

# Learn to read the Bible effectively

Sponsored by the Christadelphians



The Bible is the book that has influenced the whole course of history. It continues to influence millions of people today. It is the book in which God speaks to you.

But it is a book that many people find hard to read. It can be frustrating, confusing, boring or simply overwhelming. In this course, we shall consider how to read the Bible effectively, so that its ancient message is exciting and relevant to us today.

Learn to Read the Bible Effectively course notes,  
© Rob J Hyndman. 1998 NIV edition.  
Bethel Publications, P.O. Box 285, Beechworth VIC 3747, Australia.  
Permission is granted for these notes to be reproduced without alteration for  
class purposes only.

**Acknowledgements:** the figure on p.4 and the maps in Appendix C are taken from *What the Bible is all about for young explorers*, F. Blankenbaker (Regal Books, 1986); the figure on p.27 is taken from the *Thompson Chain Reference Bible* (B.B. Kirkbride Bible Co., Inc., Indianapolis, IN 46204, U.S.A.); the figures on p.36 and p.37 are taken from *Biblical Archaeological Review*, March–April 1994 and July–August 1991 respectively, (Biblical Archaeological Society, 4710 41st St, N.W. Washington, DC 20016, U.S.A.); and the figures on p.52 and p.54 were created by Roy and Jane Toms and are taken from *Thine is the Kingdom* by Peter Southgate (1986, Dawn Book Supply, 66 Carlton Rd, Nottingham NG3 2AP, England). All figures are reproduced with permission.

Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

For more information about our beliefs and activities, write to:

The Christadelphians  
G.P.O. Box 619E  
Melbourne VIC 3001

# Preface

---

Welcome! We know that your time is valuable. So we promise to make your time with us productive and enjoyable. Our goal is to teach you to read the Bible more effectively. You are certainly capable of reading and understanding this great book, but if you are like most people you are occasionally:

- frustrated
- confused
- bored
- overwhelmed by the task.

We assume that, since you are attending this course, you want help in furthering your understanding of the Bible while avoiding the many roadblocks that hinder progress. We think we can provide you with keys and tips in doing so.

The aims of the course are to help you:

1. become more familiar with the Bible;
2. be able to read and understand the Bible independently;
3. evaluate the claims for the Bible's inspiration.

Why are we giving this course? We are hoping God is pleased that we are attempting to build respect and familiarity with his Word. We are fulfilling our responsibility to share what we have learned with others. We are concerned for your salvation as well, but rest assured, we do not believe it is our place or role to attempt to convert you to our way of thinking in this seminar. We are committed to helping you discover the Bible message for yourself. If we come to agreement on matters, all the better. If not, your conscience and ours must be satisfied independently. For this reason we will avoid a debate of doctrine during class time, and stick to our promise of helping you read the Bible more effectively!

# Contents

---

<b>1</b>	<b>Introducing the Bible</b>	<b>1</b>	Prophecies about Israel . . . . .	49
	A unique book . . . . .	1	Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones . . . . .	51
	A library of books . . . . .	2	Vision of world empires . . . . .	53
	The Bible timeline . . . . .	7	Homework . . . . .	56
	Bible geography . . . . .	8	<b>6 Reading carefully</b>	<b>57</b>
	Why read the Bible? . . . . .	8	Internal consistency . . . . .	57
	Homework . . . . .	10	Contradictions? . . . . .	59
<b>2</b>	<b>Starting to read</b>	<b>11</b>	Bible echoes . . . . .	61
	Bible Reading Planner . . . . .	11	Homework . . . . .	64
	Preparing to read the Bible . . . . .	12	<b>7 Interpreting the Bible</b>	<b>65</b>
	Strange language . . . . .	14	The Bible interprets itself . . . . .	65
	Strange customs . . . . .	16	Why the Bible is difficult to read . . . . .	66
	Footnotes and cross references . . . . .	16	Literary styles . . . . .	67
	Homework . . . . .	19	Literal and figurative language . . . . .	72
<b>3</b>	<b>The origin and history of the Bible</b>	<b>20</b>	Basic principles for interpreting the Bible . . . . .	73
	Inspiration . . . . .	20	Homework . . . . .	74
	The canon of Scripture . . . . .	21	<b>8 Bible study tools</b>	<b>75</b>
	The Apocrypha . . . . .	21	Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias . . . . .	75
	Old Testament manuscripts . . . . .	23	Commentaries . . . . .	76
	New Testament manuscripts . . . . .	25	Concordances . . . . .	77
	The first English Bibles . . . . .	26	Topical Bibles . . . . .	78
	Choosing a Bible . . . . .	30	Lexicons . . . . .	78
	Homework . . . . .	34	Computer Bibles . . . . .	80
<b>4</b>	<b>Reasons to believe</b>	<b>35</b>	Homework . . . . .	80
	Archaeology . . . . .	35	<b>Appendix A: Book outlines</b>	<b>81</b>
	The Bible and modern medicine . . . . .	39	<b>Appendix B: Bible words</b>	<b>155</b>
	Resurrection of Jesus . . . . .	40	<b>Appendix C: Maps of Bible lands</b>	<b>162</b>
	Homework . . . . .	45	<b>Appendix D: Bible timelines</b>	<b>165</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Bible prophecy</b>	<b>46</b>		
	Predicting the future . . . . .	46		
	Bible prophets . . . . .	47		

# Session 1

## Introducing the Bible

---

In this first session of the course, we will look at some background information about this fascinating book. It is a book of amazing diversity: read the Bible and you will find a mixture of enchanting history, beautiful poetry, remarkable prophecy, great wisdom, simple proverbs and difficult teaching.

No-one can understand modern society without understanding the history and message of the Bible. It is a holy book for Christians, Jews and Moslems and it has played a major part in the development of world civilization and social values. The Bible has played a key role in influencing the world. Whether you believe it or not, you cannot ignore it.

Furthermore, it makes extraordinary claims of itself. For example:

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.

(2 Timothy 3:16–17)

It is only sensible to test these claims for ourselves. If its claims are true, we must read the Bible carefully and thoroughly. This course is designed to help you test the Bible's claims and read it effectively.

### **A unique book**

#### **Record breaker**

The Bible is the world's best seller. It has been estimated that between 1815 and 1975, about 2,500 million copies of the Bible were printed. Each year approximately 100 million Bibles or

parts of Bibles are distributed. These are staggering numbers when compared with the very few books which ever sell just one million copies. The best-selling novel ever has only sold about 30 million copies over a period of more than 20 years. What is it that makes the Bible consistently out-sell every other book ever produced? It does it every year, and has done so for hundreds of years.

The Bible also holds the record for being translated into more languages than any other book. At the end of 1993, the whole Bible had been translated into 337 languages and at least one book of the Bible had been translated into 2062 languages. This means that almost any person on earth can have access to the Bible and read or hear the words which have changed the course of history so often. The main groups involved in this work of translation, printing and sale have been the Bible Societies.

No other book is so widely quoted or so widely studied. More books are written about the Bible than any other book.

## **Survival**

The Bible has endured thousands of years of copying by hand, yet it appears to have remained almost unchanged.

It has been burned, banned and outlawed many times. For example, in 1408 England passed the following law:

that no one henceforth on his own authority translate any text of Holy Scripture into English or other language . . . and that no book of this kind be read.

Those who did translate it into English (such as William Tyndale) were killed. Others were burnt at the stake for saying the Lord's prayer in English. Only a few years ago, it was a criminal offence in many communist countries to have a Bible in your possession.

## **A library of books**

The word "bible" comes from a Greek word *biblos* meaning simply "writings". The Bible is not just one book—it is one volume but it contains 66 separate books written by many different authors. At the front of your Bible you will find a list of these 66 books, but you probably already know many of the book names and some of the stories they contain. Test yourself in the quick quiz on the following page

**Test yourself**

Genesis	Who was the first man? .....
	Who survived the great Flood? .....
Exodus	Includes the 10 .....
Psalms	Written mainly by King .....
Daniel	Daniel was thrown into a den of .....
Matthew, Mark, .....	and .....
.....	A book of symbols

Now if you check the list of books in your Bible you will see the ones mentioned above, but others too that are familiar. In fact, you may have heard of quite a lot of the Bible stories and people. Many people will have heard of the ten commandments and the Lord's prayer. Some will know a few of the stories, like Noah and the Ark, Samson and Delilah or David and Goliath. Names like Moses, Elijah, Paul and the Pharisees may be familiar. But how do they all fit together? One of the aims of this course is to help you to gain an overview of the Bible and what it is all about. You can build on your knowledge quickly, if you will read your Bible.

