

INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE  
WEEK 1 – WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

Session plan

- Week 1 – What is the Bible?
- Week 2 – What is it about?
- Week 3 – Can we trust it? (etc.)
- Week 4 – How to read it?



1. A unique book

- Six billion copies printed
- Tops the global bestseller lists every year<sup>1</sup>
- At least a portion translated into 2883 languages
- One printing press in Nanjing (China) produces 23 Bibles every minute of every year
- Has shaped Western culture in countless ways
  - including positive impact on government, law, education, science and technology, medicine, service, social care, language, compassion, freedom and more

*'The Bible is not merely a handbook of private piety. It is the very foundation of Western civilization'*

The verdict of Indian Philosopher and Theologian Vishal Mangawald in *The Book that made your world: How the Bible created Western Civilization*.

Just another 'book'? (The word Bible literally means 'book' or 'books')<sup>2</sup>

No. Uniquely God's Book.

**2 Timothy 3:16** All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness...

scripture = *graphie* (a writing) – used to referred to the Jewish 'scriptures', i.e. the Old Testament

God-breathed = *theo-pneustos* (breathed out by God) – tells us the origin of 'all scripture'

**Romans 3:1-2** What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew...<sup>2</sup> Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God.

**Matthew 15:6** ....you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition.

We find our way around the Bible with the help of the book names and chapter and verse numbers. Bible references are commonly written as:

*bookname chapter# : verse#*

Some book names start with a number. e.g. 2 Kings

2. A book of books

66 books<sup>3</sup>

- 39 in the 'Old Testament'
  - documents that relate to the 'Old Covenant' between God and the people of ancient Israel
    - a covenant is a special relationship established on the basis of solemn promise
  - written almost completely in Hebrew<sup>4</sup> between 1500BC and 400BC (approx.)
- 27 in the 'New testament'
  - documents that relate to the 'New Covenant' established by Jesus that fulfilled and superseded the old covenant
  - written in Greek – most in the period between AD48<sup>5</sup> and before AD70<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The only possible exception is 2007, when the final Harry Potter book sold 44 million copies

<sup>2</sup> from the Greek, *biblion*, the term for a papyrus roll, from another word for papyrus, *biblos* (after Býblos, a Phoenician port where papyrus was prepared and exported). The New Testament books of the Bible were written on Papyrus.

<sup>3</sup> The Bible was first divided into chapters in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and by the end of 16<sup>th</sup> century verse numbers also began to be commonly used

<sup>4</sup> portions of Ezra and Daniel are in Aramaic – used as a language of administration by the Assyrians and after them the Babylonians and Persians.

<sup>5</sup> Galatians is the earliest document in the New Testament, most likely written in AD48, or possibly AD50

<sup>6</sup> Brian Edwards discusses the arguments for dating all the book of the New Testament documents prior to AD70 in his book, 'Why 27: How can we be sure we have the right books in the New Testament' (see esp. pp. 19-25 and pp. 187-198)

including a great variety of literature (different literary *genre*)



The Old Testament: the Law, the prophets and the writings – see Luke 24:44 (where Psalms stands for ‘the writings’)

Law of Moses (Pentateuch <sup>7</sup> )	Prophets	Writings	
Genesis	Former Prophets	Psalms	Poetical Books
Exodus	Joshua	Proverbs*	
Leviticus	Judges	Job*	
Numbers	Samuel	Song of Songs*	Five festival scrolls
Deuteronomy	Kings (I & II)	Ruth	
	Latter Prophets	Lamentations	
	Isaiah	Ecclesiastes*	
	Jeremiah	Esther	
	Ezekiel	Daniel	Historical books
	The Twelve ‘minor’ prophets Hosea to Malchi	Ezra – Nehemiah	
		Chronicles (I & II)	

\* known to Christians as the *wisdom* books of the Bible

How do these books fit together historically?

