

Session 1: The Nature, Organization and Story Line of The Bible

Questions and index cards

Our word Bible comes from the Greek word *biblos* which means book. We often refer to it as the Holy Bible because holy means separate, distinct or different.

And Christians have always felt that the Bible is not just a book, but it's the Book,

different from all other books because it is the book God gave us to teach us about himself.

Sometimes you will hear the Bible referred to as The Scriptures.

You can see in the word scriptures the smaller word script.

Scripture comes from a Latin word meaning writing.

So "The Scriptures" means "The Writings."

The Writings that God has given us to reveal himself and tell us how to live lives that please him.

The Bible – The Scriptures, they refer to the same thing.

WHAT IS THE BIBLE

There are many ways to answer that question.

1. The Bible is a book consisting of many books.

The Bible as we have it contains 66 books, written by approximately 40 authors,

over a period of something like 1500 years.

It is divided into the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Testament means covenant or agreement.

The Old Testament covers the period before the birth of Christ, beginning with the creation of the world in the book of Genesis.

The New Testament covers the period from the birth of Christ through the expansion of the early church.

And with the book of Revelation we also find in the New Testament a description of what will happen in the future, including the return of Christ and eternity with God.

The Old Testament contains 39 books – all written in Hebrew, except for a few brief passages written in Aramaic. (A few chapters in Daniel and a few in Ezra. In NT several phrases: ephphatha; Eloi, Eloi lama sabachtani, talitha koum, maranatha, abba.) (First shows up in Gen and was probably the common language of the masses in Palestine in Jesus' day.)

The New Testament contains 27 books – all written in Greek which was the common language of the western and much of the eastern world during the time of Christ.

(Hellenization -- Alexander)

In the Old Testament God made a covenant with the people of Israel that he would be their God and they would be his people.

There are several covenants in the Old Testament, but the one we think of most is the Mosaic Covenant, the covenant God made with his people through Moses at Mt. Sinai.

Though this is an oversimplification, it was a covenant that stressed Law.

In the Old Testament we find God promising that he would do a new thing that would result in a new covenant.

Jeremiah 31.31-34: "The time is coming when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ...³³ This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.³⁴ No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

The New Covenant was instituted in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Luke 22.19-20: And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying,

“This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”²⁰In the same way,

after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood,

which is poured out for you.”

Again, this is an oversimplification, but the New Covenant is a covenant of grace.

John 1.17: For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus

Christ.

The New Testament is the record of the New Covenant of grace that was brought to the world in Christ.

The Bible is one book, consisting of many books, divided into Old and New Testaments.

We’ll come back to the books of the Bible in just a few minutes. How they’re organized and what kinds of literature they are.

2. The Bible is a divinely inspired book.

The Bible consists of 66 books, written by over 40 authors, living in different cultures over a period of something like 1500 years. How can we call it a single book?

Behind the 40 different human authors who wrote the books of the Bible there was a divine author inspiring their thoughts and their writings. Though these books come at spiritual truth from different angles and perspectives, there is a unity of witness and purpose because one God is their ultimate author.

God has revealed himself in many ways.

In creation.

Through the prophets.

In Christ.

And in the Scriptures.

God is a God who wants us to know him.

That's why we talk about having a relationship with God

and we try to let you know that having a religion about God is not the same thing as having a relationship about God.

Why must God reveal himself to us?

Because he is different than we are.

There are some similarities.

God is a personal being, not just some cosmic force.

Being personal means that God has intellect, emotions, and a will.

We, too, are personal beings.

God is a moral being.

We, too, know that there is a right and a wrong,
moral good and moral evil.

The reason there are similarities is because we are made in God's image.

But the Bible is clear.

God is not just a bigger one of us or a better one of us.

He is a different type of being,

unlike anything we find in the natural world.

His nature, his power, his purity, his intellect are unlike anything we can
imagine or comprehend.

And left on our own,

we would know so little about him that we could not truly say we know
him.

Isaiah 55.8-9: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. ⁹ "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

If God wants us to know him, then he must reveal himself, because on our own we're never going to think our way to him or figure him out.

So God has made himself known in many ways.
And of the means he has used is a written record of what he has done and what he has revealed about himself.
And that's what we call the Bible or the Scriptures.