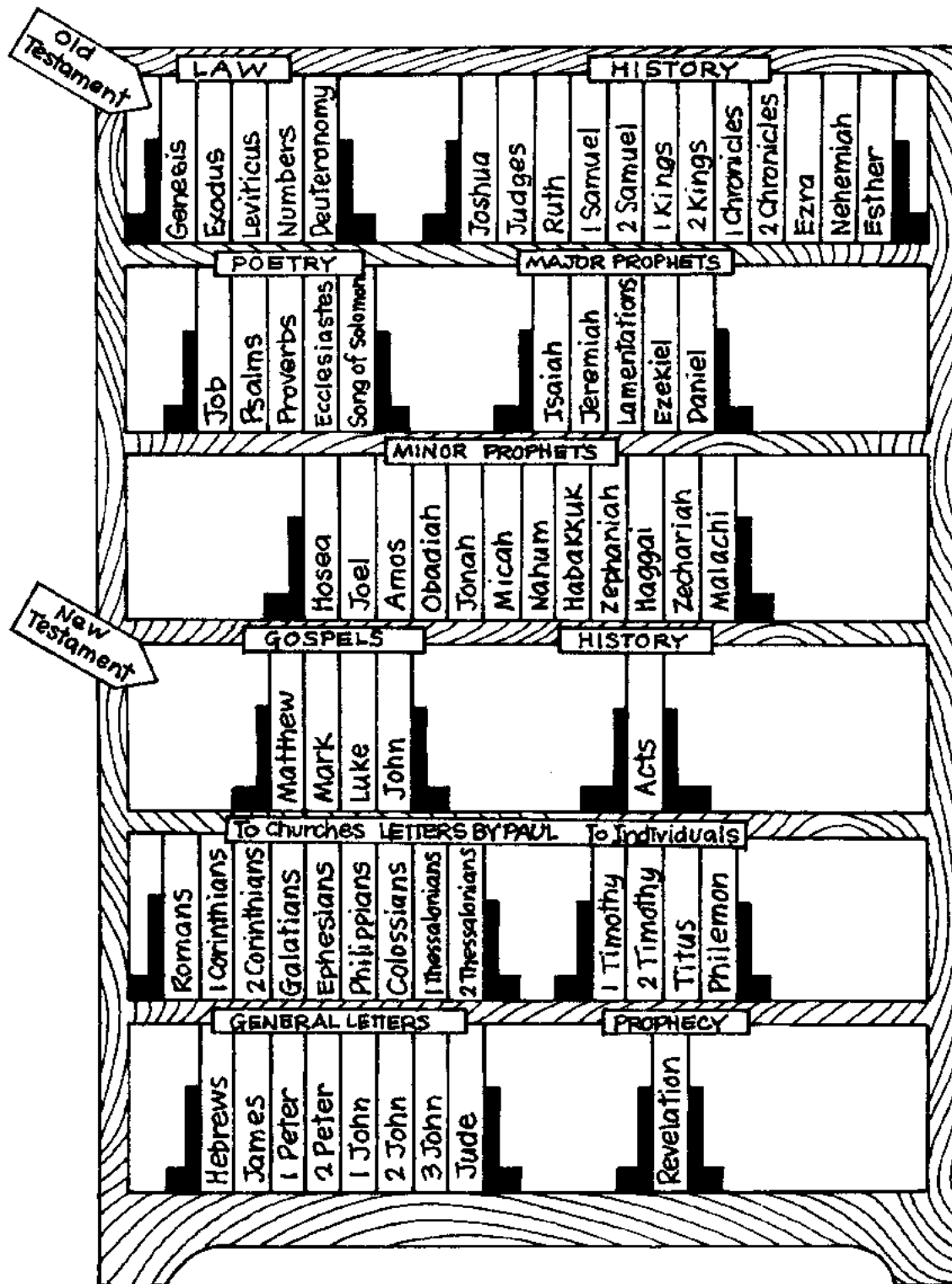
The 66 books were written by about 40 different authors of many different occupations: kings, shepherds, prophets, herdsmen, teachers, lawyers, doctors, and so on. These authors lived in ten different countries and wrote over a 1,600 year time span in three different languages. Yet their message is consistent.

**Testaments**

The bookcase on the following page shows the 66 books of the Bible divided into two sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. A testament was a covenant or an agreement. So the two parts of a Bible simply record two covenants, each between God and men.

The *Old Testament* tells of events from the creation of man to

# The Bible—A Library of Smaller Books





### Finding the passage

In these notes (and in most books about the Bible) we use a shorthand way of describing Bible passages. The Bible is a big book and locating a particular passage can be difficult. Each book of the Bible has been divided into chapters and each chapter has been further divided into verses.

When we give a Bible reference we give the book, chapter and verse. For example, **Jeremiah 30:3** refers to verse three of chapter thirty of the book of Jeremiah. Some very short books have only one chapter and so they are referred to just by verse numbers. For example, **Jude 24–25** refers to verses 24 and 25 of the book of Jude.

about 400 years before Jesus Christ was born. It gives God's word as it related particularly to the people of Israel. In contrast, the *New Testament* records God working with people through his son, Jesus Christ. In the New Testament it becomes clear to all that God's promises are to all people, not just to Israelites.

Many Christians read only the New Testament. After all, does not the very name *Christians* indicate that only records about Jesus Christ are of use to them? This is a tragic error. It is not possible to fully understand the New Testament without also reading the Old Testament. Never let us forget what Jesus said:

You diligently study the scriptures [the Old Testament] because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the scriptures that testify about me. (John 5:39)

### Variety

The Bible is a book of amazing diversity: read the Bible and you will find a mixture of enchanting history, beautiful poetry, remarkable prophecies, great wisdom, simple proverbs and difficult teaching. The bookcase shown on the previous page divides the books in each testament into categories: law, history, poetry, prophecy, letters, etc. These are man-made categories but provide a useful aid to help remember what each book contains.

- Law* The five law books at the front of your Bible are sometimes called the Pentateuch (meaning five books) and contain the early history of God's people as well as the laws he gave to Moses for Israel.
- History* The Old Testament contains much of the history of Israel. In the New Testament, the Acts of the Apostles gives the history of the early Christians.
- Poetry* Five of the Old Testament books are largely poetic. For example, you may know some of Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd". Bible poetry does not rhyme (even in the original languages). It is classified as poetry because of its structure.
- Prophecy* Human beings cannot foretell the future. If they could, we would not have insurance companies and bookmakers. Yet the Bible is full of forecasts or prophecies. Some books contain mostly prophecy and these are in the section labeled "Major Prophets" and "Minor Prophets" in the bookshelf. (The minor prophets are smaller books, not less important!) In these books, God foretold much of the history of Israel and nearby nations. Revelation, the last book of the Bible, is also a book of prophecy.
- Gospels* The four gospels are records of the life of Jesus. They contain parallel accounts of many things Jesus did and said although each of them contains information that the others omit. The word "gospel" means "good news".
- Letters* Much of the New Testament consists of letters. Most of them were written by the apostle Paul to churches and individuals.

A summary of each of the books of the Bible is found in Appendix A at the end of these notes.

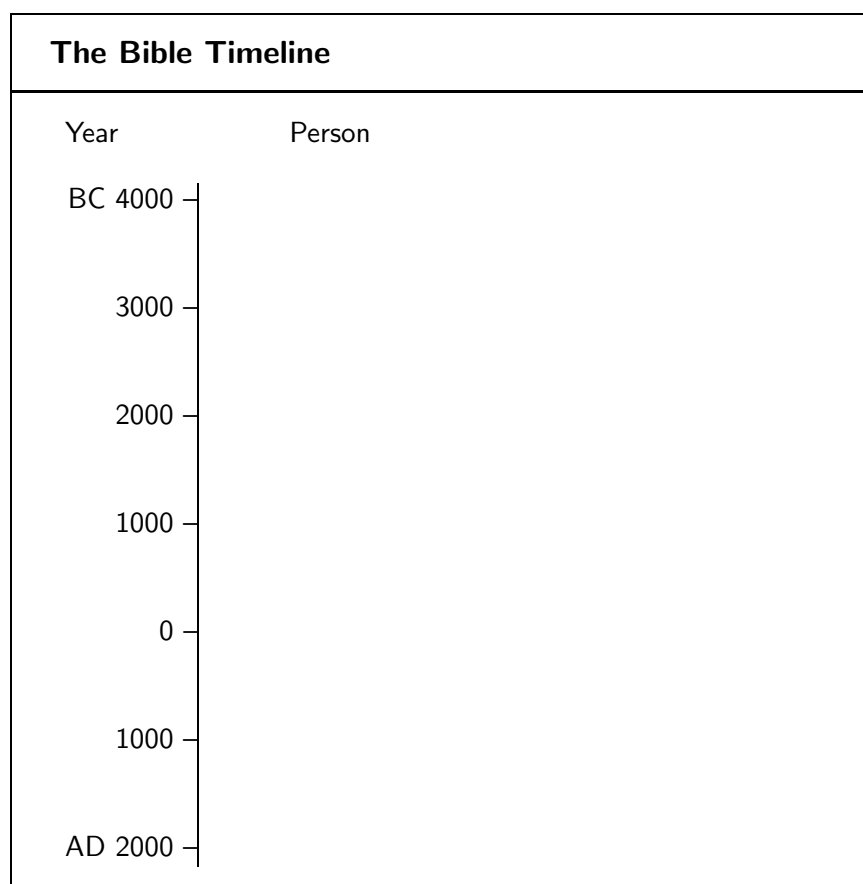
## The Bible timeline

The Bible contains quite a lot of information about when events happened. When archaeological information is also taken into account, a fairly detailed chronology of the Bible can be obtained from about the time of Abraham. Before Abraham, there is insufficient information to accurately date any event.

