

What is The Bible?

The Bible, which comes from the Latin word for library, is a collection of 66 books, written over 1500 years by dozens of authors in many different genres.¹ Though multiple human authors wrote the books that make up the Bible, it is divinely inspired by God. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 clearly affirms this— “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” This is why we refer to the Bible as the *Word of God*. God sovereignly used the Biblical authors, with their own styles and experiences, to accomplish His own purpose.

The Story

The story of Bible can be summed up in 4 different acts: *Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration*.

I. Creation:

In the beginning, God created the world and everything in it. Everything was perfect, and the man and woman God had created, enjoyed perfect fellowship with God. God commanded them to be fruitful and multiply and to subdue the earth. The only thing he prohibited them from doing was eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge and good and evil.

II. Fall:

The serpent, later identified as Satan in Revelation, tempted man and woman to eat of forbidden fruit, and as a result, sin and death entered into the world. Man's perfect

relationship with God was fractured, and he and the woman were removed from the garden and the very presence of God. Despite this bad news in Genesis 3, there is a glimmer of hope in Genesis 3:15, God promised that the offspring of the woman would one day bruise the head of the serpent.

As time went on, mankind grew and so did the perversion of sin. At one point God even wiped out the entire population with a flood save one man and his family. God set apart for Himself a particular people and gave them the standard of righteousness, the Law, but they all fell short due to the sinful nature inherited from their first parents as a result of their rebellion in the garden.

III. Redemption

At long last, a child was born in Bethlehem thousands of years later. His name was Jesus, and He fulfilled the righteous requirement of God's Law because He was in fact God himself in human flesh. He was also the promised child that would bruise the head of the serpent, but the serpent would "bruise His heel" as well. Jesus Christ died bearing the wrath of God deserved for sinners, but three days later He rose again from the grave conquering both sin and death—the result of the fall. In short: Jesus Christ was born in our likeness, lived the life that we couldn't, died the death that we deserved, and rose again that we might live forever with Him.

IV. Restoration

Because of Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection, all who put their trust in Him for salvation will be saved. They are counted as righteous before God and can once again enjoy fellowship with Him with Christ as their mediator. Ultimately, both

heaven and earth will pass away, and all of those who put their faith in Jesus Christ will dwell with Him in the New Jerusalem where they will once again be in the presence of God just as man and woman were in the Garden of Eden.

Organization

The Bible is organized into two main sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is composed of 39 books (Genesis—Malachi) while the New Testament contains only 27 (Matthew—Revelation). The Old Testament is made up of 4 primary parts: The Law (Genesis—Deuteronomy), The Histories (Joshua—Esther), Poetic and Wisdom Literature (Job—Song of Solomon), and The Prophets (Isaiah—Malachi).² Within the New Testament we find the historical account of Jesus, also referred to as The Gospels, and the early church (Matthew—Acts) followed by the Epistles, or letters (Romans—3 John), and John’s Revelation of Christ at the end.

Both testaments are equally valuable because they are both equally the Word of God, but what separates the two is the way God chooses to reveal Himself to His people. The author of Hebrews explains it well when he writes, “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world” (Hebrews 1:1-2). The New Testament is marked by the birth of Jesus. Jesus Christ is the center of the story of the Bible.³ Everything either leads to Him or happens because of Him. One of the best explanations of the Bible can be found in the *Baptist Faith and Message*:

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.⁴

How to Study the Bible

Now that we have established what the Bible is and how it is structured we will discuss how to study it for all it is worth. There are three main steps to studying the Bible: Observation, Interpretation, and Application.

1. Observation

The first step to studying the Bible is observation. Observation is simply reading through the chosen passage and making note of what you see. It is helpful in this step to ask *Who?*, *When?*, and *Where?* Answering questions like “*Who* wrote this?” and “*When* was this written?” provides a proper context to the passage you are studying. After all, “a text without a context is a pretext.”⁵ This step might seem tedious and make studying the Bible seem like homework, but establishing the context of the passage you are studying is crucial to proper interpretation and application of the text.

2. Interpretation

The second step in studying the Bible is interpretation. Interpretation is establishing the meaning of the passage you are studying. Many people attempt to jump right into interpretation when studying the Bible, but without establishing the context, the reader can risk interpreting the Bible incorrectly.⁶ When interpreting the Bible we are

asking the question, “*what does this mean?*” There are *not* multiple interpretations of the Bible, which is why we must be careful. In fact, “to engage in interpretation assumes that there is... a proper and improper meaning of a text.”⁷

Interpreting the Bible is an extremely serious matter. You should always approach it prayerfully and in an attempt to be faithful and obedient. If you come across a confusing passage it is always a good idea to interpret scripture with other scripture. Cults and heretical groups love to grab hold of obscure passages and form doctrines out of them.⁸

3. Application

The final step to studying the Bible is application. Application does not always have to be personal. Despite what some have said, the Bible is not primarily “Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth” (B.I.B.L.E). The Bible does contain a lot of instructions for the people of God, but it is much more than that. The Bible is God’s revelation of Himself to mankind. It shows us who He is and how we can relate to Him (i.e. through Jesus’ sacrifice). Because of this, the first question we should ask when applying the Bible should always be, *what does this teach me about God?* Then we can ask *how does this relate to my life?* We should also ask *How does this remind me of the Gospel?* Unlike interpretation, there can be many applications of a text.

The way we observe, interpret and apply will change slightly depending on what genre we are studying. We will focus on the different genres of scripture in future sessions.

Practice Passage: John 3:16-18

Observation

Who wrote this? (John)

Who was John? (One of the Apostles)

Who is speaking? (Jesus)

Whom is He speaking to? (Nicodemus)

Who is Nicodemus? (A Pharisee, referred to as the “ruler of the Jews” that came to visit Jesus in the night [3:1])

When is this taking place? (The beginning of Jesus’ earthly ministry)

Interpretation

What did Jesus say/*What does this mean?* (Summarize Jesus’ words)

Application

What does this teach us about God?

- He loved the world
- He sent Christ to save sinners

How does this relate to my life?

- If I do not believe in Jesus Christ, I am condemned by my unbelief
- I need a savior

How does this remind me of the Gospel?

- This IS the Gospel: God sent Christ to save sinners.

Bible Study Cheat Sheet

1) OBSERVATION

- a) **Who?**
- b) **When?**
- c) **Where?**

2) INTERPRETATION

- a) **What?**

3) APPLICATION

- a) **So What?**
 - i) **God**
 - ii) **Man**
 - iii) **The Gospel**

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1. Wayne A. Grudem, *Understanding Scripture: An Overview of the Bible's Origin, Reliability, and Meaning* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway 2012), 11.
 2. Mark Dever. *What Does God Want of Us Anyway?: A Quick Overview of the Whole Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 26.
 3. Plummer, Robert L. *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2010), 152.
 4. *Baptist Faith and Message* 2000.
 5. Daniel M. Doriani. *Getting the Message: A Plan for Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1996), 29.
 6. Howard G. Hendricks and William D. Hendricks. *Living by the Book* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2007), 40.
 7. Plummer, 79.
 8. Ibid. 96-98.