



# **Peninsula City Church**

## **Better Reading**

**I Am**

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# I Am

## Introduction

**Q.** Have you ever read the Bible and though I am bored with all of this reading it over and over again?

Christ-followers all around the world have either said or thought this or will come to this point in their life. Things have become a little ho-hum and reading the Bible has also fallen into this state. This can be the case especially with the Old Testament. On this matter it has been said that,

“You can have goals in life so out of sync with the Bible that you find the Bible boring.”<sup>1</sup>

Then we may get an attack of the guilt’s for either not wanting to read it, or plainly not reading it at all. I’m not talking about the devil making you feel guilty for not reading the Bible; you probably do a good enough job. Also the church and other Christ-followers have done a good job of making people feel guilty for this over the years.

You know what I mean; the pastor gets up on Sunday and declares that you need to be reading your Bible daily, otherwise... Or someone well-meaning comes along and tries to encourage you to read the Bible. They may use this on their latest blog or book that they are reading to encourage you. They may try to encourage you with tough love saying that your reading has become religious and so, it is boring. Or they declare that you have been reading the Bible from a secular perspective and need to see it as a sacred book. Well to answer these types of arguments,

“There is no such word as ‘religion’ in the languages of the Ancient Near East. Likewise, there is no dichotomy between sacred and secular, or even between natural and supernatural.”<sup>2</sup>

I am not out to guilt you here at all. However, if we’re completely honest there can be any number of reasons why Christ-followers (yourself included) all around the world have become bored with reading the Bible.<sup>3</sup> Subsequently, you already know the struggles that you are having reading the Bible or getting over your boredom with it. John Piper has suggested of the most common causes of Bible neglect in the Christian life, like:

“I don’t read my Bible because...

- It seems so irrelevant to my life
- I don’t have time
- I go to church every Sunday
- I find it confusing.”<sup>4</sup>

So, if you are honest, which one or ones of these excuses to do use for not reading the Bible. Anything in life can become boring if we lose the reason for doing it. You know I have never found the Bible boring and I continue to read it over and over again. However, it is important to remember that,

“The Bible is a wonderful book. Its pages reveal the epic story of God’s redemption of humankind and the long, bitter conflict against evil. Yet it’s also a book that seems strange to us. While God’s Word was written *for* us, it wasn’t written *to* us.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Piper, John. “Why We Neglect Our Bibles.” <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/why-we-neglect-our-bibles> (14<sup>th</sup> December 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Walton, John H. *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 2006), 87.

<sup>3</sup> Heiser, Michael S. *I Dare You Not to Bore Me with the Bible*. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014), vii.

<sup>4</sup> Piper, John. “Why We Neglect Our Bibles.” <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/why-we-neglect-our-bibles> (14<sup>th</sup> December 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Heiser, *I Dare You Not to Bore Me with the Bible*, ix.

So, if it was written *for* us, but it wasn't written *to* us, it will take us some of our time and intentional effort to understand what the Bible is saying in its various contexts. Although, the following quote was used for the realm of intercessory prayer, I think that it conveys well what I would like to say regarding Bible reading and study,

“Time is a quality that accommodates itself to our will; what our hearts really consider of first importance, in the day we will soon succeed in finding time for.”<sup>6</sup>

So, I would like to encourage Christ-followers to do their own reading and Bible study in both the New and Old Testaments. Augustine a Christ-follower from the fifth century AD highlighted the truth that,

“New Testament is in the Old Testament concealed, and the Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed.”<sup>7</sup>

This idea underlines the real connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament. This is especially true in relation to the Christ. On this Augustine went on to say that,

“These hidden meanings of inspired Scripture we track down as best we can, with varying degrees of success; and yet we all hold confidently to the firm belief that these historical events and the narrative of them have some foreshadowing of things to come, and are to be interpreted with reference to Christ and His church which is the City of God.”<sup>8</sup>

So, in light of what I have said in this introduction, I would like to share with you the results of a Bible study that I did for this message. Whether this helps you to reengage in your Bible reading or not is your choice, but it something that I found in my reading. This is by no means an exhaustive study, but something that any Christ-follower could do. You may not need to go to the extent that I have here in this study. All you need to do this kind of study is a Bible and access to the internet, to search and queries that you might have as you read and study. This might be one of the following sites like:

<https://www.biblegateway.com/>

<http://www.biblestudytools.com/>

<https://www.blueletterbible.org/>

## 1. Looking back

### Q. Why didn't Moses recognise God?

In Exodus chapter three we find Moses looking after the flock of sheep that belonged to Jethro his father-in-law.

