

# Unlocking the Mystery: Introduction to Bible Study

February 9, 2009

This foundational course provides an overview of the Bible and suggests methods and tools to study God's Word.

## **Notes to Instructor:**

This course is designed in the hope of conveying basic information about Bible study to people who have not studied the Bible in the past. Because of the level of the student, do not expect a lot of discussion. We hope that we have provided sufficient material to fill each class. We expect that there will be a few minutes at the beginning taken up with opening prayer, greetings, announcements, introductions, etc. Remember to leave a little time at the end for closing prayer. At this level of a course, expect to do the opening and closing prayer yourself.

**Teaching tips:** One tip for varying the amount of time required to cover the material if you are getting ahead or behind: If you are not getting any discussion, have the students read the passages referenced. If you are running short on time, read the passages yourself from the speaker's notes. Typically, the Scriptures suitable for student reading are those set in indented paragraphs with the reference at the beginning of the paragraph. If you are having students read the passages, you may wish to go through this document and highlight those so that it is easy to look ahead in the speaker's notes and assign passages to several readers at once.

These speaker's notes provide the information that is to be covered in this course, but there is certainly no need to read the material word-for-word. Put this in your own words and feel free to include your experiences and insights.

**Homework:** There is no official "homework" for this course. However, at the end of the first lesson, this curriculum encourages the students to start the habit of daily Bible reading. In classes two through nine, ten minutes are allowed at the beginning of the class for discussion of the readings. Ask general questions to start discussion. The curriculum highlights with more specific questions one of the Bible passages in each of these discussion times for the instructor to use if the general questions do not elicit enough discussion. If there is sufficient discussion without these more specific questions, do not bother using them. If the instructor wishes to highlight some other passage from the week's readings, there is no problem with that.

**Materials:** Note that there may be a materials list at the beginning of each class. Most of these are suggestions that are optional. Bring them if available. Do not worry a great deal if they are not. The church library may be able to help.

**Format:** Scripture is typically *italicized*. Notes to the instructor (not to be transmitted to the students) is in a **smaller, darker type**.

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# Unlocking the Mystery: Introduction to Bible Study

## Class 1. Introduction

**Materials:** It would be useful to have a Bible with tabs for the books as an example in the “finding references” section.

**This class is an introduction only. Please resist the temptation to include material from later classes. There is not enough time in one class to cover a lot of additional material.**

**In this first class, as you get to know the students, the question “Why do you want to study the Bible?” may help you to learn the level of student in the class, which will help you customize the material for the students present.**

### A. Opening

A father was approached by his small son who told him proudly, 'I know what the Bible means!' His father smiled and replied, 'What do you mean, you 'know' what the Bible means? The son replied, 'I do know!' 'Okay,' said his father. 'What does the Bible mean?' 'That's easy, Daddy...' the young boy replied excitedly, 'It stands for 'Basic Information Before Leaving Earth.'

The Bible is really not like any other book in the world. It is a collection of books, but *not just an anthology*; usually an anthology is organized around a type of literature, such as poetry, or a period of history or a certain culture, such as Irish short stories or the Victorian era. The Bible starts before culture was even invented, takes in several centuries of various tribes and nations, shifts its focus to the "utter ends of the earth," and winds up with the end of the world as we know it. It includes a variety of styles of literature – including poetry, history, biography, prophecy, and letters.

### B. Purposes

#### i) *Present the plan for salvation*

John 20:31: *But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

While it may be argued that this statement of the purpose for writing applies only to the book in which it is found, the pervasiveness of the subject indicates that at least one of God's purposes for the whole Bible is this presentation of salvation as a free gift of God. There are only two and a half chapters before the first promise of a Savior:

Genesis 3:15: [God said to the serpent,] *“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”*

As one proceeds through the Bible, more and more is learned about the Offspring who will defeat Satan, until in the third to last chapter of the Bible, we find:

Revelation 20:10: *And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*

The next chapter is a description of the place where the saved people live for the rest of eternity, completing the plan of salvation!

#### ii) *Meet God*

As wonderful as this topic is, however, it is not the main purpose for Scripture. The “Plan of Salvation,” if we study it in a detached manner as we would study the plan

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of a house or the plan for the siege of Vicksburg, is of little import to us. The main reason God wants us to read the Bible is so that we will "Meet the Master": that we will have a life-changing encounter with the Son of God, our Savior. In John 5:39, Jesus says, "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me."(NKJV)

As we read and study the Bible, Christ reminds us that we are to look for Him. As Luther wrote, "When Christ is not known, it is impossible to have any understanding in the Scriptures, for He is the sun and the truth in the Scriptures."<sup>1</sup> (John 1:14 -- *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*)

Meeting Jesus is the true blessing of Scripture. But in addition to this, there are other benefits from studying the Bible as well:

### iii) *Guide for life*

Psalm 1:1-3: *Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.*

This passage speaks of the Law, which has a bit of a negative connotation, but the giving of the Law was a loving act. Look at the situation when it was given. Israel had just been brought out of 400 years of slavery. These people did not know how to govern themselves, relate to one another, or relate to their God! The law was not given by a God who just wanted to watch His people jump through hoops. It is a guide given by *the* God who **IS** Love on how to live so that your life goes well for you. A modern analogy would be the seat belt laws. These are laws intended to protect us from ourselves.

Psalm 119:105: *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.* The reference to the lamp to the feet is interesting. At the time this was written, it was common when walking at night to carry an oil lamp at the end of a cord so that it was just a few inches above the ground, so one would only see a few feet in front of the lamp. Some would rather have those xenon headlights to see way down the road, but that is not what God gives us. He shows us what we need to know when we need it.

Psalm 119:9-11: *How can a young man keep his way pure?*

*By living according to your word.*

*I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands.*

*I have hidden your word in my heart  
that I might not sin against you.*

2 Tim. 3:16-17: *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

Can we afford to ignore God's Book? Think of buying a new car. In the glove compartment, you will find an owner's manual. It is written by the people that designed the car to help you take the best possible care of the car. They know how to do that since they know everything there is to know about the car. "When do you change the oil?", "What kind of gas do you use?", and so on. What if you just throw this manual away and do things your own way? Say you decide to put water in the

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gas tank to save money? Do you have cause to get upset with the manufacturer when it does not run very well? Well, the Bible is the same way. It is written by our Maker, who also made the whole earth. Do not expect things to go well in any area of life where we are not following what the Book says to do. Think of the Bible as our owner's manual.

Again, we need to balance God's laws with God's grace. Returning to the analogy of the car, the Manufacturer is not going to repossess our vehicle if we fail to do an oil change every 7,500 miles as recommended! Nor do we get bonus frequent flier miles for following directions – the car simply runs better, as its designer intended! God's laws help us to reflect His original design for our lives. We will speak more about the balance of Law and Gospel later.

- iv) *Baseline for evaluating other sources of information*  
Acts 17:11: *Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and **examined the Scriptures** every day to see if what Paul said was true.*

Note that the Bereans were commended for comparing the teaching of Paul to the Scriptures. I hope that you will do that for any teaching you receive, whether in church, in school, or from any other information source.

## C. How to Find References in the Bible

- i) *Table of Contents*
- It is not a sin to use the Table of Contents! This is often buried a few pages from the front, after some charts and articles on how to read the Bible, so you may want to put a sticky-note there if you are new to this Book. Watch out for: a) books in two parts, like 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel, or a group of books by one author, like 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter; b) Song of Solomon is sometimes called Song of Songs; c) there is the Gospel of John near the beginning of the New Testament, and there are three Letters of John near the end. (John also wrote Revelation, the last book of the Bible.)
  - It is not a sin to add tabs to your Bible! (Also, it is not a sin to underline the parts you want to find again, or to write notes to yourself in the margins!) **If available:** Here is an example of a Bible with tabs added.
  - As you study the Bible, you will learn more about where to find the books. In the next two classes, we will discuss groupings of the books of the Bible that will help you remember the general area to look for a particular book.
- ii) *Chapter divisions and verse numbering system*
- All the verses of the Bible have been numbered so we can find specific passages more quickly. The numbering and chapter divisions were not part of the original manuscripts. Some Bibles have sub-headings over sections which were added by the publisher. These are not inspired! If you are asked to read aloud, it is preferable to skip over them.
  - The numbering system is written as: Book (space) Chapter (colon) Verse. For example, at certain football games you have seen John 3:16 – you can find this important message to all football fans in the Book of John, Chapter Three, Verse 16. They don't tell you which testament it's in – that's why you need the Table of Contents, for awhile. They also usually abbreviate the names of the books: Gen for Genesis, Rev for Revelation, etc. Watch out for Philipians (Phil) versus

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Philemon (Phm). Also, a few books in the Bible are so brief that they do not have chapters, only verses (Phm 6).

- There are cases multiple verses are revered. A range of verses will normally be referenced by the beginning and ending verses with a dash (“-”) between them. A list of noncontiguous verses will be separated by commas. For example, John 1:1-9 means the first nine verses of the first chapter of John, while John 1:1,9 means only two verses from that chapter, the first and the ninth.

## D. Authorship

### i) *Inspired by God*

2 Tim. 3:16: *All Scripture is God-breathed.*

Most copies of the Bible will say “The Holy Bible” on the title page, indicating that this Book is unique. It is sacred and holy. Jews and Christians together believe that the Old Testament was written by God Himself, and Christians believe the same for the New Testament. We believe it is God’s Word. We believe it is God’s Truth. This belief is first of all based on what the Bible says about itself, but there is other evidence of divine authorship. There are testimonies of millions of people whose lives have been changed from within as they read the Bible.

There is also the testimony of its remarkable consistency and integrity, despite the fact that it took several centuries and a diverse group of scribes to write it down and collect it.

### ii) *God worked through about 40 people*

"The Bible is God's written revelation of His will to men. Its central theme is salvation through Jesus Christ. The Bible contains 66 books, written by 40 authors, covering a period of approximately 1600 years... The word "Bible" comes from the Greek word "biblos" ["book"]. The word "testament" means "covenant," or "agreement." The Old Testament is the covenant God made with man about his salvation before Christ came. The New Testament is the agreement God made with man about his salvation after Christ came. In the Old Testament we find the covenant of law [and the promise of a better covenant]. In the New Testament we find the covenant of grace which came through Jesus Christ. One led into the other (see Galatians 3:17-25)... The authors were kings and princes, poets and philosophers, prophets and statesmen. Some were learned in all the arts of the times and others were unschooled fishermen. Other books soon are out of date but this Book spans the centuries."<sup>2</sup>

### iii) *Inspired and Inerrant*

*What does "inspired and inerrant" mean?*

"Inspiration refers to a writer being under the influence of God. It is the process by which the Holy Spirit moved writers as they recorded God-breathed Scripture. And, since the text of the Bible is inspired by God (Who is perfect and Who never lies), it must be free of error, or 'inerrant.' The doctrine of inspiration and inerrancy applies to the original manuscripts only."<sup>3</sup>

*What was the process of inspiration?*

"God used several methods to ensure that the human writers of the Bible would communicate His truth: through angels (Gen 18, Gen 29), dreams (Dan 7:1), visions (Isa 1:1), nature (Ps 19:1), and miracles (Exo 3:2). On occasion God spoke through other prophetic writings (Dan 9:1-2), and sometimes He spoke in an audible voice (1

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Sam 3:4). His most common method was the inner voice of the individual's conscience and communion with God (2 Peter 1:21 below)."<sup>4</sup>

2 Peter 1:21: *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.*

*Why do Christians believe that the Bible is inspired and without error?*

In the first place, the Bible claims this about itself, as we just read from the Second Letter of Peter. (Also see 2 Tim 3:16, and John 10:34-35 where Jesus told the Pharisees, "the Scripture cannot be broken.") Paul called the Old Testament books the "sacred" or "holy" writings' (2 Tim 3:15 and Romans 1:2), as well as "the oracles" or "the very words" of God (Romans 3:2).<sup>5</sup>

In Jesus' day, the rabbis customarily taught from commentaries that had been made by earlier rabbis. Jesus taught directly from Scripture, which confirms His high view of it. And Jesus presented it as absolute truth:

Matthew 7:28-29: *When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.*

## **E. Comparison with other "holy" books**

Many religions possess writings which contain their beliefs and are respected either as coming from a deity (or deities) or as sources of wisdom.

When these writings are placed alongside the Holy Bible, it is the Bible which we discover to be in a category by itself.

"All truth is God's truth," and so as with any literature we may discover practical advice and even ethical or moral teaching of value within these documents. However when we study their theology we find that, in every case, human beings must apply self-effort to raise themselves to God (or to Ultimate Reality). Only the Bible shows God reaching down to man, lifting man up in love.

Examples<sup>6</sup> from major religions or philosophies are:

- i) *The Koran (Qur'an, meaning, "Book") of Islam* – Muhammad claims the angel Gabriel dictated these messages, around 610 A.D., as a "correction" to the system of worship found in the Old and New Testaments. Koran misquotes both, and establishes in Islam a religion in which judgment falls on those whose bad deeds outnumber their good deeds.
- ii) *The Vedas, Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita of Hinduism* – these ancient (1500 B.C. to 100 B.C.) writings wander between a belief in many gods and a belief that the universe is not only impersonal but, at least in the part we can see, unreal. The concept of reincarnation offers little hope of meaning in life.
- iii) *The Tipitaka ("Three Baskets") of Buddhism, and the Tao Te Ching of Zen* – in 83 B.C. the discourses of philosopher and mystic Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha (Enlightened One) were finally written down (Buddha died c. 438 B.C.). The thousands of pages of teachings have been condensed into an Eightfold Path which promises enlightenment through Right Thoughts, Right Speech, Right Actions and so on. God and personhood are denied. The teachings of Lao Tzu (Tao Te Ching), on which Zen Buddhism is based, also promote a "go with the flow" worldview in which all is one and all is god. Since everything is nothing, there is nothing to be saved "from."

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- iv) *Cults* - In the case of several cults, their teachings are based on a Bible which has either been “re-translated” or added to by “progressive revelation.” Examples are the New World Translation, a Bible published by Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the Book of Mormon. Even without getting into the spiritual agenda, these texts do not stand up well to scholarly investigation of their historicity, linguistics, or internal consistency. Again, most of these “new” scriptures simply re-introduce the bondage to either good works or good meditation methods that leaves men dead in their sins.

So we see that there are many sacred books which offer “ways” to God. The Christian Bible introduces us to Jesus Christ, Who said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* (John 14:6)

The Christian Bible’s message is indeed unique. Is it true? Draw near to the Bible on its own terms (*“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”* - Hebrews 11:6), and *“the truth will set you free.”* - John 8:32.

## F. The Great Messages of the Bible

**Scope and sequence note:** This section is a review of what each student should know from a basic doctrine (new members) course.

- i) *Law – What should man do?*

*The law is a curb*

In the political aspect, the law sets limits and boundaries as a deterrent to wrongdoers, those in authority act as God’s servants to curb evil (see Exo 20:20, 1 Tim 1:9)

*The law is a mirror*

In the theological aspect, the law shows us our sin, shows us our need for God grace, raises our consciousness of dependence on supernatural aid (see Rom 3:20; Rom 7:7; Gal 3:24; Josh 24:19-20; James 2:8-11)

*The law is a rule and a guide*

In the ethical aspect, the law helps us in the process of sanctification, it spurs spiritual formation in us and fosters virtuous and righteous habits, which increase our freedom in Christ (see Ps 119:9, 105; Rom 6:2-22; Eph 5:15-17)

Luther’s Small Catechism says, “the Law teaches us Christians which works we must do to lead a God-pleasing life.”<sup>7</sup> Because of Christ’s sacrifice and the Holy Spirit’s work of saving faith in us, our souls have already been declared God-pleasing. As the saying goes, ‘Works are the FRUIT, not the ROOT, of faith.’ We want to please God, not to achieve holiness nor acquire righteousness (only Jesus Christ can do that), but to enjoy the love of God to the fullest.

- ii) *Gospel – What has God done? What does God do today? What is God’s promise for tomorrow?*

John 14:6: *Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”*

The Bible’s message is that Truth is not a concept, a force, nor a collection of laws. Truth is a Person. And that Person, for the love of humankind, stepped out of eternity, infinity and immortality to rescue His children from destruction. As noble as the Law is, it remains a “way” which is impossible to travel, a “truth” which tends

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only to condemn, and a sentence of “death” rather than life. The Good News is not *about* Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ IS the Good News or Gospel.

John 3:16: *"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."*

Matthew 9:36: *When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*

The Gospel message in Scripture is like the progress of a solar eclipse: Adam and Eve knew the full light of God’s love but then they sinned; Noah and Abraham began to see the light; Moses communed with God as a friend, face to face. All these generations were saved by faith – a forward-looking faith, in a Savior partially hidden, as Hebrews (Heb 10:1) says, in the “*shadows of things to come.*” In the fullness of time, God Himself came, as a Man, a humble servant yet mighty redeemer. He completely fulfilled the Law and brought the need for blood sacrifice to an end.

1 Tim. 1:15: *Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst.*

Romans 5:8: *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Just as the birth of Christ divided the calendar into Before and After, the Gospel divides all religions into two camps: true and false – believers and unbelievers, saved and lost. Jesus is either your Savior or your stumbling block. The two “natural” reactions are to either ignore Jesus’ warning to the Pharisees about the futility of works-righteousness and go on trying to earn points with God (John 8:24), or ignore Jesus’ warning about being holy, as the Father in heaven is holy (Matt 5:48) – resulting in a fatally foolish complacency that we need no Savior.

Galatians 3:2-3: *I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?*

Romans 1:16: *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.*

## iii) Balance

“On the main issue [of law and grace] the Bible displays an unvaried stance: Mount Sinai was the primary proof that the Lord had been the agent in redeeming His people from Egypt (Exo 3:12), and consequently the law enunciated from Sinai was not a system of ‘works’ whereby the unsaved might diligently merit salvation, but was rather given as a pattern of life to those who had already been redeemed by the blood of the lamb (Ex 6:6-7; 12:13). The ‘balance’ of Exodus is exactly matched by the ‘balance’ of many Pauline epistles: first the display of the fact, richness, wonder and effectiveness of redemption (e.g. Ephesians 1-3), and then the outline of the pattern of life God desires in the redeemed (e.g. Ephesians 4-6)... The basic design is that the law provides the pattern for the responsive life of the redeemed.”<sup>8</sup>

The understanding of this balance is important in communication with others, including (but not limited to) sermons. Ephesians 4:15 mentions “*speaking the truth*

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*in love.*” Proper application of Law and Gospel in our communication carries out this admonition from Ephesians.

A final word: the great message of the Bible, in both Law and Gospel, is “I Love You.” God loves people. He wants us to be where He is. Jesus Christ is the Way there.

## **G. Daily reading**

The Bible is an overwhelming Book in size. It is not what one would call an “easy read.” It requires the reader to stop and think. It can throw so much at a reader that you just want to say, “Stop, I’m full.” And then there are the places where it seems tedious to go through the census figures or genealogies. One solution is to enter into a plan to read the Bible over a period of time, taking it in bite-sized pieces.

There are many plans that have been developed for reading the Bible in a year. The Bible contains 1189 chapters, so plans for reading the Bible in a year requires the reading of less than four chapters per day!

One plan that has been used by many is provided in the handout for this class. This plan assigns a group of scriptures to each day to the week, and then divides each of the groups into 52 readings. This arrangement has the advantage of not leaving the reader bogged down day after day when he or she arrives at one of the more tedious sections of the Bible.

At this church, we believe that every Christian should feed on the Word of God routinely. I am going to ask that you begin following this plan while you are in this course. On this plan, the weeks refer to the weeks since you start reading, not the week number of the year. Therefore, start with week 1 and we can talk about these readings next class.

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## Class 2. Old Testament

The purpose of this class is to introduce the Old Testament, with an overview to provide context for readings in that Testament. This opportunity is taken to correct the idea some people have that there is no Gospel in the Old Testament.

### A. Review week 1 readings (10 minutes)

What did you learn from the Week 1 Bible readings?

Was there anything that you found interesting? Exciting? Reassuring?

Genesis 1-3: With all the political and media attention on creation, did you realize it was covered basically in two chapters out of the 1189 chapters in the Bible? It seems that it should be given more ink, doesn't it? Why do you think that it is so controversial if it is such a small part of the Bible? (Answer: It is the foundation on which so many other things rest. If God is not Creator, what authority does He have?)

Josh 1-5

Psa 1-2

Job 1-3

Isa 1-6

Matt 1-2

Rom 1-2

Today, we will talk about the first of the two Testaments into which the Bible is divided. Five of the Week 1 readings were from the Old Testament and two were from the New Testament. From this, you may realize that the Old Testament is much larger than the New Testament.

### B. Groupings

It is believed that the Maccabees, a priestly class who led a revolt against the Syrian-Greek overlords in Palestine in 164 B.C., were the first to organize the sacred writings into one structured collection with three divisions: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. This is how Jesus referred to the Scriptures in Luke 24:44. Our Old Testament is organized into four sections (law, history, prophets, and wisdom), which reflects the structure of the first Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint (sep-TOO-a-jint), which was produced about that same time but in Alexandria, Egypt, where there was a large Jewish colony.

Roman Catholic Bibles since 1546 have included several writings of the Old Testament period which are inserted after the traditional Hebrew books. Called the "apocrypha" or "deutero-canon," they are interesting at least for their antiquity. They are not considered authoritative by Protestants.