2 Timothy 3.15-17: ...from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Peter 1.20-21: Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. ²¹For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

The Bible is the Word of God in the words of men.
When we say God inspired the writing of the Bible,
we don't mean that he turned its human authors into computer keyboards.
The different books express their human author's personality, vocabulary, writing style, and historical setting.

By saying that the Bible is God-inspired,
we mean that it's more than the thoughts that godly men had about God.
It's not just whatever the biblical authors happened to be thinking about when
they wrote the books that bear their names.
It is more than a human product.
It is the work and the Word of God.

Jesus in John's Gospel is referred to as The Word.

John's Gospel opens, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God."

Later in that same chapter it says, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

Jesus took on flesh – in particular the flesh of his mother, Mary. God and Mary together gave birth to Jesus, fully human and fully divine.

Mary was not just an empty vessel,
a conduit for the birth of Jesus,
she was his mother.
Her DNA was a part of her son's physical body
and influenced his personality.
But that didn't make Jesus less divine.
It simply made him human.

It's possible for God to use the nature and the gifts of human beings
and to bring forth something through them that's still divine and perfect.

And that's what we mean when we say Scripture is divinely inspired.
God used human authors,
their knowledge and their personalities.
But he still brought forth exactly what he wanted – what we called the
written word of God.

We could go in much more detail here.
But it's important to say that Jesus accepted what we call the Old Testament
as God's word and submitted to its authority.
The Old Testament was the Bible of his day.
And if the Old Testament said it,
for Jesus it was the same as God saying it.

And we also find that Jesus made provision for the New Testament to have
the same status as a divinely inspired witness to the truth.

Jesus promised his apostles that they would be divinely aided to
convey the truth in the future to others accurately and faithfully.
Interesting note, apostle was not first a religious term.

It was used of official representative who were sent out (that's what apostle means: one who is sent out) by a government official with that official's authority.

An emperor might send out an apostle to speak in his name or negotiate a treaty and that apostle would have the emperor's authority and his words were treated as the words of the emperor.

Jesus promised divine help for the apostles to teach others what he taught them.

John 14:25-26: All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

Jesus promised divine help for the apostles to teach additional spiritual truth that they and the church would need.

John 16:12-13: I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. ¹³But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

Jesus promised that his apostles would be inspired by the Holy Spirit (1) to remember and convey his teachings accurately and (2) to receive additional truth from the Father that they would teach to God's people.

Those who wrote the Bible were inspired by God to write it, both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

That means

3. The Bible is an authoritative book.

If the Bible is inspired by God, then it is a dependable and reliable source for determining spiritual truth.

There's even more to it than that.

It is authoritative – it sets the standard by which other claims to spiritual truth are to be judged.

When it comes to determining spiritual truth.

There are many tools that can help us.

Our reason.

Our experiences.

What the church has taught throughout the ages.

But if the Bible is God's inspired revelation,

then we can never use our reason, our experiences or what the church has taught to contradict what the Bible says.

We can use those tools to help us understand the Bible,

but not to override it because we don't like what it says.

The early church had to decide which writings God had actually inspired to be his authoritative revelation.

And they agreed upon the books we have in our Bibles.

If you're interested in how these books were determined, we can look at that another week.

There were two primary requirements for a book to be accepted as God's Word by the early church.

1. It was written under the authority of an apostle.

2. It was widely accepted throughout the church.

It wasn't a book that a few churches in one part of the Roman Empire claimed had come from Peter or John but none of the other churches throughout the rest of the known world had never read or heard of.

The books that the church accepted as God-inspired were known as the canon.

Canon comes a Greek word meaning measuring stick.

And the church recognized the 66 books we have as the measure by which all other claims to spiritual truth would be judged.

The Bible is not one of many inspired books about God,

it is the inspired witness to God and the truth he has given us.

And where other truth claims differ from the teachings of Scripture,

Scripture is authoritative.

I've read that FBI agents who specialize in recognizing counterfeit bills spend most of their time studying the real thing. They come to know what genuine bills are like so thoroughly that they can almost immediately recognize what's false.

And that's the way it is with the Bible. We don't need to study every false teaching and heresy to recognize them. We need to study the genuine, authoritative truth of the Gospel, and then it's easy to compare what's false to what's real and to see where it doesn't measure up.

The Bible is our measuring rod and our authority for spiritual matters.

