

A Lectionary Story – Part One

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You have been asked to plan a system of Bible readings for your congregation for 2014-16. The leaders want first to look at the principles which will guide your choices.

You are excited about the project, and start work. Then it occurs to you that you are not clear whether the plan is just for Sundays, or for each day. You decide to start with a Sunday plan, determined to cover as much of the Bible as possible over .

But ... you soon run up against a major issue: there are some 750 chapters plus 150 Psalms in the Old Testament, and around 260 in the New. Even over 150 Sundays, to cover it all would mean reading three Psalms and five chapters from the Old Testament, and nearly two from the New!

Planning a set of daily readings starts to look a much more practicable proposition, but you decided to stick with a Sundays set. Thinking about it, you recall that the main purpose of the scriptures, the Word of God in writing, is to tell us about the Lord Jesus, God's Word in our flesh.

So you start by looking at the four Gospels: why not read one each year? John is very different from the others, and a whole year reading its complex chapters would be hard. The other three share a similar plan, so you decide to cover one in each if your three years, and fit John around them.

The letters in the New Testament were written to explain what being a disciple of Jesus meant for a variety of churches. Most would fit nicely into a month or so, though Romans and Hebrews are quite long and would need more than one. You know that 1 and 2 Corinthians cover a series of separate topics – unity, money, sex, the resurrection, ministry etc. – and these could fit a month each. After a bit of work, you can fit most of these letters into blocks of about 4-6 weeks each.

But what about Acts and Revelation? Easter is THE celebration of Christ, so why not make it 50 days special, using these as the base? And what about the weeks leading up to it, Lent? These could be used to make a start on reading key Old Testament passages interpreting God's work leading up to the coming of Jesus.

Sorting out what to do with the Old Testament still remains. A Bible handbook explains that the Jews ordered its books in three main parts: the Law (Genesis – Deuteronomy), the Prophets ('former', Joshua to 2 Kings and 'latter', Isaiah to Malachi) and Writings (the rest). Why not read key sections from these each year? It turns out that while the Law one works well, when the Psalms and Job are taken from the Writings not a lot is left, and you need to spread the Prophets over two years – but with some effort a plan results.

By now you are feeling quite satisfied, and even though your plan only samples the Old Testament, it looks pretty good on the New Testament. And to your delight, your leaders like it, and start planning resources for a programme of formation in the congregation.

And then – a month later you are in a Christian bookstore, where a book with 'Lectionary' in its title catches your eye. Reading it at home, you find that the plan you so carefully crafted was already in use across the English-speaking world – *The Revised Common Lectionary*, which looks like this



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| <i>Year A (2014)</i> | Genesis, Exodus (plus some other readings from the Law) Romans, 1 Corinthians 1-4, 1 Peter, 1 Thessalonians Matthew |
| <i>Year B (2015)</i> | 1 Samuel–1 Kings 8 (former prophets); Job, Proverbs, Ruth (writings) 1 Cor 5-9, 2 Cor 4-8,12; 1 John, Ephesians, James, Hebrews 1-9 Mark (and some John) |
| <i>Year C (2016)</i> | 1 Kings 19-21 (former prophets), Jeremiah, ‘minor’ (latter) prophets Hebrews 10-13, Colossians, Philemon, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, 2 Thess Luke |
| <i>Plus</i> | Isaiah is read in Advent, Acts and Revelation in Easter, John in Lent; and a psalm is provided to help the congregation respond to the first reading. |

Some questions for discussion:

- (1) As you look back over your plan, you realise that – except for special times like Lent and Easter – on most Sundays there is no particular link between the readings. What do you decide to do about this (if anything)?
- (2) What principle would you use to choose the psalms – and would you allow any to be repeated?
- (3) If there were occasions when using all three readings was too much, which would you leave out, and why?
- (4) You are helping a small group of adults prepare to be baptised, and have been asked to read ten Bible passages together with them. Which would you choose, and why?

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