

study one

INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE

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WHAT KIND OF BOOK IS THIS?

1. The Bible is **mostly history**.

2. The Bible is **much more** than history.

(a) It's really God's **autobiography**.

(b) This means it's a combination of the facts of history and the heart of God for all mankind. It's his plan of how He created, sustains, works in, and saves the world.

3. The Bible is a book about God's **love affair** with people, his most unique creation.

(a) John said, "God is love..." (1 John 4:8). If this is his character, then everything He does is out of love for his creation.

(b) God's love includes everyone (John 3:16).

(c) His character doesn't change (James 1:17).

4. Because the Bible demonstrates God's love for his people, it is called **salvation** history.

SALVATION HISTORY:

This term refers to the series of historical events that are specific acts of God to save his people.

SALVATION HISTORY 101

(a) Adam and Eve were created perfect (very good);

(b) Adam fell into sin, and consequently, away from God;

(c) God used the Jews to bring his chosen Messiah into the world to save the world, not just the Jews.

5. The Bible is different from a **history** textbook; the Bible is didactic, influencing how we live.

(a) It was written to **change** your life.

(Possible discussion question: How can words on a page change a person?)

(b) If you open your **heart**, it will!

(Possible discussion questions: What does it mean to "open your heart"?

Why is having an open heart so important to change? How does a Christian keep an open heart?)

DINOSAURS & SCIENTIFIC FACTS:

Why doesn't the Bible mention dinosaurs and other archaeological or scientific facts?

Answer: It's not a relevant part of his autobiography to explain prehistory and science. The purpose of the Bible isn't to explain every scientific fact, it's to reveal his character and plan.

6. Why else did God **write** the Bible?

To give people wisdom about life and to bring people **closer** to him.

(Possible discussion questions: Why should wisdom be a value to our lives?

What are the different ways it is acquired? Does everyone acquire wisdom the same way?

What are God's ways for passing along wisdom?

DIDACTIC: Intended to instruct.

[the uniqueness of the Bible]

1. Common myth: the Bible is just another "**religious**" book.

2. Facts about the Bible that make it incredibly unique:

(a) Written over a **2,000**-year span.

(b) Written by more than **40** authors, from all walks of life - educated and uneducated, Jews and Gentiles. Most of them didn't know each other.

Moses: **politician/shepherd**

Peter: **fisherman**

Amos: **herdsman**

Joshua: **general**

Luke: **doctor**

Solomon: **king**

Matthew: **tax collector**

Paul: **pharisee and tent maker**

(c) Written in different **moods**. (From times of joy to the depths of sadness.)

(d) Written in **three** different languages.

Daniel 2:20 (Aramaic)

... and said: Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his.

עֲנֵה דַנְיָאֵל וְאָמַר לְהוּא שְׁמֵהּ דִּי־אַלְהָא מְבָרַךְ
מִן־עֲלְמָא וְעַד־עֲלְמָא דִּי חֲכֻמָּתָא וּנְבוּרָתָא דִּי לְהִיָּיא:

Deuteronomy 6:5 (Hebrew)

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד:

John 3:16 (Greek)

For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον, ὥστε τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενη ἔδωκεν, ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ ἀπόληται ἀλλ' ἔχη ζωὴν αἰώνιον.

3. The Bible contains hundreds of **controversial** issues, but there is one unfolding story: God's love for his people and his work to draw them closer to him through Jesus Christ. It can truly be said that because of the prophetic elements throughout the Old Testament, the whole Bible is about Jesus.

4. Although there's GREAT diversity (i.e. voices of authority, two covenants, different styles of literature, different languages, different readers and situations, different moods and tones, etc., in the Bible, there is GREATER unity (i.e. consistent moral message, prophecies don't conflict with one another, theological themes are consistent, moral teachings are the same, and many others). How did this happen?

5. The Bible was written by the **Holy Spirit!**

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching . . . so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

If God's love letter was written to give us wisdom for life and to draw us closer to him, with great diversity and even greater unity . . . then isn't it worth our attention?

