



St. Raphael of Brooklyn Orthodox Church



READ
the BIBLE with us



Bible Reading Plan

This is a 12-month (plus) Bible reading plan based on the Septuagint version of the Old Testament. This plan will take us a bit longer than 12 months as we have scheduled in weekends off to be used as catch-up days, if necessary.

Included in this packet is: an Overview of The Books of the Bible, prayers for before & after reading, a schedule of readings, some wisdom on reading from the Church Fathers & other helpful articles to assist you on your journey.

We will be reading daily on our own (or with an accountability partner should you desire), a closed FB group is being established to connect with others in our Parish who are reading, and monthly meetings with Fr. Sergious will be had with dates & times to be announced on our website <http://www.straphaelchurch.org/>

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

By the Rt. Rev. Bishop BASIL,
Bishop of the Diocese of Wichita and Mid America

THE OLD TESTAMENT

This introduction is a brief description of each of the forty-nine books of the Old Testament. It is helpful to keep in mind that, like the earliest Christian community, the Orthodox Church of today continues using the Greek version of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint (LXX). The Septuagint—referencing the seventy finest Jewish scholars, from all twelve Jewish tribes, who made the translation from the Hebrew in Greek—became the universally accepted version of the Old Testament since the time of its appearance some three centuries before the birth of Christ. Our Lord Jesus Christ, together with His apostles and evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and also Peter and Paul, used this Greek version when quoting the Old Testament in their gospels and epistles. These inspired Old Testament Books tell the story of God’s dealings with ancient Israel, from approximately 2000 BC until the time of Jesus.



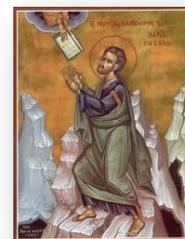
A study of the Old Testament in the light of the authentic apostolic tradition will lead the reader to Him Who fulfilled the Law and the Prophets as He promised: our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ. This collection of forty-nine Old Testament books is traditionally subdivided into four sections: 1) the five books of the Law; 2) the books of history; 3) the books of wisdom, and; 4) the books of prophecy.

The Five Books of the Law



First there are the books of the Law: *Genesis*, meaning “beginning”, since it recounts the beginning of God’s creation; *Exodus*, which means “exit” or “departure”, referring to the journey of the Hebrews from out of slavery in Egypt; *Leviticus*, a book detailing worship as led by the priests ordained from the tribe of Levi; *Numbers*, whose title is derived from the book’s opening account of the census or numbering of the people of Israel; *Deuteronomy*, whose meaning “second law”, since it gives a detailed listing of the additional laws given by God through Moses.

These first five books of the Old Testament, known jointly as the Pentateuch (*penta* means “five” in Greek) describe God’s creation of the world, the rebellion of Adam and Eve and the fall of man, and the history of God’s people from the days of Abraham, about 2000 BC, through the days of Moses, dated by many scholars at approximately 1250 BC.



The Books of History

The second section of the LXX Old Testament is known as the historical books. This group begins with the book of *Joshua*, the leader of the children of Israel following the death of Moses, who brings God’s people into the Promised Land after their forty years of wandering in the wilderness. *Judges*, relates to the traditions of the various Hebrew tribes and the exploits of their own particular heroes, the Judges of whom the title speaks, who ruled the nation. The book of *Ruth* is the charming and heroic account of a Gentile woman who placed herself under the protection of the one true God,

and in the process became an ancestor of King David, and of his descendent, Jesus Christ the Messiah of Israel.

First and Second Kingdoms (First and Second Samuel), whose principal characters are Samuel the faithful prophet, Saul the first king to rule over God's people, and David, Saul's successor and the first king of Judah in the south of Palestine, and Israel to the north. The books of *Third and Fourth Kingdoms* (First and Second Kings) opens with the enthronement of David's son Solomon and ends with the fall of the kingdom, including the destruction of its capital city of Jerusalem, and the exile of God's people from Palestine to Babylon.

First and Second Chronicles (First and Second Paraleipomenon) expand on the history recorded in *Third and Fourth Kingdoms*. The word *Paraleipomenon* is transliterated from the Greek and means "that which is omitted" in the two preceding books. The books of *First and Second Ezra* and *Nehemiah* continue this chronicle of divine history, focusing on the Jewish religious community after its return to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon.

The final books in the historical section of the Old Testament reveal the stories of people who lived heroic and God-directed lives under foreign domination and during the exile: *Tobit*, who was taken into captivity by the Assyrians; *Judith*, the pious and beautiful widow who saved her people from massacre by the invading Assyrian general; *Esther*, the Jewish queen of Persia who achieved the revocation of Haman's decree that would have allowed the persecution and mass murder of God's people; and the *Maccabees*, the family of the Hasmoneans and their followers, the faithful people who began the revolt and fought the wars of independence against foreign armies occupying their land.

The Books of Wisdom



The third section of the Old Testament is known as the books of Wisdom. The magnificent *Psalms* is the hymnal of both ancient Israel and of the Church. The book of *Job*, which in the canonical Greek LXX comes between *Psalms* and *Proverbs*, probes the depths of a man's unshakable faith in the face of tragedy and innocent suffering. *Proverbs* is a collection of moral and religious instruction taught to young people after their return from exile in Babylon. *Ecclesiastes* tells of the preacher who philosophically seeks to understand the meaning of human existence that the good man can find in this life. The moving *Song of Songs* by Solomon is a collection of Lyric Poems, written in the language of human love and courtship, which also speaks prophetically of God's love for His beloved Bride, His Church. The *Wisdom of Solomon* promises reward and immortality to the righteous, praises wisdom and condemns the folly of idolatry. The *Wisdom of Sirach* consists of lectures to young people on ethical and religious themes.

These seven books of Wisdom literature—*Psalms*, *Job*, *Proverbs*, *Ecclesiastes*, *Song of Songs*, *Wisdom of Solomon*, and *Wisdom of Sirach*—proclaim that happiness (or "blessedness" in the language of the Bible) is possible only through faith in and obedience to the one true God.

The Books of Prophecy

The fourth and final section of the LXX Old Testament includes the books of prophecy, which appear in an order different from the Hebrew and Vulgate collections.

Hosea gives a message of God's own redeeming love for His chosen people, even when they spurn Him and prostitute themselves to false gods. *Amos* is the simple shepherd called by God to denounce a self-satisfied nation for its grave social injustice, abhorrent immorality and its shallow and meaningless piety. *Micah* foretells the day when nations shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. He speaks of peace reigning over all who do justice, who love kindness, and who walk humbly with God. *Joel* is the prophet who foretells the outpouring of the Holy Spirit

upon all flesh. *Obadiah* prophesies the return of the exiles from Babylon. *Jonah* unwillingly accepts God's command to preach His mercy and forgiveness to a foreign nation.

Nahum prophesies the defeat of the powerful Assyrian enemy. *Habakkuk* deals with the perennial question, "How long, O Lord, shall I cry out to You, and You will not hear me?" (Hab 1:2). *Zephaniah* prophesies the dark days of Judah's destruction, but promises comfort and conciliation to those who wait patiently for the Lord and serve Him. *Haggai*, following the return of the exiles, exhorts them to rebuild the destroyed temple in order to unify their disrupted religious life and, more importantly, to prepare for the coming of the long awaited Messiah.

Zachariah prophesies the image of the messianic Prince of Peace, the Good Shepherd who would lay down His life for the flock. *Malachi* exhorts God's people to faithfulness and asserts the fatherhood of God over all nations. He foretells that God will appoint a forerunner, similar to the ancient prophet Elijah who will appear before the Messiah and prepare the world for the coming Day of the Lord.

Isaiah exhorts the people of God to place their confidence in the Lord, and to lead private and public lives which manifest this reliance. From Isaiah, we hear the prophecies of a Son to be born of a virgin, and of the Suffering Servant—the Messiah—who would be led as an innocent sheep to the slaughter, and by whose stripes we would be healed. *Jeremiah* severely criticizes God's people for abandoning the one true God and turning instead to the worship of idols. *Baruch* was appointed to be read on feast days as a confession of sins. In *Lamentations*, the author Jeremiah mourns the destruction of the holy city of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. The *Epistle of Jeremiah* is addressed to those about to be carried off into exile in Babylon.

Ezekiel, the prophet of the exiles, assures his hearers of the abiding presence of God amongst them, even in exile and servitude. Finally, *Daniel* writes an apocalyptic or mystical end-time prophecy which is filled with difficult and often obscure signs and symbols. In the Greek LXX, *Daniel* begins with the heroic story of Susanna and ends with the fascinating account of Bel and the Serpent.

These forty-nine God-inspired Old Testament books divided into four sections—books of the Law, of History, of Wisdom, and of Prophecy—which serve as an introduction to John the Baptist's preparation of the world for the coming of the Messiah, who is Isaiah's Suffering Servant, Zachariah's Prince of Peace, and the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the flock.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Four Gospels



Matthew, *Mark*, *Luke* and *John* recall the events in the life of Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of Man. The first three are called the Synoptic Gospels, in that they set forth a "common viewpoint" of the chronology of events and the message of Christ in His life and ministry. *Matthew* addresses his gospel primarily to fellow Jews. *Mark* is likely the first Gospel to be written, and speaks of Christ as servant of all (Mk 10:45). *Luke*, himself a physician, reveals the Incarnate Christ and His earthly ancestry. This Son of Man saves and heals the fallen race.

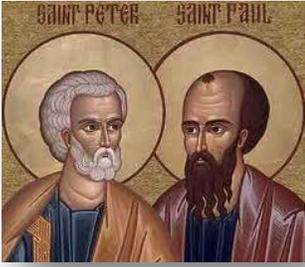
John, the last of the four gospels to be written, emphasizes the divinity of Christ, the eternal Son and Word of God, who became Man. John's gospel further reveals seven miracles of Christ, not all of them in a chronological order.

Acts

Written by St. Luke, these are the *Acts* (accomplishments) of the Apostles, but mainly of Peter (ch 1-12) and Paul (ch 13-28). Acts chronicles the earliest history of the Church from Pentecost to approximately AD 65.



