

Reading the Old and New Testaments with Children

by the Rt. Rev. W. F. Pendleton

[Note: Some of these suggestions may need accommodation when teaching primary students.]

These ideas are adapted from remarks made by the Rev. W.F. Pendleton. They were originally intended as aids to help teach children, but they can help all of us pay greater attention while reading the Word and can help us gain a deeper understanding of it. These suggestions not only suggest what to look for, but point out things that would otherwise be overlooked.

1. Tell the story of the chapter.

With youngest children it is advisable for the most part to tell the story of the chapter before it is read to them. This helps to accommodate it to their state and excites their interest and desire to know more.

2. Find the general subject of the chapter or group of verses.

The general subject is usually indicated in the leading or most important word; as, *create* in Gen. I, *garden* in Gen. II, *serpent* in Gen. III, and *flood* in Gen. VI, VII, VIII; but in Gen. XXIV *betrothed* is the general subject, but the word itself does not occur.

3. Note the first thing said in a series.

We learn from *Arcana Coelestia* 8864 that the first thing said by the Lord in a series reigns throughout in what follows. This is not always clear at first glance, but when seen is of great value. In Gen. III, the cunning of the serpent is the first thing spoken of; this idea reigns throughout and is the cause of all the results which follow.

4. The leading proper name.

Note important names. First, names of the Lord, and then other leading names such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, *etc.*

5. The numbers used.

The numbers used in the Word have great significance. They are always connected with some event. Compare the use of the same number in other passages. Take the number *forty* for example: the rain of the flood was forty days and nights, Moses was in the mountain forty days and nights, the Israelites wandered forty years in the wilderness, David reigned over Israel forty years, Elijah was forty days and nights in Horeb, and the Lord was tempted of the devil forty days in the wilderness for forty days. Young children can learn that certain numbers are significant, even though they don't yet know what they signify.

6. The person speaking, the person spoken to, and the person or thing spoken of.

Notice who it is that speaks, who is being spoken to, and who or what is being spoken about.

7. The time and place.

Note whether events occur in the day or night, in the evening or morning, at dawn, at noon, or midnight. Also, note the season of the year. Note also where the events occur, in what country or land, whether on a mountain, on a sea or river, in a house, tent, or ship. These all have important representations.

8. The general affection.

Everything spoken of in the Word comes from some affection. As, Ishmael mocking, Esau's bitter cry on losing the blessing, the groaning of the Israelites in bondage, the Lord hearing their cry—indicating contempt, grief or mercy. The Writings frequently call attention to the affection in the words.

9. Compare similar words and passages.

This is important and useful in aiding understanding.

10. Comparisons and correspondences.

Young children can understand comparisons, but not yet correspondences, which are for the rational minds of adults. For example, when speaking of the Garden of Eden tell the children that this is like the heavenly paradises. When reading of the marriage of Adam and Eve, or other marriages, close by talking to them about marriages in heaven; and so throughout.

11. The Idea of God.

Note the ideas of God presented—His attributes, such as love, mercy, power, wisdom, *etc.* He creates, He saves, He punishes the evildoer, *etc.*

12. The life after death.

Note anything that suggests the life after death; as, Abraham died and was gathered to his people, Gen. XXV: 8. That is, his body was laid in the grave, but Abraham himself went to his people in the other world, *etc.*

13. The moral life.

Note such things as the obedience of Noah, Abraham, and others; or any violations of the Commandments.

14. The social life.

These things are of great interest to children; such as feasts, eating together, *etc.*, and the hospitality of Abraham to the three angels, Gen. XVIII.

15. The human mind.

Note words which express mental qualities or properties, such as love, thought, understanding, knowledge, *etc.*

16. The human body.

Note references to the body itself, or any of its parts such as the head, arm, leg, hand, foot, heart, lungs, veins. See how these are used.

17. History and geography.

Use opportunities to bring in points of geography and history. For instance, use a map to show where Egypt is, Assyria, Babylon, Damascus, or the Jordan, when mentioned. There are also interesting points of history connected with each of these places.

18. Manners and customs.

This is a very important area. Think, for instance, about the use of the scarlet thread in Joshua 11:18, and elsewhere (see *Arcana Coelestia* 9468).

19. Government and law.

Note forms of government in different stories. Look for words which suggest government, as king, ruler, kingdom, reign, dominion, army, host, *etc.* Note the laws, such as those against murder, those providing for cities of refuge, *etc.*, and compare them with laws now.

20. Worship.

Look for words that suggest worship such as altar, tabernacle, temple, sacrifice, incense, priest, prophet, *etc.*

21. Forms of Uses.

Note utensils for farming or household work, implements of war, houses, tents, ships, clothing, jewels; in short, any product of human industry. Note especially the *use* of each.

22. The who, the what, the where, the when, the why, and the how.

These words are of great value in suggesting questions to ask the children about a story.

23. Meanings and roots of words.

In Hebrew, Greek, Latin, or English. Where the knowledge of the original languages is wanting, the English dictionary is invaluable.

24. Use the English dictionary freely.

In the larger dictionaries the fund of information is great. Other books of reference can also be used.

25. Object teaching.

In most chapters there are things that may be constructed by the children in sand, or in other ways, under the guidance of the teacher. This gives the children great delight, and is invaluable for impressing the literal text on their minds.