Let's look at the structure of the Old Testament. It may be helpful to open your Bible to the table of contents.

#### i) *The Torah*

Also known as the Pentateuch.

Genesis through Deuteronomy.

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These five books (penta means five) were all written by Moses, the man called by God to lead the Hebrew people out of slavery in Egypt.

Genesis provides the history from creation up to the time the Hebrew people moved to Egypt where God had provided food in a time of famine. There were about 70 Hebrews at this time. You read the story of creation and the first sin in this last week's readings.

Exodus tells the story of the calling of Moses and his leading the people out of Egypt. The Hebrew people had been in Egypt for 430 years, so there are several centuries between the main events of Genesis and the main events of Exodus. (The first chapter of Exodus includes a recap of the people who went to Egypt and a brief description of the Hebrew people becoming slaves and becoming numerous.) This book includes the giving of the Ten Commandments to help the Hebrew people worship God and get along with each other after such a long time without governing themselves.

Leviticus is primarily the laws given to the Hebrew people by God through Moses, including many ceremonies and sacrifices that foreshadowed the coming Savior. The ceremonial laws are not typically followed by Christians today since the Savior they foreshadowed has come, and we can know and follow the "real thing." See the first three verses of the book called Hebrews (in the New Testament).

Numbers is so named because it contains a lot of them. It provides the results of a census that indicated the number of Hebrew men coming out of Egypt was about 600,000, so the total number of people may have been approaching two million. This book continues with history of the Hebrew people during the time after leaving Egypt and before entering the Promised Land. It happens that the oldest known text from the Old Testament is the benediction of Aaron found in Numbers 6:24-26. The text, written on a silver amulet from the 7th century BC, was discovered in 1979 in tombs across the Hinnom valley from Jerusalem.

Deuteronomy, which means second telling of the law, is that and more. It does repeat the Ten Commandments and many of the laws in Leviticus, it also talks about the consequences of disobedience and the blessing of obedience (chapter 28), and ends with the story of the transfer of leadership from Moses to Joshua just before the Hebrew people enter the Promised Land.

In Judaism today, a synagogue or local congregation will own one or more Torah scrolls, that is, copies of these five books of Moses. A portion will be read each Sabbath throughout the year, and when the readings have been completed, a special celebration, called *Simchas Torah*, is held during the service, often featuring the rabbis "dancing" the scroll around the room with great joy. The coverings for the Torah scrolls are often made of precious materials and elaborately decorated. But the respect shown for these scrolls goes deeper than decoration. The meticulous process of hand-copying a scroll takes about 2,000 hours (a full-time job for one year). Throughout the centuries, Jewish scribes have adhered to the following guidelines:

- A Torah Scroll is disqualified if even a single letter is added or deleted.
- The scribe must be a learned, pious Jew, who has undergone special training and certification.

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- All materials (parchment, ink, quill) must conform to strict specifications, and be prepared specifically for the purpose of writing a Torah Scroll.
- The scribe may not write even one letter into a Torah Scroll by heart. Rather, he must have a second, kosher scroll opened before him at all times.
- The scribe must pronounce every word out loud before copying it from the correct text.
- Every letter must have sufficient white space surrounding it. If one letter touched another in any spot, it invalidates the entire scroll.
- If a single letter was so marred that it cannot be read at all, or resembles another letter (whether the defect is in the writing, or is due to a hole, tear or smudge), this invalidates the entire scroll. Each letter must be sufficiently legible so that even an ordinary schoolchild could distinguish it from other, similar letters.
- The scribe must put precise space between words, so that one word will not look like two words, or two words look like one word.
- The scribe must not alter the design of the sections, and must conform to particular line-lengths and paragraph configurations.
- A Torah Scroll in which any mistake has been found cannot be used, and must be fixed within 30 days or it will be given a religious burial.<sup>9</sup>

## ii) *History*

Joshua through Esther

This section covers about a thousand years of the history of the Hebrew people, beginning with their entry into the Promised Land. We will discuss more about the actual history in a few minutes.

The history section is interesting in that it sometimes covers major battles and movements of armies with just a couple of sentences, but at other times spends several chapters on seemingly minor incidents. Remember that the purposes of the Bible include getting to know God and His ways. Examine the parts that may not seem major from a historical point of view to see how God is dealing with His people and how He is revealing Himself. This is not just history; it is His story!

Up through this section, the Old Testament is in approximately chronological sequence, providing context for the other two sections.

## iii) *Wisdom literature*

Known by the Jews as “The Writings”

Job through Song of Solomon

These books provide great insight into the nature of God. Job is a story of one man and his struggle to follow God in hard times.

Psalms is basically the Hebrew people’s hymnbook. It contains the words to many songs by many authors. Many are written by King David, but one (#90) is known to be written by Moses, so that song is much older. The compilation of this “hymnbook” was probably completed in the third century BC.

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Proverbs is a collection of nuggets of wisdom. Parts of it seem to have very little structure. The majority of the book is the work of King Solomon, a man given great wisdom by God. However, there are mentions of other parts written by Agur and Lemuel. In the original language, Lemuel's portion contains some Aramaic spellings, indicating that he may not have been a Hebrew. Five chapters (25-29) are compiled by Hezekiah's men, although the sayings themselves are attributed to Solomon. There are parts for which the writer is unknown.

The other two books in the wisdom literature, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon, are written by King Solomon, providing lessons from His life. The Song of Solomon (also known as the Song of Songs) is interpreted on a variety of levels. It can be read as just a love story, but then why would it be in the Bible? To show what a great gift God has given us in love. It is also often read as an allegorical description of the love between God and His people. Remember that the concept of a God reaching down to people is unique to the Judeo-Christian God.

## iv) *Prophets*

Isaiah through Malachi

This section contains the writings of prophets who lived during the decline of Israel into captivity and after their return to the Holy Land up to about 400 BC. (There were other prophets [Moses, Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, etc.], so this is not a comprehensive group including all the prophets mentioned in the Bible.)

The last twelve books in this group are referred to as the Minor Prophets, not because the message is unimportant, but just because these books tend to be shorter than the writings of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. In the Jewish Bible, these twelve books are considered one book (scroll).

Major themes in this section are 1) the Messiah (Jesus) is coming, and 2) follow God's ways and things will be better for you. Many of the prophetic writings occur when the Hebrew people were (as a nation in general) falling away from following God, and the prophets are calling them to return to His ways. Sometimes we think of a prophet as one who foretells future events, but God also raises up prophets to bluntly identify evil activities as sin.

## C. *Timeline*

The chart entitled "Historical Background of the Old Testament" is one scholar's suggestion as to the time frame in which the Bible begins. Obviously it is impossible to be definitive about the dates of such early events as Creation and the Flood, and there is still debate about which Pharaoh was the one who dealt with Moses. The Bible gives few exact dates (they were on a different calendar anyway), but where clues are given, archaeology has tended to support the Bible record. For example, there was a time when highly-respected scholars believed that the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) must have been fictional heroes "adopted" into Israel's literature for the purpose of legitimizing the expanding monarchy under David. Scholars based this view on the lack of extra-biblical (other documents) evidence for the level of sophistication and cultural complexity described in the Genesis biographies. But "archaeological discoveries during the [early 20<sup>th</sup> century] show us that the patriarchal narratives fit in the period in which the Bible places them, and in no other. The clay tablets from Nuzi and Mari have helped us to visualize the political and the social world in which the patriarchs moved... we are less dependent on hypothetical reconstructions of history now that we have actual historical records."<sup>10</sup>

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It is wise to recall that the Bible is HIS-story rather than a “history textbook,” and so tends to highlight man’s spiritual progress rather than major political upheavals.

Daniel 2:20-21: *"Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are His. He changes times and seasons; He sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning."*

Go over the timeline with the class, letting the level of detail depend on the amount of time remaining in the class period, leaving 10-15 minutes for the last section.

## D. Themes

### i) *Jesus is coming!*

The Old Testament contains over 300 passages that are clearly identifiable as prophecies of the coming of the Messiah (Christ). The New Testament has numerous references to the prophecies, especially in the books of Matthew and Hebrews, which seem to have been written particularly for a Jewish audience.

The Old Testament explains the *need* for a Savior: how man was made in God’s image and created for fellowship with God; how Adam was given freedom but warned that disobedience would result in death; and how that first sin poisoned not only succeeding generations but the earth itself with a stubborn curse. The family, tribal, and national pattern showed that God’s kindness toward man was mostly met with rejection.

#### *Prophetic promises of a Savior --*

##### **Fulfilled Prophecy**

	<b>Hebrew Scripture</b>	<b>New Testament</b>
His pre-existence	Micah 5:2	John 1:1, 14
Born of a woman	Genesis 3:15	Matthew 1:18
Of the seed of Abraham	Genesis 12:3	Matthew 1:1-16
All nations blessed by Abraham's seed	Genesis 12:3	Matthew 8:5, 10
Lamb provided by God	Genesis 22:8	John 1:29
Declared to be the Son of God	Psalms 2:7	Matthew 3:17
His messenger would come before Him	Malachi 4:5-6	Luke 1:17
Rejected by His own	Isaiah 53:3	Matthew 21:42
A stone of stumbling to Israel	Isaiah 8:14-15	1 Peter 2:8
Triumphal entry into Jerusalem	Zechariah 9:9	Matthew 21:5
Heal blind/ deaf/ lame/ dumb	Isaiah 35:5-6; Isaiah 29:18	Matthew 11:5
Resurrected from the dead	Psalms 16:10-11; 49:15	Mark 16:6
Priest after the order of Melchizedek	Psalms 110:4	Hebrews 5:8-10
Ascended to right hand of God	Psalms 68:18	Luke 24:51 <sup>11</sup>

The above are just a fraction of the prophecies which were given in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New. There are websites (see [100Prophecies.org](http://100Prophecies.org), or [AboutBibleProphecy.com](http://AboutBibleProphecy.com)) which you can visit to see more prophecies, and many Study Bibles offer a limited list. But a better way to learn them is to read the Old Testament with your eyes and ears open for hints of the coming Messiah. With the “20-20 hindsight” of having met the Messiah, you can recognize the prophecies and foreshadowing more quickly than many of the ancient rabbis could.

### ii) *Preservation of a remnant -*

Genesis 45:7: *But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.*

2 Kings 19:30-31: *Once more a remnant of the house of Judah will take root below and bear fruit above. For out of Jerusalem will come a remnant, and out of*

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*Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.*

As we look at God's covenants with His people, we are amazed at His faithfulness and mercy in the face of human rebellion. He never leaves Himself without a witness. This should be a comfort to Christians as the spiritual continuation of this remnant.

### iii) *Law and Gospel*

Many think of the Old Testament as being the Law, but there is both Law and Gospel in the Old Testament. C.F.W. Walther, famed Lutheran theologian, wrote, "The doctrinal contents of the entire Holy Scriptures, both of the Old and the New Testament, are made up of two doctrines differing fundamentally from each other, viz., the Law and the Gospel...both are equally necessary. Without the Law the Gospel is not understood; without the Gospel the Law benefits us nothing... Both have for their final aim men's salvation... There are no contradictions in Scripture. Each [doctrine] is distinct from the other, but both are in perfect harmony with one another."<sup>12</sup>

Look and see how the Lord, from the opening pages of the Old Testament, identifies Himself as the One Who works mightily to save His people from their sins. Consider just some of His "titles" for Himself:

Provider (Genesis 22:14)

Banner [as in protector or victor] (Exodus 17:15)

Peace (Judges 6:24)

Healer (Exodus 15:26)

Redeemer (Ruth 4:14)

Rock (2 Samuel 22:2)

Deliverer (Psalm 18:2)

*I am the Lord, **Who makes you holy.*** (Leviticus 22:32)

*I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no **Savior.*** (Isaiah 43:11)

There is Gospel in the sacrifice of Isaac, the long-suffering of Joseph, the miracle of Passover. The scapegoat in Leviticus speaks of God's grace. Both the failures and triumphs of King David's life talk about the grace of God in seeking and restoring the fallen and the fugitive.

The handout, "Jesus in Every Old Testament Book," is a worthy resource for meditation. It shows clearly that "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*" (Hebrews 13:8) The Old Testament is His story as well.

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## Class 3. New Testament

The purpose of this class is to introduce the New Testament, with an overview to provide context for readings in that Testament. This opportunity is taken to correct the idea some people have that there is no Law in the New Testament, but the Law is presented in this chapter in the context of one who has received the Gospel.

### A. Review week 2 readings (10 minutes)

What did you learn from the Week 2 Bible readings?

Was there anything that you found interesting? Exciting? Reassuring?

Gen 4-7

Josh 6-10

Psa 3-5

Job 4-5

Isa 7-11

Matt 3-4: Matthew is a book that really ties the Testaments together. Did you see that in this weeks reading? Notice how Matthew refers to fulfilled prophecy in 3:2 and 4:15-16. Notice how Jesus refers back to the Old Testament three times in Chapter 4 (verses 4, 7, & 10).

Rom 3-4

### B. Groupings

#### i) *Gospels – Biographies of Jesus*

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – each biographer of Jesus had a personal emphasis in recounting the life and ministry of Messiah.

The four Gospels tell one story but help to give a “composite” picture of Christ’s life. Scholars have noted the following distinctives of each Gospel writer:

Matthew was a tax collector called to follow Jesus. He wrote primarily to the Jewish audience and therefore included lots of Jesus’ sermons and he mentioned numerous OT prophecies which were fulfilled by Jesus.

Mark was a disciple of Peter and a missionary. He wrote with the Roman world in mind and is known for the fast-paced action of his narrative. For Mark, Christ’s miracles were of key interest.

Luke, who also wrote Acts, traveled with Paul and was a physician. Luke was probably Greek himself and wrote for the Greek audience; he records the great parables of Jesus which would have intrigued the intellectuals of that culture. But Luke was also a careful historian, and we learn many of the who-what-where-when details of the life of Jesus from Luke.

John – like Matthew – was called by Jesus to be one of the first twelve disciples, and he became one of Jesus’ closest earthly friends. John’s resume gave his occupation as “fisherman” but he was transformed into a “fisher of men.” John’s Gospel is serious theology and contains the seven “I AM” statements of Jesus Christ. This Gospel clearly identifies Jesus Christ as God and as the Savior of all who believe in Him as Savior. Therefore, this Gospel is an excellent starting point

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for a new Christian's Bible study. John also wrote three general letters and recorded the Revelation.<sup>13</sup>

Note the different writing styles in these sample verses:

Matthew 21:4-5: *This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.' "* (Matthew refers to the prophecy from Zechariah 9:9.)

Mark 14:72: *Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times." And he broke down and wept.*

Luke 19:11: *While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once.* Greek thought esteemed variety in expressing ideas, including analogies such as parables.

John 20:30-31: *Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

As interesting as the Gospel writers' perspectives are, the real subject worthy of study is: Who is Jesus? What did He say about God and man? What identity did He claim for Himself? Should we agree with His claims? Digging into the Gospels will clarify this for us. Other themes in the Gospels include: Son of God, Son of Man, Lamb of God, Kingdom of Heaven, Spirit and Truth, Righteousness, Judgment, Servanthood, Forgiveness and Love.

## ii) Acts

Acts was written by Luke as a continuation of the Gospel of Luke beyond the resurrection of Jesus. It provides a history of the early church from the ascension of Jesus and Pentecost up through the third missionary journey of Paul. Much like the history group in the Old Testament provided context for the prophets and some of the wisdom literature, this book provides context to the epistles which follow.

## iii) Epistles (Romans thru Jude)

"Epistles" are letters. Some are written to churches, and many of those written to churches were then sent around to neighboring churches; some are written to individuals; and finally some are written to the church at large.

*Paul's letters to the churches – Romans; 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians; Galatians; Ephesians; Philippians; Colossians; 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians* – these are titled after the city in which each church was located (if Paul were writing today, his letters might be titled "Houstonians, Dallasites, 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> New Yorkers"). These letters contain the foundational teachings about Law and Gospel as well as insights into church governance, worship, and discipline. While written to specific churches, and written about the situations in those churches, these letters were intended to be circulated among other churches. They are still worthy of circulation because the truths are still relevant, and we still have some of the same situations today that Paul addressed in these letters. It was while studying Paul's letter to the Romans that Martin Luther came to an understanding of salvation by grace through faith alone.

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*Paul's letters to individuals – 1<sup>st</sup> & 2nd Timothy, Titus, Philemon*—these are sometimes called the “Pastoral Epistles,” because Timothy and Titus were local pastors, and Paul gives counseling as to the qualifications and duties of church elders. In his letter to Philemon, Paul is acting as a pastor to a Christian man whose runaway slave had, while AWOL, become a Christian and was going to be returned to his master, Philemon. Paul writes to the slave-owner to encourage Philemon to retain an attitude of Christian love and forgiveness to this slave who has wronged him.

## *General Epistles:*

Letter to the Hebrews – the authorship of this letter is uncertain. What is certain is that the writer had a beautiful understanding of the prophetic nature of the Old Testament in pointing to salvation through Jesus Christ.

Letter of James – this was written by James, the half-brother of Jesus. It is often called the most “practical” book of the NT, and contains the famous saying, “Faith without works is dead.”

Letters of Peter – the Apostle Peter, one of the “inner circle” of Christ’s disciples and the one enabled to walk on water, has much to write regarding the walk of faith.

Letters of John - Three letters written by the same John that wrote the Gospel of the same name. John came to be known as the “Apostle of Love,” and his letters speak eloquently of the nature of God.

Letter of Jude – Jude was another half-brother of Jesus. Early in His earthly ministry, Jesus' brothers (including Jude) did not believe in Him (John 7:5). However, after the resurrection they did (Acts 1:14). This brief letter exhorts us toward righteousness and warns against being fooled by false teachers. Note particularly Jude 3: *I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.* The exhortation to “contend for the faith” really hits home today in this society that places high value on a misunderstanding of “tolerance.”

## *iv) Revelation of (to) John*

The Revelation of John was written by the same John who wrote the Gospel and also the Letters that bear his name. Basically a record of several visions given to John by the Holy Spirit (1:10), it speaks of “what must soon take place” (1:1), but includes history of the salvation plan from eternity past to present as well. While the imagery is astonishing and the text is mysterious, there is a special blessing promised for those who read it (1:3). This is the most misunderstood and misused book in the Bible. It’s imagery cannot be precisely interpreted, and any attempt to add details to the book is likely to be wrong. In fact, the book itself warns against adding anything to it — 22:18: *I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book.* One of the most common errors is to see the book as a timeline. It includes several visions that may overlap, rather than predict occurrences in sequence.

## **C. Timeline**

The chart entitled “Historical Background of the New Testament” is in your handout. Merrill Unger studied archeology as well as theology and served as a professor of Old Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary after working as a pastor. While we have

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much more confidence as to the accuracy of New Testament dating, you'll note that the chart begins with Jesus being born in "B.C.!! This seeming impossibility has to do not only with various changes in setting calendars throughout the years (lunar versus solar reckoning, "advances" in science etc), but also with the reality that Christmas (the birth of Christ) was not a big deal to the Church at all for many centuries. Easter was the high point of the Christian year, and the first believers expected Christ to return quickly, before many years had gone by. And so we cannot pinpoint the day and year of the birth of Jesus, but we can marvel at the spread of the Gospel which eventually caused the known world to change its calendars in order to recognize the significance of His birth.

Unger includes church history beyond the lifetime of John the Apostle, who wrote the final book in the New Testament, Revelation. He does this, as he explains there in the period from 100-150 A.D., because this was the period in which the various Gospels, letters and other writings began to be collected to form the New Testament as we know it today. In the right-hand column Unger likes to make a point about which emperors persecuted the Church.

**Go over the timeline with the class, letting the level of detail depend on the amount of time remaining in the class period, leaving 10-15 minutes for the last section.**

## D. Themes

### i) *Jesus has come as the Savior of the world*

The Old Testament ends with Malachi's stern prophecy:

Malachi 4:5-6: *"See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."*

The New Testament begins with *"A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham..."* (Matthew 1:1), and before eleven chapters are finished, we hear about Elijah again. (Matthew 11:14)

Obviously the major "theme" of this Testament (indeed, of the entire Bible) is the biography of the greatest Person Who ever lived: Jesus of Nazareth. Before we look closer at each biography, let's look at a familiar essay on the life of Christ by James A. Francis, entitled "One Solitary Life."

"Here is a man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another obscure village. He worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty, and then for three years He was an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book. He never held an office.

He never owned a home. He never set foot inside a big city. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place where He was born. He had no credentials but Himself.

While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against Him. His friends ran away. One of them denied Him. He was turned over to His enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed upon a cross between two thieves.

His executioners gambled for the only piece of property He had on earth while He was dying -- and that was His coat. When He was dead, He was taken down and laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

[Twenty] wide centuries have come and gone and today He is the centerpiece of the human race and the leader of progress. I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that ever were built, and all the parliaments

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that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as that One Solitary Life.”

