

The Bible: God's Word for Us!

Read before
Class 2

①
(3 pages)

“For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life.”

(John 3:16)

There is probably no better way to sum up the message of the Bible than this one verse from the Gospel of John. The Bible is the story of God's love for the world, right from the first moment of creation. We human beings sin against God and each other, turning away from God's love. Yet, we cannot prevent God's loving plan from being fulfilled—thanks be to God!

God is greater than anything we could possibly understand or know by ourselves. We only know God because he chooses to show—or to reveal—himself to us. In the Bible God reveals himself and his plan for us in a way no other book can do. That is because God is the author of the Bible. Not that God actually wrote the words down, but the Holy Spirit inspired the human authors to write down what God wanted us to know. Because of this, we can count on the Bible to be absolutely true, without any error, when it teaches what God wants us to know to spend eternal life with him.

Why is the Bible so big? It is big because God is so big! Throughout all history God has been revealing himself to the human race. He has done so through creation, miraculous signs, and the words of the prophets. But God does more than just reveal himself through words and signs. He gave himself to us through the life, death, and Resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ. It takes many words to tell all these stories of God's ongoing relationship with the people he created.

Studying the Bible takes time. You could spend your whole lifetime studying it and praying with it (which many Christians do!). Even so, you always find new insights and new ways to apply it to your life. That is

INTRODUCTION

2

because the Holy Spirit is at work within us, helping us understand God's Word. With the Holy Spirit's help, you can always understand more about what God is revealing through the human authors who wrote the Bible.

You are not too young to start reading the Bible. A good place to start is by studying some of the holy and heroic people of the Bible. Be inspired by how they responded to God and how God worked through them. You might be surprised to find out they weren't all perfect people. They struggled with sin and temptation just as you do. But they became great and virtuous people because they realized their need for God. In the end they were willing to trust God and let him work through them.

This textbook and its activities will help you become familiar with some of the greatest people of the Bible: good and holy people who loved and followed God. All you need to work through its activities is a Bible, a curious mind, and an open heart. Most of all, as you learn about these Bible people, keep asking yourself this: "What is God teaching me through this person's life?" Always remember that God loves you and wants to share himself with you through the Bible, his holy Word.

"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living."

(2 Timothy 3:16)

The Scriptures and Tradition

God wants us to know him. So throughout history God has revealed himself to human beings. We call this activity Revelation. God's most complete Revelation was through the person of his Son, Jesus Christ. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Apostles handed on to others—in words and writing—what they had learned from their time with Jesus. They passed on everything our loving God revealed to save us from sin and death. The successors of the Apostles, the Pope and bishops of the Church, continue to pass on this Revelation without error for all ages until Christ returns in glory.

God's Revelation is handed on in a special way through the Bible—in both the Old and New Testaments. It is also handed on through something called Tradition. This word actually means "handing on." Tradition helps us better understand the Scriptures (another word for the Bible), and the Scriptures help us better understand what God reveals through Tradition. Together the Scriptures and Tradition form a single Deposit of Faith. We must accept and honor both equally to learn all God wants to reveal to us.

With the Holy Spirit guiding her, the Church draws upon the Scriptures and Tradition to hand on the faith to each new generation. Through the liturgy, through Catholic teachings and doctrines, and through our lives together, God's Revelation continually informs us and is our guiding light.

The Bible is divided into two major sections, the Old Testament and the New Testament. Catholic bibles have forty-six books in the Old Testament that we accept as sacred and inspired by God. The bibles most Protestants use have thirty-nine books in the Old Testament. That is the main difference between Catholic and Protestant bibles.

The Old Testament books include many different kinds of writings. You will find history, poetry, legends, laws, wise sayings, short stories, and the words of prophets. The Old Testament books are mainly about God's special relationship with his Chosen People. At different times these people are called Hebrews, Israelites, Judeans, and Jews. During their history God breaks through and calls the Chosen People to recognize him as their one and only God. God promises to bless them in a special way. He asks the Chosen People to be faithful in following his commands.

The holy promises between God and the Chosen People are called covenants. These are solemn agreements in which all involved agree to keep their commitments forever. *Testament* is another word for *covenant*, so the Old Testament is the story of the Covenant between God and his Chosen People—who eventually become the Jewish people. For this reason, most of the books of the Old Testament are also the Jewish people's sacred Scriptures. So the Old Testament isn't "old" because it is out of date. It is "old" because it is the story of how God first made his Covenant with his Chosen People.

To fully understand God's plan for the human race, we need both the Old and the New Testaments. In the Old Testament, God reveals the love he has for us. The stories teach us how sin keeps us from being in a completely loving relationship with God. The Old Testament shows how, through holy and courageous people, God breaks through to put his Chosen People on the right path. The stories in the Old Testament prepare us to understand how Jesus Christ fulfills God's Covenant to save us from sin and death.