The Letters (or Epistles) of St. Paul



The first nine of Paul's letters are written to churches. *Romans* was the only letter Paul wrote to a community he had not previously visited. Thus, the implication is that much of what he wrote to the Church at Rome he preached in other places.

Corinth was a center of commerce, immorality and false religion. *First Corinthians* is therefore a corrective epistle calling for unity, virtue, forbearance, Eucharistic order and proper use of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In contrast *Second Corinthians* recognizes the repentance within the church on the part of many, and St. Paul defends his apostolic authority.

In *Galatians*, Paul addresses several churches in Asia Minor, defending his apostleship and calling the faithful to live their lives in the strength of the Holy Spirit instead of in submission to the laws of the old covenant. *Ephesians* is a marvelous discourse on how the Church should conduct itself. This community is rich in dedication to Christ, yet just a few decades later, the Lord tells them, "you have left your first love" (Rev 2:4).

Philippians is the epistle of joy. Paul writes from a Roman prison, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say rejoice!" (Php 4:4). *Colossians* presents Christ as "the head of the body, the church..." (Col 1:18), preeminent in all things.

First Thessalonians, the first letter St. Paul penned, was a letter of encouragement written about AD 51, shortly after he planted that Church. *Second Thessalonians* acknowledges persecution and warns of lawlessness urging the Christians to "stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught..." (2Th 2:15).

Next, Paul addresses letters to individuals. In *First Timothy*, the aging apostle speaks to his youthful understudy about effective oversight of the church. In *Second Timothy*, the last letter Paul wrote, he encourages Timothy to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Ti 2:1). Paul is already in prison in Rome (1:8) awaiting martyrdom.

Titus is sent by Paul to Crete to set the church "in order" and "appoint elders in every city" (Tts 1:5). If this sounds like the work of a bishop, it is (Tts 1:7,8), and Titus is consistently named in early Church records as the Bishop of Crete. *Philemon* is a Christian slave-holder, and Paul writes him to receive back Onesimus (Phm 10-16), his runaway slave, who has become a Christian with Paul in Rome.

Hebrews is the last of the epistles attributed to St. Paul, but with little evidence it was actually written by Paul. It is a general letter to Jewish believers in Christ to continue on in the Faith. It assures them that Christ, the great High Priest in the heavens (Heb 8:1), is their once for all sacrifice for sin (Heb 10:10) and victor over death (Heb 12:1,2).

The General Epistles

James, the brother of the Lord and first bishop of Jerusalem, writes to fellow Jews, "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (Jam 1:1). His message? "Faith without works is dead" (Jam 1:20).

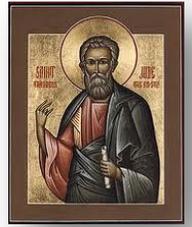
First Peter, written by the first among the apostles, urges obedience to God and man, willingness to suffer for Christ's sake, and effective pastoring of the flock. In *Second Peter*, he discusses divine power for the faithful (deification), divine judgment for false teachers and the Day of the Lord.

Next, John the Theologian offers three general epistles. *First John* is a stirring

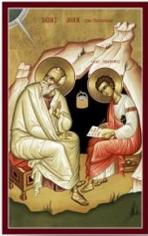


personal testimonial to God's forgiveness, love for His children and gift of eternal life. In *Second John*, he addresses an "elect lady and her children" (v1), urging them to obey the Lord's commands and beware of deceivers. *Third John* Commends Gaius and Demetrius and warns against Diotrephes.

Finally, Jude, the Lord's brother, writes a short letter exhorting the faithful to contend for the truth and beware of the devil's servant. He finishes with a stunning benediction.



Revelation



Written by St. John the Theologian, he entitles it "The Revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:1). What the book of *Daniel* is to the Old Testament, *Revelation* is to the New Testament. Another title is the *Apocalypse*, a transliteration of the Greek word for "revelation". The book speaks prophetically both to current and future events, to judgment and salvation and ends with the glorious New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven "as a bride adorned for her husband" (21:2).

PROPER ATTITUDE AND PREPARATION BEFORE READING HOLY SCRIPTURE

The Holy Scriptures should be kept in a sacred place such as our icon corner. As Orthodox Christians, when we are about to read either the Old or New the Testament - the Holy Scripture, we should make the sign of the Cross and say: *In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit*. Then, we should venerate the Holy Scriptures which are in our hands, and pray:

PRAYER BEFORE READING HOLY SCRIPTURE

Illumine our hearts, O Master Who lovest mankind, with the pure light of Thy divine knowledge. Open the eyes of our mind to the understanding of Thy gospel teachings. Implant also in us the fear of Thy blessed commandments, that trampling down all carnal desires, we may enter upon a spiritual manner of living, both thinking and doing such things as are well-pleasing unto Thee. For Thou art the illumination of our souls and bodies, O Christ our God, and unto Thee we ascribe glory, together with Thy Father, Who is from everlasting, and Thine all-holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

PRAYER AFTER READING HOLY SCRIPTURE

Blessed is God Who desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen. O Lord and Master, our God, call us, Thy servants to Thy holy illumination, and make us worthy of Thy wondrous grace; put off from us the old man, and renew us unto life everlasting, and fill us with the power of Thy Holy Spirit, in the unity of Thy Christ, that we may no longer be children of the body, but children of Thy Kingdom. Through the good will and grace of Thine Only-Begotten Son, with Whom Thou art blessed, together with Thy all-holy, good and life-creating Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen

ORTHODOX BIBLE READING PLAN

This Reading Plan is designed to be used with a Bible where the Old Testament is based on the Septuagint, the Greek translation that was quoted by Jesus and the Apostles and also used by all the early fathers. It contains roughly 25 percent more content than modern translations because it includes the so-called Deuterocanonical books.

Each day consists of four readings. The first reading is a passage from the Old Testament books of history, wisdom, or the prophets. Passages two and three are from the Psalms and Proverbs, respectively. Passage four is from the New Testament. Psalms and Proverbs are read twice through the year. Doing all four readings will take approximately 15 to 20 minutes each day.

EXAMPLE: June's reading dates are filled in for you. Continue in similar fashion, if you choose. Be sure to exclude weekends.

Day / Date	OLD TESTAMENT	PSALMS	PROVERBS	NEW TESTAMENT	✓
Mon. 6/12	Gn 1-3	Ps 1; 2	Pr 1:1-5	Mt 1	
Tues. 6/13	Gn 4-7	Ps 3; 4	Pr 1:6-10	Mt 2	
Wed. 6/14	Gn 8:1-11:9	Ps 5	Pr 1:11-15	Mt 3	
Thurs. 6/15	Gn 11:10-15:21	Ps 6	Pr 1:16-19	Mt 4	
Fri. 6/16	Gn 16-18	Ps 7	Pr 1:20-24	Mt 5:1-20	
Mon. 6/19	Gn 19-21	Ps 8	Pr 1:25-29	Mt 5:21-48	
Tues. 6/20	Gn 22-24:49	Ps 9:1-17	Pr 1:30-35	Mt 6:1-18	
Wed. 6/21	Gn 24:50-26:35	Ps 9:18-39	Pr 2:1-5	Mt 6:19-34	
Thurs. 6/22	Gn 27; 28	Ps 10; 11	Pr 2:6-9	Mt 7	
Fri. 6/23	Gn 29; 30	Ps 12; 13	Pr 2:10-16	Mt 8:1-17	
Mon. 6/26	Gn 31; 32	Ps 14; 15	Pr 2:17-23	Mt 8:18-34	
Tues. 6/27	Gn 33-35	Ps 16	Pr 3:1-5	Mt 9:1-17	
Wed. 6/28	Gn 36; 37	Ps 17:1-17	Pr 3:6-10	Mt 9:18-38	
Thurs. 6/29	Gn 38-40	Ps 17:18-32	Pr 3:11-16	Mt 10:1-23	
Fri. 6/30	Gn 41; 42	Ps 17:33-51	Pr 3:17-22	Mt 10:24-42	
	Gn 43-45	Ps 18	Pr 3:23-27	Mt 11	
	Gn 46-48	Ps 19	Pr 3:28-32	Mt 12:1-21	
	Gn 49; 50	Ps 20	Pr 3:33-38	Mt 12:22-50	
	Ex 1-3	Ps 21:1-19	Pr 4:1-8	Mt 13:1-30	
	Ex 4:1-6:27	Ps 21:20-32	Pr 4:9-12	Mt 13:31-58	
	Ex 6:28-9:35	Ps 22; 23	Pr 4:13-18	Mt 14:1-21	
	Ex 10-12	Ps 24:1-11	Pr 4:19-23	Mt 14:22-36	
	Ex 13-15	Ps 24:12-22	Pr 4:24-28	Mt 15:1-20	
	Ex 16-18	Ps 25	Pr 5:1-6	Mt 15:21-39	
	Ex 19-21	Ps 26	Pr 5:7-14	Mt 16	
	Ex 22-24	Ps 27	Pr 5:15-19	Mt 17	
	Ex 25-27	Ps 28	Pr 5:20-23	Mt 18:1-20	
	Ex 28; 29	Ps 29	Pr 6:1-6	Mt 18:21-35	
	Ex 30-32	Ps 30:1-14	Pr 6:7-12	Mt 19	
	Ex 33; 34	Ps 30:15-25	Pr 6:13-16	Mt 20:1-16	
	Ex 35-37	Ps 31	Pr 6:17-19	Mt 20:17-34	
	Ex 38-40	Ps 32:1-12	Pr 6:20-25	Mt 21:1-22	