(Aside – we might misunderstand or misinterpret what the Bible teaches, so we need to hold our opinions with humility and grace – but the problem is with us, not with the Bible.)

4. The Bible is an essential book.

Back to

2 Timothy 3.15-17: ...from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able

to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

We need the Scriptures to learn what it means to live lives that please God. How do we become wise about matters related to salvation? How do we learn spiritual truth? How do we see where we are in error, become corrected and trained for right living?

All that is found in the Bible.

God's ways are not our ways, his thoughts are not our thoughts.

If we live by what comes to us naturally, or if we guide our lives by nothing more than what our minds tell us, we will fail to do God's will or live by his ways.

So it's essential that we read the Bible, understand it, and put into practice what it teaches.

That's why we're having this course.

Ok, there's more that could be said about the nature of the Bible, but let's move on.

How is the Bible organized?

Here I want you to see the forest and some of the trees.

We've already said that the Bible is divided into two Testaments. The Old Testament comes first and records events that occurred before the coming of Christ.

It has 39 books and is a little more than three times the length of the New Testament.

How are the 39 books of the Old Testament organized?

Not chronologically.

You can't just start reading through the Bible and get from the beginning of the story to the end in linear fashion like you can in many novels or history books. (COMMON MISTAKE)

Not by topic and not by the date they were written.

They are organized by literary type.

Look at the chart How The Bible Is Structured (Chart 1 in right hand corner)

The first 17 books are historical in nature.

They tell the story line of the Old Testament.

And they are for the most part in chronological order, but not completely.

The next five books are poetical in nature.

Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon (aka The Song of Songs)

The next 17 are prophetic in nature.

The prophets from Isaiah to Daniel are referred to as the major prophets.

From Hosea to Malachi are known as the minor prophets.

How are these organized?

Catch this: primarily by length.

Big ones up front, smaller ones toward the back.

Look at the chart titled **The Three Kinds of Books in The Old Testament** to see how they hold together. (Chart 2)

Part of the problem we have in reading the Bible is not knowing the story line.

So we pick it up and start reading and we don't know where we are or what's going on,

and it's no wonder that we don't get what it's trying to tell us.

Story Line of the Bible – do Old Testament. (Chart3)

(put in extras)

Review it using Chart 4.

Show them Chart 5.

How is The New Testament Organized?

Again, the books are organized by literary type.

Look at the bottom half of the chart How is The Bible Structured (Chart 1).

The first five we can call historical.

They are the four Gospels.

The Book of Acts.

Gospel means “good news.”

Acts is short for The Acts of The Apostles and tells the story of the Holy

Spirit coming upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost and then the spread of the Gospel and the establishment of churches, primarily around the Mediterranean Sea.

The next section is the Epistles.

Epistle is more or less synonymous with letter.

Most of the books of the New testament are letters
and the majority of those were written by Paul.

Scholars refer to them as the Pauline epistles.

Paul's letters come first – there are 13 in all.

The first 9 are letters to churches again arranged mainly according to size,
with the longest letters first.

The next 4 are written to individuals – Timothy, Titus, and Philemon.

The 8 letters that follow are called the General epistles.

Paul's letters are named for the church or the individual to whom they are
addressed.

The first of the General Epistles is the book of Hebrews which was written
to Jewish Christians, though we don't know if it was meant for a
particular congregation or for a wider audience, and is named accordingly.

The other General Epistles are named for their author.

James, Peter, John, and Jude.

The final book of the New Testament is the book of Revelation (no s).

It is a different kind of literature than the rest of the Bible.

It is an apocalypse.

Apocalyptic literature was common in Jesus' day and it was a description of
the end times, usually with a word of hope for believers as well as an
exhortation to remain faithful to the end.

The author is John – who also wrote the Gospel of John and the 3 epistles
that bear his name.

To conclude issues of authorship,

The Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts were both written by Luke,
a Gentile who traveled with Paul on many of his missionary journeys.

Big picture of the New Testament story line.

Chart Story of the Bible. (Chart 3 bottom)

What Kind of Bible Should I Read?

There are many good translations available.

Here are three that I recommend.

If you are just beginning, I'd suggest

1. The New Living Translation, Life Application Study Bible

This can be confusing.

The New Living Bible is a particular translation.

The New Living translation is meant to be an accurate translation that is very readable.

