



BIBLE STUDY BASICS

Developing Bible Literacy

Why study the Bible?

Studying the Bible trains the mind, placing God at the center of the story, and consequently, through the work of the Holy Spirit, transforms our heart. Practically, when we study the Bible, we increase in Bible literacy.

What is Bible literacy?

An on-going, developing understanding of the Bible – how to responsibly read it and interpret it.

What is the Bible?

- 1) A library of 66 books of ancient writings;
- 2) Written over a period of approximately 1,400-1,500 years by roughly 40 human authors;
- 3) Contains different literary styles: narrative, poetry, discourse, prophecy, history, hymns, biography, apocalyptic, love songs;
- 4) The Bible that we know today came about by combining the Jewish Bible (the Tanakh) with the apostolic writings (what we call the New Testament);
- 5) The Old Testament: Hebrew and Aramaic (the language spoken in ancient Palestine); Collected and categorized into Law, Prophets, Writings well before Jesus' time (as early as 5th Century BC).
- 6) The New Testament: "Koine" Greek ("common language" Greek).
By about the 3rd century BC, the Old Testament scriptures were translated into koine Greek. This is what is referred to as the Septuagint.
The Gospels and epistles of the New Testament were written between 50-90 AD.
By 397 CE (the Council of Carthage), the 27 books of the New Testament were "canonized" into our current version of the New Testament.

What do we believe about the Bible?

1. Scripture is God's revelation of God's self to humanity to provide us with all that we need to know about God, the mysteries of faith, and the true Living Word - our Lord Jesus Christ.

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2. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, we experience Scripture as inspired by God, enabling us to have an encounter with God by reading it. God speaks to us through it. The Reformer John Calvin said (and we believe!) that the authority of Scripture is not in the words themselves but in the activity of the Holy Spirit at work.
3. Scripture is the human medium for divine revelation. God is at work in and through the writer. The words are God-breathed and with human fingerprints on them. All was written by specific people in particular circumstances using the human language of the time (which is always an imperfect language when referring to God), AND, it has been copied, edited, recopied (etc.,) over time. This entire process is a witness to the guiding hand of God. We can trust that all that God wanted to reveal to us in the written word has been, by the power of the Spirit, preserved in Scripture.
4. All of Scripture points to the Lord Jesus Christ (per Jesus on the road to Emmaus). This is pure Christian belief (Aquinas, Reformation, Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, etc.).
5. The Bible is meant to be read and understood in community.

What does the Bible say about the Bible?

Psalm 1:1-2 Blessed is the one
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
but their delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law they meditate day and night.

Psalm 19:9-10

The ordinances of the Lord are...more desired than gold...
sweeter than honey...

Mark 4:1-20

The Parable of the Sower

John 20:31

...these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man/woman of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

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What do others say about Scripture?

Book of Confessions:

“We believe and confess the canonical Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles of both Testaments to be the true Word of God, and to have sufficient authority of themselves, not of men. For God himself spoke to the fathers, prophets, apostles and still speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures. And in this Holy Scripture, the universal Church of Christ has the most complete exposition of all that pertains to a saving faith, and also to the framing of a life acceptable to God; and in this respect it is expressly commanded by God that nothing be either added to or taken from the same.” (2nd Helvetic Confession, 1566)

“The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture...we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word.” (Westminster Confession, 1640’s)

John Calvin: Scripture is where God reveals himself; Scripture has its authority from God, not from the church

Karl Barth: God’s unique revelation to us – human words shaped by God to serve as a revelation to us; it is a “living” witness to Jesus Christ; a meeting between the infallible God and the fallible writers – God uses our fallible means of language to communicate with us.

How does the Bible change us?

- By the power of the Holy Spirit, Scripture informs more than our intellect. It also fires our imaginations, fuels our emotions, guides our behavior, inspires new perspectives, gives us words for prayers, teaches us thoughts to entertain. Ultimately, our reading of the Bible leads us to desire closeness to our God and it teaches us how to establish that closeness. It leads to our transformation.
- The Bible tells the narrative of God and God’s interaction with God’s creation. Even though we read about people alive thousands of years ago in the Bible, we today are still a part of the narrative. The Bible compels us to understand *our* story in light of the story of God’s dealings with the world. When we bring our story to God’s story, our story is no longer our own, but it becomes part of God’s own story. We redefine ourselves as we can see how God has been at work in our lives because we have learned in Scripture how God works in the lives of God’s people.
- The Bible is the place where we meet Jesus and develop a relationship with him.