Day / Date	OLD TESTAMENT	PSALMS	PROVERBS	NEW TESTAMENT	✓
	Lv 1-4	Ps 32:13-22	Pr 6:26-31	Mt 21:23-46	
	Lv 5:1-7:10	Ps 33:1-11	Pr 6:32-36	Mt 22:1-22	
	Lv 7:11-9:24	Ps 33:12-23	Pr 6:37-40	Mt 22:23-46	
	Lv 10-12	Ps 34:1-16	Pr 7:1-6	Mt 23:1-22	
	Lv 13	Ps 34:17-28	Pr 7:7-12	Mt 23:23-39	
	Lv 14; 15	Ps 35	Pr 7:13-20	Mt 24:1-28	
	Lv 16-18	Ps 36:1-20	Pr 7:21-24	Mt 24:29-51	
	Lv 19-21	Ps 36:21-40	Pr 7:25-27	Mt 25:1-30	
	Lv 22; 23	Ps 37:1-11	Pr 8:1-5	Mt 25:31-46	
	Lv 24; 25	Ps 37:12-23	Pr 8:6-10	Mt 26:1-25	
	Lv 26; 27	Ps 38	Pr 8:11-16	Mt 26:26-46	
	Nm 1; 2	Ps 39	Pr 8:17-21	Mt 26:47-75	
	Nm 3:1-4:33	Ps 40	Pr 8:22-26	Mt 27:1-26	
	Nm 4:34-6:26	Ps 41; 42	Pr 8:27-31	Mt 27:27-44	
	Nm 7:1-8:4	Ps 43:1-9	Pr 8:32-35	Mt 27:45-66	
	Nm 8:5-10:36	Ps 43:10-27	Pr 9:1-6	Mt 28	
	Nm 11:1-14:10	Ps 44	Pr 9:7-11	Mk 1:1-20	
	Nm 14:11-15:41	Ps 45	Pr 9:12-15	Mk 1:21-45	
	Nm 16:1-18:19	Ps 46	Pr 9:16-20	Mk 2	
	Nm 18:20-21:9	Ps 47	Pr 9:21-25	Mk 3:1-19	
	Nm 21:10-22:41	Ps 48:1-10	Pr 10:1-6	Mk 3:20-35	
	Nm 23; 24	Ps 48:11-21	Pr 10:7-11	Mk 4:1-20	
	Nm 25:1-27:11	Ps 49:1-15	Pr 10:12-16	Mk 4:21-41	
	Nm 27:12-29:39	Ps 49:16-23	Pr 10:17-22	Mk 5:1-20	
	Nm 30; 31	Ps 50:1-10	Pr 10:23-27	Mk 5:21-43	
	Nm 32; 33	Ps 50:11-21	Pr 10:28-33	Mk 6:1-29	
	Nm 34-36	Ps 51	Pr 11:1-5	Mk 6:30-56	
	Dt 1; 2	Ps 52; 53	Pr 11:6-10	Mk 7:1-23	
	Dt 3; 4	Ps 54:1-12	Pr 11:11-15	Mk 7:24-37	
	Dt 5-7	Ps 54:13-24	Pr 11:16-20	Mk 8:1-21	
	Dt 8-10	Ps 55	Pr 11:21-25	Mk 8:22-9:1	
	Dt 11-13	Ps 56	Pr 11:26-30	Mk 9:2-29	
	Dt 14-16	Ps 57	Pr 12:1-5	Mk 9:30-50	
	Dt 17-19	Ps 58	Pr 12:6-10	Mk 10:1-31	
	Dt 20-22	Ps 59	Pr 12:11-15	Mk 10:32-52	
	Dt 23-25	Ps 60	Pr 12:16-20	Mk 11:1-19	
	Dt 26:1-28:14	Ps 61	Pr 12:21-25	Mk 11:20-33	
	Dt 28:15-29:28	Ps 62	Pr 12:26-31	Mk 12:1-27	
	Dt 30; 31	Ps 63	Pr 13:1-5	Mk 12:28-44	
	Day Dt 32	Ps 64	Pr 13:6-10	Mk 13:1-23	
	Dt 33; 34	Ps 65	Pr 13:11-15	Mk 13:24-37	
	Jos 1-3	Ps 66	Pr 13:16-21	Mk 14:1-31	

Day / Date	OLD TESTAMENT	PSALMS	PROVERBS	NEW TESTAMENT	✓
	Jos 4-6	Ps 67:1-20	Pr 13:22-27	Mk 14:32-52	
	Jos 7-9	Ps 67:21-36	Pr 14:1-5	Mk 14:53-72	
	Jos 10; 11	Ps 68:1-20	Pr 14:6-10	Mk 15:1-20	
	Jos 12-14	Ps 68:21-37	Pr 14:11-15	Mk 15:21-47	
	Jos 15-17	Ps 69	Pr 14:16-20	Mk 16	
	Jos 18-20	Ps 70:1-13	Pr 14:21-25	Lk 1:1-25	
	Jos 21-22	Ps 70:14-24	Pr 14:26-30	Lk 1:26-56	
	Jos 23; 24	Ps 71	Pr 14:31-36	Lk 1:57-80	
	Jdg 1; 2	Ps 72:1-14	Pr 15:1-5	Lk 2:1-24	
	Jdg 3; 4	Ps 72:15-28	Pr 15:6-10	Lk 2:25-52	
	Jdg 5:1-6:10	Ps 73:1-11	Pr 15:11-15	Lk 3:1-20	
	Jdg 6:11-7:25	Ps 73:12-23	Pr 15:16-20	Lk 3:21-38	
	Jdg 8; 9	Ps 74	Pr 15:21-26	Lk 4:1-30	
	Jdg 10; 11	Ps 75	Pr 15:27-32	Lk 4:31-44	
	Jdg 12-14	Ps 76:1-10	Pr 15:33-38	Lk 5:1-16	
	Jdg 15-17	Ps 76:11-21	Pr 16:1-5	Lk 5:17-39	
	Jdg 18; 19	Ps 77:1-17	Pr 16:6-10	Lk 6:1-26	
	Jdg 20; 21	Ps 77:18-37	Pr 16:11-15	Lk 6:27-49	
	Ru 1-4	Ps 77:38-55	Pr 16:16-20	Lk 7:1-17	
	1Kg 1:1-2:17	Ps 77:56-72	Pr 16:21-25	Lk 7:18-50	
	1Kg 2:18-4:22	Ps 78	Pr 16:26-31	Lk 8:1-25	
	1Kg 5-7	Ps 79	Pr 17:1-5	Lk 8:26-56	
	1Kg 8:1-10:16	Ps 80	Pr 17:6-10	Lk 9:1-17	
	1Kg 10:17-13:22	Ps 81	Pr 17:11-15	Lk 9:18-36	
	1Kg 14:1-15:9	Ps 82	Pr 17:16-20	Lk 9:37-62	
	1Kg 15:10-17:30	Ps 83	Pr 17:21-25	Lk 10:1-24	
	1Kg 18-21:1	Ps 84	Pr 17:26-30	Lk 10:25-42	
	1Kg 21:2-23:28	Ps 85	Pr 18:1-5	Lk 11:1-28	
	1Kg 24; 25	Ps 86	Pr 18:6-11	Lk 11:29-54	
	1Kg 26-28	Ps 87	Pr 18:11-17	Lk 12:1-34	
	1Kg 29-31	Ps 88:1-19	Pr 18:18-23	Lk 12:35-59	
	2Kg 1; 2	Ps 88:20-38	Pr 19:1-6	Lk 13:1-21	
	2Kg 3; 4	Ps 88:39-53	Pr 19:7-12	Lk 13:22-35	
	2Kg 5-7	Ps 89	Pr 19:13-18	Lk 14:1-24	
	2Kg 8-11	Ps 90	Pr 19:19-24	Lk 14:25-35	
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	2Kg 14; 15	Ps 92	Pr 20:1-5	Lk 15:11-32	
	2Kg 16-18:18	Ps 93:1-15	Pr 20:6-10	Lk 16	
	2Kg 18:19-19:44	Ps 93:16-23	Pr 20:11-15	Lk 17:1-19	
	2Kg 20; 21	Ps 94	Pr 20:16-20	Lk 17:20-37	
	2Kg 22:1-23:7	Ps 95	Pr 20:21-25	Lk 18:1-17	
	2Kg 23:8-24:25	Ps 96	Pr 21:1-5	Lk 18:18-43	

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	3Kg 7:1-8:52	Ps 101:16-29	Pr 21:21-25	Lk 20:27-47	
	3Kg 8:53-10:33	Ps 102:1-12	Pr 21:26-30	Lk 21:1-19	
	3Kg 11:1-12:25	Ps 102:13-22	Pr 22:1-5	Lk 21:20-38	
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	1Ez 4:43-5:45	Ps 134:1-12	Pr 28:26-30	Jn 20	
	1Ez 5:46-7:15	Ps 134:13-21	Pr 29:1-6	Jn 21	
	1Ez 8:1-70	Ps 135:1-15	Pr 29:7-12	Acts 1	
	1Ez 8:71-9:55	Ps 135:16-26	Pr 29:13-18	Acts 2:1-21	
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	1Mc 9:54-10:58	Ps 17:18-32	Pr 3:11-16	Acts 19:1-22	
	1Mc 10:59-11:53	Ps 17:33-51	Pr 3:17-22	Acts 19:23-41	
	1Mc 11:54-13:11	Ps 18	Pr 3:23-27	Acts 20:1-16	
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	Job 21; 22	Ps 36:21-40	Pr 7:25-27	Rom 10	
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	SS 7; 8	Ps 51	Pr 11:1-5	1Co 10:1-13	
	WSol 1; 2	Ps 52; 53	Pr 11:6-10	1Co 10:14-11:1	

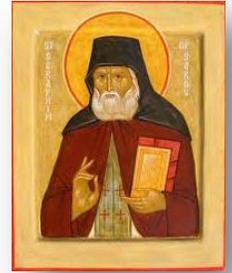
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	WSol 5; 6	Ps 54:13-24	Pr 11:16-20	1Co 11:17-34	
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	WSol 14	Ps 59	Pr 12:11-15	1Co 15:1-34	
	WSol 15:1-16:14	Ps 60	Pr 12:16-20	1Co 15:35-58	
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	WSir 3; 4	Ps 64	Pr 13:6-10	2Co 3	
	WSir 5; 6	Ps 65	Pr 13:11-15	2Co 4	
	WSir 7; 8	Ps 66	Pr 13:16-21	2Co 5	
	WSir 9; 10	Ps 67:1-20	Pr 13:22-27	2Co 6	
	WSir 11; 12	Ps 67:21-36	Pr 14:1-5	2Co 7	
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	Jer 17-19	Ps 113:1-11	Pr 24:24-27	Heb 11:23-40	
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	Jer 23-26	Ps 114	Pr 24:35-39	Heb 12:28-13:25	
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	Jer 29-31	Ps 117:1-16	Pr 25:6-11	Jam 2	
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	Lam 1	Ps 118:129-144	Pr 26:24-29	2Pt 2	
	Lam 2	Ps 118:145-160	Pr 27:1-5	2Pt 3	
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THE FATHERS ON READING HOLY SCRIPTURE