[the structure of the Bible]

1. The Bible isn't just one book. It's a collection of many books.

2. The Bible has two major divisions.

(a) Old Testament: has 39 books.

(b) New Testament: has 27 books.

What should we call the two parts of the Bible, Testament or Covenant?

Testament is usually used in terms of a person's 'last will and testament,' and determines what happens to property after death. New Testament people have access to God through Jesus.

Covenant is "an agreement between two people or two groups that involves promises on the part of each to the other."

When speaking of the Bible, the Old and New Testament are better understood as the Old and New Covenant. The agreement between God and his people is different between the Old and the New. God does not change. What changes, is how we relate to God. (See Hebrews 8:8-9.)

OLD TESTAMENT:

People have access to God through the priesthood.

NEW TESTAMENT:

People have access to God through Jesus.

TORAH:

Hebrew word meaning law, instruction, or commandment.

GOSPEL:

Greek word meaning "good news."

3. The divisions of the Old Testament:

- **Torah** or Pentateuch

Written by Moses regarding creation, the beginnings of the nation of Israel, and the Law.

- **History**

About the rise, fall, captivity, and return of the nation of Israel.

- **Poetry** and Wisdom

All from different time periods, but written mainly by David and Solomon.

- **Prophets**

Called "major" and "minor," not due to importance, but simply the size of the books.

4. The divisions of the New Testament:

- Gospels and **Acts**

About the life, teachings, and work of Jesus and the early church.

- **Letters**

Various letters written to a particular audience or person, usually for a specific purpose.

- **Revelation**

Prophecy is such a big deal it gets it's own category!

5. The Old Testament divisions and their books:

TORAH	HISTORY	POETRY & WISDOM	PROPHETS	
Genesis	Joshua	Job	Isaiah	Jonah
Exodus	Judges	Psalms	Jeremiah	Micah
Leviticus	Ruth	Proverbs	Lamentations	Nahum
Numbers	1 & 2 Samuel	Ecclesiastes	Ezekiel	Habakkuk
Deuteronomy	1 & 2 Kings	Song of Songs	Daniel	Zephaniah
	1 & 2 Chronicles	Hosea	Haggai	Zechariah
	Esther		Joel	Malachi
	Nehemiah		Amos	
	Ezra		Obadiah	

6. The New Testament divisions and their books:

GOSPELS AND ACTS	LETTERS		REVELATION
Matthew	Romans	Titus	Revelation
Mark	1 & 2 Corinthians	Philemon	
Luke	Galatians	Hebrews	
John	Ephesians	James	
Acts	Philippians	1 & 2 Peter	
	Colossians	1, 2, & 3 John	
	1 & 2 Thessalonians	Jude	
	1 & 2 Timothy		

7. The verse and chapter numbers in the Bible are not inspired, or directed, by the Holy Spirit. They were added by a monk in the Middle Ages, not by God. (And though the chapters and verses are not always in good places, they are useful for reference and study).

INSPIRATION: HOW THE BIBLE WAS WRITTEN

1. The Bible came to us through the **inspiration** of the Holy Spirit.

- No person can ever see God on his or her own. They need to be **shown**.

No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known (John 1:18).

2. The Bible was written by God **through** people. This miracle is called "inspiration."

3. Although God has revealed himself in many ways, the most significant way is through **Jesus** (Hebrews 1:1-3).

4. Our knowledge about Jesus comes from the Bible, so what we share with others about our faith includes truth from the Bible to give it **authority**.

5. Each biblical author expressed the Word of God out of his own experience:

- (a) personality
- (b) language and grammar
- (c) historical **context**

Q: If humans are imperfect, how could they write a perfect Bible?

6. Because the Scriptures are God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16), there are no **mistakes**.

WHO WROTE THAT?:
The Gospel of Luke was written by a doctor. Because of that, he uses many technical medical terms the other three books do not include.

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21).

So What's the Big Deal About Inspiration?

Since the Bible is inspired by God there are no errors. It is the ultimate authority for the truth about God and his eternal plan.

This means that when there is a conflict between:

- my feelings and the Bible . . . the Bible wins;
- my intellectual conclusions, opinions, and human reason and the Bible . . . the Bible wins;
- my personal experiences and the Bible . . . the Bible wins.