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“Of course, any Bible itself is “just a book,” ink from humans on a page. And we do not change because we have a relationship with a book. We change through a relationship with a person – God Himself. This is why the Bible has a life-giving quality. When we go to the Bible to encounter God, what we find surprises us. We encounter something far more compelling than an arid theology or philosophy. We feel the grasp of a warm hand in ours.” (Temper Longman, *Reading the Bible with Heart and Mind*)

STARTING POINT: The Metanarrative of the Bible

CREATION --- FALL --- REDEMPTION --- RESTORATION

“The Bible purposes to tell us this Big Story [metanarrative] in a thousand smaller stories, from its first page to its last.” (Jen Wilkin, *Women of the Word*)

TWO TASKS:

1. In order to understand what it means today, we first look at what it meant to its original writers/hearers. This is called “exegesis.” God’s Word for us today is what God’s Word was for them, the original readers/hearers/learners.
 - We become Bible archaeologists, and to dig deeper into the treasures of the Bible, we need good tools.

A Study Bible

Life Application Study Bible (NIV), Zondervan Publishing

The ESV Study Bible, Crossway Publishing

The Harper Collins Study Bible (NRSV), HarperOne Publishing

BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

The Bible was originally written in: HEBREW, ARAMAIC, and GREEK.

Freely read the Bible on Bible Gateway in more than 200 versions and more than 70 languages including:

TWO APPROACHES
Two main philosophies behind translating the Bible range on a continuum between:

▶ **WORD-FOR-WORD**
Adhering to the words and structure of the original language without sacrificing clarity.

▶ **THOUGHT-FOR-THOUGHT**
Prioritizing clarity and understanding of the meaning of the original language without sacrificing accuracy.

Amplified Bible
Christian Standard Bible
Common English Bible
Contemporary English Version
Easy-to-Read Version
Evangelical Heritage Version
English Standard Version
God's Word
Good News Translation
International Children's Bible
International Standard Version
King James Version
The Living Bible

The Message
Modern English Version
New American Bible (Revised Edition)
New American Standard Bible
New Century Version
New English Translation
New International Reader's Version
New International Version
New King James Version
New Living Translation
New Revised Standard Version
Revised Standard Version
The Voice

Bible translations represented in this spectrum by their abbreviations are available for reading on Bible Gateway

- www.Biblegateway.com This is an excellent way to look up scriptures on-line from a large selection of translations. You can also compare translations. There are other useful tools on Biblegateway.
- www.blueletterbible.com This is a great way to look up the meaning of various biblical words, including the original Hebrew and Greek words.
- *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*, Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart – This book is an essential reference book to have nearby when reading the Bible because it helps contextualize each book and explain cultural meaning that might not be apparent at face value.
- www.bibleproject.com All of the videos on this website are extremely well written and clearly explained (and illustrated!). You can watch videos about every book of the Bible, as well as various themes of the Bible.
- We need good questions to bring to the text. Questions about context and content. The key “W” questions to start with are:
 - What? (What is the genre of writing?)
 - Who? (Who wrote it, who was it written to/for?)
 - When? (When was it written?)
 - Where? (Where was it written from and/or where is it being written to?)
 - Why? (What was the reason for this text being written?)

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Keep in mind:

- It is important not to overcomplicate reading Scripture. It is meant to be understood just by sitting and reading it.
- The passages have one meaning, except prophecy which usually has two meanings.
- Some of Scripture is prescriptive, some is descriptive.
- The Bible has remarkable unity to it. We seek counsel for Scripture first *from* Scripture. Cross-referencing other scriptures may help give further illumination to the meaning of an excerpt.

2. We learn how to hear the same meaning in the variety of contexts of our current day. We bring together the gap between the ancient world within which the text was written and the present day within which we live. This is called “hermeneutics.” This is dependent upon our first task, exegesis, and there are very few “rules” of hermeneutics, although good biblical scholars try to apply the same “hermeneutic” throughout the Bible. The single most important rule to remember here is: *The Bible cannot mean today what it NEVER meant.* This is why we start by “excavating” what text meant in its original context.