodus 34:6) so the exile was not the end of Israel's story.

Fittingly Jeremiah is first (Dempster; in the standard Jewish ordering Isaiah is first) since he lived and prophesied during the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile from the land. Jeremiah speaks powerfully of Israel's guilt but even more so of God's continued mercy shown in his promises of restoration, *"When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart'"* (Jeremiah 29:10-13).

This hope for a new heart is picked up in Ezekiel who declares that God will *"remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws"* (Ezekiel 36:26-27). Isaiah is next, speaking so clearly of Jesus as the suffering servant who gives his life for the sins of the people and also picturing the hope of a redeemed world. The 12 so called "minor prophets" follow, each adding their voice to the story of Israel's hardheartedness and God's determined faithfulness to complete the outworking of creation: *"They will be my people and I will be their God."*

The third section of the Hebrew Bible is called the **Writings**. This section contains several different types of writing in both prose and poetry, the most notable being the wisdom literature which give directions for righteous living in an unrighteous world. These works include Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Lamentations. There are also historical works which resume the storyline - Ruth, Daniel, Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah, and 1 and 2 Chronicles. Notice that the Hebrew Bible ends with 1 and 2 Chronicles which speaks a word of hope and comfort to post-exilic Israel reminding them once again of God's covenant faithfulness and plans to work through his people despite their history of unfaithfulness. Second Chronicles concludes with Cyrus issuing the proclamation to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Israel is still under foreign dominion but once again we see that God is not yet done with his people and that there is hope for the story to continue...and it does in the New Testament with the gospel of Matthew and the birth of the Messiah! Notice how tightly the New Testament is tied to the Old Testament in Matthew chapter 1.

Reading the Bible daily and reading through the entirety of Scripture every year has been a well of living water to me. Every morning I look forward to reading God's word, meditating on it, and responding in prayer. I hope this explanation of the reading plans helps you grasp God's great story and that this year you can also deepen your fellowship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit through daily Bible reading.

You might want to consider reading like eating – three times a day. Read one column in the morning and pray to begin your day, read another at lunchtime, and the last in the evening. This may make it more manageable than trying to read it all and pray the first thing in the morning.

*"Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD"* (Deuteronomy 8:2,3).

Blessings,

Pastor Dan