The historical events described in the Old Testament take place over a period of several thousand years. A much shorter time is covered by the New Testament—only about 100 years. Bible history is highly selective. There are long periods about which the Bible says relatively little (such as the time between Adam and Noah) and short periods about which the Bible says a lot (such as the last week of Jesus' life).

The charts in Appendix D show more detailed timelines for the Old Testament, New Testament and the ministry of Jesus.

Try putting the following people on the chart below: Jesus, Moses, Adam, Noah, David, Abraham, you.



## Bible geography

When the Bible describes the geography of the events it records, it is helpful to look at a map to see where the places were. Almost all of the Bible concerns Israel or neighbouring countries in the Middle East. Of course, modern atlases of the same area aren't particularly helpful because the towns and cities have different names or may have ceased to exist altogether. Many Bibles contain maps as an appendix and some simple maps are found in Appendix C of these notes.

## Why read the Bible?

Although the Bible has 66 different books, and many thousands of verses, a single theme runs strongly through the book from start to finish. This theme is the relationship between God and human beings—a theme of love and salvation. Through the lives of individuals and nations this theme develops.

Most people who set out to read the Bible seriously, soon find it a disturbing book. The Bible claims to be the actual word of God, who created and sustains the universe, and as a result the Bible lays down rules for living and outlines the consequences of obedience and disobedience. No wonder the Bible has a real impact on any serious reader.

### The Bible ...

- makes us wise unto salvation.  
2 Timothy 3:14–17
- gives us hope  
Romans 15:4
- is the power of God for salvation  
Romans 1:16–17
- brings death if neglected  
Proverbs 13:13
- provides direction for daily living  
Psalm 119:105; Joshua 1:8.

Make no mistake—the Bible *can change your life*. Not the Bible itself, of course, but its message. In the Bible, God has revealed himself as righteous and holy. By contrast we all are unholy sinners. And in the Bible, God offers us the way of escape from our sin, the saving blessing of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus has

called people to him for 2,000 years and offered them life in a hopeless world. The Lord's invitation and command is

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

(Matthew 11:28-30)

This invitation has appeared wonderful to many. They have seen their lives as being without meaning or happiness and going nowhere. An active conscience is a terrible thing if there is no way out. Anyone who has done anything of which they are later deeply ashamed, knows just how wonderful this invitation is. If it works. History shows that it does. People who turn to God in faith and respond to the call of the Lord Jesus Christ are changed. They are not immediately made perfect, but they are made free. Free of fear and guilt. Take the opportunity over the years ahead to read the Bible, learn more of God and his son, and follow him.

## Homework

1. Find the book of Matthew
  - (a) In what section of the Bible is Matthew found?
  
  - (b) What sort of book is Matthew?
  
2. Read Matthew 3:1–6
  - (a) What was John the Baptist’s main message?
  
  - (b) How did the people respond to John’s message?
  
3. Matthew says that John was fulfilling a prophecy of Isaiah.
  - (a) In what section of the Bible is Isaiah found?
  
  - (b) What sort of book is Isaiah?
  
4. Find the prophecy quoted by Matthew and read it.  
[Hint: look at the footnotes]
  - (a) Explain how John fulfilled the prophecy.  
[Hint: “the Lord” is Jesus]
  
  - (b) Why doesn’t Matthew quote it accurately?

## Session 2

# Starting to read

---

In this chapter, we introduce the Bible Reading Planner to help you read systematically through the Bible and provide some tips to successful Bible reading. We also look at two common problems new Bible readers have: strange words and strange customs. Finally we consider the use of cross references and footnotes to help you understand the Bible better.

### Bible Reading Planner

We recommend regular intake of God's Word. Just as we have regular meals of physical food, we need regular meals of spiritual food to be in good health. A fundamental principle of Bible reading is to have a *steady, consistent diet of the Word of God*.

Because your Bible is a big book, and because it is so important, it pays to be systematic in reading it. After all, it is a textbook, your textbook for life, and if it is worth reading at all, it is worth reading well. In other words, don't just open your Bible at random each day and read a little; you wouldn't do that to a textbook on an unfamiliar topic.

However, you are not advised to open the Bible to page one, start, and keep reading day by day till it's finished. Some people have read the Bible that way, with success. But some of the difficulties experienced by first readers lead us to recommend a step by step approach which gives important and useful ideas quite early in your reading, then progressively consolidates them.

There are several ways of achieving this, but we have chosen a reading course that has been widely used and well tested.

The reading planner we are using gives daily readings for one year, each day's readings consist of one chapter. Through the year, you will read from many different parts of the Bible. The booklet will help fill you in on some of that Bible background you may need. You will cover many different parts of the Bible and have a good grasp of the overall plan of God.

## Preparing to read the Bible

There are a number of things which need to be considered when reading the Bible.

1. *Pray*

It is important to ask God's blessing on your reading. It is his book and he can help us understand it.

2. *Be comfortable*

To properly concentrate on the Bible, you will need to find a comfortable, quiet place in which to read. Try to avoid places where there is a lot of background noise from the television or other people talking. In the Bible, God speaks to us. It is worth listening carefully.

3. *Allow time*

Bible reading is most effective if you are not rushed. Set aside 20–30 minutes each day to read the chapter and think about what it means. It also takes time to become familiar with the Bible message and the background in which it is set. Be patient and over time it will all start to fit together like a beautiful jigsaw.

4. *Be open to new ideas*

The people from Berea (in Greece) are described as being of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. (Acts 17:11)

If we are to gain as much as we can from Bible reading and study, we need to approach it with the right attitudes. We need an openness to new ideas. If we approach all ideas with a “fortress mentality”—thinking that our main job is to defend the walls that make up the fortress of Christianity—we have very little space for growth.

The Bible is a book of strength that has withstood all



kinds of attacks during its history. As in all other areas of study, scholars build upon and re-evaluate the work of earlier scholars. We need not fear examining new ideas and evaluating them carefully in the light of all the teachings of the Bible.

5. *Think about it*

God told Joshua

Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. (Joshua 1:8)

To successfully understand the message of the Bible, we must spend time thinking about it carefully. So important is this that God said to the nation of Israel:

Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the LORD swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth. (Deuteronomy 11:18–21)

6. *Ask questions*

You will inevitably have questions about what you read. Write them down. You might discover the answers through further reading. Or you can take your questions to a more experienced Bible reader to see if he or she can help.

7. *Share your ideas*

We need an attitude of willingness to meditate on what we are learning and to think through for ourselves how our learning can and should be applied in our own lives. To do this, it is usually helpful to share our ideas and interpretations with other Bible students for discussion and evaluation. We can learn from each other.

Bible study is trying work. It is also exciting and life changing. Study of the Bible can enrich us as no other study can. You will experience a new energy as you learn to make your own judgments based on firm principles, and the Bible will become more alive and powerful in your life. Remember, you are intended to understand this remarkable book and to meet God in its pages.

## Strange language

The King James Version was produced in 1611 and is famous for its majestic language and is the most quoted version of the Bible.

Consider the following passage (Psalm 23:1–3).

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Compare the NIV translation:

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Note the archaic form of verbs used in the KJV. Notice, also, that punctuation has changed—the colon (:) is used differently today. However, in this passage, none of the words in the KJV are particularly difficult to understand and the meaning of the passage is clear.

This is not true everywhere. The KJV can sometimes be difficult to understand because of the archaic language. Consider the two examples below.