Period	Prehistory; 2000-1050BC (approx)			1050(approx.)-587BC		587BC-450BC
Historical record	Pentateuch	Joshua	Judges	Samuel	Kings	Ezra-Nehemiah
			Ruth		Chronicles	Daniel; Esther
Accompanying literature				Psalms		
				Latter Prophets		
Dominant Power	Egypt			Assyria/Babylon		Persia

<sup>7</sup> the word *pentateuch* (from the Greek language) means ‘the five scrolls’, it is used to refer to the five books of Moses

What about the New Testament?

Period	The lifetime of Jesus	The time of the early church (AD30-70)	
Testimony/accounts	Matthew		
	Mark		
	Luke	Book of Acts ( <i>also by Luke</i> )	
	John		
Letters		Romans	Paul's letters to churches
		1 and 2 Corinthians	
		Galatians	
		Ephesians	
		Philippians	
		Colossians	
		1 and 2 Thessalonians	
		1 and 2 Timothy	Paul's letters to individuals
		Titus	
		Philemon	
		Hebrews	Other [general] letters (mostly to churches)
		James	
		1 and 2 Peter	
		1,2 and 3 John	
	Jude		
	Revelation	Prophecy	
Dominant Power	Rome		

3. A book of books with dual authorship

**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.

*prophecy of scripture (graphe)* – the written text of the whole Old Testament (and by the extension the New Testament)

- the words, sentences and paragraphs of the Bible

*men spoke* – human authorship (ordinary words, grammar, literary forms etc.)

*from God* – divine authorship

*as they were carried along* – borne to a destination determined by the bearer

*by the Holy Spirit* – the active divine agent in the generation of the scriptures

No single method of revelation – e.g. Exodus 3:1-6

1 Kings 11:41-43

Psalms 3

Isaiah 6:1-3

Jeremiah 1:1-3

Jeremiah 36:1-8

Luke 1:1-4

John 21:24-25

2 Peter 3:15

4. A book of books for a dual readership

**Deuteronomy 31:9-13** So Moses wrote down this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel.<sup>10</sup> Then Moses commanded them: "At the end of every seven years, in the year for cancelling debts, during the Feast of Tabernacles,<sup>11</sup> when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place he will choose, you shall read this law before them in their hearing.<sup>12</sup> Assemble the people--men, women and children, and the aliens living in your towns--so that they can listen and learn to fear the LORD your God and follow carefully all the words of this law.<sup>13</sup> Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess."

**Romans 15:4** For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

**1 Corinthians 10:11** These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come.

**John 20:29-31** Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."<sup>30</sup> Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.<sup>31</sup> 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.

**Colossians 4:16** After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.

5. A book to treasure and to love...to trust and obey

**Psalm 119**

**verses 97-104**

Oh, how I love your law!  
I meditate on it all day long.  
<sup>98</sup> Your commands make me wiser than my enemies,  
for they are ever with me.  
<sup>99</sup> I have more insight than all my teachers,  
for I meditate on your statutes.  
<sup>100</sup> I have more understanding than the elders,  
for I obey your precepts.  
<sup>101</sup> I have kept my feet from every evil path  
so that I might obey your word.  
<sup>102</sup> I have not departed from your laws,  
for you yourself have taught me.  
<sup>103</sup> How sweet are your words to my taste,  
sweeter than honey to my mouth!  
<sup>104</sup> I gain understanding from your precepts;  
therefore I hate every wrong path.

**verses 119:129-136**

Your statutes are wonderful;  
therefore I obey them.  
<sup>130</sup> The unfolding of your words gives light;  
it gives understanding to the simple.  
<sup>131</sup> I open my mouth and pant,  
longing for your commands.  
<sup>132</sup> Turn to me and have mercy on me,  
as you always do to those who love your name.  
<sup>133</sup> Direct my footsteps according to your word;  
let no sin rule over me.  
<sup>134</sup> Redeem me from the oppression of men,  
that I may obey your precepts.  
<sup>135</sup> Make your face shine upon your servant  
and teach me your decrees.  
<sup>136</sup> Streams of tears flow from my eyes,  
for your law is not obeyed.