“One day Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian. He led the flock far into the wilderness and came to Sinai, the mountain of God” (Ex 3:1 NLT).

It is while he is here with the sheep that we are told that the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the middle of a bush and it didn't burn up (Ex 3:2). Wow, that was some weird incident that happened to Moses. Not only the appearance of the Angel of the LORD, but a bush that is on fire, but won't burn. What an amazing way to communicate with Moses. In fact,

“It is safe to believe that the way God communicated to humans is more complex than we have been accustomed to think.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Murray, Andrew. *The Ministry of Intercessory Prayer*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Bethany House, 2003), 116

<sup>7</sup> Rogers, & McKim, Donald. *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach*. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Pub, 1999), 33.

<sup>8</sup> Augustine. *City of God*. (London: Penguin, 1984), 221.

<sup>9</sup> Walton, John H. & Sandy, D. Brent. *The Lost World of the Bible: Ancient Literary Culture and Biblical Authority*. (Grand Rapids, MI: IVP Academic, 2013), 293.

However, who is the Angel of the LORD here in the midst of the burning bush? As we read on it tells us in verse four that,

<sup>4</sup> “When the LORD saw Moses coming to take a closer look, God called to him from the middle of the bush, ‘Moses! Moses!’ ‘Here I am!’ Moses replied. <sup>5</sup> ‘Do not come any closer,’ the Lord warned. ‘Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground. <sup>6</sup> I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ When Moses heard this, he covered his face because he was afraid to look at God” (Ex 3:4-6 NLT).

These verses tell us a number of things to qualify the Angel of the LORD:

- This Angel of the LORD was in fact the LORD Himself: v4
- It was God who called to Moses from the middle of the bush: v4
- God knew Moses and used his name twice, which highlights the importance of this meeting: v4
- The place had now become holy ground, because God was there: v5
- If that is not enough, the speaker calls Himself God: v6
- This was not just any God, but the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, so this was Moses’ ancestral God: v6; cf. v13

However, as amazing as this is that is not the best part of the story. God tells Moses “I am sending you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people Israel out of Egypt,” (v10). Then the story continues in verses 13 and 14 to a puzzling statement.

<sup>13</sup> “But Moses protested, ‘If I go to the people of Israel and tell them, “The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,” they will ask me, “What is His name?” Then what should I tell them?’ <sup>14</sup> God replied to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM. Say this to the people of Israel: I AM has sent me to you’” (Ex 3:13-14 NLT).

What was Moses inferring when he asked how should he introduce God to the Israelites? Surely he knew God’s name? Surely his father Amram mother Jochebed (Ex 6:20) had told Moses about God and His name? If they were devout worshipers and lovers of God, then they would have brought him up knowing about the LORD, see (Ex 2:1-10; cf. Acts 7:20-21; Heb 11:23).

So, Moses by asking God’s name was not showing his ignorance of the identity of his ancestral God, rather his question was more about, which identity of God is relevant to the mission on Moses was being sent.<sup>10</sup> Moses in the culture of his day was more concern with the way God was reveling Himself for this mission, since God was not merely going to monitor the situation but take action, (Ex 3:7-8).<sup>11</sup> On this matter it has been pointed out,

“If ancient cultures considered something to exist when it had a name and a function, the name of a deity is more than simply a moniker by which he or she can be invoked. It is the god’s identity and frames the god’s ‘existence.’ The announcement to Moses at the burning bush is therefore a singular defining moment. When he asks what name he should give for the God of their fathers (Ex 3:13), he is not expressing ignorance of the identity of their ancestral deity. It is not unusual for a single deity to have many different epithets or titles.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 92.