<b>Psalm 119:147–148</b>	
<b>KJV</b>	<b>NIV</b>
<sup>147</sup> I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word.	<sup>147</sup> I rise before dawn and cry for help; I have put my hope in your word.
<sup>148</sup> Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word.	<sup>148</sup> My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises.
What does the word “prevent” mean in the KJV?	

**“Conversation”**

Read the KJV of Philippians 1:27. Turn to a more recent version for comparison. What does the word “conversation” mean in the KJV?

As these two examples show, some words have a different meaning now from the meaning they had in 1611 when the KJV first appeared. In fact, it contains over 500 words which have changed their meaning or become obsolete. Some are shown in the table below.

**Some archaic words from the King James Version**

<b>Old word</b>	<b>Modern equivalent</b>	<b>Example</b>
prevent	precede	1 Thessalonians 4:15
bowels	heart	Genesis 43:30
bewitch	amaze	Acts 8:9
allow	approve	Luke 11:48
conversation	way of life	Philippians 1:27
bruit	report	Jeremiah 10:22
maketh collops	gather fat	Job 15:27
trow	think	Luke 17:9

Language is dynamic—it is always changing. New words are created, old words die out, some words change their meaning. Therefore, to read older versions effectively, you need to learn the old words. Or use a modern version.

Even with a modern version, you will come across words that are not in common use. There are things mentioned in the Bible which are not part of everyday conversation and so the words used may not be familiar. To help you when you come across these words, we have listed some of them with a definition in Appendix B.

## Strange customs

The people in the Bible lived thousands of years ago in a different culture and a different land. When reading the Bible, you will soon learn some of their ancient customs. For example:

When David arrived at the summit, where people used to worship God, Hushai the Arkite was there to meet him, his robe torn and dust on his head. (2 Samuel 15:32)

Tearing your clothes and covering your head with dust seems strange behaviour to us, but in the context it is clear that this was a sign of mourning. The same custom is found many times throughout the Old Testament. It doesn't take long to recognize these ancient customs and learn what they meant.

### Some ancient customs

- tearing clothes
- dust on head
- wearing sackcloth and sitting in ashes
- professional wailing women at funerals
- arranged marriages
- multiple marriages
- walls around cities for defence
- some names mean something
- sitting in the gate of a city

## Footnotes and cross references

Consider the following passage from Matthew 5:21–22 which is part of Jesus' famous "Sermon on the mount". This excerpt is from the RSV.

You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgement.' But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother<sup>i</sup> shall be liable to judgement; whoever insults<sup>j</sup> his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell<sup>k</sup> of fire.

The basic message of Jesus is quite clear: in the past you were told not to kill—I am telling you not even to be angry or abusive. He was taking the Old Testament commandment to a new level. However, we can understand the passage better using some simple Bible study tools.

## Footnotes

The small letters *i*, *j* and *k* after the words “brother”, “insults” and “hell” indicate there is a footnote with more explanation. In this case, the footnotes given at the bottom of the page are as follows:

- i* Other ancient authorities insert *without cause*.
- j* Greek *says Raca to* (an obscure term of abuse)
- k* Greek *Gehenna*

The first one shows that some of the ancient manuscripts of the New Testament give a slightly different form of words, which alters the meaning. Obviously the translators felt the form of words they used in the main text was the most likely but there was sufficient doubt to include the alternative as a footnote.

The second footnote explains that the original Greek actually refers to a particular abusive expression. Because this has little meaning for us, they have translated it as “insults”.

The third footnote shows that the word “hell” has been used for the Greek word *Gehenna*. *Gehenna* was a valley south of Jerusalem; it is also known as the valley of Hinnom. It was used as a rubbish dump and always had a fire burning to destroy the rubbish. Previously it had been the site of child sacrifice to an Ammonite god called Molech (2 Chronicles 33:6). Jesus seems to have used it as a symbol of complete destruction.

In general, footnotes are provided by the translators to explain some words, give alternative translations, or explain some aspect of the text. They are often helpful in understanding a passage.

## Cross-references

There is no better commentary on the Bible than the Bible itself. No source is more appropriate for interpreting God’s Word than God himself. It is in this area that the use of cross-references can be so valuable. They are verse ‘references’ supplied by the publishers which direct the reader to other locations in the Bible where the same word or the same or similar event or phrase may be found.

Bibles which have cross-references will usually place them in a centre column, after the footnotes, or at the end of each verse.

Most cross-references take one of the following forms:

1. Quotations of the Old Testament in the New Testament;
2. Parallel passage of the same or similar events;
3. More detail about a person, place or subject.

**Example: Matthew 5:21–22**

Some cross-references for Matthew 5:21–22 are given below.

Exo 20:13; Deut 5:17; 1 John 3:15; Eph 4:26; Jms 1:19–20.

Look them up. Do they help us better understand what Jesus said?

**Exercise: Genesis 1**

The second reading in the Bible Reading Planner is Genesis 1. Read the chapter and discuss the following questions.

1. Were the sun, moon and stars created after the earth? If so, how was there “evening and morning” for the first three days?
2. Human beings are described as being created “in God’s image”. Look at the following cross-references: Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10; James 3:9. How do these help us understand what Genesis means?
3. What food was assigned to man? There is a cross-reference to Genesis 9:3. What does this tell us?
4. Over what part of creation did man have dominion? Does this give us the responsibility to care for the environment?
5. How are Adam and Eve mentioned?

## Homework

1. Read the book of Ruth and find a few customs very strange to us. What do you think they mean?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Here are some examples of cross references. Use them to answer the questions.
  - (a) Luke 9:7–9  
Why was John the Baptist beheaded?  
CR to Matthew 14:1–3; Mark 6:14–16
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - (b) Matthew 12:38–42  
Who was the “Queen of the South”?  
CR to 1 Kings 10:1

## Session 3

# The origin and history of the Bible

---

How do we know that the 66 books in our Bibles were all inspired? What about other books? In this session we answer these questions. We also look at the manuscript evidence that our Bibles are reliable copies of what God originally caused to be written down. The Dead Sea Scrolls provide some fascinating and relatively recent evidence of the reliability of the Bible. Finally, we trace the history of the English Bible through to the most recent versions and discuss the problem of choosing a Bible to suit you.

### Inspiration

The word *inspiration* literally means *God-breathed*. The Bible is “inspired” because the words have been breathed by God himself. The Apostle Paul described the Scriptures like this:

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.

(2 Timothy 3:16–17)

Peter described the inspired prophets as

men [who] spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

(2 Peter 1:21)

Sometimes God seems to have inspired what they said word for word to the point when they did not always understand what they wrote (see 1 Peter 1:10–12). At other times, the writer seems to have had more freedom of expression although the thoughts expressed were inspired by God. For example, the writings of Paul are distinctive in their style and language used, but were still inspired by God.



## The canon of Scripture

The “canon of Scripture” means those writings which are inspired. How do we know what books are part of inspired Scripture and what books are not? Some Bible writers stated explicitly: “This is the word of the LORD” or “This is what the LORD says . . .” (e.g., Jeremiah 2:1; Joel 1:1). Other books do not claim to be inspired but they quickly became recognized as inspired because the person who wrote them was accepted as a prophet of God (e.g., Genesis, Song of Solomon).

The Bible provides two tests for deciding whether a prophet is inspired:

1. he should predict the future accurately (Deuteronomy 18:21–22); and
2. he should not teach people to turn away from God (Deuteronomy 13:1–5).

The Old Testament was well-established by the time of Jesus. The books had been accepted for centuries because they were recorded by prophets of God such as Moses, Isaiah and Ezra. These men had visions from God and made prophecies that came true. Therefore what they said and what they wrote were accepted as the work of God.

It did not take long for the New Testament writings to be considered “Scripture” also. For example, the gospel of Luke was considered Scripture by the time Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy (see 1 Timothy 5:18). Similarly, the writings of Paul were considered Scripture by the time Peter wrote his second letter (see 2 Peter 3:15–16).

## The Apocrypha

Most Bibles contain the 66 books mentioned in Chapter 1. But some Bibles, particularly Catholic Bibles, contain several additional Old Testament books. Most Catholic Bibles will contain an additional seven books in the Old Testament and several additions to other books. Some Bibles add up to seventeen extra books or parts of books.

These additions to the Old Testament are known as the “Apocrypha” (meaning “hidden” books). Protestants reject these books as uninspired—not part of the revealed word of God. They were written between about 200 BC and AD 100, well after the Old Testament was completed.