THERE IS NO CONTEST WHEN SOMEONE OR SOMETHING TRIES TO GO AGAINST THE BIBLE!

Scripture is:

- **Authoritative** for truth: includes theology, doctrine, and morality.
- **Universal:** spans across all cultures and time.
- **Sacred:** holy and inspired from God.
- **Normative:** for ALL believers and the rest of the world.

CANON:
This term comes from the Hebrew word for reed. Reed was straight and often used to measure things.

CANONIZATION: HOW THE BIBLE WAS RECOGNIZED

Now that we know the Bible is a collection of books, how did they get collected?

Who chose them? Why did they make the decision to include them in the Bible?

THE BIBLE:
A collection of inspired books.

The bigger question is: What qualifies as Scripture and what does not?

The Importance of Canon

As Christians, having the Bible is of the utmost importance. Without God's many revelations that were written down, his acts would be forgotten, misunderstood, or passed over. Without supernatural revelation, the death of Jesus would have just been another terrible evil the Roman Empire committed. Canon is the process of the Church recognizing God's true revelations as Scripture.

1. The process of canonization involves two parties:

The **author**.

The **Church** (or the people of God).

2. The author writes the Scripture through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

3. The Church recognizes (or “canonizes”) the Scripture through the revelation of the Holy Spirit. (God communicating truth, revealing that which was previously unknown.)
4. A book is canonized as Scripture based upon the evidence of inspired authorship.

IMPORTANT: The Church did not create the Canon or the Bible, but only recognized that which was already Scripture.

5. The first part to canonization is the actual writing of a book. It is simple: God worked through imperfect people to bring us his **perfect** message.
6. The second part is a bit more complicated, and the process **differs** between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

What is that evidence? What are the criteria that must be met for a book to be “put” into the Bible?

[old testament canon]

1. There is not a lot of **detailed** information about how Old Testament books were canonized. What we do know is that a near-complete version of the Old Testament was in circulation about 200 years before the birth of Christ.
2. However, there are many sources that tell us the Old Testament is Canon. While we may not know exactly how it was canonized, we do know that the process **did happen**.
3. Old Testament Canon happened in three waves or stages:
 - First: Law - 5 books
 - Second: Prophets - 8 books
 - Third: Writings - 11 books

Organization of the Hebrew Bible

The Hebrew Bible is organized much differently from our English version. They have three divisions:

TORAH: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

PROPHETS: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, The Twelve (our minor prophets).

WRITINGS: Psalms, Proverbs, Ruth, Job, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles.

4. The Old Testament Canon starts with **Moses**.
 - Moses **received** the Law (Ten Commandments and then some) from God.

At that time I stood between the LORD and you to declare to you the word of the LORD, because you were afraid of the fire and did not go up the mountain (Deuteronomy 5:5).

- Moses **wrote** them down.

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." Moses was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant--the Ten Commandments (Exodus 34:27-28).

- The people accepted his writings as **authoritative**.

Go near and listen to all that the LORD our God says. Then tell us whatever the LORD our God tells you. We will listen and obey (Deuteronomy 5:27).

5. Jesus said the Old Testament was **Scripture**.

He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms" (Luke 24:44).

And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar (Matthew 23:35).

Abel to Zechariah

Remember, the Bible that Jesus used was organized differently. Chronicles was the last book in this Bible. When he quotes Abel to Zechariah, he is talking about the ENTIRE Old Testament. Abel is in the first book, and Zechariah was in the last book.

6. The New Testament calls the Old Testament:

- Scripture (John 10:35, 19:36; 2 Peter 1:2)
- the Scriptures (Matthew 22:29; Acts 18:24)
- holy Scriptures (Romans 1:2)
- sacred writings (2 Timothy 3:15)
- law (John 10:34, 12:34, 15:25; 1 Corinthians 14:21)
- law and the prophets (Matthew 5:17, 7:12, 22:40; Luke 16:16; 24:44)

EXTRA-BIBLICAL:

This term applies to any text that is not the Bible. Often these sources help to illuminate or explain portions of the Bible. For example, a Jewish historian, Josephus, from the time of Jesus has recorded many cultural insights that aren't found in the Bible.

