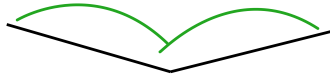


THE WARDROBE

A Sample

ENCOUNTERING THE KINGDOM OF
HEAVEN THROUGH THE BIBLE

ALAN HOARE



BROAD PLACE
publishing

broadplacepublishing.co.uk

SAMPLE FILE ONLY

First published in Great Britain in 2024

Broad Place Publishing

<https://broadplacepublishing.co.uk>

email: admin@broadplacepublishing.co.uk

Copyright © Alan Hoare 2024

The author has asserted his right under Section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the author of the work.

All rights reserved. No portion of the book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Except where otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Acknowledgements	ix
What others have said about the Bible	xi
Foreword	xv
Preface [SAMPLE INC]	xvii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 Where Did the Bible Come From?	5
Chapter 2 Can I Trust the Bible? [SAMPLE INC]	31
Chapter 3 The Big Story in the Old Testament	51
Chapter 4 The Dark Pause in the Big Story [SAMPLE INC]	83
Chapter 5 The Big Story in the New Testament	97
Chapter 6 The Approach to the Bible	125
Chapter 7 Starting to Read the Bible [SAMPLE INC]	147
Chapter 8 The Voice of God in the Bible	163
Chapter 9 Getting It Inside Me	183
Chapter 10 Constructing Solid Beliefs from the Bible	203
A Prayer Before You Start to Read the Bible	238
Appendix of Recommended Books	239
Bibliography	241
About the Author	246

PREFACE

I want to start this by retelling a well-known story. It is found in its original form in C.S. Lewis's book *The Magician's Nephew*. In the book, set in the magical and wonderful world of Narnia, a young lad called Digory is sent on a quest to find an apple from a garden located in the Western Wild. After a long and hard adventure, he brings the apple back to Aslan, the lion king of Narnia, knowing that this apple has healing properties, and thinking very much about his own seriously sick mother.

Aslan knew that Digory was thinking of his mother, and yet he told him to bury it into the soft mud by the riverbank. Digory struggled with this, but he did as he was instructed. After a difficult and mostly sleepless night, Digory awoke and quickly ran to the spot where he had buried the apple. In the morning light, he saw, to his wonder and surprise, there stood a magnificent and sweet-smelling apple tree. Aslan told Digory to pluck an apple from that tree, and then returned him, with the apple, to the world of men. When he arrived home, Digory ran up the stairs, quickly pared and cored the apple, and then fed it to his ailing mother. That evening, he took the peelings and the core and planted them at the bottom of the garden. The doctor came the next day and was amazed at her recovery.

Digory went out to the garden, and from the remains of that Narnian apple had sprung another magnificent apple tree, and it began to bear the most beautiful apples in the world, although they were not of quite the same quality as those found in Narnia itself.

One day something quite remarkable and strange happened. The sun was shining and there was a warm stillness in the air. Digory went out to the garden and to his astonishment, he saw the tree swaying as if being blown by a fierce wind. Lewis himself, describing this tree, wrote, 'But inside itself, in the very sap of it, the tree (so to speak) never forgot that other tree in Narnia to which it belonged. Sometimes it would move mysteriously when there was no wind blowing: I think that when this happened there were high winds in Narnia and the English tree quivered because, at that moment, the Narnian tree was rocking and swaying in a strong south-western gale.'¹

I remember being profoundly moved to tears as I read that passage, and the cry of my heart rose to God saying that I would love to be like that English tree. Although it was deeply rooted in the soil of earth, it would somehow pick up and respond to movements that took place in Narnia. It spoke deeply to me and became a firm conviction that, although I was planted in the earth, I could become sensitive to the conversations and movements of heaven. I came to believe also that anyone who gives serious and loving attention to the Word of God, putting down deep roots into the life of God shall also be like that tree, rooted and sensitive to the words and activities of heaven.