One should nourish the soul with the word of God: for the word of God, as St. Gregory the Theologian says, is angelic bread, by which are nourished souls who hunger for God. Most of all, one should occupy oneself with reading the New Testament and the Psalter, which one should do standing up. From this there occurs an enlightenment in the mind, which is in the mind, which is changed by a Divine change. *St. Seraphim of Sarov - Spiritual Instructions*



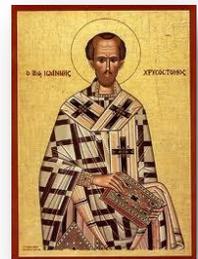
The Holy Scripture is the domain of Wisdom, Word and Spirit, of God in the Trinity: in it He clearly manifests Himself: 'The Words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life,' (St. John 6:63) said the Lord. The writings of the Holy Fathers are again the expression of the Mind, Word and Spirit of the Holy Trinity, in which the spirit of the higher class (spiritually speaking) of mankind has largely participated; the writings of ordinary worldly men are the expression of the fallen spirit of men, with all their sinful attachments, habits and passions. In Holy Scriptures we see God face to face, and ourselves as we are. Man, know thy self through them, and walk always as in the presence of God. *St. John of Kronstadt (My Life in Christ: Part 1)*

... reading and spiritual knowledge are good, but only when they lead to greater humility... *St. Peter of Damaskos (Book 1: A Treasury of Divine Knowledge, The Philokalia Vol. 3 pg. 169)*



Do not read either too fast, or too lazily or carelessly, but with reverence, attention and intelligence. Invigorated by reading that profits the soul, the mind acquires strength and prays firmly. *St. Gregory of Sinai (On Silence and Prayer no. 11)*

I am not," you will say, "one of the monks, but I have both a wife and children, and the care of a household." Why, this is what hath ruined all, your supposing that the reading of the divine Scriptures appertains to those only, when ye need it much more than they. For they that dwell in the world, and each day receive wounds, these have most need of medicines. So that it is far worse than not reading, to account the thing even "superfluous:" for these are the words of diabolical invention. Hear ye not Paul saying, "that all these things are written for our admonition"? *St. John Chrysostom, Gospel According To St. Matthew, Homily*



TEN PRINCIPLES OF ORTHODOX SCRIPTURAL EXEGESIS

adapted from Bishop MICHAEL (Dahulich)

1. Christ - God is real and is incarnate in Jesus Christ; He is the Key to the Scriptures.
2. Life - One's ability to interpret depends upon one's spiritual state; one must live it in order to fully understand it.
3. A Love Letter - We read scripture to fall deeper in love with God and put on the Scriptural Mind.
4. Theosis - We read Scripture to become by grace what God is by nature.
5. Tradition - Only within the Church and her Tradition (the consensus of the Fathers) is there full and correct interpretation.
6. Scripture is a witness to the truth, the pinnacle of Holy Tradition; it is not an exhaustive manual of church life.
7. We must interpret the Bible as the Church has handed it, not try to reconstruct the canon of Scripture.
8. Personal - Ask yourself not only: what does the text mean, but what does it mean for me?
9. Humility - As many Church Fathers, consider your understanding of difficult texts as provisional.
10. Use secondary knowledge (history, literary criticism, archeology) to illuminate our understanding, not redefine dogma.



HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God (2 Tim. 3:16)

If an earthly king, our emperor," wrote Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk (1724-83), "wrote you a letter, would you not read it with joy? Certainly, with great rejoicing and careful attention." But what, he asks, is our attitude toward the letter that has been addressed to us by no one less than God Himself? "You have been sent a letter, not by any earthly emperor, but by the King of Heaven. And yet you almost despise such a gift, so priceless a treasure." To open and read this letter, Saint Tikhon adds, is to enter into a personal conversation face-to-face with the living God. "Whenever you read the Gospel, Christ Himself is speaking to you. And while you read; you are praying and talking to Him."



Such exactly is our Orthodox attitude to the reading of Scripture. I am to see the Bible as God's personal letter sent specifically to myself. The words are not intended merely for others, far away and long ago, but they are written particularly and directly to me, here and now. Whenever we open our Bible, we are engaging in a creative dialogue with the Savior. In listening, we also respond. "Speak, for Your servant hears," we reply to God as we read (1 Sam. 3:10); "Here am I" (Is. 6:8).

Two centuries after Saint Tikhon, at the Moscow Conference held in 1976 between the Orthodox and the Anglicans, the true attitude toward Scripture was expressed in different but equally valid terms. This joint statement, signed by the delegates of both traditions, forms an excellent summary of the Orthodox view: “The Scriptures constitute a coherent whole. They are at once divinely inspired and humanly expressed. They bear authoritative witness to God’s revelation of Himself in creation, in the Incarnation of the Word, and in the whole history of salvation, and as such express the word of God in human language. We know, receive, and interpret Scripture through the Church and in the Church. Our approach to the Bible is one of obedience.”

Combining Saint Tikhon’s words and the Moscow statement, the four key characteristics which mark the Orthodox “Scriptural mind” may be distinguished. First, our reading of Scripture is *obedient*. Second, it is *ecclesial*, in union with the Church. Third, it is *Christ-centered*. Fourth, it is *personal*.

READING THE BIBLE WITH OBEDIENCE

First of all, we see Scripture as inspired by God, and we approach it in a spirit of obedience. The divine inspiration of the Bible is emphasized alike by Saint Tikhon and by the 1976 Moscow Conference: Scripture is “a letter” from “the King of Heaven,” writes Saint Tikhon; “Christ Himself is speaking to you.” The Bible, states the Conference, is God’s “authoritative witness” of Himself, expressing “the word of God in human language.” Our response to this divine word is rightly one of obedient receptivity. As we read, we wait on the Spirit.

Since it is divinely inspired, the Bible possesses a fundamental unity, a total coherence, because the same Spirit speaks on every page. We do not refer to it as “the books” in the plural, *ta biblia*. We call it “the Bible,” “the Book,” in the singular. It is one book, one Holy Scripture, with the same message throughout one composite and yet a single story from Genesis to Revelation.

At the same time, however, the Bible is also humanly expressed. It is an entire library of distinct writings, composed at varying times, by different persons in widely diverse situations. We find God speaking here “at various times and in various ways” (Heb. 1:1). Each work in the Bible reflects the outlook of the age in which it was written and the particular viewpoint of the author. For God does not abolish our created personhood but enhances it. Divine grace cooperates with human freedom: we are “fellow workers,” cooperators with God (1 Cor. 3:9). In the words of the second-century *Letter to Diognetus*, “God persuades, He does not compel; for violence is foreign to the divine nature.” So it is precisely in the writing of inspired Scripture. The author of each book was not just a passive instrument, a flute played by the Spirit, a dictation machine recording a message. Every writer of Scripture contributes his or her particular human gifts. Alongside the divine aspect, there is also a human element in Scripture, and we are to value both.

Each of the four Evangelists, for example, has his own particular stand point. Matthew is the most “ecclesiastical” and the most Jewish of the four, with his special interest in the relationship of the gospel to the Jewish Law, and his understanding of Christianity as the “New Law.” Mark writes in less polished Greek, closer to the language of daily life, and includes vivid narrative details not found in the other gospels. Luke emphasizes the universality of Christ’s love and His all-embracing compassion that extends equally to Jew and Gentile. The Fourth Gospel expresses a more inward and mystical approach, and was aptly styled by Saint Clement of Alexandria “a spiritual Gospel.” Let us explore and enjoy to the fullest this life-giving variety within the Bible.

Because Scripture is in this way the word of God expressed in human language, there is a place for honest and exacting critical inquiry when studying the Bible. Our reasoning brain is a gift from God, and we need not be afraid to use it to the utmost when reading Scripture. Orthodox Christians neglect

at our peril the results of independent scholarly research into the origin, dates, and authorship of the books of the Bible, although we shall always want to test these results in the light of Holy Tradition.

Alongside this human element, however, we are always to see the divine aspect. These texts are not simply the work of the individual authors. What we hear in Scripture is not just human words, marked by a greater or lesser skill and perceptiveness, but the uncreated Word of God Himself—the Father’s Word “coming forth from silence,” to use the phrase of Saint Ignatius of Antioch—the eternal Word of salvation; Approaching the Bible, then, we come not merely out of curiosity or to gain historical information; We come with a specific question: “How can I be saved?”

Obedient receptivity to God’s word means above all two things: *a sense of wonder* and *an attitude of listening*. (1) *Wonder* is easily quenched. Do we not feel all too often, as we read the Bible, that it has become overly familiar, even boring? Have we not lost our alertness, our sense of expectation? How far are we changed by what we read? Continually, we need to cleanse the doors of our perception and to look with new eyes, in awe and amazement, at the miracle that is set before us—the ever-present miracle of God’s divine word of salvation expressed in human language. As Plato remarked, “The beginning of truth is to wonder at things.”

Some years ago I had a dream that I still remember vividly. I was back in the house where, for three years as a child, I lived in boarding school. A friend took me first through the rooms already familiar to me from the waking life of my childhood. Then, in my dream we entered other rooms that I had never seen before—spacious, elegant, filled with light. Finally, we came to a small, dark chapel, with golden mosaics gleaming in the candlelight. “How strange,” I said to my companion, “that I have lived here for so long, and yet I never knew about the existence of all these rooms.” And he replied, “But it is always so.” I awoke, and, behold, it was a dream.

Should we not react in the presence of the Bible with exactly the same surprise, the same feeling of joy and discovery, that I experienced in my dream? There are so many rooms in Scripture that we have never as yet entered. There is so much for us still to explore.

