Biblos

What is the Bible and How to Read It

Study Booklet

Segment One: How the Bible Formed

Sessions 1–4

Welcome

Thank you for taking your time to join our study on the Bible. The Bible is often misunderstood, misconstrued, misquoted and mishandled. I have been guilty of some of these mistakes over the years and only realize my errors as my knowledge and experience with the Bible has grown. There is no need to feel guilty or shameful if you realize you have changed opinions on a view you once held. If you are studying the scriptures correctly, this is a natural outworking.

This study is designed to give everyone who participates a stronger understanding of the texts within the Bible and how we should read them today. We will look at how the Bible came together, the context of these ancient texts which inform our understanding and some practical tips on studying the scripture today that everyone can use. Whether you have spent a lifetime studying the Bible or are brand new, it is my hope this course strengthens your abilities to read the Bible.

How the course is designed:

There are three major segments broken into four sessions each. Each session will include four videos. This structure is meant to take twelve weeks with each session covering one week. This guide has reflection questions for each video to help you think about the material presented. Feel free to use the videos as a type of daily study for four days of your week or at any pace which makes sense to you.

Additional Resources

Here is a list of the books I consulted in putting this study together. In no way does this list represent a comprehensive guide to becoming an expert on the Bible. Many of these books were already in my library or on my reading list.

- *Getting the Message* by Daniel Doriani
- *Holy Bible, Human Bible* by Gordon Oliver
- *How the Bible Actually Works* by Peter Enns
- *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth* by Gordon Fee
- *Making Sense of the Bible* by Adam Hamilton
- *Our Father Abraham* by Marvin Wilson
- *Reading the Scripture with the Church Fathers* by Christopher Hall
- *Scripture and the Authority of God* by N.T. Wright
- *The Good Book* by Peter Gomes
- *What Is the Bible?* by Rob Bell

In addition, there is a great podcast by Pete Enns called *The Bible for Normal People.* You can find it on his website: https://peteenns.com/podcast/

I do not always agree with the authors/scholars represented on this list, but I also believe it is good to have your own view point challenged by others to strengthen your own understanding.

66 Books, Two Testaments, Three Languages, 1000+ Years

Watch: Session 1, Video 1

Reflection Questions:

1. When you have thought about scripture in the past, have you seen it as a book or more of a library of ancient texts? Has your view changed after watching this video?

2. What difference does seeing the Bible as a library of ancient texts allow you to understand it?

3. Do you believe the Bible is inspired and directed by God if it is a library of ancient texts and not a solitary "book?"

Deeply Human Work

Watch: Session 1, Video 2

Reflection Questions:

1. What does it mean to you that the Bible is a human work?

2. What are the advantages of recognizing the humanity of the Bible's origin?

3. What are some dangers of seeing the Bible as only a human work?

Deeply Divine Work

Read: 2 Timothy 3:10–17

Watch: Session 1, Video 3

Reflection Questions:

1. What does it mean to you that the Bible is a Divine work?

2. What are the advantages of recognizing the divinity of the Bible's origin?

3. What are some dangers of seeing the Bible as only a Divine work?

Multitude of Genres

Watch: Session 1, Video 4

Reflection Questions:

1. Name as many literary genres you are aware of (eg: comics, news, fiction, etc.)

2. Think of a few times recently where the genre of something you read impacted how you understood it.

3. What genres of ancient texts in the Bible are you aware of?

The Hebrew and Aramaic Texts

Watch: Session 2, Video 1

Reflection Questions:

1. Find a piece of English literature over 400 years old and read it. How much could you understand?

2. How does the continual evolution of language hinder our study of scripture?

3. In what ways can we be encouraged by the message of Scripture to remain meaningful throughout such a long time of language and cultural development?

Materials Used to Record the Text

Read: Revelation 5:1–5

Watch: Session 2, Video 2

Reflection Questions:

1. Have you ever thought much about the physical work required in ancient times to create written works?

2. Knowing the practical process ancient people went through to write the texts down, how does your appreciation of how the texts ended up in our hands change?