Many years later, the tree blew down in a large storm. Digory, now a middle-aged professor, could not bear to have it cut into firewood, and so he had it built into a wardrobe. Lewis wrote, 'and although he himself did not discover the magical

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, (Grafton, London, 2002), p.170

properties of that wardrobe, someone else did. And that was the beginnings of all the comings and goings between Narnia and our world.²

That 'someone else' was a young girl called Lucy, who one day found herself stumbling into the world of Narnia whilst hiding in that wardrobe.

The Bible, like the Narnian wardrobe, can become the wardrobe of heaven, leading to vistas of God and His kingdom. If we enter in, pushing through, we will find ourselves tumbling into this wonderful world of the kingdom of heaven. We must learn to go there often and explore the terrain.

² C.S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, (Grafton, London, 2002), p.171

A SAMPLE FROM CHAPTER 2

CAN I TRUST THE BIBLE?

The Trustworthiness of the Bible

1. Authority: The Bible is *God's Word*. For thousands of years, both Hebrews and Christians have believed that the Old Testament Scriptures are God's Word to all humankind. It contains what He has to say on the issues of life. Moreover, for centuries Christian theologians have believed that the Bible – the entire canon of Scripture – is the final authority on all matters of faith and practice.

The word 'authority' is not a favourite word today, and so it does need to be understood. The main argument for the authority of the Bible is that it contains the words, thoughts, purposes and values of God Himself, and therefore, to dismiss them, or disobey them, is to dismiss and disobey God Himself. The Scriptures contain His voice, and therefore they should command our respect, our attention and most of all, our obedience. It is hugely significant that the two English words

‘hear’ and ‘obey’ are just one Hebrew word, *shâma*. The inference is crystal clear: if we do not obey, we have not heard.

If we are confused or unsure about what to believe in any given situation, the Scriptures give clear guidance from God’s point of view. ‘Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path’ (Psalm 119:105). If we find elements of God’s Word confusing, we are encouraged to ask God for wisdom. James, the half-brother of Jesus, wrote, ‘If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.’ (James 1:5).

It is important, then, that we read the Bible with a correct understanding of its authority. If the Bible is not recognised as the final word in all matters of faith and practice, we will be completely at sea. If its authenticity and authority are questioned or doubted, then our spiritual foundations become shaky. If we are not confident about this Bible, then upon what do we stake our life and our future with Christ?

When we take Scripture lightly, we are at the mercy of our own tendencies and perceptions. This ‘take it or leave it’ attitude is so detrimental to our spiritual growth and can lead us up many a garden path!

Putting it another way: When we make ourselves the judge of the validity and authority of the Scriptures, we put our own views and perceptions above God’s. We choose whether or not it carries weight in our lives. Whenever that happens, our respect for God and what He says, will fly out of the window, and our trust in Him and what He says will slowly die. By contrast, when we trust the Bible, we feel its power. How we

view this issue, therefore, determines the shape of our theology *and* the depth of our faith.

Why do we need authority? ...

To continue reading, order The Wardrobe from:

<https://broadplacepublishing.co.uk/product/the-wardrobe/>

SAMPLE

A SAMPLE FROM CHAPTER 4

THE DARK PAUSE IN THE BIG STORY

The Bit in Between

Before we break into the big story found in the New Testament, I think it is important to give our attention to another narrative that occurred during the 400 years mentioned in the previous chapter. This time is also known as the *inter-testamental period*. W. Graham Scroggie, a wonderful Bible expositor, wrote, ‘The New Testament does not begin from where the Old Testament ends. Tremendous changes took place in all directions, and to know what these were, and what was their significance, is of the utmost importance for an understanding of how the story of the first hundred years AD was made possible.’¹

This was a long epoch where prophetic voices fell silent, and the light of God ceased to shine on the nation. It was also a season of the seeming absence of God. Within that spiritual vacuum, a melting pot was formed, which strong voices and great powers began to stir. In the ensuing darkness, the

¹ W. Graham Scroggie, *The Unfolding Drama of Redemption, Vol.2* (Kregel Publications, Michigan, 1994), p.25

political, social and religious landscape heaved and buckled in response.