One verse from the Gospels sums up their primary theme:

Luke 9:20 *"But what about you?" [Jesus] asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "The Christ of God."*

## ii) *The close of Messiah's earthly ministry*

The Lord Jesus knew that there was a time limit on His earthly ministry. He predicted His substitutionary death which made perfect atonement for mankind's sins, His burial and His victorious resurrection. But the Bible does not end with the Gospels. Isn't that curious? Surely He had accomplished all that the Father sent Him to do! He had preached to the "spirits in prison," (1 Peter 3:19) brought that thief on the other cross with Him into paradise. The eleven "faithful" disciples were finally catching on to the fact that Jesus was the Son of God – true, the prostitutes and tax collectors had caught on much earlier (Matthew 21:31), but surely the disciples would eventually put their faith in Jesus, too! So why not declare an end to the human race, roll the final credits, take all believers to heaven and the rest go to you-know-where?

In most action and adventure stories, once the hero has defeated the villain, the story is drawing to a conclusion. But what else often happens before the words, "The End" flash on the screen? What one last thing does the hero usually do?

Answer: He gets The Girl.

2 Peter 3:9: *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.* (See also Matthew 18:14.)

The pattern of the Groom-to-be romancing the Bride-to-be is one that becomes brilliantly clear with the appearance of the Messiah, but it is woven throughout Scripture. God displays His desire for fellowship and oneness with His people from the Garden of Eden to the New Jerusalem. His actions toward His "fiancée" reflect the customs of engagement and marriage in the Near East: a betrothal arranged by the parent(s) of the Bride and Groom; the paying of a "bride-price"; a lengthy engagement in which much communication is handled by a go-between; the Groom's responsibility to build living quarters, usually within his father's house; the Bride gathering for herself special garments which speak of purity, dedication, and also royalty; and finally, the Groom's arrival to escort his Beloved to their new home and the commencement of a vast and extended feast.

The Lord will not return until His Bride is completely ready. Only God the Father knows the exact wedding date (Acts 1:7). Perhaps we struggle to know what "completely ready" means – I heard one little old lady say, "Lord, I've been ready for YEARS." Rather than become impatient, let us look with joy for opportunities to help in preparing the Bride for the return of the Bridegroom. To help us in our task, God has given us His Word in the rest of the New Testament: Acts, the Epistles, and the Revelation.

## iii) *History of the early church*

For the important themes in the Book of Acts, many look at the title: "Acts of the Apostles." However, it may also be titled, "Acts of the Holy Spirit," for the Third Person – as promised by Jesus, figures prominently in the miraculous empowering of the disciples at Pentecost, the directing of evangelistic outreach, and the rapid

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growth of the Church in the first century after Christ's ascension. The Holy Spirit chose a learned doctor and historian, Luke, to keep record of these amazing events, and to anchor them in their historical settings so that believers in ages to come would have a documented witness to the truth of these happenings.

Readers sometimes approach Acts with "rose-colored glasses," imagining that the first Christians did everything perfectly and if we only could return to "the early Church pattern," we too could achieve a "perfect church." Or, possibly worse, some branches of Christendom view the first days of the church as a kind of "Roswell" experience: the Holy Spirit landed like a UFO, zapped thousands of people during the space of a few months, then disappeared like a flying saucer, never to return again! The themes of Acts include "*learning to be the Church*" and "*learning to walk by the Spirit*." So what if they got the name of the twelfth apostle wrong – casting lots and coming up with Matthias, when the Lord had planned to convert Saul of Tarsus into an apostle at the proper time. So they thought that only Jewish people would be interested in Jesus. We have learned from their mistakes, and we still have the Holy Spirit to help us whenever we make our own mistakes. Luke 11:13 tells us that any child of God make ask for the Holy Spirit and receive.

One other theme of Acts must not be ignored: *persecution*. Jesus had told His disciples to expect harsh opposition. His prayer for them was not that the persecution would disappear, but that their faith would remain strong in the face of it (John 17:15). In Acts, the newborn Church would witness to the power of His prayer. In this century, we see that His prayer is still being answered.

Lastly the theme of *the Church as the Bride* being prepared for the Marriage Supper of the Lamb is begun in Acts and developed through the Epistles. Christ is still making us "ready." We are comforted by His promise that "*...surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*" (Matthew 28:20)

## iv) *Law in the New Testament*

In Matthew 5:18-20 Jesus stated quite clearly, "*...not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ... I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.*" This was not good news, for the Pharisees were fanatically "righteous," having added several hundred new laws to the Levitical system through their teaching and commentaries. Continuing His sermon on the mount, Jesus gave examples of what the Law really requires: if you call your brother a worthless moron, you are guilty of murdering him; if you look lustfully at a woman, you are guilty of committing adultery with her; if someone hits you with a left jab, you're not being truly righteous until you let him use his right hook on you also! (Matthew 5: 21-40)

There is plenty of Law in the New Testament, but it must remain in context. That context is uniform throughout Scripture: compared to the Most Holy God, no one is righteous. No one can keep even one Law. Who then can be saved?

In Matthew 5:17 Jesus explained, "*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.*" Jesus saves. The obedient Son of God perfectly keeps the Law.

**The Law's meaning and use is transformed for Christians.** In John 13:34-35 Jesus laid down this new understanding: "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By*

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*this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*" (NASB)

At the last Passover meal with His disciples, Jesus boldly instituted a "new commandment," placing Himself on a par with Moses the Law Giver, and with God, the Law Creator. The "Great Commandment," as it has come to be called in the Church, is the final summation of the Law, perfectly portrayed in the spotless Lamb, Christ our Lord and Savior. Later that same evening (cf John 15), Jesus taught the disciples the principle of the Vine and the Branches, telling them that "Apart from Me, you can do nothing." Here He repeated, several times, His 'new commandment': "Love one another as I have loved you." Although on closer inspection, there is nothing new in this requirement (cf Deuteronomy 6:5; Mark 12:29-31), the usual Greek word for new (*neos*) is not used; instead Jesus used the term *kainos*, which means "new" in the same sense as "fresh."<sup>14</sup>

For Christians, the Law – perfectly fulfilled and taught through Christ's life – has become a resource for learning what pleases God. Repentance and faith have opened our eyes to the Commandment of Love. Once we are no longer hostile to God, we are no longer hostile to His commands. We treasure them for the light that they give to our path.

### v) *Response to the Gospel*

The Great Commandment was followed by The Great Commission:

Matthew 28:18-20: *Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Notice again how Jesus claims the authority to give commandments. Is there Law in these final words of the Lord Jesus Christ? Certainly, but it is balanced with the Gospel. There is baptism; there is teaching. There is faith and there is obedience. Everything is to be done in dependence on the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

In Matthew 10:8 Jesus urges His followers: *Freely you have received, freely give.* Later, the Apostle Paul describes carrying the Gospel to the ends of the earth as like having "*treasure within jars of clay.*" He says that this ironic situation was chosen "*to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.*" (2 Corinthians 4:7) The New Testament offers insight to the ordinary people whose response to the message and life of Jesus eventually turned the world upside down. Freely they received the Gospel; just as freely did they share it. The challenge remains for us to do the same.

# Unlocking the Mystery: Introduction to Bible Study

## Class 4. History of the Bible

The purpose of this class is to inspire confidence in the student that the Bible we have today is faithful to the original inspired and inerrant Word of God. This chapter's text is a little longer than usual in the expectation that there will be little discussion and there are few Bible verses to be looked up. Therefore, watch the time to be sure that you do not run long.

### A. Review week 3 readings (10 minutes)

What did you learn from the Week 3 Bible readings?

Was there anything that you found interesting? Exciting? Reassuring?

Gen 8-11

Josh 11-15

Psa 6-8: Psalm 8 is a song of praise from which we learn about God's nature. For what is God praised? (He is praised for creation and David is amazed that a God so great also is concerned with mere human beings.) What does this say about man's relationship to creation? (Creation was made subject to man, his highest creation.) Is this different that some other philosophies prevalent today? (Yes, environmental extremists would put equal value on all species.)

Job 6-7

Isa 12-17

Matt 5-7

Rom 5-6

### B. Creation of the Canon

i) *What does "canon" mean?*

"The word 'canon' came from the Greek *kanon*, which was a rod of straightness, or something one could measure against. When we say 'the OT canon,' or 'the NT canon,' we are referring to the list of books which are recognized as inspired (or sacred or holy) Scripture.

**Old Testament Canon** - A volume called "The Book of the Law" is mentioned in 2 Kings 22, which recounts the reign of Josiah, King of Judah (648 - 609 B.C.) Also called the Book of the Covenant, it was "found" in the Temple, apparently in a neglected corner. This book may have been the five books of Moses, or perhaps Deuteronomy only. The Levites were charged with keeping copies of the Law, but each king was to make a copy for his own personal guidance.<sup>15</sup> It was also to be read publicly every seven years (Deut 31:10-13). Whether this was done faithfully or not, scholars agree that recognition of the Pentateuch (the five books attributed to Moses) as the foundation of the Hebrew sacred canon was early in Israel's history. This section is also called "Torah" (Law).

Clues as to when the other sections of the Hebrew Scriptures came to be included come from Ezra (7:10) and Nehemiah (8:2), and are attested to by the historian Josephus, who wrote in 100 A.D. "the Scriptures of the Palestinian Hebrews formed a closed and sacred collection from the days of the Persian king, Artaxerxes Longimanus (465-425 B.C.), a contemporary of Esdras (Ezra)." <sup>16</sup> So, by the middle of the 5th century before Christ, the OT had taken a form with three divisions: **Torah** (the five books of Moses in the order we are used to), **Nevi'im**

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(Prophets, but arranged as four books called “the Former Prophets,” -- Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings; followed by the four books of “the Latter Prophets,” -- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel; and one book of “Minor Prophets” (containing writings of twelve prophets); and finally **Ketuvim** (Writings, comprised of Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles). The actual Hebrew names for these books differ from those in Christian Bibles (usually the name is based on the first word or phrase of the book itself). So Torah, Nevi'im, and Ketuvim formed the three divisions of the Hebrew canon. In modern Judaism this T-N-K grouping is referred to as the “Tanakh,” an acronym (much as Dallas Area Rapid Transit is called DART).

Why is the order and naming of books different in our Old Testament? The Judaic order was derived from scriptures gathered by the Babylonian and Palestinian Jewish communities, descendants of the exiles. Our Old Testament arrangement is derived from an early Greek translation, called the Septuagint, published by a Jewish community in Alexandria, Egypt, during the Greek empire about 200 B.C.<sup>17</sup> (The name Septuagint refers to “The Seventy” scholars who translated it; a Greek version was desired for the Hellenized Jews of Alexandria under the Greek empire of the time.)

While the OT canon was probably informally recognized as complete by the time of Jesus, Jewish tradition says it was “officially” recognized as canonical at the Synod of Jamnia (a council of rabbis) about 100 A.D., possibly as a reaction to the spread of Christianity, which was viewed as a Jewish heresy. “Synod” is simply a Greek word for “council.” In modern usage it has become associated with councils of churches, which figure importantly in deciding the structure of the later New Testament canon.

**New Testament Canon** - The canon of the New Testament also took several centuries to be considered complete. Remember that the first Christians were Jews with a deep reverence for the “Law and the Prophets,” as the Scriptures were sometimes called. The apostles, as a group, were quite literate, although not all were scholars and theologians. They were also a scattered group, and thus most of the early literature which formed the New Testament is in the form of letters to the scattered churches of the new movement. We know that the letters from the apostles – who came to be highly regarded because they had personally walked with Jesus Christ – were passed along from church to church. No doubt some copying was done to facilitate this. Scholars date the Letter of James as the earliest to be written, followed by Paul’s letters. When the first Christians realized that the return of Christ would not occur during their generation, the Gospels were written down and circulated. The Apostle John’s letters, and the vision he was given shortly before he died, were the last to be put in writing and copied for the churches – probably close to the end of the first century. However, as Christianity grew, many false letters were circulated.”<sup>18</sup> A need rose to identify the true Word of God.

What criteria were used to determine what should be included in the canon? Here are five major considerations used in forming the New Testament, outlined by Woodrow Kroll of The Good News Broadcasting Association:

1) Authorship - Who wrote the book or epistle? Was it an apostle, a well-known church member or an unknown person?

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2) Local church acceptance – What opinion of the book or epistle was held by the first-century church? Did they read it? Did they accept it as accurate? Did it square with their experience?

3) Recognition by church fathers – Did the fathers of the church in the second century regard the book as authentic? (The “fathers” were the disciples of the Disciples. For example, Polycarp was a pupil of John the Apostle. The question would be asked, what did Polycarp think about this book?)

4) Subject matter – What was the book or epistle about? Was it doctrinally sound? Did it contradict other books? Were the stories in the book wild and fanciful?

5) Personal edification – Did the book have the potential to inspire, convict or edify the local congregation and individual believers? <sup>19</sup>

These are just some of the factors weighed by the councils which determined the canon.

### ii) *When was the canon complete?*

As mentioned before, the Old Testament as we know it was in written form by 400 B.C. and was “officially” recognized as canonical at the Synod of Jamnia (a council of rabbis) in 100 A.D. The early Christians accepted the content of the Hebrew canon as their Old Testament, although the order of the books varied.

Both the Septuagint and the Bible of the Roman Catholic Church include writings from the Old Testament era, which are called the *Apocrypha* ('hidden things'). Until the Council of Trent in 1546, Catholics did not place the Apocrypha on an equal level with Scripture. Luther included them in his translation, with a note of caution that they are not inspired, but "profitable" to read. Other church reformers explicitly rejected these books and thus few Protestants have ever read them.

The New Testament books were written in the first century. Late in the first century, the Gospels, Acts and writings of Paul had gained special respect. About 156 A.D., a group called the Montanists were producing pseudo-Christian works and claiming that their writings were sacred revelation. This motivated a much more serious and organized effort by the Church, still a widely-dispersed array of local congregations, to determine what could be confidently termed “the New Testament.” Spurred by the arguments of various regional bishops and scholars, and after several international councils, the New Testament canon as we know it today was recognized by the Eastern church at the Synod of Carthage in 397 A.D. The Western church was slower, but general agreement to include the current books seemed to exist by the sixth century. The New Testament books which were almost excluded from the Bible are Hebrews, James, 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter, and Jude. <sup>20</sup>

### iii) *When were chapters and verse numbers added?*

The organization and versification which assists us so greatly in studying our Bible and in sharing its treasures with others is really a recently added feature, and sprang primarily from the invention of movable type and the “publishing explosion” of the Renaissance.

Interestingly, the Old Testament Scriptures were organized into verses first, and then broken down into chapters, whereas the New Testament writings were organized into chapters about 300 years before the verses were designated and numbered. This irony occurred through the interaction of academic pursuits among Jewish and Christian scholars for a period around 1200-1400 A.D.

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OT manuscripts, originally copied without any punctuation or even word division – mostly because writing materials were costly -- were formatted with section breaks as early as the Qumran scrolls (first century A.D.). These large divisions, were further broken down by about 200 A.D., into verse divisions called *soph pasuq*. The OT verse structure has largely remained; however the order of books and the chapter divisions in Jewish scripture has definite differences from publications of Catholics and Protestants. Yet the chaptering was influenced, even introduced, by Christian scholars.

Keep in mind that throughout the Middle Ages the Latin translation of the Bible made by Jerome in the fourth century A.D. (the Vulgate) remained the basis of Bible texts. It was hand-copied and the Old Testament sections were based not on Hebrew manuscripts but the Greek Septuagint translation. Printing of Hebrew characters was not done until about 1475, and the first important editions of biblical texts were printed at Soncino, east of Milan, Italy (1485-86). The whole of the Hebrew Old Testament was not printed until 1488.<sup>21</sup>

However, the present chapter divisions in our Bibles were invented circa 1215 by Stephen Langton, a professor in Paris, who became Archbishop of Canterbury in England. Langton put these into a Vulgate edition of the Bible. These chapter divisions were first adapted by the Jews in 1330 for the Hebrew Scriptures in a manuscript and for a printed edition in 1516. This system of chapter divisions likewise came into the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament in the 1400s. According to the Bridwell Library of Southern Methodist University, which holds an extensive collection of early Bible manuscripts and printed texts, this innovation [of chapter divisions] is “one of the rare instances in which Latin scholarship also affected the format of the Greek Bible of the Eastern Church and the Talmud.”<sup>22</sup> So God used Christians to influence how the Jews organize their Scriptures.

The advent of the printing press brought about numbered verses. It was Robert Stephanus, a Parisian book printer, whose versification of the Bible has prevailed to the present. He took over the verse divisions already indicated in the Hebrew Bible by the *soph pasuq* (marks which indicated where an Aramaic translator was to give his translation during public readings) and assigned numbers to them within the chapter divisions already assigned by Stephan Langton. While riding on horseback from Paris to Lyons he affixed his own verse divisions to the New Testament and numbered them within Langton's chapter divisions. Consequently the quality of his work was not the best. Von Soden complained,

The verse divisions of Stephanus which he, according to an incidental remark by his son, made during a trip from Paris to Lyons, frequently do not do service to the sense of the text. There is no consistent method at work in this system. The verses sometimes coincide with a single sentence, and sometimes they include several sentences; sometimes a single sentence is divided into two verses, with the result that the reader is led to consider the second verse while forgetting the point of view of the first verse. Especially objectionable is the way in which words introducing a direct quotation sometimes belong to the preceding verse and sometimes to the verse in which the quotation is found.<sup>23</sup>

Robert Stephanus published four editions of the New Testament, dating from 1546 through 1549, 1550 and lastly 1551. The first whole Bible to be printed in the modern chapter-verse format was Stephanus' Latin Bible of 1555. The first English Bible to incorporate these verse divisions was The Geneva New Testament of 1557,

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followed by the Geneva Bible of 1560. The work of Stephanus was one of the resources for the Authorized or King James Version which appeared in 1611. Although a few other publishers offered different markings, through Stephanus the versification of the Old Testament found its way into the Hebrew Bible printed in 1571. Then Theodor Beza's use of Stephanus' verse and chapter divisions in his edition of the textus receptus of the New Testament (1565) assured them the permanence that they enjoy in our Bibles today.

The entire Bible has 31,173 verses: 23,214 verses in the Old and 7,959 verses in the New Testament. Will someone please read the very first verse (Genesis 1:1 - *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*). Thank you; now someone please read the final verse (Rev. 22:21 - *The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all. Amen.*) Thank you. For your information, the verse at the center of the Bible (computing by numbers of verses, i.e. Verse No.15,587) is Psalm 118:8 "*It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man.*"

A final comment about chapters, verses, and subheadings: downtown Dallas is situated at 32° 51' North latitude and 96° 51' West longitude on the globe. Is there any spiritual significance to the letters and numbers 32, 51 N; 96, 51 W? The answer is: not much. This is to warn Bible students against getting entangled in numerology, cryptology or other methods of trying to get "deeper meaning" from the Bible based on the way in which it has been formatted. As we have just seen, even the professional Bible scholars dislike how the chapters and verses have been placed. They were placed simply as markers to make it easier to find specific portions more quickly. They are not "inspired" in the same sense that the very words of the Bible are God-breathed.

The subheadings within chapters are inserted by editors and publishers as part of book design. They are not inspired either. It is not proper, when reading Scripture aloud, to read the subheadings as if they were part of the text. They are sometimes helpful and are often used to *introduce* the readings of day, just remember, for example, that Luke did not insert the title "Parable of the Prodigal Son" before he wrote Luke 15:11.

Dear Bible students, God is sovereign and knew exactly how His Word would be arranged and re-arranged, just as He knew the exact location of Dallas, Texas before it was on any map. Our mystical attempts at finding meaning in such things is no surprise to Him, and He may certainly use our searching in that direction to His glory. But we see that God does not really want His Word to be a "puzzle" to His children. Listen to Deut. 30:11-14 - *Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.* (NIV)

Our time is much better spent in obeying what we DO understand, than in speculation on what we DON'T.

## C. Reliability of the Canon

### i) Do we have any "original" manuscripts?

When you go to a library and check out a book, you are quite aware that you are only reading a *copy* of what the author wrote. This doesn't bother you much; you

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probably have little desire to see the writer's original manuscript unless, when you open the book, you discover that every third word is misspelled, parts of sentences are missing, and about a dozen pages at the center of the book have been torn out! Even then, you might return to the library and ask for a "better copy." You would not call the author on the phone and demand the original unless you thought all copies were full of errors.

We do not have the actual scroll on which John wrote down the vision he had of the end of time (Revelation). We do not have the actual parchment on which Paul wrote his letter to the church at Ephesus (Ephesians). The ravages of time have destroyed these fragile materials. Even the stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written have disappeared – apparently a casualty of war. But we do have some very early copies of God's Word.

## ii) *How reliable are the "copies" that we have?*

- We have over 10,000 OT manuscripts, dating from 200 B.C. to 1400 A.D.
- We have 24,633 NT manuscripts, dating from 125 A.D. to 1000 A.D. These are now being well cared-for in various libraries and educational institutions around the world. Why should this inspire confidence? Compare these thousands of manuscripts with the fact that there are only 643 manuscripts of Homer's *Iliad* in existence; only 7 manuscripts of Plato. Not only do we have a greater number of manuscripts, the ones we have are older – that is, closer to the date of the originals – than documents on which much of our history of Western civilization is based.

For example, our earliest manuscript of the book of John is from 130 A.D., a lapse of well under 100 years from its writing. The oldest manuscript of Plato is from 900 A.D., a lapse of 1200 years. The oldest manuscript of Aristotle is from 1100 A.D., a lapse of 1400 years. Your handout contains a chart comparing the NT documents to other historical sources.<sup>24</sup>

Look at Caesar's *Gallic Wars*. Although nowadays there is no educational interest in "dead white European males," when I went to school a lot of books mentioned Julius Caesar and his military exploits. He was portrayed as a real person who really lived and influenced history – based on just ten little copies of his book, the oldest one written down nearly a thousand years after he died!