(2) If obedience means wonder, it also means *listening*. Such indeed is the literal meaning of the word for “obey” in both Greek and Latin—to hear. The trouble is that most of us are better at talking than at listening. An incident on the *Goon Show*, which I used to follow eagerly on the radio in my student days, sums up our predicament all too well. The telephone rings, and one of the characters picks it up. “Hello,” he exclaims, “hello, hello.” His volume rises. “Who is speaking? I can’t hear you. Hello, who is speaking?” A voice at the other end says, “You are speaking.” “Ah,” he replies, “I thought the voice sounded familiar.” And he puts the receiver down.

One of the primary requirements, if we are to acquire a “scriptural mind,” is to stop talking and to start listening. When we enter an Orthodox Church decorated in the traditional way, and look up towards the sanctuary, we see there in the apse the figure of the Mother of God with her hands raised to heaven—the ancient scriptural manner of praying that many still use today. Such is also to be our attitude to Scripture—an attitude of openness and attentive receptivity, our hands invisibly outstretched to heaven.

As we read our Bible, then, we are to model ourselves in this way on the Blessed Virgin Mary, for she is supremely the one who listens. At the Annunciation, listening to the angel, she responds obediently, “Let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). Had she not first listened to God’s word and received it spiritually in her heart, she would never have borne the Word of God bodily in her womb. Receptive listening continues to be her attitude throughout the Gospel story. At Christ’s nativity, after the adoration of the shepherds, “Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19). After the visit to Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve years old, “His Mother kept all these things in her heart” (Luke 2:51). The vital importance of listening is also indicated in the last

words attributed to the Theotokos in Holy Scripture, at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. “Whatever He says to you, do it” (John 2:5), she says to the servants—and to each one of us.

In all this the Virgin serves as a mirror and living icon of the biblical Christian. Hearing God’s word, we are to be like her: pondering, keeping all these things in our hearts, doing whatever He tells us. We are to listen in obedience while God speaks.

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE THROUGH THE CHURCH

As the Moscow Conference affirms, “We know, receive, and interpret Scripture through the Church and in the Church.” Our approach to the Bible is not only obedient but ecclesial. The words of Scripture, while addressed to us personally, are at the same time addressed to us as members of a community. Book and Church are not to be separated.

The interdependence of Church and Bible is evident in at least two ways. First, we *receive* Scripture through and in the Church. The Church tells us what is Scripture. In the first three centuries of Christian history, a lengthy process of sifting and testing was needed in order to distinguish between that which is authentically “canonical” Scripture, bearing authoritative witness to Christ’s person and message, and that which is “apocryphal,” useful perhaps for teaching, but not a normative source of doctrine. Thus, the Church has decided which books form the Canon of the New Testament. A book is not part of Holy Scripture because of any particular theory about its date and authorship, but because the Church treats it as canonical. Suppose, for example, that it could be proved that the Fourth Gospel was not actually written by Saint John the beloved disciple of Christ—in my view, there are in fact strong reasons for continuing to accept John’s authorship—yet, even so, this would not alter the fact that we regard the Fourth Gospel as Scripture. Why? Because the Fourth Gospel, whoever the author may be, is accepted by the Church and in the Church.

Secondly, we *interpret* Scripture through and in the Church. If it is the Church that tells us what is Scripture, equally it is the Church that tells us how Scripture is to be understood. Coming upon the Ethiopian as he read the Old Testament in his chariot, Philip the Deacon asked him, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

“How can I,” answered the Ethiopian, “unless someone guides me?” (Acts 8:30, 31).

His difficulty is also ours. The words of Scripture are not always self-explanatory. The Bible has a marvelous underlying simplicity, but when studied in detail it can prove a difficult book. God does indeed speak directly to the heart of each one of us during our Scripture reading—as Saint Tikhon says, our reading is a personal dialogue between each one and Christ Himself—but we also need guidance. And our guide is the Church. We make full use of our private understanding; illuminated by the Spirit. We make full use of biblical commentaries and of the findings of modern research. But we submit individual opinions, whether our own or those of the scholars, to the judgment of the Church.

We read the Bible personally, but not as isolated individuals. We say not “I” but “we.” We read as the members of a family, the family of the Orthodox Catholic Church. We read in communion with all the other members of the Body of Christ in all parts of the world and in all generations of time. This communal or *catholic* approach to the Bible is underlined in one of the questions asked of a convert at the reception service used in the Russian Church: “Do you acknowledge that the Holy Scripture must be accepted and interpreted in accordance with the belief which has been handed down by the Holy Fathers, and which the Holy Orthodox Church, our Mother, has always held and still does hold?” The decisive criterion of our understanding of what Scripture means is *the mind of the Church*.

To discover this “mind of the Church,” where do we begin? A first step is to see how Scripture is used in worship. How in particular are biblical lessons chosen for reading at the different feasts? A second step is to consult the writings of the Church Fathers, especially St. John Chrysostom. How do

they analyze and apply the text of Scripture? An ecclesial manner of reading the Bible is in this Way both *liturgical and patristic*.

To illustrate what it means to interpret Scripture in a liturgical way, consider the Old Testament lessons at Vespers for the Feast of the Annunciation (May 25) and at Vespers on Holy Saturday, the first part of the ancient Paschal Vigil. At the Annunciation there are five readings:

(1) *Genesis 28:10-17: Jacob's dream of a ladder set up from earth to heaven.*

(2) *Ezekiel 43:27-44: the prophet's vision of the Jerusalem temple, with the closed gate through which none but the Prince may pass.*

(3) *Proverbs 9:1-11: one of the great Sophianic passages in the Old Testament, beginning "Wisdom has built her house."*

(4) *Exodus 3:1-8: Moses at the Burning Bush.*

(5) *Proverbs 8:22-30: another Sophianic text, describing Wisdom's place in God's eternal providence: "I have been established from everlasting, from the beginning, before there was ever an earth."*

In these passages from the Old Testament, we have a series of powerful images to indicate the role of the Theotokos in God's unfolding plan of salvation. She is Jacob's ladder, for by means of her, God comes down and enters our world, assuming the flesh that she supplies. She is both Mother and Ever-Virgin; Christ is born from her, yet she remains still inviolate, the gate of her virginity sealed. She provides the humanity or house which Christ the Wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24) takes as His dwelling; alternatively, she is herself to be regarded as God's Wisdom. She is the Burning Bush, who contains within her womb the uncreated fire of the Godhead and yet is not consumed. From all eternity, "before there was ever an earth," she was forechosen by God to be His Mother.

Reading these passages in their original context within the Old Testament, we might not at once appreciate that they foreshadow the Savior's Incarnation from the Virgin. But, by exploring the use made of the Old Testament in the Church lectionary, we can discover layer upon layer of meanings that are far from obvious at first sight.

The same thing happens when we consider how Scripture is used on Holy Saturday. Here there are no less than fifteen Old Testament lessons. Regrettably, in many of our parishes the majority of these are omitted, so God's people are starved of their proper biblical nourishment. This long sequence of readings sets before us the deeper significance of Christ's "passing over" through death to resurrection. First among the lessons is the account of the creation (Gen. 1:1-13): Christ's Resurrection is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17; Rev. 21:5), the inauguration of a new age, the age to come. The third lesson describes the Jewish ritual of the Passover meal: Christ crucified and risen is the new Passover, the Paschal Lamb who alone can take away the sin of the world (1 Cor. 5:7; John 1:29). The fourth lesson is the book of Jonah in its entirety: the prophet's three days in the belly of the fish foreshadow Christ's resurrection after three days in the tomb (Matt. 12:40). The sixth lesson recounts the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites (Ex. 13:20-15:19): Christ leads us from the bondage of Egypt (sin), through the Red Sea (baptism), into the promised land (the Church). The final lesson is the story of the three Holy Children in the fiery furnace (Dan. 3), once more a "type" or foreshowing of Christ's rising from the tomb.

How can we develop this ecclesial and liturgical way of reading Scripture in the Bible study circles within our parishes? One person can be given the task of noting whenever a particular passage is used for a festival or saint's day, and the group can then discuss together the reasons why it has been so chosen. Others in the group may be assigned to do homework among the Fathers, relying above all upon the biblical homilies of St. John Chrysostom, which are available in English translation in the series *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, reissued by Eerdmans. Initially we may be disappointed: the

Fathers' manner of thinking and speaking is often strikingly different from our own today. But there is gold in the patristic texts, if only we have the persistence and imagination to discover it.

CHRIST, THE HEART OF THE BIBLE

The third requirement in our reading of Scripture is that it should be Christ-centered. If we agree with the 1976 Moscow Conference that the “Scriptures constitute a coherent whole,” where are we to locate their wholeness and coherence? *In the person of Christ*. He is the unifying thread, that runs through the entirety of the Bible from the first sentence to the last. Jesus meets us on every page. It all ties up because of Him. “In Him all things hold together” (Col. 1:17 NRSV).

Much study of Scripture by modern western scholars has adopted an analytical approach, breaking up each book into what are seen as its original sources. The connecting links are unraveled, and the Bible is reduced to a series of isolated units. Recently, there has been a reaction against this, with biblical critics in the west devoting much greater attention to the way in which these primary units have come to be joined together. This is something that we Orthodox may certainly welcome. We must see the unity of Scripture as well as the diversity, the all-embracing end as well as the scattered beginnings. Orthodoxy prefers for the most part a “synthetic” rather than an analytical style of hermeneutics, seeing the Bible as an integrated whole, with Christ everywhere as the bond of union.

Such, as we have just seen, is precisely the effect of reading Scripture within the context of the Church's worship. As the lessons for the Annunciation and Holy Saturday make clear, everywhere in the Old Testament we find signposts and waymarks pointing to the mystery of Christ and His Mother Mary. Interpreting the Old Testament in the light of the New, and the New in the light of the Old—as the Church lectionary encourages us to do—we discover how the whole of Scripture finds its point of convergence in the Savior.