<sup>11</sup> Walton, John H. *Ancient Israelite Literature in its Cultural Context: A Survey of Parallels between Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Texts*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 91.

<sup>12</sup> Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 93.

The fact that Moses asked what God's name could be puzzling to some readers. One question that arises here is "Had God ever revealed Himself by this name before, and to whom did He reveal it?" Well in Exodus 6:2-3, God showed that He had made Himself know by this name of LORD to Moses' ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

"I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as El-Shaddai—'God Almighty'-- but I did not reveal my name, Yahweh, to them" (Ex 6:3 NLT).

Now this may be a little confusing when God says "but I did not reveal my name, Yahweh, to them." Because he had, but although He had revealed Himself to them as Yahweh, they had not known Him the way that Moses knew Him. On this matter it has been said that,

"The patriarchs had only the promises, not the *things* promised."<sup>13</sup>

Moses knew Yahweh according to the new fulfilled the role in Moses' time. So, His statement does not suggest that the patriarchs had never been introduced to the name Yahweh.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the name Yahweh was used 165 times in the book of Genesis. The first time that it was used was in Genesis 2:4 when it is recorded,

"This is the account of the creation of the heavens and the earth. When the LORD (Yahweh) God made the earth and the heavens" (Gen 2:4 NLT).

In most Bibles God's name Yahweh will appear in capital letters like the following LORD. This is the great IAM who in fact, also appeared to Abram and then when he became Abraham. The following are some noteworthy times when Yahweh appeared to him.

The first recorded time that He appeared to him was,

"The LORD had said to Abram, 'Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you'" (Gen 12:1 NLT).

Some other significant times,

"Some time later, the LORD spoke to Abram in a vision and said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Abram, for I will protect you, and your reward will be great.'" (Gen 15:1 NLT)

"When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, 'I am El-Shaddai—(God Almighty).' Serve me faithfully and live a blameless life" (Gen 17:1 NLT)

"The LORD appeared again to Abraham near the oak grove belonging to Mamre. One day Abraham was sitting at the entrance to his tent during the hottest part of the day" (Gen 18:1 NLT).

So, God had revealed Himself as Yahweh to Abraham in action that was applicable to them. But this was a new day and Yahweh was revealing Himself for the mission with Moses. In this context God was not just going to monitor the current situation but take the action of deliverance, (Ex 3:17-18). This deliverance would be known as the Exodus. This Exodus would be God keeping His covenant (Ex 6:4), then lead to becoming a kingdom of priest a holy nation (Ex 19:6), the giving of the Law (Ex 20:1-17), and the fulfillment of the promised inheritance of the Promised Land (Gen 12:1-3; 15:7,18; cf. Ex 6:8).

The formula of God's name that was revealed to Moses is understood in three different ways:<sup>15</sup>

- a. As a statement concerning God's being
- b. As an attempt to avoid revealing the name: Moses will see who God is from His works
- c. As a statement concerning the activity of God

<sup>13</sup> Kaiser Jr., Walter C. "Exodus." In *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Genesis–Leviticus*. Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland. (Eds). (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 392.

<sup>14</sup> Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 93.

<sup>15</sup> Jenni, Ernst & Westermann, Claus. *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 359.

Regarding this name it has been said that,

“Yahweh is the name of the official God of Israel, both in the northern kingdom and in Judah.”<sup>16</sup>

So, the patriarchs would have known God by this name, but not in the way that Moses would know Him. This was to be a new and mighty work done by Yahweh as He chose to work in and through Moses. Israel was about to enter into a new and powerful relationship with Yahweh as they learn His name and see Him perform. Therefore, it has rightly been said that,

“In this sense, Yahweh was not presented as a name they had never heard of before, but as a name representing a function that they had not as yet experienced.”<sup>17</sup>

## 2. Looking back to look forward

**Q.** What did Jesus mean “before Abraham was even born, I AM”?

There is an interesting passage in John’s gospel that would be important to read at this point. But, first some helpful context is that Jesus in discussion with the religious leaders introduces Abraham as their ancestor (Jn 8:37). However, they were not acting as his ancestors (Jn 8:39-41), rather as Jesus pointed out as the ancestors of the devil, (Jn 8:44). Then Jesus went on to make an outlandish statement that caused the religious leaders to act, well, downright devilish.