God has preserved His Word, virtually intact across the centuries. He raised up persons (first scribes and later monastic copyists) who dedicated much of their lives to carefully transmitting the words of the Bible from one generation to the next.

In 1947 in the Judean desert, a Bedouin goat-herder was looking for stray goats. He was in an area that had many caves so, to save time, he was pitching stones into the caves and listening to hear the bleating of a lost goat. One stone he threw produced a resounding crash, like a bull in a china cabinet. He investigated and found several jars containing ancient scrolls. Archaeologists took over from there and found eleven caves containing thousands of scroll fragments from the Bible. Scholars estimated that the scrolls represent activity from 300 B.C. to 68 A.D. Coming from the time when Jesus of Nazareth lived, they are older than any other surviving Biblical manuscripts by almost one thousand years!<sup>25</sup> Known as the Dead Sea Scrolls or the Qumran Scrolls, they provided comparison texts for every Old Testament book except Esther. The Masoretic Text from 900 A.D. was

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almost identical to these much older scrolls. Slips of pen and spelling accounted for the differences.

Before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls the Nash Papyrus was the oldest known witness to the OT which dated to the first or second century AD. It contained the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments). The second oldest were the Cairo Geniza fragments (about 200,000) which date to the fifth century AD (See Princeton Geniza Project). Most of these are in the Cambridge University Library and the Bodleian Library at Oxford. Today the oldest known text of the OT was discovered in 1979 in tombs across the Hinnom valley from Jerusalem. The text is the benediction of Aaron (Numbers 6:24-26) written on a silver amulet from the 7th century BC.<sup>26</sup>

The passing down of the Old Testament Scriptures had some built-in preservation measures, basically from the tradition of exacting scholarship and the view the rabbis and scribes held that each copy was sacred. As we mentioned in our first class meeting, tradition requires each Torah scroll to be copied by hand, with each letter in the exact same position as the original, and thorough proofreading so that no mistakes will be made. It is explained: "The scribe must be learned and pious and must exert the greatest care in assuring correctness, copying from an examined text, not from memory. He must pronounce every word before writing it, and must make sure that his letters are well formed and that there is sufficient space between them, 'so that even an ordinary school boy' can readily distinguish between even similar letters. Before writing the name of God, the scribe must state, 'My intention is now to write the Holy Name'; then he must inscribe it without interruption. Should he err, he may not erase the mistake; the whole sheet must be put away, to await later reverential interment in consecrated earth. Rabbi Ishmael admonished a scribe, 'be careful in thy work, as it is heavenly work, lest thou err in omitting or adding one iota, and so cause the destruction of the whole world.'"<sup>27</sup>

Let's try to put this attitude of the Jewish scribes in perspective, in stark contrast to our era of making copies of copies in copiers and forwarding e-mails and publishing multiple editions of the same literary work. If you go to the library looking for something by Tom Clancy about submarines, you may find they have *The Hunt for the Red October* in a pocket-sized paperback, a medium-size soft cover, a hardbound library edition, and a coffee-table size gift book with photographs added. You would hope that the actual text which Clancy wrote is the same in all these editions, but since editors, typographers, and proofreaders are involved in producing the different editions, you actually have no guarantee that, here and there, words may have changed, been added, or dropped out. But in any case, if chapter 3 of the paperback edition appeared to start on page 54, you would not go to page 54 of the hardbound version and expect it to begin there as well. Or suppose you notice that the first mention of the "caterpillar drive" in the paperback is on page 21, fourth line from the top, exactly ten letters and two word spaces from the left... would you expect it to be in the same position in the coffee-table edition? Not very likely?

Well, in the case of Torah scrolls permitted to be used in worship, that is how strictly they are copied. While there are different sizes of scrolls, the hand copying is done so that everything is in the same position, on the same page, as that of the original. Judaic scholars claim extreme accuracy in their copying, saying the only place they have found discrepancies is in the scrolls from the

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long-isolated Jewish communities in Yemen, and even in those the differences are matters of spelling – no change in meaning.

So, we can have great confidence in the Old Testament, due to the strict and sacred practices of the scribes who copied the scrolls.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls confirmed OT scholarship. As for the New Testament, there is such a wealth of *primary documents* (history that was written soon after the events occurred) that it has been observed, "From the historian's viewpoint, we have more evidence for the existence of Jesus of Nazareth than we do for Julius Caesar."<sup>28</sup>

- Types of errors - Only about .1 percent (one-tenth of one percent) of the text of the Bible is considered "in doubt" by scholars today, that is, those verses which appear in so many different forms in different manuscripts that we cannot state with certainty which version God intended. And these few "errors" are mostly problems of spelling or linguistics (eg., HEISNOWHERE could be 'he is now here,' or 'he is nowhere'). There is no punctuation in Greek or Hebrew and in Greek there is no spacing between words.
- Significance of errors - Only a very small percentage would make a significant difference to our faith. For those of us who cannot read the Hebrew or Greek anyway, scholars continue to remove translation errors. For example, the Bible used by the sculptor Michelangelo (1475-1564) translated Exodus 34:30 as "*Moses had horns on his head and they were afraid to come near him.*" Later scholars learned that the Hebrew idiom meant "*his face was shining,*" but the artist didn't know that, so Michelangelo's statue of Moses has horns!

### iii) *What about advances in linguistics and archeology?*

(If you enjoy Biblical archeology, we recommend the video series, "*Jesus: Legend or Lord*".) Modern archeology and the study of ancient languages do continue to refine our understanding of Bible passages. In no way have they materially changed the content of our faith. Archaeologists have not found a tomb with a body labeled "Jesus of Nazareth" in it. If they did find one, Saint Paul would be the first to admit Christianity is wrong:

1 Corinthians 15:16-17: *For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.*

An on line Bible teacher writes, "In the face of these doubts the informed Christian and student of the Bible affirms his complete confidence in the fact that we have God's inspired word today... When all corrections are made upon the basis of better and earlier evidences, no doctrine, no substantial fact of Christian history is affected... The evidence behind [the latest editions] of the Greek New Testament is threefold. First, manuscript evidence. Second, the evidence from early versions. Third, the evidence from the quotations of the Greek scriptures by the Greek church fathers. Any one of these types of evidence is enough to confirm the authenticity of the original text. Therefore, they form a tripod of evidence which is overwhelming. '*In the mouth of two or three witnesses, shall every word be established.*' – 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 13:1... Our Lord Himself said,

Matthew 24:35: *'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away'*

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Surely the God Who made this world with all its complexities is capable of preserving His word for all generations."<sup>29</sup>

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## Class 5. Translations

The purpose of this class is help the student find the best translation for their purpose. This chapter's text is a little longer than usual in the expectation that there will be little discussion and there are few Bible verses to be looked up. Therefore, watch the time to be sure that you do not run long.

**Materials:** An Interlinear Greek New Testament may be particularly useful in explaining the translation process.

### A. Review week 4 readings (10 minutes)

What did you learn from the Week 4 Bible readings?

Was there anything that you found interesting? Exciting? Reassuring?

Gen 12-15

Josh 16-20

Psa 9-11

Job 8

Isa 18-22

Matt 8-10

Rom 7-8: The readings in Romans the last couple of weeks are critical in our understanding of the Gospel. They are also somewhat deep. Did you have trouble understanding this week's reading in Romans? What does Paul tell us about the Law? (It shows us that we are sinners. It is holy. It condemns us. We cannot follow it.) Paul also has Good News! How and in what sense are we free from the Law? (Through Jesus Christ, we are free from the consequences of the law. Believers are empowered by the Spirit to live a more holy life.) This reading ends with great assurance of God's care for his followers.

### B. Dead languages

Since the separation of languages at the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:9), human language has undergone constant change, but it has not been, for the most part, "evolutionary" change. By this we mean, people groups do not graduate from a "primitive" language to communication that is more complex. On the contrary, many languages of so-called "primitive" societies show a great complexity of syntax as well as vocabulary – and languages with a long history tend to simplify their internal structure, dropping or shortening the most common forms and usages as time goes by.

"Dead languages" refers to those that have a written form which is no longer spoken. Latin is clearly the precursor of Italian (also of Spanish and Portuguese and a few others), but no one talks Julius Caesar's language nowadays (outside of Latin class). The beauty of dead languages is that they are no longer subject to the forces which tend to produce abbreviated and irregular forms seen in tongues which are still being spoken.

Biblical Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek are frozen in time, and not many of us can read them. It is interesting to consider the characteristics of these languages which God used to first give us His Word. Woodrow Kroll of the "Back to the Bible" broadcast describes Hebrew as pictorial, with concrete and vivid nouns. There was no neuter gender and it was a rich language to convey the Personhood, personality, and personal nature of God.

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Hebrew did not shrink from expressing heartfelt or strong emotions. It was a wonderful language for poetry, song, and ardent worship.

While Hebrew was the language of a relatively small group of people in a somewhat obscure territory, the Koine Greek (as contrasted with the ancient Classical Greek) was an international language, spoken throughout the civilized world in New Testament times. Greek was more of an intellectual language which offered beautiful precision and expression of deep and abstract thoughts. Scholars point out that when Jesus referred to the commandment in Deut. 6:5, He said, '*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul **and with all your mind** [emphasis ours] and with all your strength.*' (Mark 12:30) The dedication of one's intellect to God is implied in the Hebrew, but is explicit in the Greek. The Greek language was ideal for communicating the doctrine and theology of the newly-established Church, especially the infinite and eternal nature of God.<sup>30</sup>

Aramaic is still being spoken in pockets of the Middle East. It is a Semitic language, a relative of Hebrew and Arabic. Samples of Aramaic writing date from about 900 B.C. It appears to have been a trade language known from Egypt to parts of India. Its alphabet was derived from the old Canaanite Phoenician language. Parts of the Old Testament were written in Aramaic: Ezra 4:8-6:18; Ezra 7:12-26; Daniel 2:4b-7:28; Jeremiah 10:11, as well as the Genesis 31:47 quotation of Laban saying, "*Jegar-sahadutha*" ("heap of witness"). A number of Aramaic words came into common Hebrew usage, and several passages in the Hebrew Bible show Aramaic influence. Eventually the Old Testament was translated into Aramaic. Many ancient Jewish documents, including several of the Dead Sea Scrolls, were written in this language. Jewish Palestinian Aramaic words and phrases occur in the New Testament, such as *Abba* (father) (Mark 14:36), *talitha, qumi* (maiden, arise) (Mark 5:41), *lama sabachthani* (why hast thou forsaken me?) (Mark 15:34).

## C. Earliest translations

Today's class is on translations of the Bible. The need for translations is clear, since very few of us read Greek and Hebrew. Let's start by discussing some of the earliest significant translations.

### i) *Septuagint*

2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. (some say mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC) – the Old Testament was translated from Hebrew into Greek by Jewish scholars at Alexandria in Egypt. The title actually comes from a Latin term for "The Seventy," as tradition tells us that 70 scholars worked on the translation.

### ii) *Vulgate*

4th century A.D. - both Testaments were translated from the original languages by a cleric named Jerome (340? - 420) after studying at Rome and academic centers of the East, Jerome founded a Bethlehem monastery in which he spent the remainder of his life. Jerome's Vulgate, as his version is called, is regarded as the foundation of ecclesiastical Latin, and Jerome is considered one of the great scholars of the Western church. He was multilingual, and at a time when there were conscious efforts to distance the Church from its Jewish background, Jerome not only went to the Hebrew Bible but also sought help with difficult texts from Jews. The name Vulgate comes from the Latin "vulgata", "to make public" or, "in common use." Ironically, Pope Damasus commissioned this translation in 382 in response to the fact that Greek was no longer the language of the people. A few other Latin Bibles had been made but there were noticeable disharmonies among them. Eventually,

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Latin suffered the same fate as Greek and the Vulgate came to be considered inaccessible by the reformers who wished to keep the Scriptures available to all believers by translating it into the “common” languages.

## iii) *Erasmus and return to Greek scholarship*

Jerome’s Vulgate, finished about 400 A.D., gained wide acceptance in Christendom and was considered “definitive” for centuries. The first printed Bible, from Gutenberg’s press, was the Latin Vulgate. It was declared the “only authentic Latin text” at the Council of Trent in 1546. This action was somewhat of a put-down of the brilliant Erasmus’ Greek NT with its accompanying new Latin translation of 1516, the first serious return to Greek scholarship in centuries. Possibly this happened because a renegade monk, Martin Luther, greatly appreciated the studies of Erasmus and based his first German NT translation on Erasmus’ work. Desiderius Erasmus, originally from Rotterdam but settling in Basel, Switzerland, is better known as a humanist philosopher than a theologian, and was one of the first to insist on secular academic approaches to Bible translation. There is no doubting his intellect, but his interpretations sometimes leave little room for the divine. Erasmus brought out several editions of the Bible and New Testament, and modern scholars would point out that he sometimes favored the Vulgate interpretation over the original language, and he also failed to use the earliest texts as his sources. Still, his work merits noting as a forerunner to the “textus receptus” used by KJV translators.

## iv) *Translations, polyglots and England’s battle for the Bible*

**Last days of the Empire** - The level of translation activity was influenced by the shift of power in the political realm. Missionaries were translating parts of Scripture into Syriac, Coptic, and Ethiopian in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. where small Christian communities struggled amidst the intermittent persecutions of Roman emperors. The last pagan emperor, Diocletian, ordered all copies of Christian scriptures to be confiscated and destroyed. In 306 Constantine gained control of the empire. Later, he became a Christian himself, and his Edict of Milan proclaimed freedom of worship in 313. Rather than keeping their Bibles hidden, churches and monasteries began to produce copies in the two major languages, Latin and Greek. It was during the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries that discussion and formation of the canon occurred and the fledgling church determined which writings would be its foundation forevermore.

Naturally the Edict of Milan opened doors for further mission activity, especially to northern and western Europe, which remained pagan and frequently attacked Rome. A further incentive was the rise and spread of Islam beginning in 632. While Latin and Greek remained the languages of worship, the missionaries at times preached and taught in the tongues of the people they served. In 861, priests and brothers Cyril and Methodius were called to the Slavic countries, where Cyril devised an alphabet, based on the Greek letters, for the Slavonic language, and translated the Septuagint OT and other Greek liturgical texts into this heretofore unwritten language. Imagine that your first language textbook in school is the Bible! This method of evangelism is used by Wycliffe Bible Translators and others today – giving unreached people groups an alphabet, a dictionary, and the Bible in their own languages.

**Multilingual editions** - A church father named Origen produced a polyglot (multi-language, from the Greek for “many tongues”) Old Testament called the *Hexapla* in the third century. It had six parallel columns, one of the Scripture in Hebrew, and the other five of various Greek translations. This was a monumental undertaking for hand-copyists.

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Cardinal Ximenes de Cisneros, archbishop of Toledo in Spain, was one of the first to produce a printed edition of the NT in its original Greek, in vol. v of his Polyglot Bible (also called the *Complutensian Polyglot*). The manuscripts he used were comparatively modern and would be considered inferior to scholars of today. Though the volume is dated June 10, 1514, the New Testament was not published before 1521 or 1522. Its OT included Hebrew, Greek and Latin renderings, and the NT offered Greek and Latin, and also a dictionary and a grammar. Not all polyglot Bibles represented new translations, but they enabled the reader to compare a familiar language with an ancient one. Later polyglots of the 1600s featured Syriac (related to Aramaic), Arabic, Samaritan, Ethiopic and Persian texts. Such editions launched a greater interest in Near East linguistics and the collection of ancient Biblical documents.

**Bibles for England** - Meanwhile in mediaeval Britain in about 735 the Venerable Bede (historian) translated the Gospels into English (Anglo-Saxon); partial translations from the Latin into English were accomplished by Caedmon, Alfred the Great, Aelfric, and Aldred from about 650 A.D. – 1020 A.D. But the English language – as well as the attitude of the institutional church toward translations – changed greatly with the passage of years, and the common people of England were again without access to the Scriptures by the time of John Wycliffe (1380).

## D. Reformation translators

### i) *Martin Luther*

The time called the "Reformation" was a religious revival and church reform movement which arose in Western Christendom about 1500 and continued through the mid-1600's. Martin Luther was a Roman Catholic monk who felt that the church needed to change. He lodged 95 protests against the Pope by posting them as debate topics on a church door in Germany on **October 31, 1517**. Those who agreed with his protests became known as "Protestants," and eventually left Catholicism altogether.

The rallying cry of the Reformation was a Latin phrase: "Sola Fide; Sola Gratia; Sola Scriptura." It means "Faith Alone; Grace Alone; Scripture Alone." In Martin Luther's day, most people would have known enough Latin to understand this slogan. But did they know enough Latin to read the Bible for themselves? Martin Luther didn't think so. In fact, after Luther learned to read the original Greek and Hebrew texts, he found some errors in the Latin translation – most notably Acts 2:38 -- *Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.* The Latin said "do penance" instead of "repent." Big difference! Luther produced a German translation in 1534 so that his fellow countrymen could read the Bible on their own. With the invention of movable type and the printing press, books became more affordable, and Bible knowledge spread.

### ii) *Wycliffe and Tyndale*

We are indebted to two scholars, John Wycliffe and William Tyndale, for the earliest English translations. John Wycliffe (c.1330-1384), an Oxford professor, developed a number of doctrines -- that the Bible is the supreme authority, that the clergy should hold no property, that there is no basis for the doctrine of transubstantiation -- which were later condemned as heretical. Among his greatest contributions to English literature was his inspiration of the translation of the Bible into Middle English, the

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first complete translation in the language, and a notable influence on the language itself. Wycliffe based his translation on the Vulgate.

For his work, Wycliffe was hauled before several church councils, was fired from his Oxford teaching position, and was condemned both by the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury. Fortunately King Richard II did his best to ignore ecclesiastical edicts against heretics. Wycliffe died of a stroke in 1384 – however, by church decree in 1415, his body was dug up, the bones burned, and ashes thrown into a river.<sup>31</sup>

Much later, an Englishman forbidden to work in England, William Tyndale translated and printed in English the New Testament and half the Old Testament between 1525 and 1535 in Germany and the Low Countries, including a visit to Luther at Wittenberg. He worked from the Greek and Hebrew original texts when knowledge of those languages in England was rare. His pocket-sized Bible translations were smuggled into England, and then ruthlessly sought out by the Church, confiscated and destroyed. Condemned as a heretic by the Church hierarchy, Tyndale was strangled and burned outside Brussels in 1536.<sup>32</sup>

Church authorities reviled Tyndale's work because it was not made from the authorized Vulgate version, and it changed important ecclesiastical jargon; for example "penance" became "repent", "church" became "congregation," and "priest" became "elder." Furthermore the idea of a vernacular (common language) Bible was threatening to the establishment, as such publications were hallmarks of the Reformation – seen as inimical to the Church. Also it must be admitted that Tyndale's preface and marginal notes were recognizably Lutheran and critical in slant. Although we have only two copies of the 1526 edition NT, we know that 90 percent of his translation was used in the King James Version and the Revised Standard Version retained about 75 percent of his words.<sup>33</sup>

The work of English translators eased greatly when Henry VIII separated the Church of England from Rome in 1534. In 1538 Henry decreed that each parish church ought to have one entire Bible in English. The editions available to fill the King's order were the Coverdale Bible of 1535, the Matthew Bible of 1537 (printed in Antwerp under the alias for John Rogers), and by 1539 the Great Bible.

### iii) *The Geneva Bible*

*The Geneva Bible*, published 1560, was produced by a community of Protestant exiles during the reign of Queen Mary of England (Mary restored Catholicism to England in 1553). This was the first English Bible translated throughout from the original text, and it also featured the chapter and verse notations which made for easier study. It became the household Bible of English-speaking Protestants; it was the Bible of Shakespeare and of the Pilgrims to New England. As with Tyndale, the translators permitted their Protestant bias to show in marginal notes. For instance, the 1595 edition comments on the beast in Revelation 11:7 as "the Pope which hath his power out of hell and cometh thence."<sup>34</sup> Another Bible translation published by "exiles" was the Douai-Reims, named after the towns in northern France where Catholic scholars from Oxford sought refuge and prepared an English text in anticipation of the day when the Church of England would reconcile with Rome. It was translated from the Latin Vulgate, not the original languages, during Elizabeth's reign in 1582 (with the OT added in 1609). The translators had difficulty in finding English equivalents for many expressions and invented Latinisms to fill the gaps. It underwent later revisions and a modernized edition more in accordance with Greek and Hebrew is available today.

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## iv) *The Authorized King James Version*

For nearly three centuries, English-speaking Protestants favored the "Authorized" or "King James" version published in 1611. Forty-seven scholars and translators worked on it from the time of a council called by James the First in 1604. The translators drew on previous English translations, those of other languages, and also the Greek and Hebrew documents. Two aspects made it immensely popular: first, it refrained from all controversial annotations; and second, it was written in an excellent English prose that came to life when read aloud. Many of us still recite our memory verses from the King James version. Its literary style is unsurpassed and greatly impacted the rhetoric of many generations of English speech-makers, from the 1600s to the late 1800s when the Revised Version was introduced.<sup>35</sup>

## E. *Modern English translations*

The last two centuries have seen many, many translations or versions of the Bible published in English. A few examples of some popular translations: The *New International Version* (NIV) and the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB). Both get high marks for scholarship and readability. There is also an updated version of the King James (NKJV), and the recently-published CEV (*Contemporary English Version*) of the American Bible Society has a nice flow to it.