Orthodoxy makes extensive use of this “typological” method of interpretation, whereby “types” of Christ, signs and symbols of His work, are to be detected throughout the Old Testament. Melchizedek, for example, the priest-king of Salem, who offered bread and wine to Abraham (Gen. 14:18), is regarded as a “type” of Christ not only by the Fathers but equally in the New Testament itself (Heb. 5:6; 7:1-19). The rock that flowed with water in the wilderness of Sinai (Ex. 17:6; Num. 30:7-11) is likewise a symbol of Christ (1 Cor. 10:4). Typology explains the choice of lessons, not only on Holy Saturday, but throughout the ‘second half of Lent. Why are the Genesis readings in, the sixth week dominated by the figure of Joseph? Why read from the Book of Job in Holy Week? Because Joseph and Job, who both suffered innocently, foreshadow the redemptive suffering of Christ on the Cross.

We can discover many other correspondences between the Old and New Testament by using a biblical concordance. Often the best commentary of all is simply a concordance, or an edition of the Bible with well-chosen marginal cross-references. Only connect. It all ties up. In the words of Father Alexander Schmemmann, “A Christian is the one who, wherever he looks, finds everywhere Christ, and rejoices in Him.” This is true in particular of the biblical Christian. Wherever he looks, on every page, he finds everywhere Christ.

THE BIBLE AS PERSONAL

According to Saint Mark the Monk (“Mark the Ascetic,” fifth/sixth century), “He who is humble in his thoughts and engaged in spiritual work, when he reads the Holy Scriptures, will apply everything to himself and not to his neighbor.” We are to look throughout Scripture for a *personal application*. Our question is not simply “What does it mean?” but “What does it mean *for me*?” As Saint Tikhon insists,

“Christ Himself is speaking to you.” Scripture is a direct, intimate dialogue between the Savior and myself-Christ addressing me and my heart responding. That is the fourth criterion in our Bible reading.

I am to see all the narratives in Scripture as part of my own personal story. The description of Adam’s fall is equally an account of something in my own experience. Who is Adam? His name means simply “man,” “human”: it is I who am Adam. It is to me that God says, “Where are *you*?” (Gen. 3:9). We often ask, “Where is *God*?” But the real question is the one that God puts to the Adam in each one of us: “Where are *you*?”

Who is Cain, the murderer of his brother? It is I. God’s challenge, “Where is Abel your brother?” (Gen. 4:9), is addressed to the Cain in each of us. The way to God lies through love for other people, and there is no other way. Disowning my sister or brother, I replace the image of God with the mark of Cain, and deny my essential humanity.

The same personal application is evident in the Lenten services, and above all in the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete. “I am the man who fell among thieves,” we say (see Luke 10:30); “I was Your younger son, and wasted the wealth that You gave me...and now I am starved and hungry” (see Luke 15:11-14). “Who are the sheep, and who are the goats?” the Desert Fathers of Egypt used to ask (see Matt. 25:31-46). “The sheep are known to God,” they replied. “As for the goats—that means *me*.”

There are three steps to be taken when reading Scripture. First, we reflect that what we have in Scripture is *sacred history*: the history of the world from the Creation, the history of God’s chosen people, the history of God Himself incarnate in Palestine, the history of the “wonderful works” (Acts 2:11) after Pentecost. We are never to forget that what we find in the Bible is not an ideology, not a philosophical theory, but a historical faith.

Next, we observe the *particularity*, the specificity, of this sacred history. In the Bible we find God intervening at specific times and in particular places, entering into dialogue with individual humans. We see before us the distinctive calls issued by God to each different person, to Abraham, Moses, and David, to Rebekah and Ruth, to Isaiah and the prophets. We see God becoming incarnate once only, in a particular corner of the earth, at a particular moment and from a particular Mother. This particularity we are to regard not as a scandal but as a blessing. Divine love is universal in its scope, but always personal in its expression.

This sense of the specificity of the Bible is a vital element in the Orthodox “scriptural mind.” If we really love the Bible, we will love genealogies and details of dating and geography. One of the best ways to enliven the study of Scripture is to go on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Walk where Christ walked. Go down near the Dead Sea, climb the mountain of the Temptation, scan the desolation, feel how Christ must have felt during His forty days alone in the wilderness. Drink from the well where Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman. Take a boat out on the Sea of Galilee, have the sailors stop the engine, and gaze in silence across the water. Go at night to the Garden of Gethsemane, sit in the dark under the ancient olives, and look across the valley to the lights of the city. Taste to the utmost the characteristic “isness” of the historical setting, and take that experience back to the daily Scripture reading.

Then we are to take a third step. After reliving Bible history in all its particularity, we are to apply it *directly to ourselves*. We are to say to ourselves, “These are not just distant places, events in the remote past. They belong to my own encounter with the Lord. The stories include me.”

Betrayal, for instance, is part of the personal story of everyone. Have we not all betrayed others at some time in our life, and have we not all known what it is to be betrayed? And does not the memory of these moments leave deep, continuing scars on our psyche? Reading, then, the account of Saint Peter’s betrayal of Jesus and of his restoration after the resurrection, we can see ourselves as each an actor in the story. Imagining what both Peter and Christ experienced at the moment immediately after the betrayal, we make their feelings our own. I am Peter; in the situation of betrayal, can I also be

Christ? Reflecting likewise on the moment of reconciliation—seeing how the risen Savior with a love utterly devoid of sentimentality restored the fallen Peter to fellowship, seeing how Peter on his side had the humility and courage to accept this restoration—we ask ourselves: How Christlike am I to those who have betrayed me? And—after my own acts of betrayal, am I able to accept the forgiveness of others—am I able to forgive myself?

Take, as another example, the “woman who was a sinner,” who emptied the flask of ointment over Christ’s feet (Luke 7:36-50), and whom some identify with Saint Mary Magdalene, although that is not the usual Orthodox interpretation. Can I see her mirrored in myself? Do I share in her generosity, in her spontaneity and loving impulsiveness? “Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much.” Or am I calculating; mean, timid, holding myself back, never willing to commit myself fully to anything, either good or bad? As the Desert Fathers say, “Better someone who has sinned, if he knows he has sinned and repents, than a person who has not sinned and thinks of himself as righteous.”

A personal approach of this kind means that in reading the Bible we are not simply detached and objective observers, absorbing information, taking note of facts. The Bible is not merely: a work of literature or a collection of historical documents, although certainly it can be approached on that level. It is, much more fundamentally, a *sacred* book, addressed to *believers*, to be read with faith and love. We shall not profit fully from reading the Gospels unless we are in love with Christ. “Heart speaks to heart” I enter into the living truth of Scripture only when my heart responds with love to the heart of God.

Reading Scripture in this way—in obedience, as a member of the Church, finding Christ everywhere, and seeing everything as part of my own personal story—we shall sense something of the power and healing to be found in the Bible. Yet always in our biblical voyage of exploration we are only at the very beginning. We are like someone launching out in a tiny boat across a limitless ocean. But, however great the journey, we can embark on it today, at this very hour, in this very moment.

At the high point of his spiritual crisis, wrestling with himself alone in the garden, Saint Augustine heard a child’s voice crying out, “Take up and read, take up and read.” He took up his Bible and read, and what he read altered his entire life. Let us do the same: *Take up and read*.

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 118 [119]:105).

HOW TO READ THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

Fr. Seraphim Rose

It is well known that Protestants spend a great deal of time on Holy Scripture, because for them it is everything. For us Orthodox Christians the Scripture also holds an essential place. Often, however, we do not take advantage of it, and do not realize what importance it has for us; or if we do, we often do not approach it in the right spirit because the Protestant approach and Protestant books about the Scriptures are widespread, while our Orthodox approach is quite different.

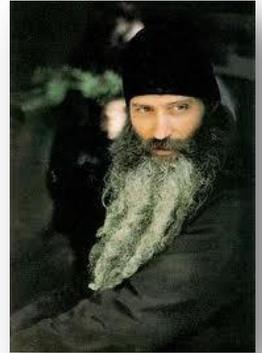
The fact that Scripture is an essential part of our Faith can be seen in our Orthodox services. Anyone who has a *St. Herman Calendar* will see that there are daily readings from the New Testament: from both the Epistles and the Gospels. In one year we read through almost the entire New Testament. In the first three days of the week before Pascha—the feast of Christ's Resurrection—the four Gospels are read in church, and on Thursday night of Passion Week twelve long selections from the Gospels are read concerning the Passion of our Lord, with verses sung in between, commenting on these passages. The Old Testament is also used in the services. In the Vespers for every great feast three parables are read prefiguring the feast. And the Divine services themselves are filled with Scriptural quotations, Scriptural allusions, and inspiration coming directly from Holy Scripture. Orthodox Christians also read the Scripture outside the services. St. Seraphim [of Sarov], in his monastic life, read the entire New Testament every week. Perhaps it is because we have such a richness of Scripture in our Orthodox tradition that we are often guilty of taking the Scriptures for granted, of not valuing and making use of them.

One of the leading interpreters of Holy Scripture for us is St. John Chrysostom, an early fifth-century Holy Father. He wrote commentaries on practically the whole of the New Testament, including all of St. Paul's Epistles and also many Old Testament books. In one sermon concerning Scripture, he addresses his flock:

"I exhort you, and I will not cease to exhort you to pay heed not only to what is said here, but when you are home also you should occupy yourselves attentively with the reading of Holy Scripture. Let no one say to me such cold words-worthy of judgment-as these: 'I am occupied with a trial, I have obligations in the city, I have a wife, I have to feed my children, and it is not my duty to read the Scripture but the duty of those who have renounced everything.' What are you saying?! It is not your duty to read Scripture because you are distracted by innumerable cares? On the contrary, it is your duty more than those others, more than the monks; they do not have such need of help as do you who live in the midst of such cares. You need treatment all the more, because you are constantly under such blows and are wounded so often. The reading of Scripture is a great defense against sin. Ignorance of the Scripture is a great misfortune, a great abyss. Not to know anything from the word of God is a disaster. This is what has given rise to heresies, to immorality; it has turned everything upside down."