Instead of using a theological term like justify, it will take a couple of nontechnical words like made right and put them in its place.

The Greek word is the word for justify.

So you could argue that justify would be a more accurate translation.

But, since most guys who are just starting to read the Bible don't know what the Bible means by justify, it's helpful to have biblical scholars translate it in a way that's very accessible.

When you start reading the Bible, it can be confusing if you don't know some of the jargon.

So, it's best to start with a translation that gives you as much help as possible.

Romans 8.1-4

King James Version: ¹There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. ²For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. ³For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: ⁴That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

New International Version: ¹Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ²because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. ³For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, ⁴in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

New Living Bible: ¹So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. ²For the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you through Christ Jesus from the power of sin that leads to death. ³The law of Moses could not save us, because of our sinful nature. But God put into effect a different plan to save us. He sent his own Son in a human body like ours, except that ours are sinful. God destroyed sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. ⁴He did this so that the requirement of the law would be fully accomplished for us who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit.

Why not King James

The phrase behind The New Living Translation is “Life Application Study Bible”.

Life Application Study Bible refers to all the aids that a publisher has included to help you understand what you’re reading.

(Many different study Bibles, have different helps.)

At the beginning of each book, it will tell you who wrote it, what was going on that caused the book to be written, who it was written for and it will provide an outline of the book.

Also, it will give you the book’s big themes so you can look for them as you read and be better able to get the message of the book.

It has time lines and maps and biographical sketches on the key figures in the book.

And at the bottom of each page, it will have comments on various verses that will help you follow what’s going on. (Extremely helpful – poetry: annotated notes.)

2. Another good option is the New International Version, Life Application Study Bible.

Same helps as we just described, only a different translation.

The New International Version has become the standard translation.

It’s hard not to suggest it, but if you’re just getting started try the New Living, and then move up to the New International.

If you’ve been reading the Bible for a good while, I’d go with The New International Study Bible.

It has many of the helps I mentioned above with the Life Application Study Bible.

But its notes are more detailed and aren't trying to be as good about helping you follow the story line.

They are less commentary and more an explanation about the meaning of particular words and how what you're reading relates to other parts of Scripture.

Once you decide on the kind you want,

then you have to decide if you're getting leather or hardcover or paperback.

Your cost will go up to \$70 or \$80 if you get leather and fine paper.

Let me suggest you get a cheap version of one of the Bibles I've listed below.

Either a cheap hardcover or a paperback version.

And then when you read, read with a pen in your hand, and write in your bible.

Circle words, write notes in the margin, put a question mark by something you don't understand and you want to look up later.

If you're reading, and God reveals something to you, or prompts you to pray about a truth you're learning, mark it and come back to it later, either for further reflection or prayer.

The Bible is holy because God inspired it.

But you honor it by studying it not by keeping its pages pristine and the cover nice.

If you want a Bible that 20 years from now will look as good as it does the day you bought it, buy two.

One to read and study, and one to carry around and impress people.

Are there other helps as I get started reading the Bible?

Let me suggest just one.

It's what's called a Bible Dictionary.

Two I'd recommend.

New Bible Dictionary, Wood, Millard, Packer, Wiseman, Marshall, eds.
New International Bible Dictionary, Douglas and Tenney, eds.

The title says Dictioanry, but it's more like a mini-encyclopedia.
Practically all the topics you'll ever want to know about related to the Bible.

Does give you info on books of the Bible – who wrote it, when, why,
outlines, major themes. Similar to what you find in a good study Bible
but more in depth.

But also lengthy articles on topics as varied as the Temple, predestination,
the plants and animals of the Bible, leprosy, the ark of the covenant – any
topic you come across in the Bible and you need to know more about it to
understand what you're reading, it'll help.

DAILY READINGS

Tuesday: John 12.20-33

Wednesday: 2 Corinthians 5.16-6.2

Thursday: Romans 5.1-11

Friday: 1 Corinthians 1.18-25

Saturday: Matthew 16.21-28

Sunday: Matthew 21.1-17

Monday: Mark 14.1-11

Tuesday: John 13.1-17

Wednesday: Mark 14.12-31

Thursday: Luke 22.39-62

Friday: Matthew 27.32-56

Saturday: Psalm 22

Easter: Matthew 28.1-20

Monday: Luke 24.13-35