## F. *What is the difference between a translation and a paraphrase?*

To be sure you are looking at a translation and not a paraphrase, look on the title page of the Bible. The publishers of a paraphrase typically have the primary concern of making the Bible readable. They will insert American or British figures of speech when a strict translation is unclear. Often they choose an informal style (such as "don't" rather than "do not"). Often the entire text is in prose; they make no attempt to use poetry where the original writers did.

Paraphrases are very helpful to first-time readers of the Bible and are useful when you want to get an overview of a large section by reading it straight through. What good is the Bible if it sits on a table gathering dust? Find a Bible that you will read every day. The *Good News Bible* (Today's English Version) was one of the earliest of the Bible editions which sought to appeal to modern readers; it even had cartoon illustrations. It is actually a fairly accurate translation. *The Living Bible* seems to be the favorite of televangelists. It is very easy to read, but it tends to be informal in style and sacrifices accuracy in order to make the English sound natural. Again, if you find a paraphrase that enables you to be in the Word more often, go for it. When it is time to discuss questions of doctrine, however, you will need a *translation*, not a paraphrase.

## G. *Why so many translations?*

### i) *Languages keep changing*

If you ever visit Plimoth Plantation, the living history museum of the Pilgrims of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, be sure to look for the exhibit in which you can pick up a telephone and listen to a "pilgrim" speak to you. It's a recorded message, in English -- but in the English of 1620! Not only is the vocabulary and idiom strange, but even the words you recognize are pronounced in an unfamiliar way. God's message has not changed, but His hearers have. As one modern writer states it: "the Bible will continue to nourish the faith and life of believers, because scholars will learn more about the ancient languages in which the Bible was written, and because the English language will continue to evolve. New translations of the Bible are a practical necessity."<sup>36</sup>

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Tyndale House has found the change in language so great that they published the *New Living Translation* in 1996, updating the *The Living Bible* published in 1971, only 25 years earlier.

(See the page in the handout “An Early Parallel Bible.”)

## ii) *Goals and needs are varied*

The need for a Bible in the language of an isolated people who cannot understand any other language is obvious. But do we need the Bible in every language? It has been translated into Navajo, yet many Navajo are also literate in English. There is a Swahili Bible, but Swahili is the trade language of a large area of East Africa. Many African tribal language groups still do not have their own Scriptures. Should we publish a Bible for each and every tribe, no matter how small?

What about Bibles in English? Do we need special Bibles for readers in Great Britain that are different from American Bibles? Visit any Christian bookstore and you will discover that we now have Bibles for men, Bibles for women, Bibles for youth, and Bibles for children, as well as Bibles for senior citizens and Bibles for people who are in twelve-step recovery programs! Not all of these editions require whole new translations, but they illustrate the varied motives which drive Bible translation.

**Gender-inclusive translations** - Recently there has been some controversy over publication of “gender-inclusive” translations of the Bible. Zondervan Publishing and The International Bible Society caught flack from conservative evangelicals for even *planning* to bring out a version of the NIV (which was last updated in 1984) that changed personal pronouns and other grammatical constructions so that female readers would not feel excluded, and that God would not appear to be overly masculine. Looking at both sides of this question may be a good example of the problems faced by translators of a sacred Book:

(From the International Bible Society’s website) The term “gender-neutral” has often been used in error when used to describe inclusive language texts. The *TNIV* is in fact “gender-accurate.” Gender neutrality suggests the removal of specific male or female attributes. The *TNIV* does not remove these attributes or “neuter” any passages of Scripture. The *TNIV* uses generic language **only** where the meaning of the text was intended to include both men and women. These changes reflect a better understanding of the meaning of the original Greek and Hebrew. <sup>37</sup>

(From a newsletter of the Southern Baptists) “...Israel’s language for God cannot be explained merely by the fact that Israel was a patriarchy. All of Israel’s neighbors were patriarchies too, and most worshipped female deities. And so, if we are talking about the God of the Bible and not some other god, we are not free to make the Bible’s God whomever we wish Him to be, or to describe Him with whatever language that happens to garner a majority vote at any given time. He is that very specific personality that is rendered in the Bible, the one whom Jesus taught us to call “Father.” ...In Bible translation God-language should be chosen on the basis of a theology appropriate to the Bible we are translating.” <sup>38</sup>

For a summary of the “problem passages” in the *TNIV*, there is a PDF file posted at the website of CBMW (The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, Louisville KY) at [CBMW.org](http://www.cbmw.org) .

(The Acrobat file is at <http://www.cbmw.org/resources/tniv/inaccuracies.pdf> )

## iii) *Translation is not an exact science*

Different scholars may look at the same passage and translate it differently. Some of the reasons include:

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- There is no punctuation in Greek or Hebrew ancient texts.
- There are no spaces between words in earliest Greek texts.
- In the Greek, word order is used for emphasis and would be difficult for the English reader. There do exist translations that leave the original word order. These are typically in presentations that are called Interlinear Bibles, having the original language on one line and the word for word translation underneath. To illustrate the difficulty with the original word order, consider the following translation of John 3:16 from an interlinear Bible:

*For thus loved [the] God the world, so as the Son the only begotten he gave, that everyone believing in him may not perish but may have life eternal.*

Realize that this is difficult to follow, even with the punctuation is provided by the translator. Also the translator left out the “the” in front of God, but it **is** in the Greek. **Pass the Interlinear Bible around if you have one, suggesting that the class members look up their favorite (New Testament) verse and see if they understand the work-for-word translation.**

- Greek is a much more exact language than English. There can be as many as 32 ways to conjugate a Greek verb, many of which do not have comparable conjugations in English. For example, consider Matthew 7:7: “Ask and it will be given to you...” The Greek verb translated as “ask” has a tense not available in English expressing a continuing action. A translation that would better express this meaning would be “Keep asking and it will be given to you...” A bit different in meaning, isn’t it?

There are also cases where there are multiple Greek words translated as one word in English. There are four words in Greek that can be translated into the English word “love.” Consider John chapter 21. In verse 15 we find, “Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’” (NASB) It sounds like Peter responded affirmatively, but the Greek gives a very different picture because two different words are translated as love. The word Jesus used (agape) is the same word used in talking about the love of God; it is unconditional, perfect love, the love described in 1Corinthians 13. Peter’s responds with the a word (phileo) that refers to brotherly love.

Another example is found in the shortest verse in the Bible, John 11:35: *Jesus wept.* The word translated as “wept” means burst into tears, with loud sobbing and the heaving of shoulders, not just a quite tear or two. That depth of meaning does not really come out in the English translation.

- Idioms – Should they be translated literally, or should the meaning of the idiom be explained? Different translators answer this question differently. This is one of the biggest challenges, because idioms are cultural hallmarks and an outsider, though he may speak flawlessly as far as grammar and pronunciation are concerned, can be spotted immediately if he doesn’t use the appropriate idiom. Try asking to see the “big turnip” instead of the “big cheese”... or bragging that your job is “a piece of cheese” instead of “a piece of cake.” See your handout?? for a comparison of several translations of the common Bible idiom, “May God do so to me and more.” Incidentally, linguists have found that there is a hand motion which usually accompanies this

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expression [make movement of cutting your own throat]. Does that help with the interpretation?

- Culture – There was once a missionary translating Matthew 7, where Jesus asked, “Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?” The problem was that the tribe for whom the translation was being done considered snake a delicacy, so they would have thought a snake was better than a fish. Therefore, a literal translation would have completely distorted the meaning. (The translator chose to put “poisonous snake.”) Another example: What do you do with Hebrews 12:2 where it says that Jesus sat down at God the Father’s right hand in a culture where the left hand side is the place of honor?

## H. Choosing a Translation

There are two things to look for in a Bible for personal study and use: 1) is it a translation from the original languages? [Some versions are merely updates of earlier versions.] 2) is it faithful to the original meaning while being readable in English? (Look at an “interlinear” translation – yes, the words are there, but do they make sense? Or consider the KJV’s use of “thee” and “thou.”)

Read the preface to discover the goals which the translators had. The names and credentials of the translators should be listed somewhere (one notable exception: The *Jehovah’s Witness Bible* – **do not use it**), as well as some indication of what documents the work is based upon.

Look for a description of their approach or method. There are three major “methods” of Bible translation which may be mentioned:<sup>39</sup>

The **Form-Equivalent**, or “Literal” translation method – in which scholars choose from a limited list of meanings for particular words, and endeavor to retain the word arrangement and grammar of the original language. This may be “accurate,” but can result in awkward phrasing, as in the KJV’s 1 Samuel 9:2 - *And he had a son, whose name was Saul, a choice young man, and a goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people.*

The **Function-Equivalent**, or “Paraphrase” method – in which the aim is English readability, trying to make the English function the same way the original language did for its readers. Two dangers are that translators must omit some concepts which simply have no “English equivalent,” and that the commitment to “ordinary” language may result in too informal a tone for serious books such as Ephesians, for example, Ephes. 1:9-10 - *God has told us his secret reason for sending Christ, a plan he decided on in mercy long ago; [10] and this was his purpose: that when the time is ripe he will gather us all together from wherever we are--in heaven or on earth--to be with him in Christ forever.* (LB)

The **Closest-Natural-Equivalent**, or “Dynamic” translation method – in which translators first find the closest way to express the intent of the original writers, and then seek to attain high readability in the translation. This is more a “sense for sense” than a “word for word” translation, used by the translators of the *God’s Word Bible*, published by God’s Word to the Nations Bible Society. God’s Word began as an update to An American Translation, also known as the Beck’s Bible, the work of Dr. William F. Beck and colleagues 1963-1976. While a New Testament was brought out in 1988, by 1991 new leadership, a new team of full-time translators and a contract with consultant Dr. Eugene

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W. Bunkowske -- a professor at Concordia Theological Seminary -- found the method shifting to "closest-natural-equivalent" method, a new translation principle at that time. The finished Bible was published in 1995. Here is John 3:16 in the GW - *God loved the world this way: He gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life.*

Let's not forget what is really important, as illustrated by the following story: Four preachers were out fishing together when their conversation turned to which Bible translation was the best. One recommended the NIV. The next said he thought the NASB was unsurpassed. "I'll still take the good old King James Version," said the third pastor, "It just sounds better from the pulpit." The fourth preacher hesitated, then said, "I think I like my grandmother's version the best." The others asked him to say again. "I like my grandmother's version the best," he repeated. "You mean your grandmother did her own translation?" the others demanded. "No," said the preacher quietly, "I mean *she lived it.*"

Jeremiah 31:33-34

*"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."*

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## Class 6. Prayer and Meditation

The purpose of this class is help the student deepen his or her Bible study, recognizing the Holy Spirit's role in God's communication with His people.

### A. Review week 5 readings (10 minutes)

What did you learn from the Week 5 Bible readings?

Was there anything that you found interesting? Exciting? Reassuring?

Genesis 16-19

Joshua 21-24 – This week's reading concluded the book of Joshua. What would you say is the theme of this book? (Joshua is a story of conquest and fulfillment of God's promises.) What do we learn about God in this book? (He is powerful and cares for His people.) How are both Law and Gospel displayed? (God action is evident in clearly supernatural victories. Law and its consequences are clearly evident in the defeat at Ai due to Achan's sin.) Note that Joshua is the Hebrew name equivalent to Jesus, both meaning "the Lord saves." How are Joshua and Jesus similar? (Joshua is a triumphant leader winning a victory unattainable by Moses, while Jesus won the victory for his followers that could not be obtained through the Mosaic Law.)

Psalms 12-14

Job 9-10

Isaiah 23-28

Matthew 11-13 – In the first couple of these chapters, Jesus is tough on the Pharisees and on His earthly family. Is this how we think of Jesus? Does it seem to be in the character of the loving God we know?

Romans 9-10 – One of the clearest sections of Scripture explaining the difference between Law and Gospel.

### B. Opening

For the past five weeks, you have been asked to read the Bible daily. Have you learned anything, gained new insights? **Assuming the answer is "Yes:"** Good. Our topic today is intended to help you learn even more from your time in God's Word.

### C. Holy Spirit

How can we learn more of God's Truth from the Bible?

John 16:12-15: [Jesus said,] *"I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. <sup>13</sup>But 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. <sup>14</sup>He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. <sup>15</sup>All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you."*

God has promised the Holy Spirit to help us understand this Book. Note that the Holy Spirit does not speak on His own, but what the Father tells Him. Therefore, whatever the Holy Spirit tells us will be consistent with the written Word, the Bible.

1 Corinthians 2:14-15: *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*

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*them, because they are spiritually discerned. <sup>15</sup>The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment.*

The Bible has authority and gives light if it is:

Interpreted BY THE SPIRIT, by people who are  
IN THE SPIRIT (born again).

Help from God includes the Spirit working directly with the believer, and the provision of gifted teachers within the Church

Ephesians 4:11-12: *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.*

Remember that "...the very life of God was planted within you when you became a Christian. You were born again. ...Spiritual life, like biological life, has its own developmental needs, one of which is truth. As you absorb truth from Scripture, spiritual life will thrive within you. As Peter says, you will grow as you feed on the ...Word."<sup>40</sup>

## **D. Focus on Christ**

Prayer and meditation aid in the "digestion" of spiritual truths. A person seeking citizenship in the U.S. may read its Constitution in order to pass an examination, or simply to familiarize himself with the rights granted to citizens. A person writing a biography of James Madison will read the Constitution to gain an insight into the mind of Madison, who was a leader in the Constitutional Convention where the document was framed. If we desire deeper insights into the mind of God we will approach Scripture with prayer and dwell on it with meditation. Here is an example of how this is done.

**(The following article was written by Rev. Prof. John W. Saleska, an Associate Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Missions at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.)**

Christ is the secret. He is the Key that unlocks the Bible. In John 5:39, Jesus says, "Search the Scriptures; for in them you think you have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me." As we read and study the Bible, Christ reminds us that we are to look for Him. He is the theme and substance of every part of the Scriptures. Jesus Himself asserts that the Bible is the revelation of Himself. He is unveiled there in the word pictures presented by the holy writers. Following are a few quotations by Luther to underscore this idea: "It is beyond a doubt that the entire Scripture points to Christ alone." "All Scripture is pure Christ, God and Mary's Son." "When Christ is not known, it is impossible to have any understanding in the Scriptures, for He is the sun and the truth in the Scriptures."

Christ himself teaches us how to study the Bible as He conducts a class for the two disciples, as well as for us, on the road to Emmaus, and He permits us to view the Old Testament through His eyes when He says, "... O fools and slow of heart to believe-all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." Later in the evening in the upper room "He opened their understanding (gave them eyes, if you will) that they might understand the Scriptures, and said unto them, thus it is written and thus it behooved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day." Our Lord is there instructing His disciples that the way to study Scripture is to look for one simple yet profound message: *The Death and Resurrection of the Messiah*. The theology of the Cross is the theology of all of Scripture. Luther says: "Christ crucified is found everywhere in the Scripture." The center piece for the study of both Old and New Testament is Jesus Christ and Him crucified. This is Christ's own approach. He is commending it to us in Luke 24.

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Now that we know that Christ crucified is the object of the search, you might want to know why.

To anyone whose eyes have been opened, the answer is evident. This entire universe is in disarray. The effects of the Fall are apparent everywhere. Pain, heartache, disease and finally death need to be dealt with in order for the world to be restored to its former state of perfection. The cross is where God Himself took on the effects of the Fall, soaked them up into His person like a sponge, and went to death with them, and having dealt with them, came back alive. This is how He has, in effect, put this dying universe back together again. Restored it. It is evident, then, that any study of the Bible would have the cross as its guiding principle: This the Truth to which all Scripture points. It is the gold to be mined as you study the Bible.

As you read portions of the Scriptures, it might be helpful to ask yourself the following questions:

1. Which parts of the event, story, etc., either directly or by example show our sin and need of a Savior?
2. Which parts show God's kindness either directly or by example, which is bound together with Christ's finished work?
3. Which parts of the Scripture invite us to faith in Christ's work either directly or by example, and, also, thus to praise, thanksgiving and works of love? <sup>41</sup>

## **E. Pray before reading**

Prayer should be much more than just presenting a grocery list of requests to God. As Richard C. Halverson, former Chaplain of the U.S. Congress writes -

Prayer is not so much getting things from God . . .  
As it is getting God's viewpoint about things  
It is seeking God's will rather than demanding my way.  
It is submitting to God - not using God.  
Prayer is as much listening to God as it is talking to God  
It is dialogue . . . not monologue!<sup>42</sup>

Arthur Ashe put it this way after he knew he was dying of AIDS, "I do not waste time pleading with God to make me well ... Rather, prayer is a medium through which I ask God to show me His will and to give me strength to carry out that will."<sup>43</sup>

Pray before Scripture reading, with the attitude described by these two men, and your Bible study will greatly increase in fruitfulness. Starting a prayer by praising God will help you to recognize that you are a lesser being subjecting yourself to the Almighty God of the Universe.

1 Peter 5:5 ...*"God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."*

As you submit to God, ask him to show you His view of the Scripture and how it applies in your life. We have a promise that He will:

James 1:5-8 *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.*

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## F. *Meditate on what has been read*

What does it mean to meditate on Scripture? Mainly, give it time to soak in. This time should be when you focus your heart, when you drive your roots deep into the nourishing soil of His Word, for the nurture of your soul.

*Psalm 1:1-3 Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.*

Meditation brings strength. As John White wrote, "...Scripture truth is more than milk... It varies in texture and substance, and correspondingly in ease of digestion. The more you develop spiritually the better able you will be to stomach the 'meat' of Scripture. Strong truth makes strong Christians stronger."<sup>44</sup> Another author has likened meditation to pouring a foundation. The believer, by dwelling deeply in the Word, learns where to place the "wooden forms" in his personal life, into which the Lord will pour His cement foundation of obedience, righteousness, joy and other spiritual blessings. It is a process of opening the heart to God's love.<sup>45</sup> The object of meditation is not to collect a pile of Bible knowledge and flaunt it in Sunday School. Its purpose is both to deepen our relationship with Jesus and to lay a foundation, built on Christ, which will remain steady during the storms of life.

Some people never try meditation because they assume it's only for certain people – like shepherds, maybe? – who have time to read the Bible "day and night." It's true David was a shepherd, but he was also a man of action. It is true that meditation takes time, quiet time, but it does not require sitting for 24 hours with a Bible in our laps.

One writer explains, "To meditate on something is to think slowly and deeply about [a truth], ...and to live out of that truth... as we reflect on the Scriptures off and on throughout the day, we will know how to face our everyday lives with strength and confidence... it is not a method of Bible study but a method of seeking to relate the Scripture to your own life... in essence a two-way conversation with God... [which] draws you to make a life response back to what you are reading."<sup>46</sup>

This process of intentional interaction with God through His Word and this resulting transfer of objective concepts into personal conviction and action are crucial. It distinguishes Christian meditation from that which is called "Eastern" or in a specific instance "transcendental" meditation. TM emphasizes emptying the mind. Ever heard the old saying, "An empty head is the Devil's playground?" Don't try it!

The Hebrew words translated as "meditate" have a root which implies murmuring, or muttering. In some places the same word indicates moaning or wailing! The Greek words translated as "meditate" have a root denoting "preparing" and "revolving in the mind." The Psalmist did not think of meditation as emptying his mind, but rather vigorously debating within it the thoughts of God that he encountered in worship and prayer. His purpose in meditating on God's commands was not to become "at one" with the universe, but to stake his very life on God's truth.

So, if we do not have to assume a "lotus position" in order to meditate on the Bible, just what do we need? It is helpful to have a place free of distraction, and it is also helpful to have a journal, although this is not required. Many urban Christians use the long commute in and out of the city to get their meditating done. Some can do it while working out at the gym. But God has given us our very life – can we not set aside a few minutes

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for Him? When we are able to include God in our daytimers or calendar appointments, it helps us to commit to times of meditation.

Psalm 46:10 *"Be still, and know that I am God."*

I wonder if the Psalmist knew how difficult that would be in the world today, where the lights are never dimmed and the noise never stops.

Your handout contains some aspects of meditating – not all may occur each time we try this, this is just a list of things other Christians have found useful.

1. Read until a verse “strikes a chord in your heart.” Psalms are a recommended place to begin, but if you are already on a Bible reading plan or doing other study, keep following that. The plan we handed out during the first class includes some Psalms every week.
2. Underline and date the verse, with notes about why it seems meaningful.
3. Use your God-given imagination to picture the setting of the verse; place yourself in the verse.
4. Think again about why this passage resonates with your life right now.
5. Make a prayer based on this verse, asking the Holy Spirit to help you.
6. Sit quietly and ask God to speak to you through the verse, re-reading and repeating it aloud if possible. Prepare your heart to accept the truth contained there.
7. Try rewriting the verse in your own words, to be sure you understand it.
8. Respond with a commitment. This commitment may take the form of a planned action or a changed behavior, but it is just as important to release your situation into the Lord’s hands, based on the truth you have just learned. Remember those wooden forms for the cement foundation? This is where the Lord may show you how to walk by faith.<sup>47</sup>

## **G. Does God show us things not explicitly in the text?**

This is a Living Word and it you may approach it both for Truth which is *ageless and applies to all mankind*, and also for *inspiration and wisdom to guide your personal walk*. In the Greek, there are two different words used to describe God's speaking to us — *logos* and *rhema*. *Logos* is the written Word, the Bible, the Law and the Gospel, the “whole counsel of God.” *Rhema* often refers to the Word of God specifically for one believer. As we study God’s Word, we see that it is eternal, universal and timeless Truth, but it is also a vehicle for God to grant us immediate and timely instruction.