It's like God was spending a lot of time rearranging the stage, getting it ready for the second half of the story. After the first part ends, the interval curtain comes down to prepare for the second. The audience can see nothing, but behind the curtain, there is a lot of movement. When the curtains open again, the scene is totally different.

Political Developments

To imagine the time frame, consider the difference between the reigns of Elizabeth I and Elizabeth II. There were many significant changes in England during that particular 400-year period. So it was with Israel between the testaments. It is important to understand, because it is the background to all that Jesus and the early church experienced.

What happened during this period is not recorded in our canon of Scripture, but much information can be found in the Apocryphal books of 1 and 2 Maccabees. This narrative, although not recognised as a sacred text by most, is probably the best historical documentation of that period. We can also find much additional material in *The Antiquities of the Jews*, written by Flavius Josephus, a Jewish historian (AD 37–101).²

There is also a prophetic glimpse in the book of Daniel. When interpreting a dream for Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2:1–45), Daniel gave a strong, accurate, prophetic flash of insight into this period of history. Nebuchadnezzar's dream was of a statue – the head was made of gold, the chest and arms were

² See Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, translated by William Whiston, (Nimmo, Hay & Mitchell, Edinburgh, 1895)

made of silver, its middle and thighs were made of bronze, and its feet were made of iron and clay. Daniel said the head of gold was Nebuchadnezzar, the present king of Babylon. He then outlined three other empires that would come after Babylon – the Medo-Persian Empire, the Greek Empire and the Roman Empire. The accuracy of Daniel's prediction is astonishing and remarkable.

The last Old Testament prophet, Malachi, prophesied under the rule of the Medo-Persian Empire, 'the chest and arms of silver' in Daniel's vision. This empire lasted for just over 200 years until, in 335 BC, Alexander the Great swept through the Mediterranean countries, pushing east as far as India. He was the 'middle and thighs of bronze'. During his time, he sowed Greek (Hellenist) culture into all the lands he conquered. Greek became the language of the day. Greek culture was essentially secular, although there was a religious side to it in 'the nodding of the head' to the Greek pantheon of gods. Polytheism ruled the day. (The apostle Paul would later encounter Greek culture and philosophy in Athens.)³

After the early death of Alexander the Great...

To continue reading, order The Wardrobe from:

<https://broadplacepublishing.co.uk/product/the-wardrobe/>

³ See Acts 17:16-32

A SAMPLE FROM CHAPTER 7

STARTING TO READ THE BIBLE

Where do I Start?

In the late 60s, when I became a Christian, I was given my first Bible by a man called John Smale, the father of my good friend, Ishmael. I opened it at the beginning, as we all normally do with a book, and started reading. Some of it was great and some of it was heavy going, especially for someone like me who had no idea what the Bible was all about! Nevertheless, I persevered and ploughed my way through.

Then I met Ralph, one of my first mentors. I mentioned him in chapter one. We were having a conversation about reading the Bible and he asked me how I did it. I told him about reading it from the beginning to the end, and that when I got to books like Leviticus and Deuteronomy, I found it heavy going. He looked at me with a smile on his face and said, 'Alan, you are having a lot of meat and potatoes in your spiritual diet. You need also a daily dose of vitamins.' He then explained that I needed to introduce into my reading portions from both the

Old and the New Testaments. I put that into practice and the heavy going got a lot easier!

Since that time, I have developed a system of reading the Bible that has proved so beneficial to me. It is a method that I have now taught for decades. I call it 'The Five Finger Method.'