<b>Old Testament Apocrypha</b>	
<b>Title</b>	<b>Approximate date of writing</b>
Psalm 151	200 BC?
Ecclesiasticus	180 BC
Tobit	180 BC
The Prayer of Manasseh	150 BC
Judith	150 BC
1 Esdras	150 BC
Additions to Esther	100 BC
Song of the Three Young Men	100 BC
Susanna	50–100 BC
Bel and the Dragon	50–100 BC
1,2&3 Maccabees	50–100 BC
4 Maccabees	AD 40
The Wisdom of Solomon	AD 40
2 Esdras	AD 100
Baruch	AD 100

Some of the books of the Apocrypha are mainly historical: for example, 1&2 Maccabees describe the history of the Jews about 150–100 years before Jesus. Other books are pure fiction: Tobit tells the story of a man named Tobit who travels with his guardian angel, Raphael, and fights off the demon Asmodeus with the organs of a fish! Another fictional story, Judith, contains major historical blunders: it says Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Assyria in Nineveh instead of the king of Babylon. Many of the books falsely claim to be written by people mentioned in the Bible. For example, Baruch claims to be written by Jeremiah’s friend but was certainly written much later. Similarly Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon were written hundreds of years after Solomon, not by Solomon himself.

It is clear why some of these book should not be considered “canonical” (i.e., part of the inspired word of God). They contain historical and doctrinal errors and were not written by the person they claim. But others, like 1 Maccabees, seem reasonably factual and accurate. So why shouldn’t these be part of our Bibles?

None of the books of the Apocrypha came from prophets and so they were never accepted by the Jews as inspired. The Jews sometimes quoted from the Apocrypha, but in the same way that we would quote Shakespeare—interesting literature but

definitely not the work of God.

It seems that about 100 years after Jesus, some non-Jewish Christians didn't understand that the books of the Apocrypha were not generally accepted, and thought they were part of the Old Testament. In this way, they came to be part of the Bibles of some Christians and are still used today.

There is also a New Testament Apocrypha which is not so well known. No-one suggests these books are inspired and they are not included in any Bibles.

<b>New Testament Apocrypha</b>	
<b>Title</b>	<b>Approximate date of writing</b>
The gospel according to the Hebrews	AD 65–100
Epistle of Barnabas	AD 70–79
Epistle to the Corinthians	AD 96
The seven epistles of Ignatius	AD 100
Didache, teaching of the twelve	AD 100
Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians	AD 108
Shepherd of Hermas	AD 115–140
Second epistle of Clement	AD 120–140
Apocalypse of Peter	AD 150
Acts of Paul and Thecla	AD 170
Epistle to the Laodiceans	AD 350

## Old Testament manuscripts

The Old Testament was written mainly in Hebrew between about 1450 BC and 400 BC. It has been copied by scribes, many times (there were no printing presses), then later translated into English. Can we be sure that the Bible we read today is a true record of God's words in the original?

It was the job of scribes to copy out the Old Testament onto scrolls of parchment or animal hides, and later into books. The process of copying was carried out with extraordinary care.

For example, several copies of the Old Testament have been found dating from about AD 900. These were produced by a group of Jews known as Masoretes who followed a number of precise rules when copying (see the box on the following page). As long as such rules were followed, it was highly unlikely that

### **Masoretic rules for copying the Old Testament**

1. the whole scroll must be carefully ruled before a word is written
2. the ink must be black, made from soot, charcoal and honey
3. each line is to contain 30 letters exactly
4. each column is to contain an even number of lines, the same number throughout the scroll
5. no letter or word is to be written from memory
6. each word must be studied in the original manuscript and spoken aloud before being copied
7. the document is to be carefully checked using word and letter counts
8. the entire scroll is to be checked by a supervisor

errors crept in. However, there are some places in the Old Testament where there appear to have been minor copying errors.

### **Dead Sea Scrolls**

The Dead Sea Scrolls are a large collection of scrolls discovered in the Dead Sea area. The first scrolls were discovered in early 1947 by three Bedouin shepherds. Eventually, some of the scrolls made their way into the hands of archaeologists and Hebrew scholars who were amazed to find an entire copy of Isaiah which they dated to the first century BC. At that time, this was about 1000 years older than the next oldest manuscript of any part of the Bible. About 800 different manuscripts have since been found in this area. There are manuscripts or fragments of every book in the Old Testament except Esther. Several copies of some books were found including Isaiah, Psalms, Deuteronomy and Genesis.

All the manuscripts are dated between 150 BC and AD 250. Until this discovery, all translation was based on the Masoretic text which is a little over 1000 years old. The Dead Sea Scrolls are about 2000 years old! Yet when compared with the Masoretic text, there was hardly any difference. Because of their great age, they provide amazing evidence that the Bible has been faithfully copied by scribes for centuries. So accurate has this copying been, that it provides compelling evidence that God has preserved his word for future generations.

When the Isaiah scroll was discovered, the translators of the

RSV had already completed their translation of Isaiah. They compared what they had done with the Isaiah scroll and made a total of 13 changes. That is, in only 13 places did they think the Dead Sea Scrolls were more accurate than the later Masoretic text. All changes were minor.

Since then, many more manuscripts have become available and have been used in more modern versions such as the NIV.

The scrolls are also interesting because they help to date prophecies. Before the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, some critics said that prophecies about Jesus, such as those in the Psalms and Isaiah, were written after the event. The Dead Sea Scrolls proved that they were true prophecies which predated Jesus, and we know they were fulfilled. Again, this gives further evidence that God inspired the Bible, and preserved it for us to read.

## **New Testament manuscripts**

The New Testament was written in Greek. Its accuracy is also well supported by the manuscript evidence. In fact, there are thousands of surviving New Testament manuscripts from the first few centuries after Jesus. When compared with other ancient writings from the time of Jesus and before, the evidence for the New Testament is overwhelming.

Professor F.F. Bruce (University of Manchester) has written:

The evidence for our New Testament writings is ever so much greater than the evidence for many writings of classical authors, the authenticity of which no-one dreams of questioning. And if the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt. *The New Testament Documents*, 1960, p.15.

Other support for the reliability of the New Testament comes from early believers who quoted it. For example, Ignatius (Bishop of Antioch, AD 70–110) quoted from Matthew, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, James, 1&2 Thessalonians, 1&2 Timothy and 1 Peter. Others such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement, Origen and Tertullian quoted thousands of times from the New Testament. These quotations can also be used to check the accuracy of the surviving manuscripts.

Professor Bruce Metzger has written:

### Manuscripts of Ancient Documents

Author	Written	Earliest copy	Time span (years)	Copies
Caesar	100–44 BC	AD 900	1000	10
Livy	59 BC – AD 17	?	?	20
Plato	427–347 BC	AD 900	1200	7
Tacitus	AD 100	AD 1100	1000	20
Pliny the Younger	AD 61–113	AD 850	750	1
Thucydides	460–400 BC	AD 900	1300	7
Suetonius	AD 75–160	AD 950	800	8
Herodotus	480–425 BC	AD 900	1300	8
Horace	?	?	900	8
Sophocles	496–406 BC	AD 1000	1400	193
Lucretius	55 BC	?	1100	2
Catullus	54 BC	AD 1550	1600	3
Euripides	480–406 BC	AD 1100	1500	9
Aristotle	384–322 BC	AD 1100	1400	49
Aristophanes	450–385 BC	AD 900	1200	10
Homer	900 BC	400 BC	500	643
<b>New Testament</b>	<b>AD 40–100</b>	<b>AD 125</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>24000</b>

Taken from *Evidence that demands a verdict*, Josh McDowell, revised edition 1979, p.42–43.

Indeed so extensive are these citations that if all other sources of our knowledge of the text of the New Testament were destroyed, they would be sufficient alone for the reconstruction of practically the entire New Testament.

*The Text of the New Testament*, 1968, p.86.