This understanding demonstrates the activity of the Holy Spirit as we read the same passage years apart and find different meanings.

To clarify, here are verses in which *logos* is used, and translated as “word”:

John 1:1: *In the beginning was the **Word**, and the **Word** was with God, and the **Word** was God.*

Matthew 7:24: *“Therefore everyone who hears these **words** of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”*

Colossians 3:16: *Let the **word** of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.*

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Compare the sense of the preceding verses with these, in which *rhema* is the chosen Greek expression for “word”:

Luke 1:38: *And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy **word**. And the angel departed from her.*

Luke 3:2: *Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the **word** of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.*

Luke 5:5: *And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy **word** I will let down the net.*

This is not a strict rule about the usage of these Greek words; for instance, in John 6:63 Jesus says, *“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The **words** I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.”* Our Lord uses *rhema* in this passage, and, since He seems to be speaking of the word of salvation (He had just been talking about eating the manna from above), we might expect Him to use *logos*. However, note that He was speaking to His disciples, not just the crowd. Scholars have noticed that *rhema* tends to be used in more intimate settings.

One way to remember the distinction is that *logos* forms the root of such words as “biology” and “theology,” that is, general study of a broad topic. Our word “rheostat” is related to the Greek root from which *rhema* comes. Just as we adjust the flow of electric current to our particular needs when we use a rheostat, God uses His Word to address our particular needs, to help us in individual circumstances.

How does this work out in the course of our Bible study? Here’s an example: John 3:16 is a statement of Truth about salvation to all people (*logos*); to the Christian struggling with loneliness or rejection from others, it may be a word to lift him up in the knowledge that God loves him (*rhema*). Or, look at Matthew 22:21 “...Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.” From a *logos* perspective, we learn the truth that God expects us to do our civic duty toward the state, and He also expects us to do our duty toward His kingdom. Sergeant Alvin York, a soldier in World War I, drew a *rhema* interpretation from this verse. As a new Christian, he was struggling with the question of whether it was right for believers to go to war, for didn’t that violate the commandment not to kill? He prayed and searched the Scripture, and this was the verse that made him decide to remain with his unit. He was sent to France and there earned the Medal of Honor. Part of his citation reads: “he charged with great daring a machine gun nest which was pouring deadly and incessant fire upon his platoon. In this heroic feat the machine gun nest was taken, together with 4 officers and 128 men and several guns.” York had sought God’s help with a specific decision, and God’s word helped him – not only to come to terms with serving his country, but to do his best to save American lives.

Two things to Note: the *rhema* should always line up with the *logos* (God will not instruct you to rob a bank, for instance); and, the Bible is not a Christian horoscope (beware of reading into it some mysterious instructions for the day). Do not be like Herod who was only interested in meeting Jesus to see Him do “magic tricks.” Search the Scripture in humility, and not just to *know* God’s truth, but to put it into *action*.

We read John 16:12-15 earlier. Note specifically verse 13: [The Spirit] *will guide you into **all** truth*. Does the Bible contain all truth? Clearly not, although it contains the most important Truth. These verses tell us that there must be more truth that the Holy Spirit will reveal to us, while we are serving the Lord.

David understood this. In Psalm 16:7, he wrote, *I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me.*

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John 8:47 *He who belongs to God hears what God says.*

Many of these revelations will occur in the context of Bible study. The Holy Spirit will show you applications of the Scripture that apply to your situation, but may not apply to others.

We do have a big caution. Are the thoughts that come to us from God? Or are they from some other source — Satan, our flesh, our desires? This is where Bible study is very helpful. If thoughts come during our meditation, compare them to Scripture. Are they consistent with the written Word that is known to be reliable? Is God glorified? Are the thoughts consistent with the God we have come to know through His Word?

The Bible warns us of the pitfalls of wandering from the right path. Do a negative analysis of the meditation. Do these thoughts appeal to our pride? Would we follow this plan if we knew it would hurt our best friend? Have we checked to make sure it wouldn't? Have we considered how it might injure anyone — even an enemy — or prevent someone from seeing the love of Jesus in us?

Are we in a big hurry to get an answer from God on this? Are we looking for a rubber stamp to approve what we want to do, or are we really seeking His will and not ours?

George Mueller, a pastor who founded several orphanages in England in the 1800's, and became known as a wonderful example of the power of prayer, revealed in his journals his method for learning the will of God: first, he prayed until he felt that his heart truly desired only God's will; then he determined to trust in the Spirit's guidance in connection with the Word, rather than in "feelings," and in this frame of mind he studied the Scripture; third, he looked at "providential circumstances," that is, what God was presently doing in his life that affirmed a certain direction; and finally, he made a habit of making "two or three petitions" and waiting until his mind was at peace before proceeding.

George Mueller, at the time of his death, had distributed over eight million dollars to the needy, which had come to him in answer to prayer.<sup>48</sup>

He had indeed learned to find God's will through prayer, Scripture study, meditation and more prayer. The Scriptures were a steady source of guidance — and comfort — to him. The Lord is quite willing that we may meet Him in His Word also. We trust in His promises:

John 14:23: *Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.*

John 17:3, 8: *Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent... For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.*

Psalms 119:105: *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.*

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## Class 7. Interpretation

The purpose of this class is to provide the student with proper tools and understanding to get the message God intends from each passage they study.

### A. Review week 6 readings (10 minutes)

What did you learn from the Week 6 Bible readings?

Was there anything that you found interesting? Exciting? Reassuring?

Gen 20-23

Judg 1-6

Psa 15-17

Job 11: In Job 11, Zophar is speaking to Job about Job's trouble. To what does Zophar attribute Job's suffering? Sin. What does Zophar say would happen if Job devoted his heart to God? (Troubles would be over.) Is this right? (No, it is works righteousness, not recognizing the grace of God.) How can we say it is wrong if it is in the Bible? (It is right in the sense that the Bible describes what Zophar said, but it is not a correct understanding of God. See 42:7 where God states that Job's friends were wrong.)

Isa 29-33

Matt 14-16

Rom 11-12

### B. Opening

We often hear that modern art means "whatever the viewer wants it to mean," or "beauty is in the eye of the beholder!" Some modern religious movements promote a similar approach to Bible interpretation. They say that the interpretation of the Bible "is in the mind of the reader." When tempted to believe this, remember the statement of Peter:<sup>49</sup>

2 Peter 1:20-21: *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.*

i) *Bible interpretation should start with what is plain and clear.*

- start with the literal meanings of words (both the denotation and connotation)
- pay attention to the context of the writing (read passages, not just single verses; learn about the human writer, his audience, his culture and time frame)
- allow *language* to work the way language usually works (figures of speech have meaning; authors may be using humor, exaggeration, irony, rhetorical questions, etc. Plural vs singular nouns, present tense vs past tense etc are there for a reason — the usual reason)

ii) *Bible revelation should be understood as progressive.*

Example: God created humans as vegetarians (Genesis 2:9, 16-17) but He later exhorted them to eat meat (Genesis 9:3). There was an Old Covenant, now there is a New Covenant. This is not God changing His mind but rather completing His Plan.

God's revelation is the same in our lives. We tend to start with basics and get more and more understanding as we continue to study.

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- iii) *Bible language is phenomenal (from the Greek word for appearance).*  
The language of the Bible describes things as they *appear*, rather than in scientific technical terms, as in “the sun rose,” or “the four corners of the earth.” The Bible was written for ordinary people to understand.
- iv) *Bible reading should be done with both Attention and Intention*  
This is a Living Word and should produce fruit in your life (Mat 13:23). To read it “in faith” does not mean “with mindless acceptance,” but with “personal responsiveness.” Be looking for ways it can change you, mold you into Christ’s likeness. Be ready to act in obedience to the light you are given.

This is a Living Word and cutting it into very small pieces may “kill it” for your understanding. Read an entire Gospel or Letter at one sitting before going back for in-depth study. Get the big picture, then enjoy the details. Get an inexpensive paperback modern translation without study guides so you won’t be distracted by human commentary. The whole Bible can be read in about 90 hours. You are aware that there are reading plans which will help you finish it within a year.

Let’s jump in to a few topics in hermeneutics, the study of Biblical interpretation.

## C. *Prescriptive / Descriptive*

A quick illustration of the two approaches called Prescriptive and Descriptive is the true account of a Baptist minister who had been invited to give a Bible overview seminar at a Lutheran church. In making the advance arrangements the Baptist asked the Lutheran pastor if there would be a problem with his talking about baptism by immersion during the seminar. “... ‘Of course not, Jim,’ the pastor replied without hesitation. ‘It’s true that we usually baptize by sprinkling, but we are always eager to accommodate any believer’s request if they feel that immersion would be more proper for them.’ Sensing my relief, [he added,] ‘By the way, Jim... our congregation observes the Lord’s Meal with the *real stuff*. Will you be teaching that, or is *grape juice* literal enough for you?”

“...A church leader may claim to “follow the Bible,” but *thinking biblically* requires him to answer this question: “Do you follow the Bible *descriptively* or *prescriptively*?” In other words, “Which parts do you interpret as a *description* of how things were back then, and which parts are a *prescription* for how we should do things today?”<sup>50</sup>

Both men based their actions on their interpretation of God’s Word. Both were acting in sincere faith, in the light of Scripture. How shall we judge which method of interpretation is “better”? Let’s go back to the Bible (as always). Here are two verses that may help:

Romans 12:2: *And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.* (KJV)

Philippians 2:5: *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus...*

In Romans, Paul points out the worldly and cultural pressures to conform. So, one precaution as we look into Scripture is to watch for our human tendency to interpret it through our own cultural lenses. This is natural and expected, and in some cases even necessary in order to gain a hearing for the Gospel. “*Greet one another with a holy kiss*” is usually interpreted *descriptively* by American males – but in other cultures, the Christian brothers do embrace and kiss each other.

Two kinds of **problems** may arise in using “descriptive” interpretation: first, because it doesn’t seem to “fit” our lifestyle, we may ignore the verse entirely, rather than seeking

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to know the spirit of what is written there; or second, we may unconsciously question the faith of other Christians who don't conform to our cultural norms.

Paul's other instruction about the mind, in Philippians, talks about having, as our supreme goal, the "mind of Christ." The passage goes on to say that Christ "*made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant*" and "*humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*" (Philippians 2:7-8 KJV). It takes humility to pursue the more literal, or *prescriptive* interpretation of God's Word, because so often God calls us to abandon our comfortable self-centeredness. It calls us to confront the Truth daily – sometimes a painful encounter! There are potential problems with a strictly literal interpretation method, however. For example, people of Salem, Massachusetts in 1692 supposedly took a literal interpretation of Exodus 22:18 "*Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.*" They suspected witchcraft in their village and took steps to eradicate it. However, they often overlooked Deuteronomy 17:6 "*...no one shall be put to death on the testimony of only one witness.*" Their courts accepted hearsay evidence, evidence from minors, even evidence from ghosts! Also, from the records it appears that those who confessed to witchcraft received short jail terms and released, while those who maintained their innocence were executed. Had they also overlooked the Bible's teachings on impartial justice? (Leviticus 19:15; Romans 2:11)<sup>51</sup>

One **danger** of the *prescriptive* method is that of fastening on a single verse or passage out of context, and acting on it without regard to the whole counsel of God. Does "*Be still, and know that I am God*" (Psalm 46:10) mean we cannot pray while we are on a walk, or in rush hour traffic? (See 1 Thess 5:17). Another danger is trying to find a "prescription" where there is none; the Bible says very little specifically about space travel, cloning, organ transplants, and a host of other controversies. If an activity is not mentioned in Scripture, should we feel free to do it? Or assume that it is prohibited? Good Christians have argued about this since the beginning of the Church.

From this discussion, it is hoped that we see value – as well as pitfalls -- in both the *descriptive* and *prescriptive* methods of interpretation. It seems evident that we need to have both methods available as study tools. (See Job 11 from this week's readings. The Bible correctly describes what Zophar says, but God later specifically says Zophar was wrong [Job 42:7].)

## D. Symbolic

As with any literature, language conveys meaning on different levels and in different ways. Signs and symbols are an important mode of communication, and may deepen understanding by offering several messages simultaneously. Signs and symbols tend to spring from a shared or collective consciousness within a people's particular history, so context and background is very important when seeking to interpret them.

There is symbolic language in nearly every book of the Bible, but probably the first section we think of under this topic is the Revelation, the Apostle John's vision while on the Isle of Patmos. As an example of the multiple possibilities for interpreting one symbol, we may look at the Woman in Revelation 12. Suppose she is not a specific person, an individual in time and space (such as John the Apostle), but a symbol for something God is telling John. One scholar has proposed four ideas as to what the Woman symbolizes: she could be 1) Israel -- for she is associated with the sun, the moon, and twelve stars, per the imagery of Joseph's dream in Genesis; 2) the Church -- for her "other children" are those who keep the testimony of Jesus the Messiah; 3) Eve -- for she is involved in a three-way conflict between the Woman, her Seed, and the old serpent; or 4) Mary -- for she is the mother of Jesus, "*a son, a male child, who will rule*

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*all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to His throne.” (Rev. 12:5)*

Right away we see an important question in symbolic interpretation might be: Is there only one right interpretation? Or is this passage communicating several ideas using one symbol? Of the several ideas which occur to the reader, should we expect to validate all, or only one, or fifty percent of them – and if so, WHICH fifty percent?

This dilemma brings us to the next very important principle of interpretation:

## **E. Scripture is interpreted by Scripture**

“Through this approach, what the Spirit is trying to tell us through Scripture is unlocked by, tested by, qualified by, and balanced by, the whole of Scripture. No part of the Bible is slighted or ignored -- but no part of the Bible stands on its own, apart from the meaning of the whole and apart from other specific parts which deal with related matters. Since the Bible is the way the Spirit reaches us, the rest of the Bible is the most reliable resource for finding what the Spirit is saying in any one section of the Bible.”<sup>52</sup>

With symbolic passages, which we were just discussing, this approach is essential and most helpful. A symbol such as the Serpent in the Desert (Numbers 21:8-9) becomes less puzzling when Jesus mentions it (John 3:14, John 12:32), and then re-enacts it (John 19:17-19). When John the Baptist refers to Jesus as a Lamb, this casts new light on the significance of Passover. This method also shows how the Old and New Testaments comprise an integral whole. Remember Paul was able to “share the Gospel” using the Old Testament. The first Christians firmly believed that Jesus was the Messiah promised by their Jewish prophets. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus pointed his disciples to the only Scriptures they had at the time: Moses, the Prophets, and the Writings (Luke 24:27). Jesus quoted from the Old Testament many times.

(For another example, refer again to Job 11 from this week’s readings. The Bible correctly describes what Zophar says, but God later specifically says Zophar was wrong [Job 42:7], an extreme case of Scripture interpreting Scripture.)

Many Bibles provide cross references that are useful in finding other Scripture that may shed light on a passage, but always remember that these are man made, not inspired. So we should understand that they may reflect a bias on the part of the creator of the cross-references. There is no substitute for your own familiarity with the content of Scripture.

## **F. Context**

One of the most common errors in interpreting scripture is in taking a verse or passage out of context. We are more likely to find an accurate understanding of a message when we take time to consider its setting.

For example, in the 60’s, when young people were taking an interest in Communism and reading *The Sayings of Chairman Mao*, a Christian publisher brought out a small book entitled *The Sayings of Chairman Jesus*. He hoped it would be eye-catching and perhaps inspire some readers to want to read the full Bible. The only drawback was the lack of context for the sayings. They were arranged under broad topical categories (Marriage, Wealth, Anxiety, and so on), but no mention was made of where and when Jesus said these things, nor to whom He said them. The result was a bouquet of fine-sounding words which, like cut flowers, had no roots which would support them. Warnings which had been addressed to the Pharisees were mixed in with gentle teachings aimed at the disciples. Under “Promises,” the verses from John 14:2-3 were

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printed: *“In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”* This is indeed a beautiful promise, but it was spoken to those who had put their faith in Jesus Christ. What if someone flipped to that page first, never reading the section where Matthew 7:14 was printed: *“But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”* ? No doubt *The Sayings of Chairman Jesus* did cause some to want to read more about Christ, but if all we had of scripture were disconnected discourses, we would have a severely limited understanding of God’s plan.

An Old Testament verse which is often used out of context is Genesis 31:49 “... The Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another.” It is often called “The Mizpah Benediction,” after the place-name given where it was spoken, and is a favorite text for the makers of sentimental greeting cards. If we look at the context, however, we find it is anything but a fond farewell. The occasion is Jacob’s unannounced departure from his service to Laban, his father-in-law. Jacob had been told by the Lord God (Gen 31:3) to return to his own land, but he was afraid that Laban would not permit him to move Laban’s daughters that far away, so he waited until Laban was off shearing some sheep, packed up, and headed for Canaan. Unbeknown to him, Rachel had stolen some “household gods” from Laban and hidden them in her camel saddle. When Laban caught up with Jacob, he was quite angry, but a dream from God had warned him not to complain. He did insist on searching the tents for his missing idols, and this infuriated Jacob, who didn’t know of Rachel’s theft. Finally Laban suggested they make a covenant over a heap of stones. Laban’s words were not a “blessing” but a warning to Jacob that he’d better not mistreat Laban’s daughters, or God will know about it. He went on to make Jacob promise not to come back to harm him. After the “peace treaty” and ceremony, Laban kissed his daughters and grandchildren goodbye – we notice he didn’t kiss Jacob – and he departed.

As one commentator puts it, “This is not a suitable benediction for dismissing Sunday School or church services. This is an agreement between two men who don’t trust each other asking God to make each honor the agreement to stay away from each other and each other’s property.” – Rev. C. David Coyle, Mennonite Seminary

Another example of failing to recognize context is a (John Hagee) sermon once delivered on the topic, “Command ye the Lord!” This was a “name-it-and-claim it” sermon based upon Isaiah 45:9-12. KJV translates this as a statement, NIV a question, but in either case the Lord is rebuking those who would dare to “command” Him about anything... see the context!

When we talk about context, we usually think of it as being the passage that contains the verse, but we should look at larger circles around the verses. Think about the entire book containing these verses. How do the verses fit with the general theme of the book. If it is a book written by the writer of several books, you may want to study the whole body of writings written through that author. And finally, where do the verses fit in the entire Bible. Remember what we said about Scripture interpreting Scripture. Also, remember the concept of progressive revelation. For example, are you looking at verses that were part of the Jewish ceremonial law which is characterized as foreshadowing of the Messiah (Hebrews 1:1-3).

## G. Audience

A pastor once observed, *“Many years ago in Latin America I was astonished to discover that Roman Catholic students (who in those days had had little or no exposure to*

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*Scripture) and communist students were far better at Bible study than students from evangelical churches. In group study the communists and Catholics were quick to see what the passage actually said. Many evangelical students, on the other hand, had a mental block at this point. They seemed only able to see what the Bible was supposed to say. It was as though they screened Bible statements through a doctrinal filter, seeing that which they had been trained to expect.* “<sup>53</sup>

This is an example of two “audiences” for God’s Word, in a modern setting. Each had its own set of thought-patterns and expectations – its own worldview.

When we study the Bible which was written down in another language, time and geography from that which is part of our own worldview, we are wise to consider the character of the audience for which it was first written.

We mentioned earlier that the Bible was not written for modern scientists. When Jeremiah writes about God: “When he thunders, the waters in the heavens roar; he makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth. He sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses” (Jeremiah 10:13), he uses anthropomorphic terms for God and poetic terms for how thunderstorms occur. An atheist meteorologist would scoff at this description, of course; but how should a Christian meteorologist read it? He knows that a big guy with a long white beard is not literally bringing wind out of a storehouse – but he also knows that God is Creator and it is He Who set in place the natural laws which cause storms to happen, and it is only He Who is powerful enough to alter or suspend those laws at will. (The disciples went and woke him, saying, “Master, Master, we’re going to drown!” He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. - Luke 8:24)<sup>54</sup>

Writer Judson Poling<sup>55</sup> gives two examples of the importance of knowing the audience: suppose you pick up a magazine clipping which asserts that “any man who doesn’t keep a stockpile of wood or coal close by him is a fool.” If you looked at the page and noticed it was dated 1898, you might nod your head, understanding his audience. Or if the page date was 2002, and the magazine was entitled “Wilderness Camping,” the message might seem acceptable – you understand the audience. What if it turned out to be a letter to the editor in last week’s newspaper?

Some passages in the Bible have increased impact when you understand the audience. For instance, according to Biblical scholarship, each of the plagues Moses called down on the Egyptians corresponded to a favorite Egyptian deity. The Pharaoh and his priests and magicians were being pointedly introduced to the truth that their so-called “gods” were all inferior and subject to the Hebrew God. This was no random demonstration of power over nature; it was judgment of the pagan beliefs of the Egyptians.