7. The bottom line is this: Jesus and the rest of the New Testament authors referred to the entire Old Testament as **Scripture**.

[new testament canon]

1. There were basically four criteria the early church fathers used to determine the canonicity of New Testament texts:

- **Content** (Is the book consistent with the Gospels, and the OT?)
- **Authorship** (Was the author an Apostle or did he have a sustained relationship with an Apostle?)
- **Catholicity** (Was it universally accepted by churches?)
- **Spiritual** (Does this material reveal the truth of God? Is the book spiritual in character?)

2. In the early church, about 180 A.D., elders from cities where the Church was strong, met and decided which letters in their possession had Apostolic credibility. These men of God **collected**, evaluated, and decided which of the books would be considered Christian Scripture.

3. Summary of canon:

“Jesus Himself affirmed the full authority of the Old Testament as Scripture. Then He made His own words and deeds equally authoritative, and promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would remind them of His ministry and teach them its significance. The canon of the New Testament, then, is the authoritative record and interpretation of God’s revelation of Himself through Jesus Christ.” (R. Gundry. A Survey of the New Testament, p. 58)

[what about the stuff that didn’t get in?]

1. Not **everything** made it into the Bible.

APOSTLE:

Someone who had actually seen or been with Jesus, and then personally commissioned by him to carry the message of the Gospel.

2. Some of the material that didn’t make it into the Canon can be found in the Apocrypha (definition: “hidden”).

- These books were written **in-between** the Old Testament and the New Testament. A time of about 400 years.

3. The Apocrypha was a part of the Bible called the Septuagint (abbreviated LXX).

- LXX means **70**.

- The LXX was a common **translation** used during Jesus’ time.

- The LXX was written in **Greek**, which was the language everyone knew.

COMMUNICATION:

Communication and transportation were limited when the Bible was written and recognized as canon. It’s interesting that the churches who had little or no contact often reached similar conclusions about which texts were Scripture.

4. Why is the Apocryphal literature not in the Protestant Bible?

- Jesus, the Apostles, and the first generation of church fathers after the Apostles never referred to any passage in the Apocrypha in their writings, nor did they ever refer to it as Scripture.

- The Jews do not consider the Apocrypha to be Scripture.

5. The Apocrypha is in Roman Catholic Bibles, but is not considered to be on the same **level** as the “rest” of Scripture.

ILLUMINATION: HOW THE BIBLE IS UNDERSTOOD

1. We cannot fully understand the Bible without faith in Jesus as our **Savior**.

- Why? We need the Holy Spirit to **teach** us what would otherwise be impossible to understand.

For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. “For who has known the mind of the Lord that He may instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:11-16).

But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth (John 16:13).

2. Anyone can be a Christian, so anyone can **understand** the Bible. (It does not take a degree from a Bible college to understand Scripture.)

3. Illumination is the Holy Spirit's work of making **truth** from the Bible clear when a Christian reads the Bible. This is why people are touched differently by the same passages. The Holy Spirit always teaches us what we need to know, when we need to know it. This doesn't mean the Bible is only a matter of interpretation, and that any verse can mean anything. God is consistent in the overall meaning of Scripture, but is creative and powerful enough to make it apply to various people's circumstances, in different places in the world, at every point of history.

EIGHT IMAGES THE BIBLE USES TO DESCRIBE ITSELF

1. Seed

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring Word of God (1 Peter 1:23).

2. Sword

Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17).

For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).

- In Ephesians the sword is in our hand, defending against the enemy.
- In Hebrews the sword is in God's hands, penetrating and deeply impacting our lives.

3. Food

When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God Almighty (Jeremiah 15:16).

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God' " (Matthew 4:4).

4. Milk

Like newborn babies crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation (1 Peter 2:2).

5. Hammer

Is not my Word like fire, declares the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces? (Jeremiah 23:29).

6. Fire

Therefore this is what the LORD God Almighty says: "Because the people have spoken these words, I will make my words in your mouth a fire and these people the wood it consumes" (Jeremiah 5:14).