<sup>56</sup> “Your father Abraham rejoiced as he looked forward to My coming, he saw it and was glad.

<sup>57</sup> The people said, ‘You aren’t even fifty years old. How can You say You have seen Abraham?’ <sup>58</sup> Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, before Abraham was even born, I AM!’ <sup>59</sup> At that point they picked up stones to throw at him. But Jesus was hidden from them and left the Temple” (Jn 8:56-59 NLT).

Here Jesus used the identical phrase that God used with Moses, i.e. “I AM.” Jesus’ hearers understood exactly what He was saying and this is indicated demonstrated by their reaction of wanting to stone Him, v59. This was the penalty for blaspheme (Lev 24:16), as Jesus was in fact calling Himself God and they knew it.

“Anyone who blasphemes the Name of the LORD must be stoned to death by the whole community of Israel. Any native-born Israelite or foreigner among you who blasphemes the Name of the LORD must be put to death” (Lev 24:16 NLT)

Although there is no literal mention in Genesis of Abraham seeing Jesus’s coming, Jesus still mentioned this as truth, when He said, “I tell you the truth,” (v58). So, if we have no record of Abraham seeing this or saying anything about it why would Jesus say such a thing? Well, we do not know everything that has been done or said by Abraham, but if Jesus is whom He claims to be then He would be telling the truth. This is an amazing truth as the next revelation of the great I AM was taking place and He was getting ready to act and fulfil His promise made to Abram.

So, its use will have new relevance to the mission of redemption, which Jesus had been sent. What is interesting is that Jesus referred all the way back to Abraham and not to Moses. He wanted His hearers to look back to the Abraham who had known Yahweh and remember the covenant of Genesis 12.

<sup>1</sup> “The LORD had said to Abram, ‘Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen 12:1-3 NLT).

<sup>16</sup> Van der Toorn, Karel. “Yahweh.” In *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*. Karel Van der Toorn, & Pieter W. Van der Horst. (Eds.). (2<sup>nd</sup> extensively rev. ed.; Leiden; Boston; Grand Rapids, MI: Brill; Eerdmans, 1999), 910.

<sup>17</sup> Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 93.

Once they had looked back to Abraham, then they were to look forward to their present day and see Jesus Christ standing right in front of them as the fulfilment of this covenant. So, Jesus was taking up His name and stating that He was ready to do the will of God. Since, Jesus as I AM was not merely going to monitor the situation, but take action. As people who lived in the Ancient Middle East, they would have understood the implications of Jesus' words. It has been said that,

“Perhaps the strongest claim Jesus made to be Yahweh is in verse 58, where He says, ‘Before Abraham was born, I AM.’”<sup>18</sup>

Remember that, Matthew recorded that fact that an angel had appeared to Joseph and told him,

“And she (Mary) will have a Son, and you are to name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matt 1:21 NLT).

Therefore, Jesus was to be the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham in Gen 12:1-3. So, I Am (Yahweh), in this case Jesus the Christ was revealed and ready to act in a way that, either Abraham or Moses had not known Him in their day. This was a new day and Yahweh preparing to conclude the mission redemption through Jesus Christ. In this context God was not just going to monitor the current situation of humanities sin, but take the action of deliverance and save His people from their sins.