We enrich our understanding of the Epistles by getting to know each audience. Consider this passage: *Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.* (1 Corinthians 1:26-27) Paul wrote somewhat differently to the church at Corinth than he did to the believers in Rome.

Jesus perfectly tailored His speaking to His audience. Matthew 13:10-17 explains that he used parables to speak to “the crowds,” but more specific teaching to His disciples. Both Jesus and John the Baptist had special ways of speaking to any Pharisees in the audience (Luke 3:7, Matthew 12:34). What do we know about the Pharisees? Often a message will open up when we make an effort to get to know the hearers.

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## H. Three simple rules for accurate interpretation

Three simple rules for accurate interpretation -

1. INTERPRET THE PART BY THE WHOLE. *Scripture interprets Scripture so the whole remains consistent; the clear interprets the unclear; the primary interprets the secondary; that which is stated multiple times interprets that which is said only once or rarely.*
2. FOLLOW THE LITERAL SENSE. *Attempt to go with the obvious meaning rather than some hidden message; simple sense is better than contrived; follow the rules of literature (don't force poetry to follow the rules of narrative, or apocalyptic material to follow the rules of historical material etc).*
3. USE THE GRAMMATICO-HISTORICAL METHOD. *The grammar and historic setting of the passage dictates its meaning; any elaborate or multilevel interpretive schemes are suspect.*<sup>56</sup>

There are, of course, other guidelines for interpretation out there, but this is a well-respected one. More liberal theologians would allow us to “de-mythologize” the Bible and to “recognize multiple levels of inspiration” – which attitude results in picking and choosing which truths we feel comfortable with, and jettisoning those troublesome “stumbling blocks.” Unfortunately this does not require us to bend our pride before God at all, and we know where that leads.

At the opposite end of the continuum, perhaps, are the mystic interpretations, which allow for imaginative forays into numerology, acrostics, and allegorical renderings of almost every passage of Scripture. A well-known example is *Hidden Prophecies in the Psalms*, by J.R. Church, who proposes that The Psalms appear to be written so as to tell the story of Israel's return from exile in the 1900s, like this:

- Psalm 17 alludes to the liberation of Jerusalem in 1917.
- Psalms 39-45 correspond to the years of the Holocaust - 1939-1945.
- Psalm 48 alludes to the birth of Israel in 1948.
- Psalm 91 became the favorite psalm of the soldiers in the 1991 war against Iraq, because of its uncanny descriptions of that war.
- Every psalm contains a reference to events that occurred in the year numbered (from 1900) by the psalm.

Then there is *The Bible Code*, by journalist Michael Drosnin, which relies on the way the Torah scrolls are copied to find messages which, *in hindsight*, seem to be predictions of modern events. This type of Bible interpretation is not only a waste of time, it may also conceivably bring judgment on the person who dabbles in it. Deuteronomy 18 has much to say against trying to predict the future, especially verse 14, *The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the Lord your God has not permitted you to do so.* Or Isaiah 2:6 *You have abandoned your people, the house of Jacob. They are full of superstitions from the East; they practice divination like the Philistines and clasp hands with pagans.* Or Jesus' words in Matthew 16:4 *A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah."*

Now these are the extremes. We must not say that Scripture can never be interpreted on more than one level. When we read the accounts of Jesus feeding the multitudes, we understand historically that He fed real people, with real food, in a real time and place.

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We understand that this was a miracle, which affirmed His claims to be God. But Jesus Himself taught us to interpret this event on a second level, namely ... *"I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."* (John 6:26-27)

Perhaps the best single guideline for interpretation would be: How would a loving Father write to His beloved children? If His intent is to draw us closer to His Son, He will communicate in ways we may understand. Other so-called holy books are only for the highly-educated, or the priestly class, or the "enlightened ones." While the depth of the Father's mind cannot be fully known by finite humans, the depth of His love can! The Bible is for all people. Let us interpret it in simplicity and humility. Let us interpret it in faith, so that we may not stumble – nor cause others to stumble.

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## Class 8. Bible Study Tools

The purpose of this class is make the student aware of tools that can assist in Bible study.

**Instructor materials:** Examples of tools discussed, including if available *Strong's*, *Nave's*, commentaries, *The Narrated Bible*.

If possible, set up a computer with Bible study software for demonstration. Otherwise, the material provided will need to be stretched.

### A. Review week 7 readings (10 minutes)

What did you learn from the Week 7 Bible readings?

Was there anything that you found interesting? Exciting? Reassuring?

Gen 24-27 – A wife for Isaac through Jacob's blessing

Judg 7-11 – Gideon, several other Judges

Psa 18-20

Job 12-14

Isa 34-39: The reading in Isaiah for last week is the end of the first major section of Isaiah. How would you characterize the message of Isaiah in what you have read so far? (Judgment, shape up or else.) What event from the Old Testament timeline is prophesied in Chapter 39? (Babylonian captivity.) This event takes place between the writing of chapter 39 and chapter 40. You will find as you continue reading Isaiah that he becomes more comforting. The terrible events previously prophesied have come to pass. Now the Hebrews need to be comforted by the fact that there will be an end to their punishment. There is also a significant amount of prophecy concerning the coming Messiah in the remainder of the book.

Matt 17-19

Rom 13-14 – Government, adiaphora

### B. A Word of Caution

It is probably better to read a section and meditate on it before jumping immediately to a tool discussed in this class. Let your understanding come from the Holy Spirit aided by man's tools, not be dictated by men.

Henrietta Mears says, "Don't wish to put on colored glasses of man's opinions and then read through the interpretation put on it by other minds. Let the Spirit of God Himself teach you. Each has a right to read it for himself. *No scripture is of any private interpretation.* (2 Peter 1:20). Read it seeking for illumination. It is a revelation, and He will flash light upon the page as you come humbly."<sup>57</sup>

That said, let us look at some tools to aid in our Bible study.

### C. Concordance

If you can remember some words or phrases that you think are in the Bible, and you want to look them up, you need a *Concordance*. Many Bibles will have a short concordance (really an alphabetical index of key words) at the back. You can also purchase a separate concordance – as a paperback or huge hardbound book at your local Christian bookstore. If you have a computer, most Bible software includes a concordance. Suppose you want to find the part in the Christmas story where the angels

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appeared to the shepherds. Look up key words you remember (angel, shepherd, field, sheep). You'll find a lot of places in the Bible where angels appear... but since you know the biographies of Jesus are in the Gospels, you narrow it down to Luke 2. Note: sometimes you need to think of a synonym, such as "flocks" for "sheep."

One of the best-known concordances is *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Dr. Strong labored for 35 years to produce this volume in 1890 (before computers could help him sort the words). This concordance is based upon the King James Version of the Bible. It is exhaustive in the sense that it shows every verse containing every word in the Bible with the exception of 47 very common words that would not be used to look up a passage ("a," "the," "I," etc.) It is a great tool for serious study of the Bible. Not only does it function as a concordance, it includes a reference to a Greek or Hebrew lexicon for the original word translated as the word sought for each verse. This helps the student note when different words are translated into the English word of interest.

## **D. Topical Bibles**

Topical Bibles list verses by topic. Many verses apply to more than one topic, so they are listed in more than one place. The best known of these is Nave's Topical Bible, first copyrighted in 1896 by Orville J. Nave, a United States Army Chaplain. This book claims to contain one hundred thousand references, so, on the average, a verse is referenced slightly over three times. There are more than twenty thousand topics and subtopics.

## **E. Dictionaries**

The Bible often uses terms that are not in common usage, and which are therefore not included in standard dictionaries. Bible dictionaries help fill this gap. They are used like standard dictionaries — looking up words in alphabetical order.

## **F. Maps**

Maps help the user understand the relationships and distances between places mentioned in the Bible. Many Bibles contain a few maps at the back, showing the political boundaries at various times. Note the scale as you use the maps. The Holy Land is really a very small amount of real estate for all the attention it gets.

## **G. Commentaries**

As one reads the Bible, particularly one who has not read much of it before, he or she will certainly come across names of people and places they are unfamiliar with. Commentaries are typically written by people who have extensively studied the section they are writing about. (Many commentary writers are seminary professors.) These people can be valuable in understanding the names, idioms, and social context of the passages.

This may sound a bit like the description of a Bible dictionary. Yes, some of the information is similar, but a commentary is typically organized by book, chapter, and verse. Therefore, one may look up the passage in the commentary and get a discussion of everything the author has to say about all the terms, people, places, and interpretation for that passage.

Watch what you read in commentaries as they may be heavily influenced by the authors' theology, which may or may not be good theology.

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## H. Study Bibles

A study Bible contains features that help you dig deeper into the Bible, such as lengthy footnotes, cross-references to other verses, timelines, charts, maps, and a concordance. Study Bibles are particularly useful in helping us understand the audience, as we talked about last week.

Another form of study bible is the Parallel Edition, in which the publisher has printed three or four different English translations side-by-side on each page. This makes for a fairly heavy book — but it is great to see how different translators approached the same passage.

There are "chain reference" or "reference" Bibles which enable you to follow a certain topic, such as Salvation or Covenant, all through the Scripture. There are devotional Bibles, printed in sections for daily reading. There are Bibles with study questions and sidebar articles aimed at men, women, and students.

## I. Chronological Bibles

Chronological Bibles puts everything in chronological order. This can help in understanding the context of a passage. For example, when you read a passage about a certain king in the historical books, it is followed by the writings of the prophets who lived during his reign. Of course, this ordering of the Bible, as well as the one we are more familiar with, is created by man. It is not 100% reliable. There is not universal agreement among Bible scholars about the exact times of many incidents in the Bible.

*The Narrated Bible* is an example of a chronological Bible. The Scripture is the NIV translation. Examples of the chronological ordering include the fact that there is one Gospel which contains the life of Christ taken from the words of the four Gospels. In the case of events reported by more than one of the Gospel writers, the arranger of this chronological Bible only includes one of the accounts, but provides a cross reference to the accounts not included, so you can check him if you wish. The fact that this arrangement was produced by an attorney is evident in his treatment of the laws given by Moses in Exodus and Deuteronomy. He has combined all the laws in the books of Moses in one place and has organized them like a criminal code. This is an excellent choice for daily reading since it is much easier to follow the history, providing context.

## J. Computer Software

**Demonstrate whatever software is available for demonstration to the class.**

**Demonstration should include lookup by word or reference, side-by-side display of several translations, study tools offered. Take up the remainder of class time leaving just a couple of minutes for the next section and the closing.**

Examples of Bible software include:

e-Sword is free and has a very nice user interface, but as a free package, it understandably does not include some of the modern translations that are still under copyright. This package is available for download from [e-sword.net](http://e-sword.net).

Word Search has a very comprehensive collection of Bible Study resources. You may download the software and the KJV from [wordsearchbible.com](http://wordsearchbible.com) at no charge. They will charge for the additional materials.

Logos Bible Software has been around about as long as any consumer level Bible software. See [logos.com](http://logos.com) for more info.

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Numerous additional sources can be found by searching for “Bible software” in a search engine.

## **K. Internet Resources**

[www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)

This web site provides the Bible in numerous languages, including 21 translations in English. It provides lookup by reference and by a word search. The search is fairly advanced in that it allows restriction to ranges of book, searches for exact phrases, and the ability to specify “and” or “or” relationships for searches involving multiple words. Numerous other resources are included, including commentaries, dictionaries, and other study materials. Audio readings and mobile device tools are also available.

[www.studylight.org](http://www.studylight.org)

This web site provides the Bible in 3 different languages, including 20 translations in English. It provides lookup by reference and by a word search, including the ability to restrict a search to sections of the Bible. Audio readings of the Bible are also available. This site includes many study tools, including the ability to display translations side by side as in a parallel Bible, numerous commentaries, topical Bibles, encyclopedias, maps, diagrams, and histories. It includes what they call an interlinear Bible, but it is not a true interlinear in that the translation is not word for word. You may display a verse at a time in the Greek or Hebrew along with the King James or NAS version; it is interesting in that it provides three compilations of the Greek text and includes the Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint. The site also provides devotionals and daily reading schedules.

[bible.crosswalk.com](http://bible.crosswalk.com)

Through this website, Crosswalk.com provides 23 translations and a great many study tools. It appears that they use the same source as [www.studylight.org](http://www.studylight.org) because the sites are very similar.

[audiobible.com](http://audiobible.com)

Want to listen to the Bible? This site is for you! This site contains the great recording of the King James Version done in the forties by Alexander Scourby.

[olivetree.com](http://olivetree.com)

This site provides Bible Readers and Bibles for mobile devices. Great resource for when you want to bring the Word with you!

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## Class 9. The Bible in the Life of the Christian

The purpose of this class is encourage the student to involve Scripture in everyday life, and to recognize when it already there.

**Instructor materials:** a recent service bulletin or a hymnal containing an order of service.

**The handout for this class is three pages. Do not staple them together. The third page is to be handed out at the end so it is not available during the class.**

### A. Review week 8 readings (10 minutes)

What did you learn from the Week 8 Bible readings?

Was there anything that you found interesting? Exciting? Reassuring?

Gen 28-31

Judges 12-16

Psalms 21-23

Job 15-17

Isaiah 40-44

Matt 20-22

Rom 15-16 – This reading concludes the book of Romans. What would you say is the theme of this book? What do we learn about God in this book? How is both Law and Gospel displayed?

### B. Use in Liturgical Worship

#### i) *Scriptural Foundations of the Liturgy*

Benjamin Kolodziej, a student of the history of liturgy, has written about the Scripture's importance in forming the structure of worship in today's Christian churches. He notes, "**Exodus 24:1-8** describes the foundation of Old Testament worship upon which historic worship to the present day will be based. There are five salient points of worship which are present in our corporate worship of today: 1) the meeting was convoked by God; 2) the people were arranged in a structure of responsibility; 3) the meeting was characterized by proclamation of the Word; 4) the people acknowledged their responsibility in the Covenant; and 5) the meeting is climaxed by a dramatic symbol of ratification."<sup>58</sup>

Kolodziej points out the many directives (both positive and negative) concerning worship ceremonies in the Old Testament, including **Deuteronomy 12:1-7** as well as the many passages in Leviticus which focus on the duties of the priesthood. A summary passage is:

**...and after they [the pagans] have been destroyed before you, be careful not to be ensnared by inquiring about their gods, saying, "How do these nations serve their gods? We will do the same." You must not worship the Lord your God in their way, because in worshiping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the Lord hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods. (Deuteronomy 12:30-31)**

The basic pattern of Old Testament worship is carried over into the Early Church. It remains a dialogue, initiated by the Almighty God, calling for a response from His

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people, a celebration enriched with symbolic adornments of color, music and drama yet firmly founded in clearly defined Truth. The *form* of Christian worship may have *tradition* behind it, but the *power* is based on Scripture, Sacraments, and the Holy Spirit. The liturgical form has its roots deep in Scripture as well, but there is no “order of service” given to the church in the New Testament..

The order of worship reflects God’s Word in its balance of Law and Gospel. One writer describes it this way: “At the heart of the liturgy are two principal parts which hold everything together – the Word and the Lord’s Supper. They stand like two mountain peaks giving perspective to everything else. This ancient duo has guided Christian worship since the time of the apostles.”<sup>59</sup> Isn’t this just like the Bible? There are two covenants, Old and New. There are two themes, Law and Gospel, sin and forgiveness. There are two mountains, Sinai and Calvary.

The Order of Worship, at least in churches which cherish the early traditions, retraces the journey from slavery to deliverance, from wilderness to promised land, every Sunday. Because the Bible is so important to Christians, churches around the world re-enact this journey on a weekly basis. It is comforting to imagine our international brothers and sisters, who, like us, begin with Invocation, Confession, Absolution, Praise, Prayers and then the Service of the Word including the Lessons (readings), a Creed, and the Sermon. The other half of the service, which culminates in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, reminds us of the unity of the Church in Christ. And so, Word and Sacrament. Law and Grace -- in other words the whole Bible – give us our historic pattern for the worship service.

Incidentally, in the church of the early centuries, the unbelievers and catechumens (or confirmands) were dismissed between the Service of the Word and the Service of Communion, as this part of the service was for baptized members only. The Offertory marked the beginning of the communion service; non-members were not expected to bring tithes or offerings to support the church.<sup>60</sup>

### ii) *Singing Scripture: Psalms and Hymns*

Obviously the book of Psalms is an aid to worship, even if a formal “Psalmody” is not included in each Sunday service. Most of the Psalms were designed to be set to music and some are clearly identified as choral pieces.

Liturgical Churches mark Psalms to be read antiphonally, that is, responsively or alternating between a worship leader and the congregation, or between groups within the congregation (such as men’s voices and women’s voices). This arrangement imitates the way Psalms were sometimes sung by the Levitical singers. It also echoes the use of “couplets” in Hebrew poetry – instead of rhyming of sounds, Hebrew poetry presented “rhyming ideas,” or pairs of concepts that were either parallel or contrasting.<sup>61</sup>

There are wings of the church which sing exclusively from the Psalter (the book of Psalms) – hymns are disallowed. But the New Testament itself seems to indicate that Psalms were supplemented with songs (called canticles), such as the *Magnificat* of Mary in Luke 1:46, and the doxology of the angels in Luke 2:14. Matthew 26:30 mentions the disciples singing a Jewish hymn, and of course Paul mentions hymn-singing as an expected part of the meeting of the church in 1 Corinthians 4:26. We have manuscripts of one or two Christian hymns in Greek, circa 200 A.D., and several Latin hymns dating from the fourth through eleventh centuries.<sup>62</sup> With the Reformation, the Calvinists returned to singing Psalms only; a famous example is “Old Hundredth,” named for Psalm 100. The original words

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began, “All People That On Earth Do Dwell,” a translation of the Psalm. But its tune is now associated with a hymn, “The Doxology.” Ironically, the writer of “The Doxology” (Thomas Ken, 1674) strictly instructed his friends to sing it only in their personal devotions, since he believed that only Psalms may be used in worship... unwittingly he created one of the most frequently-heard pieces of church music!

The distinctions between psalms and hymns are basic: Psalms are the text of Psalms set to music – although with words chosen and arranged to fit the needs of Western rhyme and meter. Hymns are a paraphrase of Scripture and tend to be topical, addressing the great themes of Salvation, Grace, the Love of God, the Universal Church, and so on – and hymns tend to be structured under these topics, with sections for certain seasonal hymns as well. The “classic” hymn form (of the 1700s and 1800s) tells the complete Gospel over the successive verses, and typically in the final verse mentions the believer’s hope for eternal life after death.

Those who oppose hymn-singing claim that there are too many hymns which are self-centric and subjective, promoting private piety and individuality over the corporate life of the congregation. This is a valid caution; however, where hymns are indeed based on Scripture, it is difficult to deny the impact of their blessing on the life of the church. Many of the modern hymnals *and collections of contemporary “praise songs”* display the Bible references on which each hymn is based.

If you use a hymnal in your daily devotions (many Christians do), you may find it interesting to look up the verses which have been the inspiration for hymn writers and use them for your deeper study or meditation. Someone has said that Christians as a group have the greatest musical heritage in the world.

### iii) *Scripture Lessons: The Pericopes*

The Scripture readings which we hear each Sunday are called the Lessons or the Lectionary in most churches, from a Latin root which means “readings.” But we also sometimes hear them called the “pericopes” (pe-RICK-o-pees), from the Greek meaning “to cut around.” This term actually refers to any short passage taken from any larger literary work, but it is used for the Bible passages to be read aloud during a service.

Who decided which verses to read, and when? According to Andy Langford, pastor and one of the editors of *The Revised Common Lectionary*,

“The Christian calendar came first. The earliest Christians first celebrated Easter, then Pentecost, then Epiphany, then Christmas, then Lent and Advent, and finally other special days that rounded out the Christian year. Obviously, each of these days had associated readings from the Bible, and thus the lectionary took shape... By the fourth century, the Western lectionary took the shape that most English-speaking Christians in the West would recognize... Lectionaries do not replace the reading of the whole Bible, but give structures through which scripture might be more fully understood.”

“...The *Roman Lectionary* is a three year calendar that essentially bases each Sunday on a particular Gospel lesson, and then chooses an Epistle reading, and Old Testament reading based on the Gospel reading. The Psalm is always a response to the Old Testament reading. The *Revised Common Lectionary (RCL)* was created by an ecumenical liturgical group called the Consultation on Common Texts. This was first published in 1983 and revised in 1992.”<sup>63</sup>

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Most Protestant denominations described as “liturgical” use the *RCL*; some Anglican churches still use the daily lectionary found in *The Book of Common Prayer*, which was largely written by Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer, in 1549 (it has gone through several revisions).

**Update this paragraph as necessary to use current dates.** Remember the Church Year begins with Advent. Advent of 2007 will start “Year A” of the 3-year cycle of readings. Advent 2008 will commence “Year B,” and then in 2009 the churches will include the readings from “Year C,”

This system of readings promotes the knowledge and respect of the Bible in our churches. In some parts of the world it is the local Christians’ only way to learn what the Bible says. For those with Bibles and who can read, it should not substitute for daily reading, study, and meditation on Scripture in the life of the individual believer.

iv) *Recognizing Scripture in Worship*

In liturgical churches, it is often true that the order of service will contain Scripture, although it may not be labeled as such. However, if you participate in such services, you may find it exciting as you read the Bible to find verses that you already know from the worship service.