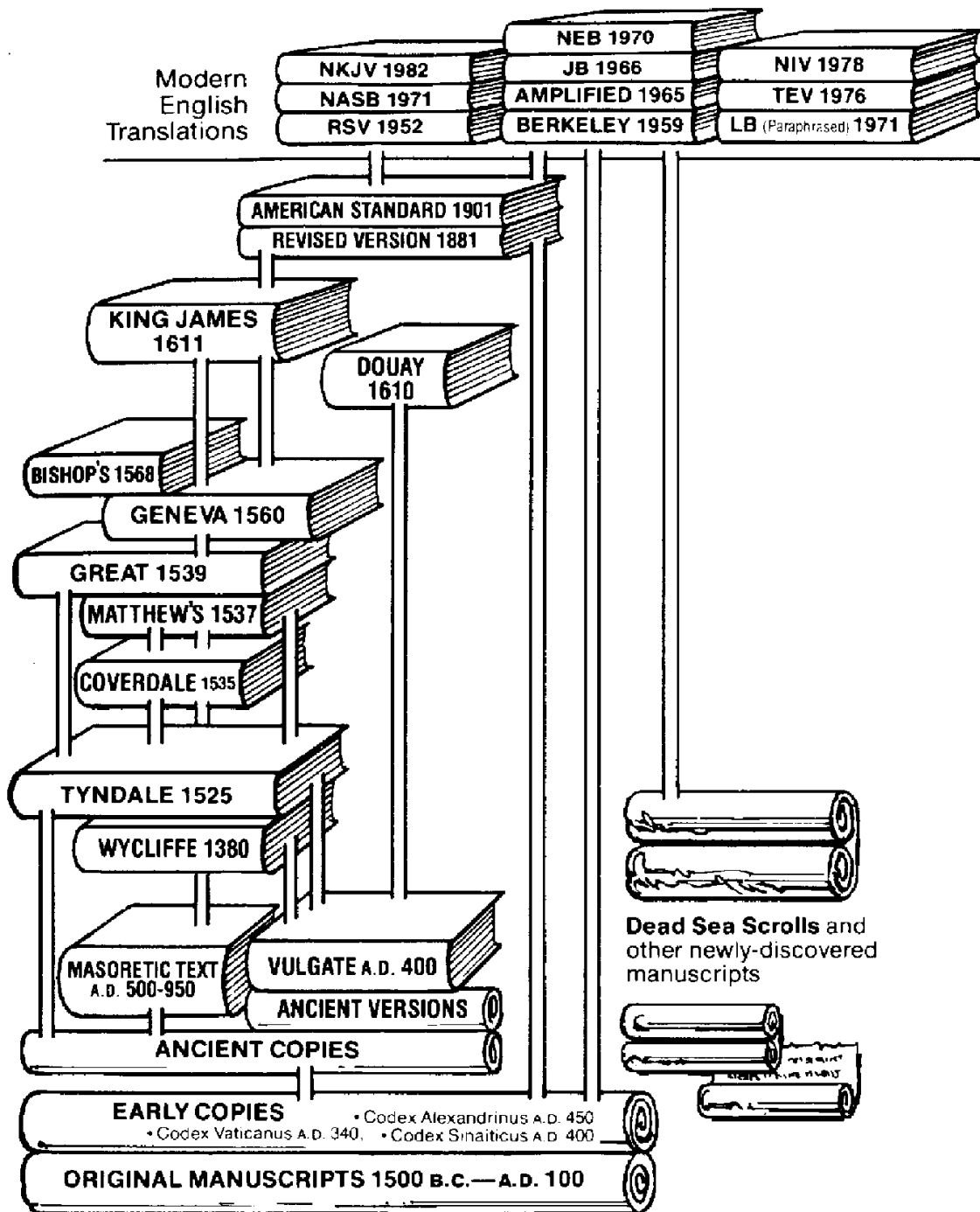
## The first English Bibles

There are several translations of parts of the Bible into English dating back to the 7th century. However, English has changed so much that we would not be able to understand any of these!

### John Wycliffe

The first translation of the entire Bible into English was in the 14th century by John Wycliffe in 1382. Wycliffe did not translate from the Hebrew and Greek but from a Latin edition of the

### The origin and growth of the English Bible



Bible known as the Vulgate. For the first time, the common people could hear the Bible in their own language for the first time. They quickly realised that the church leaders were astray from the Bible in both what they taught and how they lived. Wycliffe and his followers met with great opposition from the church for their work and many were killed. Forty years after Wycliffe died, his bones were dug up, burned, and the ashes thrown into a nearby river. This was meant to be a lesson for others who might attempt unauthorised translations.

Wycliffe's Bible was handwritten in manuscript form. It took about ten months for each copy to be produced and cost an educated man a year's salary. Of course, most people could not afford a copy themselves but were thrilled to be able to hear it read by one of Wycliffe's followers. Wycliffe's Bible was one of the first to include chapters (but not verses).

In the 1450s, the first printing press was developed by Gutenberg. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of printing for Bible believers. Suddenly, the Bible was widely available to be read by almost anyone who wanted to.

### **William Tyndale**

Towards the end of the 15th century there was a resurgence of the study of Greek. By 1500, Greek was being taught at Oxford. When Tyndale graduated from Oxford in 1515, he had studied the Scriptures in both Greek and Hebrew. He developed a strong desire to translate the Bible into English, from the original languages.

Due to Church opposition he was forced to relocate to Hamburg in Germany, where he completed his translation of the New Testament in 1525. Bibles arrived in England in 1526, where they were gladly received by the common people, and burned by the Church!

After finishing the New Testament, Tyndale began work on the Old Testament, but was martyred before he could complete it. Tyndale continued to work abroad, revising and reissuing his translation until his arrest and imprisonment in 1535. After over a year in prison, he was first strangled, and then burned at the stake, in 1536. At the time of his death, he had completed the Pentateuch, Jonah, and some of the historical books.

Miles Coverdale was an assistant to Tyndale. He had worked with Tyndale, on the translation of the Pentateuch. During



Tyndale's imprisonment, he continued the work of translating the entire Old Testament. This was completed in 1537.

By the time this translation was issued, Henry VIII had broken all ties with the Roman Church. He was ready to tolerate an English translation. He endorsed Coverdale's Bible without knowing that it was essentially the work of Tyndale, which he had previously condemned!

### **Geneva Bible**

When King Henry VIII died, his daughter Queen Mary succeeded him. She was a Roman Catholic and instituted a bitter persecution of Bible translators and readers. Coverdale escaped to Geneva in Switzerland, where he began work on a fresh translation which was to contain explanatory notes, some additional charts, maps and illustrations, and the first use of verse divisions. It is also the first Bible to use our Roman type face and to have cross-references.

The Geneva Bible was published in 1560 and is the one Shakespeare quotes from in his plays. It is popularly known as the "Breeches Bible" because in Genesis 3:7 it states that Adam and Eve sewed fig leaves together and made themselves "breeches".

### **King James Version**

The Geneva Bible was immediately popular and acknowledged as the best translation to that time. However, the marginal notes in the Geneva Bible reflected Calvinist theology which was not welcomed by the Church of England.

In 1604 King James I convened a church conference which resolved

that a translation be made of the whole Bible, as consonant as can be to the original Hebrew and Greek; and this to be set out and printed without any marginal notes, and only to be used in all Churches of England in time of divine service.

In 1611 his resolution bore fruit in the most loved English Bible ever, the King James Version or Authorised Version (KJV or AV). It became the universally accepted version for the English speaking world, and remained so for 350 years.

However, the KJV has not been without amendment. A new edition in 1613 contained over 400 such variations. Countless others have been added over the centuries since.

### Some famous mistakes

Some of the most famous early English editions are known for printers' errors or unusual translations. For example, in the very first edition of the KJV in 1611, Exodus 14:10 is repeated, word for word.

Then there was the unfortunate "Adultery Bible" of 1641 where the printer left out the word *not* from Exodus 20:14! He was fined 300 pounds.

In 1702 a Bible was printed where Psalm 119:161 read "Printers have persecuted me without cause." (It should have read "princes".)

### Modern translations

Towards the end of the 19th century it was considered crucial to perform a new translation as so much of the KJV needed explanation. Changes were needed for two reasons: additional ancient manuscripts had come to light since 1611, and many English words had changed meaning so significantly as to cause confusion for the ordinary reader. As a result, in 1885 the Revised Version (RV) was published in the UK and in 1901 the American Standard Version based on the same texts. The RV is recognised as one of the most accurate Bibles ever, but its readability left much to be desired.

The twentieth century has seen many new translations of the Bible. More than 70 new versions have been produced since 1948. These newer versions have the advantage of being based on more extensive manuscript evidence and contain more modern language which is more easily understood by current readers. The most widely used of these newer versions is the New International Version (NIV), first released in 1978.

### Choosing a Bible

Once there was no choice. The only English Bible was the King James Version (KJV) and the only colour was black. These days there is a bewildering array of English translations. Some of them are shown in the table on the next page.

Each version has its good and bad points. Some have been

<b>Some Bible versions in English</b>		
King James Version	KJV	1611
also called Authorised Version	AV	
Revised Standard Version	RSV	1952
New American Standard Bible	NASB	1960
New English Bible	NEB	1970
Living Bible	LB	1971
Good News Bible	GNB	1976
also called Today's English Version	TEV	
New International Version	NIV	1978
New King James Version	NKJV	1983
New Revised Standard Version	NRSV	1989

designed for easy reading in modern English, others stick very closely to the original text but are more difficult to understand, some have more study helps available, and so on. There are also versions that are published by specific denominations. These tend to emphasise certain doctrines that are held by that denomination, often at the expense of accuracy. Many of the popular, readily available translations will be suitable for reliable everyday use.