Finger One – Continuous Reading

Using the analogy of the hand, the first finger is continuous reading. We need to read the Bible methodically, systematically, thoroughly and deeply. This is where we learn to go through the whole Bible, whole books, whole gospels and whole letters. This way we get the bigger picture. A.T. Pierson, in his biography of George Müller, wrote, 'Continuous reading of the Word will in due course throw light upon the general teaching of the Word, revealing God's thoughts in their variety and connection, and will go far to correct erroneous views.'⁴

There are those who skip about in their reading of Scripture, having favourite texts or passages that they often refer to. I understand that, but we do need to dig into unfamiliar areas. It is the difference between listening to our favourite albums or playlists, where you know what is coming next, and listening to the radio or someone else's playlist, where you don't know.

When replying to a group of Sadducees who had come to trip Him up in His teaching, Jesus said, 'You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God' (Matthew 22:29). The best antidote to error is a thorough knowledge of the truth. On occasions, I have asked a

⁴ A.T. Pierson, *George Müller of Bristol*, (Pantianos Classics, first published 1899), pp.168,169

congregation the question: 'How many of you have read the Bible from cover to cover?' I have watched a few hands go up, and usually it is about five percent of the people sitting in front of me.

I certainly do not recommend the 'skip about' method. This type of reading produces nothing but well-worn sections of the Bible. It would do us good to challenge ourselves with the thought that a Muslim boy in Saudi Arabia, for example, will have both read and memorised the whole of the Qur'an by the time he is 14 years old. I have rarely met someone of that age who had read the whole of the New Testament.

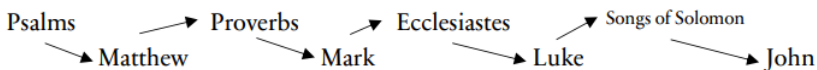
Neither do I recommend the 'open up and point' method. This is where we ask the Lord for a Scripture to help us, then randomly open the Bible and point to a text. This methodology can really lead you up the garden path. The story is told of a man who, looking for guidance, opened his Bible and rested his finger on Matthew 27:5. Unhappy with what he read he repeated the process and pointed at Luke 10:37. Still unhappy, he did it again and came to John 13:27. Have a look at them and then draw your own conclusions!

I do recommend that we develop a regular reading pattern. For an absolute beginner, I suggest starting with the Gospel of Mark, reading it right through several times. Mark was the first to write an account of the life and death of Jesus and it reads very easily. After that, read through all four Gospels several times. Then read the whole of the New Testament several times, whilst starting to go slowly through Psalms and Proverbs. Once you have done that, I recommend the following pattern of

reading to give us a truly balanced diet. It is a pattern that I have developed and adopted over the years.

Firstly, there is my *devotional* reading. I say that, because these are the eight books where I look to encounter the heart and mind of the Lord, seeking to deepen my relationship with Him. If I am honest, much of my theology has arisen from the slow, meditative reading of these books. I start with Psalm 1, and then the next day I read Psalm 2. Then, over several weeks, I read a psalm each day. (When it comes to Psalm 119, I take about a week with it, reading three or four sections at a time. They are helpfully divided into the Hebrew alphabetical order.) When I have finished the book of Psalms, I turn my attention to the Gospel of Matthew, reading one chapter daily. 28 days later, when I have finished the book, I go to the book of Proverbs, reading one chapter daily. 32 days later, I start the Gospel of Mark, followed by Ecclesiastes, followed by the Gospel of Luke, followed by the Song of Solomon, ending with the Gospel of John. On each, I read a chapter a day.

It looks like this:



Secondly, I start on my *vitamin* reading. Here I begin with the Acts of the Apostles, and then work my way through all the letters of Paul, and the others, ending with the book of Revelation. Again, I seek to read one chapter a day. I miss out the four gospels because I am already covering them in my devotional reading.

Thirdly, I get into my *meat and potatoes* reading. I make a start with the book of Genesis, and work my way through,

seeking to do three chapters a day. I read right through to the book of Malachi, missing out Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon because I am already covering them. In all, I seek to read around five chapters a day.