## C. *The Bible as Daily Bread*

i) *Read through the Bible in a year*

In the first class, I asked you to embark on a journey through the Bible according to a plan that led you through the entire Bible in a year. Even though this class comes to an end with this session, I encourage you to continue in this habit of spending a little time in the Bible each day.

I recommended a particular plan for us all to use during the class so that we would all be “on the same page.” There are many plans that have been devised to help the Bible reader go through the entire Bible in a year, or some other fixed time.

The web site [bible.crosswalk.com/BibleInAYear](http://bible.crosswalk.com/BibleInAYear) provides users with a plan that includes three readings for each day of the year, together with a tool to track progress. The website also has the feature of providing the audio for the readings, so the user can listen to the readings for the day.

Daily devotion booklets often contain suggested readings that take the reader through the entire Bible every year or two. A few publishers offer editions of the Bible in which the pages themselves have marks showing recommended beginning and ending points for daily readings.

There is no commandment to pursue a particular reading program on a particular schedule. Yet the more we know of the Bible, the more we know of God Himself. When we remember that the Bible has been preserved despite persecution and even execution of our ancestors in the faith, simple gratitude calls us to set a personal goal of reading the entire Bible.

ii) *The Word as a “Means of Grace”*

Martin Luther wanted people of all stations in life to have opportunity to come to the Bible for spiritual nourishment. Along with the Sacraments (Baptism and Communion, in which the Word also plays a significant role), the Scriptures provide a way (“means”) for our Lord to communicate with us, help us, and bless us (“give us grace”). Look at these promises:

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Matthew 4:3-4: *The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." [4] Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*

Hebrews 5:12-14: *In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! [13] Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. [14] But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.*

## iii) *The Word as a Window on Eternity*

When we come to the Bible, we find that Truth is a Person. We find that this Person wants to draw us into a loving relationship with Him. So we come to the Bible, not so that we will know ABOUT God, but so that we will KNOW God. To know Him is to love Him. And to love Him is to find meaning, and purpose, and joy, and strength in this life – and a home in the next.

Proverbs 8:17: *I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me.*

Romans 16:25-27: *Now to him who is able to establish you by... the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed... through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him-- to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.*

## iv) *The Word as a Treasure to be Shared*

And what is all this Bible knowledge for? As theologian Paul F. Little wrote, "No doubt it is true that, in large measure, the clearer our understanding of the Word of God, the greater our desire to transmit it to others ...we should pray for opportunities to explain to people round us what we discover for ourselves, and for clarity in conveying it, so that the thrill that very often comes to one engaged in Bible study may register its impression on others. Everything that God gives us is a trust: possessions, talents, wife, children – everything. But at the top of the list comes what God says to us... to study the Bible as a Christian is to walk in [Christ's] steps. There is a taking in and a giving out. The one involves much self-imposed discipline, and the other may involve much suffering... But if both the study and the declaration are essential factors in the task of the Christian sower, and if the study involves effort as certainly as the declaration risks danger, the psalmist's promise sustains us: 'He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.' (Psalm 126:6 NIV)"<sup>64</sup>

There is certainly truth in Little's perspective, but Bible learning need not be an entirely somber activity, to be approached with the same amount of joy as taking cod liver oil... the Lord will surely bless us as we meet Him in His Word. And when we think of the people who have never met Him and have no idea of His love and His blessings, we will be happy to share these treasures with them.

Matthew 10:8 *Freely you have received; freely give.*

## v) *The Word as a Comfort in Time of Trouble*

We serve a great and mighty God who loves each of us. In spite of this, we all face troubles of various kinds. Our God has not promised that we can live in a fallen world without suffering from the effects of The Fall, but He has promised to be with

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us. Some specific passages useful in times of specific types of trouble are found on the second page of the handout.

Is anyone now subject to any of the types of trouble listed? **If so, have someone look up the passages listed for that trouble to comfort the class member.**

## **D. Influence on our culture – Scripture that you already know!**

### *i) Common expressions from the Bible*

On a lighter note, let's close this course with a look at how much of the Bible you already know through its influence on the English language. If you have ever used any of these expressions, you have been quoting from the Bible. Raise your hand if you think you know where they are found.

"Handwriting on the wall" Daniel 5:5-7

"Written in stone" Exodus 24:12; Exodus 34:1

"Apple of His eye" Deuteronomy 32:10; Psalm 17:8; Proverbs 7:2; Lamentations 2:18; Zechariah 2:8

"Taking your life in your hands" Judges 12:3\* *[from this week's readings]*

"Escaped by the skin of our teeth" Job 19:20

"Like mother, like daughter" Ezekiel 16:44

"No rest for the wicked" Psalm 95:10-11; Rev 14:11

"A man after my own heart" 1 Samuel 13:14

"The signs of the times" Matthew 16:3; 1 Chronicles 12:32

"In the twinkling of an eye" 1 Corinthians 15:52

"A labor of love" 1 Thessalonians 1:3

"Salt of the earth" Matthew 5:13

"Eat, drink and be merry" Ecclesiastes 8:15, Luke 12:19

"At his wit's end" Psalm 139:9

"His knees were knocking" Daniel 5:6

"Turn swords into plowshares" Isaiah 2:4

"of the making of many books there is no end" Ecclesiastes 12:12

"who cannot tell their right hand from their left" Jonah 4:11

"David and Goliath" 1 Samuel 17

### *ii) Common misquotes or misuse*

"Money is the root of all evil" This is a popular saying based upon the Bible, but it is a misquote. What the Bible actually says is, "The *love* of money is the root of all *kinds* of evil." (1 Timothy 6:10). Money is neutral. As Larry Burkett has pointed out, "If money had any spiritual value, God would allow us to keep it!"

Or consider this verse, "Abstain from all appearance of evil." (1 Thessalonians 5:22 KJV) A common misuse, due to archaic language in the King James translation, is to quote this verse to persons who "appear" or "seem" to be doing something wrong,

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when in fact they are not (such as visiting a bar)... the better translation is “Abstain from every form of evil” (NASB) or “keep away from every kind of evil.”

“God works all things together for good,” is the slightly misquoted version of Romans 8:28, often used as a quick encouraging platitude for a friend who is disturbed or distressed. Closest to the Greek is the *God’s Word* rendering, “We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God—those whom he has called according to his plan.” This verse comes in the center of one of those many Bible passages which speak of the special blessings and privileges that are the heritage of those who believe in, and therefore belong to, Jesus Christ. Although God, in His infinite mercy and goodness, can and often does intervene in the lives of unbelievers, this particular verse has a narrower audience.

Sometimes misquotes of Bible verses are due to poetic license. For example, during Advent you will see lots of greeting cards depicting or referring to the Lion and the Lamb. Isaiah 11:6, the basis of this image, actually pairs the “wolf and the lamb” together, and later the “lion and the calf” lie down together, with a little child leading them as a symbol of peace on earth. It just sounds better in English poetry to put the Lion and the Lamb together! A different example would be the Christmas carol, “We Three Kings.” Matthew 2:11 doesn’t say how many visitors there were, only that they brought three kinds of gifts. It doesn’t call them kings, either, but wise men.

And here’s another “misquoted” verse: “The Lord helps those who help themselves.” Someone look that up in Hezekiah 3:3!!! (Not in the Bible.)

**The third page of the handout can now be passed out.**

### iii) *Arts*

Although the culture of our day tends to biblical illiteracy, the Bible’s heritage in the arts is rich for those who care to explore it. Sculptors, painters and composers have dedicated many works to biblical themes. Soaring Gothic architecture and splendid stained glass pictured the glory of God as well as favorite Bible scenes. Music from Gregorian chant to Negro spiritual to Handel’s *Messiah* is inspired by God’s Word, and enriches us.

### iv) *Literature*

Literature, too, has long drawn on this source. “Without the Bible, we should not have Dante and Chaucer, Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Browning’s *Saul* and *Samson Agonistes*, or the deep spiritual notes that appear in the works of such writers as William Blake, Tennyson, Matthew Arnold, Emerson, and Whittier. Shakespeare makes many allusions to the Bible. The addresses of Abraham Lincoln, who as a boy had the Bible as one of the few books accessible to him, are filled with its great overtones”<sup>65</sup> such as “A house divided against itself cannot stand,” from Mark 3:25. Modern novelists and playwrights still borrow good story lines and catchy titles from the Bible: *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Little Foxes*, *The Prince of Egypt*, *Inherit the Wind*, *Mark of the Beast*, *Apocalypse Now*, *Pale Horse – Pale Rider*, *Joshua Son of None*, *East of Eden*, *J.B.*, *David and Bathsheba*, *Giants in the Earth*, *The Ten Commandments*, *Greatest Story ever Told*, *Jesus Christ – Superstar*, *Godspell*. The incredibly popular “*Left Behind*” series of novels is based on Bible verses about the so-called “end times” (Luke 17:32-36 and selections from 1 Corinthians 15, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Revelation). (Note: This series is based upon one of many interpretations of end-time prophecies that involves the removal of believers from the earth prior to the second coming of Christ.)

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The following is available to help answer questions; do not read unless asked:

*The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck novel, title from Job 21:19-20, Revelation 14:10

*The Little Foxes*, drama & film, title from Song of Solomon 2:15

*The Prince of Egypt*, animated feature film based on Exodus 1-14

*Inherit the Wind*, drama & film on the Scopes Monkey Trial, title from Proverbs 11:29

*Mark of the Beast*, film, title from Revelation 16:2

*Apocalypse Now*, film, title from the Greek word “apokalupsin” translated: revelation or disclosure, another title for the final book of the NT.

*Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, short story by Porter, title from Revelation 6:8

*Joshua Son of None*, novel about cloning, title a wordplay on Exodus 33:11

*East of Eden*, novel & film, title from Genesis 4:16

*J.B.*, drama based on the book of Job, about a modern corporate exec

*David and Bathsheba*, film based on 2 Samuel 11.

*Giants in the Earth*, novel of Scandinavian immigrants, title from Genesis 6:4

*The Ten Commandments*, epic film on the events of Exodus

*Greatest Story Ever Told*, film based upon the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ life

*Jesus Christ, Superstar*, musical play and film based upon the Gospel accounts of the Holy Week events

*Godspell*, musical play and film based upon the Gospel of Matthew

## v) *Politics*

And, as one writer has said of the Bible, “One can scarcely be a good patriot... without some acquaintance with this fountainhead of so much that is good in American life.”<sup>66</sup> The worldview of the founding fathers – while not all of them professed Christ – was undergirded by the principles of individual worth before God, equality before the law, insistence upon the truth, and the shining ideal of freedom. Philadelphia’s famous Liberty Bell is so named because of a Bible verse inscribed upon it: ... *proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof...* (Leviticus 25:10)

May it please God that the Bible continue to influence our community and our culture – but more importantly, the hearts and spirits of people everywhere, including each of us.

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## End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> John W. Saleska, *How to Study the Bible*, "Thy Kingdom Come" Vol 3, No 3 (Ft Wayne IN: Concordia Theological Seminary)
- <sup>2</sup> Henrietta Mears, *What the Bible is All About* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books / Gospel Light Publications, 1973), p. 1.
- <sup>3</sup> Adapted from *The Mind Games Notebook*, Lou Whitworth, ed., Probe Ministries International, 1900 Firman Drive, Suite 100, Richardson TX 75081, 1995 edition. (p. 315)
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, (p. 315)
- <sup>5</sup> Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Handbook* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), p. 1 ff.
- <sup>6</sup> The problems with other religious writings are oversimplified here for the sake of brevity. A handout is available with a more detailed and documented look at the writings mentioned.
- <sup>7</sup> Dr. Heinrich C. Schwan et al., *Luther's Small Catechism* (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), p.86.
- <sup>8</sup> Alec Motyer in *How to Study the Bible* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 1972), p.17.
- <sup>9</sup> Writing a Torah Scroll, ([http://www.aish.com/holidays/Shavuot/Accuracy\\_of\\_Torah\\_Text.asp](http://www.aish.com/holidays/Shavuot/Accuracy_of_Torah_Text.asp))
- <sup>10</sup> Charles F. Pfeiffer, *The Patriarchal Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1961), p. 12.
- <sup>11</sup> Daniel Sims, The Hope of Israel Baptist Mission (<http://www.jesus-is-lord.com/messiah.htm> )
- <sup>12</sup> C.F.W. Walther, *God's No and God's Yes: The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel* (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973), Thesis I, p.15.
- <sup>13</sup> Gerry Mathisen, *Cover to Cover: Getting the Bible's Big Picture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, ©2000 Willow Creek Assoc), p. 30.
- <sup>14</sup> Strong's Greek and Hebrew Dictionary (John 13:34 is **kainos**, kahee-nos'; of uncertain affinity; *new* (especially in *freshness*) [Greek 2537]; while the usual word translated as 'new,' **neos** [Greek 3501] is used with respect to age.)
- <sup>15</sup> Deut. 17:18-20 *When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. [19] It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees [20] and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel.* (NIV)
- <sup>16</sup> from "Canon of the Old Testament," in *Catholic Encyclopedia Online* (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03267a.htm> ).
- <sup>17</sup> from various articles in *Catholic Encyclopedia Online* (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/> ), 1997.
- <sup>18</sup> "The History of the Bible," in *Mind Games College Survival Course: Notebook*, Richardson TX 75081: Probe Ministries International, 1995 ed., pp. 318-319.
- <sup>19</sup> Kroll, Woodrow, *How the Book was Born* (Lincoln, NE: Back to the Bible, 1994), p.13.
- <sup>20</sup> "The History of the Bible," in *Mind Games College Survival Course: Notebook*, Richardson TX 75081: Probe Ministries International, 1995 ed., pp. 316-317.
- <sup>21</sup> "Bible, editions of," quoted from *Market House Books Encyclopaedia of the Renaissance*, © Market House Books Ltd 1987 ( [www.xrefer.com](http://www.xrefer.com) ).
- <sup>22</sup> "Formatting the Word of God," Bridwell Library Catalog, ( [www.smu.edu/bridwell/publications/ryrie\\_catalog/xi\\_1htm](http://www.smu.edu/bridwell/publications/ryrie_catalog/xi_1htm) ) , from Chapter 11: Marking the text with chapter and verse.
- <sup>23</sup> H. von Soden, *Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments*, quoted in Daniel P. Fuller's "Berean Corner," ([www.fuller.edu/ministry/berean/](http://www.fuller.edu/ministry/berean/) ), "Chapters and Verses – Late comers!" 1998.

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## End Notes

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 319.

<sup>25</sup> Sanders, J.A. The Psalms Scroll of Qumran Cave 11 (11QPsa). *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert, IV*. Oxford, 1965. [www.ibiblio.org/expo/deadsea.scrolls.exhibit](http://www.ibiblio.org/expo/deadsea.scrolls.exhibit) .

<sup>26</sup> (Hoerth 1998, 386). In website ([www.bibleandscience.com](http://www.bibleandscience.com)), of the Institute for Bible and Science.

<sup>27</sup> Jewish Treasures in the Library of Congress, (<http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/loc/Torah.html>)

<sup>28</sup> McDowell, Josh, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1979).

<sup>29</sup> *The Interactive Bible* (<http://bible.ca/b-lost-altered-corrupted.htm>), 4/6/98

<sup>30</sup> Woodrow Kroll, *How the Book Was Born*. Lincoln NE: Good News Broadcasting Assoc., Inc., 1994), pp 7-8.

<sup>31</sup> The Geoffrey Chaucer Page, (<http://icg.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/> ).

<sup>32</sup> The Tyndale Society Home Page, (<http://www.tyndale.org/> ).

<sup>33</sup> Tony Lane, "The Crown of English Bibles," (Carol Stream IL: Christian History Magazine, 1994), Issue 43, Vol XIII, No. 3, pp 8-9.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

<sup>35</sup> F.F. Bruce, "Bible – English Versions," (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan Corporation, 1974, 1978), *the New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 128.

<sup>36</sup> "St Jerome: Perils of a Bible Translator," in *St. Anthony Messenger Online*, [www.americancatholic.org/Messenger/Sep1997/links\\_for\\_learners.asp](http://www.americancatholic.org/Messenger/Sep1997/links_for_learners.asp) ).

<sup>37</sup> "TNIV FAQs" International Bible Society website: "Today's New International Version" (<http://www.tniv.info/QandA.php> )

<sup>38</sup> R. Wayne Stacy, "The God of the Bible is not a Language Issue," (Raleigh NC : Baptist State Convention, April 30, 1999), in *The Biblical Recorder Online* ([http://www.biblicalrecorder.org/opinion/4\\_30\\_99/the.html](http://www.biblicalrecorder.org/opinion/4_30_99/the.html) )

<sup>39</sup> *God's Word* (Iowa : World Bible Publishing, 1995), summary of methods in the Introduction.

<sup>40</sup> John White, *The Fight* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976), p. 40.

<sup>41</sup> John W. Saleska. "How to Study the Bible." *Thy Kingdom Come*, Vol 3, No 3. (Ft Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary)

<sup>42</sup> Richard C. Halverson, *Perspective*. McLean, VA: Concern Ministries, Inc., 7/22/81.

<sup>43</sup> Arthur Ashe, "Why Not Me?" *Hope Health Letter*, December, 1993, p. 4.

<sup>44</sup> John White, *op.cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>45</sup> Larry Christenson, *The Renewed Mind* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1974 ), p.15.

<sup>46</sup> Kathy Dice, *Personal Devotions: Taking God's Word to Heart* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, ©2000 Willow Creek Assoc.), pp. 27-28.

<sup>47</sup> Kathy Dice, *op.cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>48</sup> Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 1990), p.33.

<sup>49</sup> *How to Study the Bible*, Good News, 6973 Chippewa St., St. Louis, MO 63109, 1996.

<sup>50</sup> J.S. Tuell, *Speaking the Truth in Love* (Euless, TX: Educational Evangelism Inc), ©1989 James S. Tuell, pp 159-162.

<sup>51</sup> See also Exodus 12:49; 2 Chron. 19:7; Proverbs 28:21; James 2:9.

<sup>52</sup> Robert Longman, Jr. ©1996, 2001 (<http://www.spirithome.com/scrip4.html>)

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## End Notes

<sup>53</sup> John White, *The Fight: The Christian Struggle* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976), p.44.

<sup>54</sup> Comparing Biblical writings with scientific theory is an interesting topic. There are at least two approaches: Dr. Stephen C. Meyers and Dr. Arlton C. Murray, of The Institute for Bible and Science ([www.bibleandscience.com](http://www.bibleandscience.com)) prefer to start with archaeology and see where it matches Scripture; they have some fascinating web articles about the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Conquest of Canaan. They insist, however, that the purpose of Scripture is strictly delineated in 2 Timothy 3:16 and that no “scientific breakthroughs” are to be achieved by studying the Bible. They openly accuse Henry Morris, renowned creationist, of reading modern scientific terms into Bible.

Henry M. Morris, Ph.D., of The Institute for Creation Research ([www.icr.org](http://www.icr.org)) has written many interesting books on “creation science,” including works which seem to find scientific clues within Genesis, Job, and Psalms. He might argue with his detractors that the modern definition of “science” and “scientist” has been over-secularized. The argument is not between Science and Faith but between scientists who embrace materialism or evolutionism versus those who are open to creationism or intelligent design. Both of these groups offer interesting and entertaining reading, but they are more Bible “discussions” than Bible studies. The Bible’s chief audience was not the scientific community.

<sup>55</sup> Judson Poling, *Interpretation: Discovering the Bible for Yourself* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, ©2000 Willow Creek Association), pp 12-13.

<sup>56</sup> R.C. Sproul, credited in Judson Poling, *ibid*.

<sup>57</sup> Henrietta Mears, *What the Bible is All About* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books / Gospel Light Publications, 1973), p. 10.

<sup>58</sup> Benjamin A. Kolodziej, *Introduction to Christian Worship: a Lutheran Perspective* (curriculum, Lord of Life Lutheran Church – Plano TX.).

<sup>59</sup> Mons Teig, “*Introduction to Lutheran Worship*,” (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House Leaflet Ministry, 1983).

<sup>60</sup> Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, North Mankato MN, website, “Liturgy.” ([http://homepage.mac.com/gurban/liturgy\\_lectionary/goodshepherd\\_liturgy2.html](http://homepage.mac.com/gurban/liturgy_lectionary/goodshepherd_liturgy2.html))

<sup>61</sup> Bill Donahue, *Unlocking the Bible’s Mysteries: Parables & Prophecy* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, ©2000 Willow Creek Association), p.9.

<sup>62</sup> John S. Andrews, in *Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p. 494.

<sup>63</sup> Rev. Andy Langford, “Western Lectionaries: an Introduction,” ([http://www.spiritrestoration.org/All\\_about\\_church/Western\\_lectionary/](http://www.spiritrestoration.org/All_about_church/Western_lectionary/) )

<sup>64</sup> John B. Job, *How to Study the Bible* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 1972), pp 109-110.

<sup>65</sup> Georgia Harkness, *Toward Understanding the Bible* (Cincinnati: Board of Missions, the Methodist Church) ©1952 Georgia Harkness, p.11.

<sup>66</sup> Georgia Harkness, *Toward Understanding the Bible* (Cincinnati: Board of Missions, the Methodist Church) ©1952 Georgia Harkness, p.13.