When selecting a Bible to use, remember:

- what is best for one person, is not necessarily the best for another;
- a study Bible is not necessarily a good reading Bible, and vice versa.
- reading with children may be different from reading with adults or reading on your own;
- using several versions is helpful.

Whichever Bible version you read from regularly, you will often come across words, or verses, or ideas, that are not entirely clear. It is an enormous help to have several Bible versions so that you can compare them.

### **Approaches to translation**

One difference between versions is the approach they take to translation. The three main approaches are:

- Formal equivalence: literal (word for word). (e.g., NASB)
- Dynamic equivalence: thought for thought. (e.g., NIV)
- Paraphrase: some interpretation involved. (e.g., LB)

**Exercise: paraphrases**

Read Matthew 5:3–10. These verses are commonly known as “The Beatitudes”.

1. In groups of two or three, write a paraphrase of the verses. [Ask for help if you don't understand some words or phrases.]
2. How does your paraphrase help people understand the passage?
3. What things did you omit in your paraphrase? Did you insert any new ideas? Will your paraphrase mislead people?
4. Read the same passage from a paraphrase version such as the Living Bible. How does it compare with yours?

Most versions lie somewhere on this continuum.

A formally equivalent translation attempts to translate each word into an equivalent word in English. A dynamically equivalent translation attempts to translate each thought or phrase into an equivalent thought in English. A paraphrase contains the same ideas as the original but doesn't follow the original text so closely.

For example, consider the first three verses of Psalm 23. The NIV reads

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

The LB reads

Because the Lord is my Shepherd, I have everything I need! He lets me rest in the meadow grass and leads me beside the quiet streams. He restores my failing health. He helps me do what honours him the most.

Paraphrases are popular for reading because they are designed to be easy to read and they can provide fresh insight into familiar passages. However, there is always a danger that the interpretations of the translator are wrong and you have no way of finding this out for yourself. Paraphrases are not good for study purposes either.

At first it might seem that the best approach is literal translation since that is “closest” to the original text. But that is not

necessarily the case. Consider these two examples.

- In Luke 18:13, a man “beat his breast” in remorse. In Chokwe (a West Zambian language) this means to congratulate yourself—the opposite of what Jesus meant!. Therefore, in the Chokwe Bible, the phrase “beat his breast” has been translated “beat his brow”, which carries the idea of remorse. This is not a literal translation, but a “thought for thought” translation.
- In the Philippines, repeating a word shows you are not sure. So when Jesus said “Truly, truly . . .”, this would mean “I’m not sure of what I am about to say” instead of “I really mean this and want you to listen”. Again, a literal translation is not the best.

### Other differences

Versions also vary in size of vocabulary, traditional or modern tone, use of archaic language, theological orientation and textual layout.

Textual layout means how the text is arranged on the page. A Bible with good textual layout:

- prints the text in the natural paragraphs (instead of printing each verse as a separate paragraph);
- includes subheadings to help the reader see the natural breaks in the text and know what is to follow;
- prints the poetic parts of the Bible in the natural stanzas rather than as prose or in the artificial verse divisions;
- gives lists of names or places in columns instead of as prose.

The NIV makes most use of textual layout to assist the reader. The KJV makes the least use of textual layout. Most other versions are somewhere in between.

Apart from the version, you will also need to consider the *format* of your Bible. It is worth buying one with wide margins around the text. This provides room for notes you may wish to make. Bibles with cross-references are very useful for finding related passages. Some Bibles also have charts and maps in the text which can be helpful.

## Homework

1. Read the translations of Acts 1:10–11 below from the KJV and RSV. Find and read one other version of the same passage.

KJV: <sup>10</sup> And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;  
<sup>11</sup> Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

RSV: <sup>10</sup> And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold two men stood by them in white robes, <sup>11</sup> and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking to heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

- (a) Which do you prefer?
  - (b) Why?
- 
2. In your readings this week, use a few different versions if you have access to them. List what you feel are their strengths and weaknesses.

## Session 4

# Reasons to believe

---

The Bible was written so long ago. How can we be sure that it is really the word of God? In fact, there is a lot of evidence that the Bible is divinely inspired. In this session we look at three lines of evidence which give us confidence that the Bible did come from God. These are:

- archaeology
- modern medicine
- the resurrection of Jesus

Together these show us that the Bible is historically accurate, that it was written by our Creator and that the gospel message is true.

### Archaeology

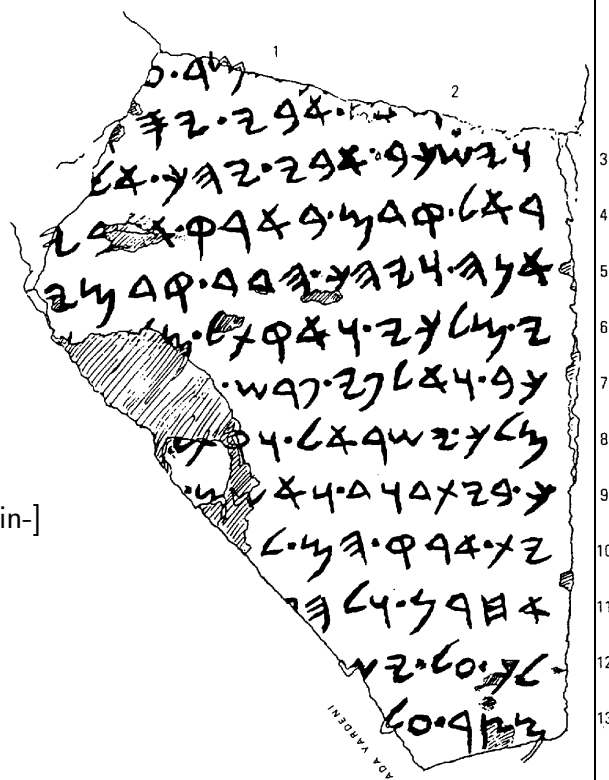
In the past 150 years there has been a large number of archaeological excavations at hundreds of sites in the countries of the Bible. Many finds demonstrate the historical accuracy of the Bible. Some examples are given below.

#### House of David inscription

In mid 1993, a stone inscription was discovered which referred to the “House of David” and the “King of Israel”. This is the first reference to King David found outside the Bible. The stone has been dated to the ninth century BC and appears to commemorate the victory of an Aramean king over the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. The inscription provides strong evidence for the existence of King David and the dynasty which he founded.

**Translation**

1. ...
2. ... my father went up
3. ... and my father died, he went to [his fate... Is-]
4. ... rael formerly in my father's land...
5. I [fought against Israel?] and Hadad went in front of me...
6. ... my king. And I slew of [them X footmen, Y cha-]
7. riots and two thousand horsemen...
8. the king of Israel. And [I] slew [... the kin-]
9. g of the House of David. And I put...
10. their land...
11. other... [... ru-]
12. led over Is[rael...]
13. siege upon...



**Seals of Biblical Persons**

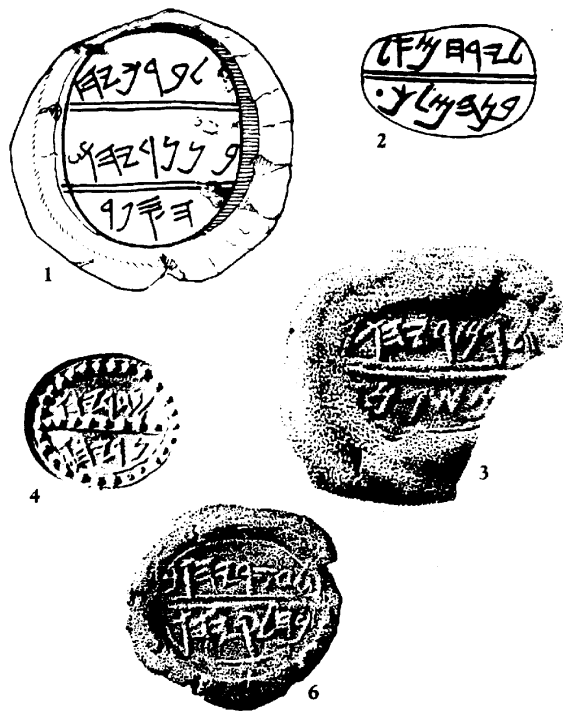
When letters and official documents were sent to someone, they were normally sealed with a wax or clay seal bearing the writer's imprint. This normally had the writer's name and title along with a geometric design. Some of the clay seals have survived and been found (although the documents to which they were once attached have long since crumbled away). Some of them are shown on the following page. These apparently belonged to the following people.