3. Do you have a similar care and respect for the text as ancient people? If not, in what ways could you gain that care and respect?

Meticulous Nature of Copying the Text

Watch: Session 2, Video 3

Reflection Questions:

1. What is something you do very carefully every time you do it? Why are you so careful?

2. What factors in modern times cause us to be more relaxed about the written word that were not factors in ancient times?

3. How can we be more respectful of the biblical texts in today's culture?

The Greek New Testament

Watch: Session 2, Video 4

Reflection Questions:

1. What does it mean that most scholars place Paul's writings earlier than the Gospels?

2. What would it have been like to have to choose life or death based on protecting the Christian texts or giving them to the persecuting authorities?

3. What does it mean to you that there are variations of texts found from the early days of Christianity?

The Septuagint and First Translation of the Old Testament

Watch: Session 3, Video 1

Reflection Questions:

1. Were you aware there was an ancient Greek version of the Old Testament? If not, how might this knowledge widen your understanding of the Bible?

2. What does it tell us about scripture that the New Testament often quotes directly from the Greek translation of the Old Testament?

3. The story of the Septuagint tells us a team of scholars worked together to translate the scriptures. This is a practice most modern translations use today. What might we learn from this team approach in our Churches?

Latin Vulgate and Loss of the Original Greek in the West

Watch: Session 3, Video 2

Reflection Questions:

1. The translation of the Biblical texts into Latin was very important to the Western Church, in what ways is continued translation an important thing today?

2. As the West moved further from the Greek and Hebrew texts and relied more on the Latin translations, rifts of culture began between the Eastern and Western Churches. In what ways have you seen cultural shifts cause division today?

Recovery of the Greek in the West and Reformation

Watch: Session 3, Video 3

Reflection Questions:

1. Pendulums often swing back and forth in culture. Several generations swing away from traditionalism and then subsequent generations may swing back to recover the "original." How have you seen this play out in your lifetime with modern culture?

2. What was required by the Reformers to try to understand the original meaning of the scriptures?

3. Do we need a fresh look at the scriptures today? In what ways?

To English and Beyond

Watch: Session 3, Video 4

Reflection Questions:

1. Do some google investigating and see if you can come up with a count of English translations of the Scriptures. Why do we have so many?

2. What is your favorite Bible translation to read? Why?

3. Challenge yourself to find a translation you are not familiar with and read it. Look for ways the different translation of familiar texts might give you new insight into the original meaning.

The Jewish Sacred Texts and Canonization

Watch: Session 4, Video 1

Reflection Questions:

1. Were you aware of the theories of how various Old Testament texts came together? Does it challenge your view of the Bible?

2. Do you believe God was in control of any process which brought together the ancient Hebrew texts? Why or why not?

3. Knowing how important Old Testament commentary was to understanding the Hebrew scriptures in Jesus' day, what role do you think tradition plays today?

The Apocrypha and Why Protestants Don't Include It

Watch: Session 4, Video 2

Reflection Questions:

1. Have you ever read the texts in the Apocrypha? If not, why not?

2. Do you agree with the Protestant reasons for not including the texts?

3. What does it mean for our study of the Bible that even Christians today don't agree on what should be included?

The Early New Testament Cannon

Watch: Session 4, Video 3

Reflection Questions:

1. Were you aware of the criteria early Christian leaders used to solidify the New Testament Cannon?

2. Have you heard of any of the texts which almost made it into the New Testament Cannon? Have you read them?

3. Do you believe God was in control of the process which brought together the ancient Christian texts? Why or why not?

Today's New Testament Canon and Protestant Bible

Read: Revelation 22:18–21

Watch: Session 4, Video 4

Reflection Questions:

1. Do you agree with Martin Luther's view of Scripture? Why or why not?

2. In what ways are modern views of the Bible healthy, and in what ways might they be unhealthy?

3. What does the constant divisiveness of the Church in the last 500 years tell us about ourselves and how we approach the biblical texts?