Here we see that the reading of Holy Scripture provides us with a great weapon in the fight against the worldly temptations surrounding us—and we do not do enough of it. The Orthodox Church, far from being against the reading of Scripture, greatly encourages it. The Church is only against the misreading of Scripture, against reading one's own private opinions and passions, even sins into the sacred text. When we hear that the Protestants are all excited about something that they say is in the Scripture—the rapture, for example, or the millennium—we are not against their reading the Scripture but against their misinterpretation of the Scripture. To avoid this pitfall ourselves we must understand what this sacred text is and how we should approach it.

The Bible—the Holy Scripture, the Old and New Testaments—is not an ordinary book. It is one that contains not human but divinely revealed truths. It is the word of God. Therefore, we must approach it with reverence and contrition of heart, not with mere idle curiosity and academic coldness. Nowadays one cannot expect a person who has no sympathy for Christianity, no sympathy for the Scriptures, to have a proper attitude of reverence. There is, however, such power in the words of Scripture—especially



in the Gospels-that it can convert a person even without this proper attitude. We have heard of cases in Communist countries; the police go out in special squads to persecute believers and break up their meetings; they confiscate all their literature: Bibles, hymn books, patristic texts-many written out by hand. They're supposed to burn them, but sometimes either the person who is assigned to burn them or the person collecting them gets curious and begins reading the condemned materials. And there have been cases where this has changed the person's life. All of a sudden he meets Jesus Christ. And he's shocked, especially if he has been raised with the notion that this is a great evil; he discovers that there is no evil here at all, but something quite fantastic.

Many modern scholars approach the Scriptures with a cold, academic spirit; they do not wish to save their souls by reading Scripture: they only want to prove what great scholars they are, what new ideas they can come up with; they want to make a name for themselves. But we who are Orthodox Christians must have utmost reverence and contrition of heart, i.e., we must approach the word of God with a desire to change our hearts. We read the Scripture in order to gain salvation, not, as some Protestants believe, because we are already saved without the possibility of falling away, but rather as those desperately trying to keep the salvation which Christ has given us, fully aware of our spiritual poverty. For us, reading Scripture is literally a matter of life and death. As King David wrote in the Psalms: *Because of Thy words my heart hath been afraid. I will rejoice in Thy sayings as one that hath found great spoil* (Ps. 118: 161-62).

The Scripture contains truth, and nothing else. Therefore, we must study the Scripture believing in its truth, without doubt or criticism. If we have this latter attitude we shall receive no benefit from reading Scripture but only find ourselves with those "wise" men who think they know more than God's revelation. In fact, the wise of this world often miss the meaning of Scripture. Our Lord prayed: *I thank Thee, O Father ... that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes* (Luke 10:21). In our approach we must not be sophisticated, complicated scholars; we must be simple. And if we are simple the words will have meaning for us.

For our reading of Scripture to be fruitful, to help save our souls, we must ourselves be leading a spiritual life in accordance with the Gospel. The Scriptures are addressed precisely to those who are trying to lead a spiritual life. Others will usually read them in vain, and will not even understand much. St. Paul teaches: *The natural [i.e., unspiritual] man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned* (I Cor. 2: 14). The more one is leading a spiritual life, the more one is capable of understanding the Scripture.

A second point. Because we are weak and can only boast of our infirmities, we must pray to God to open the eyes of our understanding by His grace. Even Christ's disciples on the road to Emmaus did not understand the Scripture; they did not understand that it was Christ in front of them interpreting the Scripture, until Christ Himself opened their minds (cf Luke 24:45). So unless we have our minds opened-which comes from the grace of God-we will read Scripture and not understand it; hearing we will not understand, seeing we will not see.

THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

Why do we say that Scripture is the inspired word of God? Among occultists and spiritualists there is a phenomenon known as automatic writing, in which a person is literally possessed by a spirit and writes without using his free will. In fact, the latest fashion in this kind of occultism is to sit in front of a typewriter and let the spirit take over your fingers, and "spirit messages" appear. This is not the way Holy Scripture is inspired. This is the way demons operate. St. Basil, in his introduction to his commentary on the Book of Isaiah, writes:

"Some think that the prophets prophesied in ecstasy, so that the human mind was eclipsed by the Spirit. But it is against the promise of God to give divine inspiration in an ecstatic state, so that when a person is filled with divine teachings he should go out of his normal mind, and when he gives benefit to others he should receive no benefit from his own words.... And in general," St. Basil continues, "is it reasonable that the spirit of wisdom should make a man like someone out of his mind, and that the spirit of knowledge should annihilate the power of reason? Light does not produce darkness, but on the contrary awakens the power of sight given by nature. And the spirit does not produce darkness in

souls; on the contrary, the mind which has been cleansed of sinful defilements is thereby awakened to mental vision or contemplation."

The revelation of Holy Scripture is thus given to pure and holy men who are in an exalted and inspired state but in full possession of their mental faculties. Those who wish to understand the Scriptures must likewise be struggling to lead a pure and holy life, receiving God's grace to understand what the Holy Spirit has revealed. St. Basil, in this same introduction, writes:

"The first and great gift, which requires that a soul be carefully cleansed, is to contain in oneself divine inspiration and to prophesy of God's mysteries. [This refers to a person who writes the Scripture.] And the second gift after this, which likewise requires great and assiduous care, is to pay heed to the intent of what has been declared by the Spirit, and not to err in understanding it, but to be led up to this understanding by the Spirit." That is, the second great thing is to understand what these prophets, the writers of Holy Scripture have written in their state of inspiration. So we ourselves must be striving to receive God's grace and inspiration to understand the Scripture. Therefore, the labor of interpreting the Scripture is not an easy one. In fact, St. Basil teaches, "there are many places in Scripture that are deliberately difficult to understand." How can this be? He writes:

"Just as our Creator did not will that we should be like the animals and that all the conveniences of life should be born together with us [i.e., fur to clothe us, horns to defend us, etc.], so that the lack of what is necessary should lead to the use of the mind; so too in Scripture He allowed there to be a lack of clarity [that is, sometimes] for the benefit of the mind, so as to arouse its activity. That which is obtained with labor somehow attaches itself more to us, and what is produced over a long time is more solid, while that which is obtained easily is not so much enjoyed." That is, we see that the Scriptures are deliberately difficult so that we might force our mind to be raised up to a state of understanding and not simply receive on a platter an already obvious meaning.

All this shows that the reading of Scripture is not to be taken up lightly, and it is not just to gather information which we can take or leave. Rather, it is for the salvation of our souls. And as we read we must be in the process of changing ourselves because this is the purpose of Scripture. If we are not converted, it is to convert us; if we are already converted, it is so that we will work on ourselves more; if we are working on ourselves, it is so that we will be humble and not think too highly of ourselves. There is no state in which Scripture is not applicable to us.

All this is quite different from the teachings of those Protestants who regard Scripture as an infallible oracle (which is, in fact, similar to a belief in the infallibility of the Pope of Rome) and that man's Common sense can understand its meaning. If you look at the innumerable Protestant sects, you will see that they each have different peculiar interpretations of the same passages, and they all say theirs is the "obvious" meaning. Sometimes they learn Greek, and they say that's "obviously" what the Greek says, while someone else has exactly the opposite interpretation and he thinks it's just as obvious. How do you know what it really says?

HOW TO INTERPRET SCRIPTURE

First, some examples of how to misinterpret Scripture.

There are in Scripture numerous passages which seem to contradict other passages. For example, *Whosoever abideth in God sinneth not, and Whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither knoweth Him* (I John 3:9). According to the plain meaning of this passage you would think that a person who becomes a Christian ceases to sin. If this is so, why do we have Confession? Why do we look at ourselves and see that we constantly sin? Does this mean that we are not really Christians? But in this same Epistle we read: *If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us* (I John 1:8). How can the same writer say two such seemingly contradictory things? It's obvious that we must have a deeper understanding of both passages. We must understand that while we have the grace of God we do not sin; when we sin it proves we have lost the grace of God, and we must struggle to regain it. We must recognize that there is a standard, a model which we must follow, which is not to sin. We must not deceive ourselves in thinking that we are constantly in a sinless state; rather, we are constantly striving towards it, sometimes reaching it and then falling away. That is our Christian life. These passages must be read with an awareness of what it is to struggle as an Orthodox Christian.

Again, St. Matthew says, *Call no man your father on the earth* (Matthew 23:9). Many Protestants interpret this quite literally and thereby refuse to call any clergyman "Father." But even this same book of St. Matthew calls Abraham the father of us all (cf. Matt. 4: 16). That, of course, concerns a father who is dead; that's one difference. In his Epistle to the Hebrews, St. Paul speaks of the fathers and prophets of the Old Testament; these are also dead. But he also speaks about living fathers: *Though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel* (I Cor. 4:15). Here he says quite clearly that "I am your spiritual father." He doesn't say this in so many words, so the Protestants overlook this passage. Nevertheless, he is saying, "You have not many fathers, therefore you have some, and I am one of them because I have begotten you in the Gospel." That seems to contradict what the Lord says: *Call no man father upon the earth*. But here our Lord is speaking about the One Father; there is One Who is Father in the sense that no one else is father. There are others who are fathers in the limited sense: there are some spiritual fathers, there are fathers in the flesh.... They are all fathers, but different types. Just as He says, *Neither be ye called masters, for one is your Master, even Christ* (Matt. 23:10).

LITERAL vs. NON-LITERAL

Once we were visited by some Protestants who told us that they interpreted the Bible absolutely literally. I asked them about the passage, *Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you* (John 6:53). And the first thing they said was, "Well, that is not literal." Immediately they contradicted themselves. They think that they accept everything literally, but they make excuses for not accepting literally those passages which do not agree with their beliefs.

Many passages in Scripture can only be understood in the context of dogmatic teaching-which a person receives either from other Scriptures or from some other source, either from the authority of the Church or the private opinions of some particular teacher. Some Seventh-Day Adventists, commenting on the Lord's promise to the wise thief, *Verily I say unto thee, today thou shalt be with Me in Paradise* (Luke 23:43), claim that it is mispunctuated, that it should read: "Verily, I say unto thee today, thou shalt ... ", because they believe that when a person dies his soul goes to sleep, and therefore the thief could not be with Christ in Paradise today. Here is an example of changing the meaning of Scripture to conform with one's beliefs. And because their dogmatic teaching is wrong on *this* subject, their interpretation of Scripture is also wrong.