Reflection

Page through the Old Testament of your Bible. What stories do you recognize? If you have any favorite stories in the Old Testament, what are they? What do they teach you about God?

Sections of the Old Testament

The Old Testament in Christian bibles is usually divided into four different sections. Here is some information on each section.

The Pentateuch or Torah.

These first five biblical books are the heart of the Old Testament. They contain the stories of Creation and stories about how sin entered the world. They tell how God broke through to first make his Covenant with Noah and Abraham. The Book of Exodus tells how God led his people out of slavery through the leadership of Moses. At Mount Sinai, God extended the Covenant to all his Chosen People and gave them the Ten Commandments.

The Historical Books.

These sixteen books are mostly religious history and some short novels. They tell how the Chosen People settled in the Promised Land. Eventually they became a kingdom led by kings like Saul, David, and Solomon. But the rulers—and the people often worshiped false gods and ignored the poor. So God sent prophets like Elijah and Elisha to call the people to be faithful to the Covenant. The historical books also have stories about heroes like Ruth, Tobit, Judith, and Esther.

The Wisdom Books.

These seven books contain the collected wisdom of the Chosen People. They include the songs the people used in worship and prayer. They contain advice for living good and holy lives. The Song of Songs has poetry about the goodness of sexuality. The Book of Job is a debate about why good people suffer bad things.

The Books of the Prophets.

These eighteen books contain the messages of important prophets. The prophets delivered God's message to the Chosen People. They warned the Chosen People against worshiping false gods. They challenged the Chosen People to act fairly and care for the poor. The prophets also offered comfort and hope when the people thought God had abandoned them. Some prophets promised a future Savior, the Messiah, who would bring God's love, justice, and peace to the world.

INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

Turn to the table of contents in the beginning of your Bible and use it to answer the following questions on the Old Testament.

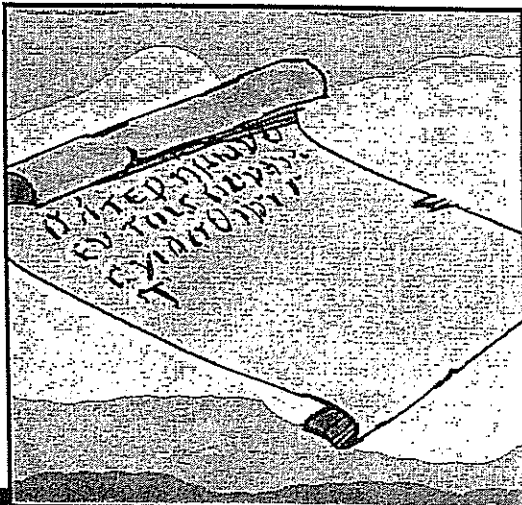
1. How many books are in the Old Testament? _____
2. What is the first book of the Old Testament? _____
3. What is the last book of the Old Testament? _____
4. Which book of the Old Testament is the shortest? _____
5. Which book of the Old Testament is the longest? _____
6. What are the four sections of the Old Testament? _____

7. List the five books of the Pentateuch. _____

8. Which book comes after Psalms? _____
9. In which section do you find each of the following books?
1 Kings _____ Nahum _____
Song of Songs _____ Jonah _____

Now try looking up some Bible passages. Look up each passage below and write the word indicated to complete a sentence about the Old Testament.

10. Exodus 12:37 Write the second word of the passage in the space before the (10).
11. Judges 10:14 Write the tenth word of the passage in the space before the (11).
12. Isaiah 32:18 Write the second word of the passage in the space before the (12).



The Old Testament is the story of the

- _____ (10),
God's _____ (11)
_____ (12).

Books of the Old Testament

The Old Testament (Hebrew Bible)

(Note: Catholics use Bibles with forty-six books in the Old Testament. Protestants usually use Bibles with thirty-nine books in the Old Testament.)

Pentateuch

- Genesis
- Exodus
- Leviticus
- Numbers
- Deuteronomy

Historical Books

- Joshua
- Judges
- Ruth
- 1 and 2 Samuel
- 1 and 2 Kings
- 1 and 2 Chronicles
- Ezra
- Nehemiah
- Tobit*
- Judith*
- Esther
- 1 and 2 Maccabees*

Wisdom Books:

- Job
- Psalms
- Proverbs
- Ecclesiastes
- Song of Songs (Song of Solomon)
- Wisdom*
- Sirach*

Prophets

- Isaiah
- Jeremiah
- Lamentations
- Baruch*
- Ezekiel
- Daniel
- Hosea
- Joel

- Amos
- Obadiah
- Jonah
- Micah
- Nahum
- Habakkuk
- Zephaniah
- Haggai
- Zechariah
- Malachi

* This book is considered Deuterocanonical (meaning "second canon") and is not found in Protestant Bibles.