## Some Concluding Thoughts

So, let me ask,

**Q.** What would it take for you to be more open to intentionally reading and studying your Bible more regularly?

**Q.** What can we/I do to help you in your journey?

We/I am more than willing to help you in your journey and especially in reading and studying your Bible. When reading the Bible and especially the Old Testament, do you recognise I Am and see it pointing towards a new day of the coming I AM revealed in the New Testament? It has been said,

“It is safe to believe that the inspiration of the written texts of the New Testament is an inference based on the inspiration of the Old Testament.”<sup>19</sup>

Reading your Bible frequently needs to be part of your spiritual diet. You may not have a way of reading your Bible, or have become bored with reading it. Well, if you don't already know, we have a church App for both Apple and Android phones and tablets. They are found at the Apple and Google Apps stores. If you don't have the App, why not stop right now and download it to your device? Just Google Peninsula City Church App and you will have the choice of the PenCC on the App Store - iTunes – Apple or Google Play Store. On the App, you have a button called Devotions, which has daily reading for each day of the year. Often one reading from the Old Testament and one from the New, but sometimes just from the New. You can either listen to the Bible, read it or both the choice is yours.

One practical suggestion for your bible reading if you decide to use the App is if you miss a day or two, or three, don't go back and try to make it up. Just pick up from where you are up to on the day and read from there. The whole thing regarding reading your Bible is not an obligation, but a relationship. It is growing in your relationship with the LORD; that i.e. the I AM on a daily basis. Yes, you will have setbacks, but we all do and in all areas of our lives, but that doesn't mean that we need to give up in all areas of our lives.

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<sup>18</sup> Geisler, Norman L. *When Skeptics Ask: A Handbook on Christian Evidences*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 106.

<sup>19</sup> Walton, & Sandy, *The Lost World of the Bible*, 301.



The great I Am Jesus Christ has done a great thing in your life, in that He has saved you from your sin. He did not merely monitor your situation, but He took action. He died, and rose again to give you unending and full life and blessed you as He fulfilled the promise made to Abraham so long ago (Gen 12:1-3). How do we know this? Well Paul the Apostle in the letter to the local Galatian church said that,

<sup>16</sup> “God gave the promises to Abraham and his child (seed). And notice that the Scripture doesn’t say ‘to his children (seeds), as if it meant many descendants. Rather, it says ‘to His child’—and that, of course, means Christ. <sup>17</sup> This is what I am trying to say: The agreement God made with Abraham could not be cancelled 430 years later when God gave the Law to Moses. God would be breaking his promise. <sup>18</sup> For if the inheritance could be received by keeping the Law, and then it would not be the result of accepting God’s promise. But God graciously gave it to Abraham as a promise” (Gal 3:16-18 NLT).

So, the promise was greater than both Abraham and Moses and was fulfilled in Jesus Christ the I Am as He pointed out in Jn 8:58-59. This is the I AM who died, and rose again to give you unending and full life and blessed you. What an amazing truth that was recorded in the pages of your Bible so long ago and yet, completely applies to you today.

Does this mean that you won’t have your daily ups and downs and challenges? No, but it does mean that you can draw closer to the great I AM in a personal relationship each moment of your day. This can be at home, at work, in the car, at the gym, when you are alone, while with people i.e. at any time. However, the Bible does play an important role in this relationship. The more you read and study it the more that you will know about the I AM and get to know His revealed behaviour.

Let me come back to my opening question, “Have you ever read the Bible and thought I am bored with all of this reading it over and over again?” So, where to from here? Here are a few Questions to try to help you get some direction:

1. What do you know now that you did not know before about better reading of your Bible for life?
2. What new biblical idea about the better reading of your Bible for life are you going to share with your family, friends, & those in your social circle?
3. What action are you going to take RIGHT NOW regarding this matter?
4. That is, what are you prepared to do ‘STARING RIGHT NOW,’ or change to put this new knowledge into practice in real-life situations?

It is time to read your Bible to help develop real-life solutions & processes from what you have heard today & apply them to your real-world problems, issues & relationships, etc. The apostle Paul in his last letter had written the following words before he died to his friend Timothy. These may be of encouragement to you for your Bible reading.

<sup>16</sup> “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. <sup>17</sup> God uses it to prepare and equips his people to do every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17 NLT).