

## **A Pastor's Perspective — On Reading the Bible**

“Reading Exodus in Big Chunks” by Michael Hontz

“If you could give just one piece of advice on how to get more out of my Bible study, what would it be?” I've been asked this question many times over the years. My answer today is quite different than it would have been during my earliest years in ministry. Perhaps it is surprising. To get more out of Bible study, read Scripture in larger chunks and look for the theme(s) that hold the book together.

If you're like me, you were taught to slow down and consider each word, maybe even look in Greek or Hebrew lexicons to maximize your study. While this can certainly be helpful, I've found it can also be a detriment to grasping the broader context. I would suggest first reading through an entire book of the Bible in one sitting. Longer books of the Bible (e.g., Genesis, Exodus) aren't as difficult to read through in one sitting as you might think. They require two and half to three hours; however, since most people don't have that much time to read in one day, reading a larger book in a week is more achievable.

After the initial reading, repeat the process for several days or weeks, depending on the size of the book. Repeated reading of the same book deepens understanding and appreciation. You will be amazed at the things you will notice your third and fourth times through that you previously missed. Additionally, you will begin to see literary themes that create connections between otherwise disconnected sections of the book.

When I first read Exodus in this way, I noticed how the theme of worship dominates the book. In chapters 3-10, Moses tells Pharaoh almost a dozen times to let God's people go so they can worship God. Exodus fifteen comprises a worship song about God's salvation. Four of the Ten Commandments deal directly with worship. Later portions of the book describe the tabernacle and its furnishings, as well as the priesthood and their ministry, all of which define Israelite worship for centuries to come. In chapter thirty-two, worship of the golden calf contrasts the pure form that should typify a believer. When one realizes how worship dominates the book, it isn't hard to see how other stories, such as Moses gazing on and reflecting the glory of God, fit naturally within this broader theme as well.

For me, seeing these sorts of themes tie together a book like Exodus adds value to the focused study of a single word or couple of sentences. Actually, because of my focus on this broader theme, I discovered that the word translated "worship" or "serve" in regards to God's calling his people out of Egypt (3:12, 4:23, 7:16, etc.) is the same Hebrew term translated "work" or "serve" in context of the Israelites' service of Pharaoh (1:14, 5:9, 18, etc.) which is itself a pretty interesting literary foil, but that's another article for another day.

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