Sections of the Old Testament

Copy this handout and then cut it out along the dotted lines. Make enough copies so each participant receives four slips of paper, each with one of the four sections of the Old Testament on it.

1
e/f

Pentateuch

Historical Books

Wisdom Books

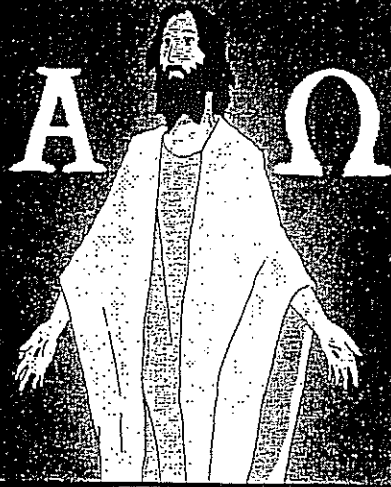
Prophets

Pentateuch

Historical Books

Wisdom Books

Prophets



SALVATION HISTORY

In the Bible, God shows—or reveals—himself to us. We learn about his love for all humanity. God's words and deeds in the Bible help us understand his plan to save us from sin and death and bring us to eternal life. Because of this activity, the history told in the Bible is sometimes called salvation history. Following is a brief overview of salvation history.

Primeval History. The Bible begins with stories—filled with symbolism about how God created everything that exists. The stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the flood, and the tower of Babel teach us that God created everything. They also show us that human beings have a special place in creation. The stories teach us that sin destroys our relationships with God and one another.

Patriarchs. In this period of salvation history, God begins to form a special relationship with a chosen group of people. He makes a special promise, called a covenant, with a man named Abraham. God promises that Abraham and his wife, Sarah, will have a son in their old age. God promises that their descendants will be numerous. He promises that they will inherit a Promised Land.

Egypt and the Exodus. The descendants of Abraham—now called Israelites—are in slavery in Egypt. God hears their cries and calls Moses to lead the people out of slavery. The Israelites' escape from Egypt and journey to the Promised Land is called the Exodus. On the way to the Promised Land, the Israelites stop at Mount Sinai. There, God extends to all the Israelites the Covenant he made with Abraham. He gives Moses Ten Commandments, which the people must obey as part of their Covenant promises.

Settling the Promised Land. Moses dies. God calls a new leader, Joshua. He will lead the people into the Promised Land, which other people inhabit. The Israelites must fight to gain control of the land. When they trust God, they are successful in their battles. When they do not trust God, they fail. Eventually they gain control of the land. Each of the twelve Tribes is given its own section of the land.

Kingdoms of Judah and Israel. When the Israelites want their own king, God reluctantly agrees to their plea. He has Samuel anoint Saul as the first king of Israel. David follows Saul as the next king. David is a mighty warrior who unites all the twelve Tribes into one kingdom called Israel. David's son Solomon becomes the third king of the Israelites. He builds a Temple at Jerusalem, the capital city. After Solomon's death there is disagreement among the tribes. The kingdom splits in two. The northern ten tribes form Israel. The southern two form Judah. During this time God calls prophets to remind the kings and the people to obey their Covenant with God.

Exile and Return. Despite the prophets' warnings, the people of Israel and Judah continue to turn away from God's Covenant with them. So God lets their kingdoms be conquered. Many of the people are taken into captivity outside their homeland. This time is called the Exile. Prophets like Ezekiel comfort the Israelites with the promise that God is still with them. Fifty years pass in exile. Then a new king, Cyrus of Persia, comes to rule over the kingdom that captured the Israelites. He allows the people—now called Judeans, or Jews—to return to Jerusalem to rebuild it and the Temple.

Life of Jesus Christ. When the time is right, God sends his only Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. When Jesus is born, the Romans rule Israel. Some of the Jews hope for a mighty warrior and king like David. They hope he will drive out the Romans. Jesus shows a different way. He preaches love, justice, and forgiveness. When Jesus is killed, his followers think all is lost. Instead, after three days God raises Jesus from the dead. God's saving plan is now fulfilled.

Early Christian Church. After his Resurrection, Jesus instructs his closest followers, the Apostles, to go and spread the Good News of salvation to all people. The Holy Spirit gives them the courage to tell others about Jesus Christ. Sometimes people who do not believe in Jesus persecute and kill the Apostles. People like Peter and Paul spread the message to other cities and regions. Soon Christianity spreads throughout the Roman Empire.