7. Lamp

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path (Psalm 119:105).

8. Mirror

Anyone who listens to the Word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that

gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--he will be blessed in what he does (James 1:23-25).

PROBLEMS IN UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

1. The New Testament was written almost **2000** years ago, and the Old Testament is even older. This naturally leads to some problems in our understanding of the text.

2. Differences in culture:

- we've never had a **king**;
- we've (probably) never farmed or raised **sheep**;
- we've never performed an Old Testament **sacrifice**;
- we don't live in **tribes**;
- we've never lived under the oppression of the **Philistines**;
- we've never lived in a house made of mud, straw, and **brick**;
- we don't live in a Hellenistic **culture**;
- we don't have a formal **priesthood**;
- we don't travel by camel or **donkey**;
- we don't write on papyrus or **clay tablets**.

THREE STRIKES:

If someone told you they always strike out when they take a test, then you know that they are terrible test takers.

Would you know what they mean if you never heard about the game of baseball?

3. Differences in **language**.

(The Hebrew reads right to left.)

4. Differences in common **knowledge**. The author is writing to an audience that has a specific point of reference as to the context of what is written. The letters of the New Testament were written for a specific purpose, and we often know very little about what that was. It's like listening in on a phone conversation or reading a letter from someone you don't know to someone you've never met. When the Old Testament talks about the "Kings of Israel," it is giving an incomplete picture and reference to another book.

- As for the other events of Solomon's reign-- all he did and the wisdom he displayed-- are they not written in the book of the annals of Solomon? (1 Kings 11:41).

5. We are filled with our own **assumptions**.

6. The key to understanding the Bible is to first understand it in its own context and then bring that truth into **today**.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Congratulations! You made it through a lot of material. If some of it was confusing, don't worry!

Most of the material in this lesson is background information, relevant to reading the Bible. Hopefully, you've learned some things that will fill in the gaps and help you understand the Bible next time you read it.

Our challenge to you: Go back to the section called "8 images the Bible uses to describe itself," read through it again, and reflect on how the Bible should impact your life. It's our prayer that your love for God's Word will grow.

APPENDIX A:

Advanced Bible Study Method

Here is a good process to use in interpreting a particular biblical text.

(Step 1) Observation: What does the author say?

- (a) Read and survey a unit of Scripture (book, chapter, pericope, paragraph).
- (b) Read and survey the context.
- (c) Ask questions (Who? Where? When? What?).
 - Who are the characters?
 - Where is the unit occurring?
 - When is the unit occurring?
 - What is happening?
- (d) Title the unit.
- (e) State the theme of the unit in one sentence.
- (f) Outline, diagram, and/or chart the unit.

PERICOPE:

Another word for a context-defined unit of Scripture. The parable of the Good Samaritan is a pericope.

(Step 2) What did the author originally mean?

- (a) Ask questions (Who? Where? When? What?).
 - Introduction Is there an introductory sentence or paragraph?
 - Interrogation Why? How? Who? Where? When? What?
 - Comparison How are things similar?
 - Contrast How are things different?
 - Interchange Are there alternating elements?
 - Unifying Theme What theme permeates the unit?
 - Continuity How does theme relate to the context?
 - Cause and Effect Does one action or statement cause another?
 - Progression How are themes developed?
 - Repetition Are there any ideas or phrases repeated?
 - Cruciality Is the unit arranged around one pivotal point?
 - Summarization Is there a portion of the unit that summarizes the activity or thought of the unit?

- (b) Study major terms.
- (c) Summarize and evaluate meaning of unit as a whole.

(Step 3) Understanding and Application: What does it mean for today?

- (a) Evaluate: What have you learned? What principles does the unit teach that have meaning for every age? What are the results?
- (b) Meditate on the theological, spiritual, and ethical implications.
- (c) Dedicate the principles you've discovered to your life:
 - What has been said to me?
 - How should my attitudes respond to these truths?
 - How should my behavior respond to these truths?
- (d) Communicate:
 - What would you teach to others? What applies only to your life?
 - How would you teach this to others?