Having said that, please do not get hung up on the five chapters a day. That is just a rough guide. You may do considerably less one day if you come across a verse or passage that grabs your attention, inviting you to think about it and respond to it. Another day, you may read considerably more, either because you have got a lot of time on your hands, or you have got caught up in the flow of a story.

Using this approach will help you to know where you are going and to check where you are up to. Having said that, keeping to the scheme will easily get you through the whole Bible in a year.

Here is a thought for you: Robert Chapman, a contemporary of George Müller, and a devout and careful reader of the Bible, wrote, 'A careless reader of Scripture never made a close walker with God.'⁵

Let me quote at large Ralph Shallis, the man who first instilled in me a disciplined love for the Scriptures. He wrote of his own experience:

At first, I found all this discipline pretty tough going. But after a few months, it ceased to be hard: it became an unspeakable joy. God began to reveal himself to my soul in a way that no words can describe...

⁵ Robert Cleaver Chapman, *Choice sayings*, (Scholar's Choice, United States, 2015)

After I read the Bible through several times, I began to discover a positive pattern in God's thought, a sequence in his revelation. I could now follow the development of his purpose from the beginning until his final issue at the end of time...

I was discovering a new universe, the kingdom of God itself.⁶

Finger Two – Verse or Passage Study

Often when I take a walk around the lakes at the back of our house with Mo, my wife, something catches my eye, and I stop to take a closer look. In a similar way, if in our reading of the Scriptures, something catches our attention, we do well to stop. This is the moment to dig a little around what we have noticed. Think of a miner who has spotted a little glimpse of gold. He stops, digs around the nugget and eases it out.

To continue reading, order The Wardrobe from:

<https://broadplacepublishing.co.uk/product/the-wardrobe/>

⁶ Ralph Shallis, *From Now On*, (STL Books, Bromley, 1978), p. 100

A PRAYER BEFORE YOU START TO READ THE BIBLE

Dear Lord,

Please open my eyes so that I may see wonderful things in Your word, vistas of the kingdom that will draw my heart after You, truths that will set me free and cause my heart to run after You.

Please open my ears so that I may hear Your voice in the Scriptures, speaking words that are affirming, challenging, and even disturbing, words that will both build me up and never let me settle into complacency.

Please open my mind to understand the Scriptures, so that I may read them as You read them and see them in the light of heaven.

Please open my heart that I might receive Your words, so that my life may be the more conformed to Your image, that I might walk more fully in Your purposes and plans for me, and that I might partake and share even more in Your divine nature.

Amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Alan Hoare has been exercising a pastoral and teaching ministry for nearly fifty years, whilst being married to his wife, Mo. Together they have five children (now mature adults) and eleven grandchildren.

Now fully retired from church leadership, he has turned his attention to writing, mentoring and occasionally preaching. His heart has consistently been to see Christians engage meaningfully with the Bible for themselves, putting down deep roots into a life-long relationship with the God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Find out more at exploringscripture.co.uk

ABOUT BROAD PLACE PUBLISHING

Broad Place Publishing is a Christian imprint whose aim is to bring Jesus-centred books to the market. We want to see good-quality books, inspired by the Holy Spirit, brought to life and made available across the world.

We look to partner with authors and readers, developing new ways of working together, modelling Kingdom values. If you would like to support us, in prayer or financially, please go to broadplacepublishing.co.uk/support

For more information, go to broadplacepublishing.co.uk

ALSO FROM BROAD PLACE PUBLISHING



Books to encourage families in their walk with Jesus

by Joy Vee

The Kai Series (5-8s):

Kai: Born to be Super

Kai: Making it Count

Kai: Playing his Part

The Sienna Series (8-12s):

Love from Sienna

Left Out, Sienna?

The Petrov Series:

The Letters She Never Sent (8-12s)

They Whisper About Us (12+)

Adult Fiction



The Wanderer Series

by Natasha Woodcraft

“You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.”

1. The Wanderer Scorned
Cain & Abel reimagined

2. The Wanderer Reborn
Can hope triumph after the first murder?