Some Heroic Bible People

Primeval History

- Adam and Eve
- Noah

Patriarchs

- Abraham and Sarah

Egypt and the Exodus

- Moses, Miriam, and Aaron

Settling the Promised Land

- Joshua
- Samson
- Ruth

Kingdoms of Judah and Israel

- King David
- King Solomon
- Isaiah

Exile and Return

- Ezekiel
- Ezra and Nehemiah
- The Maccabees

Life of Jesus Christ

- Mary of Nazareth
- John the Baptist
- Jesus, the Christ
- Peter
- Mary Magdalene

Early Christian Church

- Paul
- Priscilla and Aquila

SALVATION HISTORY

History told from the perspective of God's breaking through is called salvation history. This time line gives a big-picture view of salvation history. In the spaces below, create your own big picture of salvation history with a drawing representing an event that occurred during each time period. Write a brief caption for each drawing.



<p>PRIMEVAL HISTORY CREATION-2000 BC</p>	<p>PATRIARCHS 2000 BC-1700 BC</p>
<p>EGYPT AND THE EXODUS 1700 BC-1250 BC</p>	<p>SETTLING THE PROMISED LAND 1250 BC-1050 BC</p>
<p>KINGDOMS OF JUDAH AND ISRAEL 1050 BC-587 BC</p>	<p>EXILE AND RETURN 587 BC-AD 1</p>
<p>LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST AD 1-AD 33</p>	<p>EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH AD 33-AD 100</p>

PENTATEUCH Genesis through Deuteronomy

Old Testament

HISTORY Joshua through 2 Maccabees

Old Testament

Bible
Bookmarks

Place this bookmark on the last page of the book of Deuteronomy. Welcome to the section called the “Pentateuch” or “Torah,” meaning the five books of the Law. This section captures the beginnings of the relationship between God and the people of Israel with the central focus being the Exodus event—the experience of being led from slavery to freedom. Here are some of the highlights:

- the Creation stories
- Adam and Eve
- Cain and Abel
- Noah’s ark
- the Tower of Babel
- Sodom and Gomorrah
- Abraham and Sarah
- Isaac and Rebekah
- Jacob and Esau
- Joseph (the coat of many colors)
- Moses (in the reeds, the burning bush, the ten plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea, the Passover, the Ten Commandments, the Ark of the Covenant, the journey through the desert, the death of Moses)
- the twelve tribes of Israel
- the laws, traditions, and feasts of Israel

Place this bookmark on the last page of 2 Maccabees. You’ve now entered the History section of the Bible—the section that records the story of the people of Israel who, under various leaders (judges and kings), fought to establish and keep the Promised Land. Here are the highlights:

- Joshua (crossing the Jordan, the walls of Jericho)
- Samson and Delilah
- Ruth and Naomi
- Samuel (request for a king)
- King Saul
- David and Goliath; King David
- Solomon (the temple, Queen of Sheba)
- Elijah and Elisha
- many kings, battles, and genealogies
- division of the kingdom
- Exile and return
- Judith and Esther

From
“The
Bible
Blueprints”
Paprocki

WISDOM Job through Sirach

Old Testament

Place this bookmark at the end of the book of Sirach. You're now ready to explore the Wisdom section of the Bible. While the Bible contains wisdom throughout, this section collects the wisdom of the people of Israel over thousands of years of wandering the desert, living in the Promised Land, worshiping in the temple, and struggling through the Exile. Among the many anecdotes, sayings, prayers, poems, and songs, here are some highlights:

- Job's suffering
- 150 Psalms for all occasions
- hundreds of proverbs
- wise sayings, including "Vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!" and "There is a time for everything" and "A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter" and more
- a romantic love song
- thousands more sayings about wisdom, prudence, good health, wealth, holiness, family, friends, misery, death, and even table etiquette

PROPHETS Isaiah through Malachi

Old Testament

Place this at the end of the book of Malachi and welcome to the last section of the Old Testament—the Prophets. The prophets were not concerned with foretelling the future as much as with calling the people of Israel back to their past fidelity to God, lest they face doom. Likewise, they held out hope for the future when the people of Israel faced dire consequences in exile. This hope was the notion of a messiah and an everlasting kingdom. Yet, even these assurances of a future are accompanied by a call for a return to the fidelity of the past. Here are some highlights:

The major (meaning lengthier) prophets

- Isaiah (Immanuel, "the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light," "comfort my people," etc.)
- Jeremiah (call of Jeremiah, Exile and return)
- Ezekiel (the dry bones)

The minor (meaning briefer) prophets

- Daniel (the lion's den, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego)
- Hosea (the unfaithful wife)
- Joel (the Day of the Lord)
- Amos (the call to justice)
- Jonah (swallowed by a large fish)