There are many such seeming problems which can be seen if one looks at separate verses of Scripture. Some Protestants argue for hours, even years, over such questions. It is important for us not to get bogged down in such problems. We must understand the principles of correctly interpreting Scripture. About this St. John Chrysostom writes:

"One must not simply seize the words of Scripture and tear them out of their connection and context. One must not take bare words, depriving them of support from what precedes and what follows in order then simply to ridicule and make clever tricks. For if in criminal trials, where we examine worldly matters, we set forth everything which serves for justification-the place and time, the causes, the persons and much else-would it not be absurd when we have before us the struggle for eternal life to quote the words of Scripture simply, just as they occur" (Homily on Jeremiah 10:23).

This is precisely what many Protestants do; not having the whole context, not having the whole, reasoned theological dogma, they quote the Scriptures just as they occur: "It's obvious that's what it means." But Scriptures must be placed in context, in the complete picture both of the book in which they occur, in the rest of Holy Scripture, and in the whole teaching of Christ as handed down in His Church.

A difficult question concerns what in Holy Scripture is to be interpreted literally and what is not to be interpreted literally. We cannot answer this question by "common sense" because this only causes new sects to arise. St. Symeon the New Theologian, the great Orthodox Father of the eleventh century, explains this in concise form:

"Christ the Master of all daily teaches us through the Holy Gospel, where some things He speaks in a hidden way so that not many might understand, when He speaks in parables. And some of these things

He later explains alone to His disciples, saying: *Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, but to the rest in parables* (Luke 8: 10). But other things He speaks plainly, clearly to everyone, as the Apostle said to Him, *Lo, now speakest Thou plainly and speakest no parable* (John 16:29). Therefore, it is our duty to investigate and find out in which words the Lord taught plainly and clearly, and in which He taught in a hidden manner and in parables" (Homily 52).

St. Symeon gives examples of when our Lord speaks plainly. For instance, *Love your enemies* (Matt. 5:44). We are to understand that literally. Or again, in the Beatitudes: *Blessed are ye that weep now, for ye shall laugh* (Luke 6:21), etc. We must understand this as it is written; now is a time for weeping. And again, *Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand* (Matt. 3:2); or *He that loveth his own soul will lose it* (John 3:25); or *If any would follow Me, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow Me* (Matt. 16:24).

Some of these things are very hard to do. And some are even quite difficult for our worldly minds to grasp. But, with knowledge of the Kingdom of Heaven and the spiritual life, they become clear and they are interpreted literally, even though sometimes also by the use of metaphors.

As examples of parables, St. Symeon speaks of "faith being like a mustard seed" (cf Luke 13), or of "the Kingdom of Heaven being like the pearl of great price" (cf Matt. 13:45) or "leaven" (cf Matt. 13:33). St. Symeon continues:

"Therefore, reflect, I beg you, on how great is God's wisdom, that by means of such sensuous examples, which seem to us to be lowly, He depicts for us and like an artist sketches out in our mind that which is unthinkable and unapproachable. He does this so that unbelievers might remain blind, deprived of knowledge of those good things of heaven, since they have become unworthy of this by reason of unbelief. But believers, on the other hand, hearing and receiving with faith the word of the parable, might see the truth and clearly know the reality in the things which are shown by the parables, for parables are the images of spiritual things" (Homily 52).

St. Symeon teaches that the Epistles of the Apostles also contain many hidden things, in addition to the things which are said plainly.

Closely related to the literal vs. the mystical meaning of texts are cases in which a particular text has many meanings, where material objects are spoken of in order to raise our minds to spiritual realities. This is not to say that we should deliberately search the Scriptures for symbols, as if whatever is said means something else; rather, it is a matter of raising ourselves to a spiritual level where we can begin to understand the spiritual reality about which the inspired writers often speak.

Thus, when David says, *Thou has broken my bonds asunder* (Ps. 115), he is not merely speaking of physical bonds but is using this as a symbol of deliverance from corruption and death. This is the mystical meaning. In using this worldly image of "bonds," he is speaking at the same time on a second level of meaning, using the physical image as an opportunity to express the spiritual truth of deliverance from corruption. If we already know the Christian teaching of Adam's fall, the corruption of the world, and our redemption by Jesus Christ, and if we are struggling to raise ourselves to this spiritual level, we do not need a commentary to explain the words; that is, the Holy Fathers will help us, but we don't need a commentary to tell us that "x = y." The words themselves express the spiritual meaning. Anyone who reads and prays with the Psalms has experienced this. Especially in times of sorrow, the words of Psalms acquire a new and deeper meaning; we find that physical things refer to our own sorrows and dejection and our need to receive deliverance from Christ.

The Orthodox services are full of this same kind of language, which we call sacred poetry. The key to understanding this poetry is the leading of a spiritual life, which is what Scripture speaks about.

In a word, the understanding of Scripture requires God's grace. St. Symeon the New Theologian gives an excellent image of this:

"Spiritual knowledge is like a house built in the midst of Greek and worldly wisdom, in which house, like a tightly locked trunk, there is the knowledge of the Divine Scriptures, and the unutterable treasure hidden in this knowledge of the Scriptures, that is, Divine grace. Those who enter this house cannot see this treasure if the trunk is not opened for them, but this trunk cannot be opened by any human wisdom. This is why people who think in a worldly way do not know the spiritual treasure which lies in the trunk of spiritual knowledge, and just as someone who lifts this trunk on his shoulders cannot by this alone see the treasure which is inside, so also even if someone were to read

and learn by heart the Divine Scriptures, and could read them all like a single Psalm, he cannot by this alone acquire the grace of the Holy Spirit, which is hidden in them. For just as what is hidden in the trunk cannot be revealed by the trunk itself, so also what is concealed in the Divine Scriptures cannot be revealed by the Scriptures themselves" (Homily 49).

This is a very interesting passage; it shows that the Protestants are clearly wrong-for Scripture itself does not reveal the meaning of Scripture. Rather, it is revealed by God's grace. St. Symeon continues:

"When God comes to dwell in us and reveals Himself to us consciously, then we awaken to knowledge, i.e., we understand in reality those divine mysteries which are concealed in the Divine Scriptures But it is impossible to attain this in any other way.... Those who do not know what I have spoken about and have not experienced it in reality have not yet tasted of the sweetness of the immortal life which the divine words have, and they boast only of their knowledge; they place the hope for their salvation on the knowledge of the Divine Scripture alone and in the fact that they know it by heart. Such ones, after death, will be judged more than those who have not heard the Scripture at all. Especially do those who have gone astray in ignorance corrupt the meaning of Divine Scripture and interpret it according to their lusts. For them the power of Divine Scripture is inaccessible.

One who has the whole of Divine Scripture on his lips cannot understand and attain to the mystical divine glory and power concealed in it if he will not fulfill the commandments of God and be vouchsafed to receive the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, Who might open to him the words of Divine Scripture as a book, and show him the mystical glory which is within them and might at the same time show the power and glory of God; which good things are concealed in them, together with eternal life overflowing with those good things. But these things are concealed and unknown to all those who are careless disdainers of God's commandments" (ibid.).

Thus, in order to read and understand the Scriptures we must be leading a life according to the commandments, receiving the grace of the Holy Spirit, even as the authors of the sacred books were doing. And we must be eager and zealous in our reading. St. John Damascene, the great Orthodox Father of the eighth century, who summed up the teaching of the earlier Fathers in his book *On the Orthodox Faith*, says: "Let us knock at the very beautiful paradise of the Scriptures Let us not knock casually, but with eagerness and persistence, and let us not lose heart while knocking, for so it will be opened to us. If we should read once and then a second time and still not understand what we are reading, let us not be discouraged. Rather, let us persist, let us reflect and inquire, for it is written: *Ask thy father and he will declare it to thee, thy el and they will tell it thee* (Deut. 32:7). For not all have knowledge. From the fountain of Paradise let us draw ever-flowing and most pure waters springing up into life everlasting. Let us revel in them, let us revel greedily in them to satiety, for they contain the grace which cannot be exhausted" (*On the Orthodox Faith* 4.17).

Another important point in approaching the Scriptures is that we should approach them with humility, i.e., we should not expect to read just once and immediately "understand"; we should not expect to read and use our common sense and think that we really understand; but we should have a very humble idea that there is probably a great deal that we missed, even in the most seemingly "obvious" passages. We must have this basic humility because the underlying cause of all these Protestant sects, which are based on different interpretations of Scriptures, is precisely pride. They read and they think, "I understand what it says." And that is wrong. When we read the Scriptures we must think to ourselves: "I understand a little, my fathers have taught me, I've read commentaries and heard sermons in Church, and my understanding is in accordance with what I've been taught by Church Tradition; but still, I don't trust entirely that I know what it means." We cannot simply take the first idea that comes into our minds-or even the second or third idea; we must go deeper and see what the Fathers teach us, what the Church teaches us, how this fits in with other books of the Bible, always thinking that our knowledge of Scripture-no matter how much we know-is always deficient; we never know enough; we must always be willing to learn more.

Further Reading and Commentary

Farley, Lawrence Fr.

Orthodox Bible Study Companion (Series)

Kantiotes, Augustinos N., Bishop of Florina

A Panoramic View of Holy Scripture, 2-volume set

Manley, Johanna

The Bible and Holy Fathers for Orthodox

Grace for Grace: The Psalter and the Holy Fathers

Isaiah Through the Ages

Wisdom, Let Us Attend: Job, the Fathers, and the Old Testament

Reardon, Patrick Henry

Creation and the Patriarchal Histories: Orthodox Christian Reflections on the Book of Genesis

Christ in the Psalms

The Trial of Job: Orthodox Christian Reflections on the Book of Job

Chronicles of History and Worship: Orthodox Christian Reflections on the Books of Chronicles

Theophylact of Ochrid

The Explanation of the Gospels - Four Volume Set

Explanation of the Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians

Explanation of the Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians

Notes