1. Baruch, son of Neriah	Jer 36:4	(Jeremiah's scribe)
2. Yerahmeel, son of the king	Jer 36:26	(near Baruch seal)
3. Gemariah, son of Shaphan	Jer 36:10	
4. Seriah, son of Neriah	Jer 51:59	(Baruch's brother)
5. Azariah, son of Hilkiah	1 Chr 6:13	(son of high priest)
6. Azaliah, son of Meshullam	2 Kgs 22:3	

All of these seals have been dated to around 600 BC, exactly the right time according to the Bible's chronology.

In fact, two seals belonging to Baruch, son of Neriah have been found. One of them also showed a fingerprint, perhaps the mark of Baruch himself.





### Nebuchadnezzar's bricks

Many bricks have been found in Babylon bearing the following inscription

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, who provides for Esagila and Ezida, the eldest son of Nabopolassar, king of Babylon, am I.

(Esagila and Ezida were temples in Babylon.) Until these bricks were found early this century, the name Nebuchadnezzar was unknown outside the Bible.

### Babylonian chronicle

The Babylonian chronicle was also found and provides a description of Babylon's attack on Jerusalem in 598–597 BC which agrees exactly with the biblical description in 2 Kings 24:10–17.

#### Babylonian chronicle

Seventh year: In the month of Kislimu, the king of Akkad [Babylon] called up his army, marched against Syria [lit. Hattu-land], encamped against the city of Judah and seized the town on the second day of the month Adar. He captured the king. He appointed there a king of his own choice. He took much booty from it and sent [it] to Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar recorded the date as the 2nd of Adar in his 7th year. He also recorded the dates of astronomical events such as solar eclipses which can be accurately calculated and so the Babylonian calendar can be synchronized with our modern calendar. In this way, the date of the attack on Jerusalem is calculated to be 16 March, 597 BC.

### Jehoiachin in Babylon

The Bible describes Jehoiachin king of Judah being taken captive to Babylon where he was imprisoned. Many years later, the Bible says he was released and fed by the king of Babylon (2 Kings 25:27–30). Archaeologists have found receipts for delivery of oil to the king's household in Babylon. One receipt listed Jehoiachin as receiving some of the king's oil.

#### Deliveries of oil to royal household:

1½ sila for 3 carpenters from Arvad, ½ sila each  
11½ sila for 8 ditto from Byblos, 1 sila each  
3½ sila for 7 ditto, Greeks, ½ sila each  
½ sila to Nabu-etir the carpenter  
10 sila to Jehoiachin, the son of the king of Judah  
2½ sila for the 5 sons of the king of Judah through Qana'a

### Sheep's liver

Nebuchadnezzar could not decide whether to attack Rabbah, the capital city of the Ammonites, or Jerusalem, the capital city of the Jews. In Ezekiel we read

Mark out one road for the sword [of the king of Babylon] to come against Rabbah of the Ammonites and another against Judah and fortified Jerusalem. For the king of Babylon will stop at the fork in the road, at the junction of the two roads, to seek an omen: he will cast lots with arrows, he will consult his idols, he will examine the liver. (Ezekiel 21:20–21)

Thus he used a number of methods of divination to determine which city to attack. But how did he “examine the liver”?

Archaeologists have discovered numerous clay models of sheep's livers. These appear to have been used to teach student astrologers. They are divided into 55 different parts and it is thought that the future was predicted based on which part of the liver was infected with parasites—rather like reading tea leaves!

These few examples show that the Bible is accurate, in both the history it records and its preservation through time. In fact,

there has not been any archaeological find that contradicts the Bible. But there have been many to support it.

## The Bible and modern medicine

Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt in about 1445 BC. Having crossed the Red Sea, they camped at Mt Sinai where God gave Moses the laws which were to form the basis for the new nation. Amongst other things, the laws covered cleanliness, morality, ethics and hygiene. Although it was not intended to be a scientific document, the Law of Moses outlined many provisions that are now recognized as important to the health of the Israelites. They could not have known this at the time. So these provisions provide further evidence that the Bible comes from God.

1. Before the improved preparation and refrigeration of foods, eating pork and seafood led to intestinal problems and frequent food poisoning. The Law of Moses prohibited these foods (Leviticus 11:4–8,10–20).
2. The Law of Moses emphasises (Leviticus 11:32–38)
  - (a) washing of hands and food
  - (b) regular use of running water (not stagnant)
  - (c) contaminated implements being scoured before re-use or broken
3. Until relatively recently, it was common for excrement to be dumped into the streets. Flies bred in the filth and spread intestinal diseases that killed millions. Diseases such as cholera, dysentery and typhoid fever took a heavy toll of lives. But none of these things were problems to the Israelites. God had given them the following law.

Designate a place outside the camp where you can go to relieve yourself. As part of your equipment have something to dig with, and when you relieve yourself, dig a hole and cover the excrement. (Deuteronomy 23:12–13)
4. Treatment of wounds was also based on hygienic protection. See Leviticus 15:4–12.
5. The laws of leprosy in Leviticus 13 required careful isolation of infection. Medical historians regard this as the first model of a sanitary legislation—thousands of years before the scientific basis for infection control was understood.

### Contemporary Egyptian medicine

Compare the Law of Moses with Egyptian medical practice at the time. The *Papyrus Ebers* provides the following advice.

- To prevent hair from turning grey, anoint it with the blood of a black calf which has been boiled in oil or the fat of a snake.
- To cure blindness, mix pig's eyes, antimony, red ochre and honey and pour into the sufferer's ear.
- For an embedded splinter, apply worm's blood and asses' dung.

No doubt, the Israelites were familiar with these "treatments" having lived in Egypt.

## Resurrection of Jesus

Perhaps the most amazing claim in the whole Bible is that Jesus rose from the dead. If the Bible is inspired, this claim must be true. On the other hand, if Jesus did not rise from the dead, the Bible cannot be the word of God.

The resurrection is extremely important to the Christian faith. Professor Josh McDowell has written

... the resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the most wicked, vicious, heartless hoaxes ever foisted upon the minds of men, or it is the most fantastic fact of history.

Josh McDowell,  
*Evidence That Demands a Verdict*

The whole of Christianity hangs on the resurrection. Without it, there is no hope of salvation or hope for the future. The apostle Paul wrote

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. (1 Corinthians 15:17)

Jesus ... was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. (Romans 4:24-25)

It was also a major part of the message that the apostles taught (see Acts 2:24,32; 4:1-2; 17:18; etc.) So it is important to consider the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus.

### What happened...

1. Joseph asked Pilate for Jesus' body  
(*Matthew 27:57–58; Mark 15:42–45; Luke 23:50–52; John 19:38*)
2. Joseph and Nicodemus laid him in a tomb, but because it was the Sabbath they did not anoint him. Some women saw where he was laid.  
(*Matthew 27:59–61; Mark 15:46–47; Luke 23:53–56; John 19:39–42*)
3. The tomb was blocked with a large stone across its entrance.  
(*Matthew 27:60; Mark 15:46*)
4. The Jewish leaders asked for a Roman guard to be placed on the tomb. The guard was granted and the tomb was officially sealed.  
(*Matthew 27:62–66*)
5. The women came back later to anoint him but found the stone moved and the grave empty. Two angels appeared to them and explained that Jesus had risen from the dead. Peter and John also saw the empty tomb.  
(*Matthew 28:1–7; Mark 16:1–8; Luke 24:1–8; John 20:1–9*)
6. The Jewish leaders bribed the soldiers not to tell anyone what had happened, but to say they had fallen asleep and the disciples had stolen the body.  
(*Matthew 28:11–15*)
7. Jesus appeared to some of them, and later to the disciples as a group. They were reluctant to believe, but were convinced when they saw him.  
(*Matthew 28:8–20; Mark 16:9–14; Luke 24:9–49; John 20:10–31; Acts 1:3–4*)

### Eyewitnesses

A large number of people claimed to see Jesus after his resurrection. Those we know about are listed below.

- Mary Magdalene
- Women returning from tomb
- Peter
- Disciples on road to Emmaus
- Apostles, Thomas absent
- Apostles, Thomas present
- Seven by Sea of Galilee
- 500 believers at one time
- James
- Eleven
- At ascension
- Paul
- Stephen
- Paul in temple
- John on Patmos

In fact, many of them were initially skeptical and Jesus had to give “many convincing proofs that he was alive” (Acts 1:3). The

apostle Thomas was not prepared to believe until he saw Jesus for himself (John 20:25). The fact that they all did eventually believe, shows that there must have been convincing evidence.

Their eye-witness accounts were an important part of the gospel message (Acts 2:32; 3:15; 10:39–41; 1 Corinthians 15:3–8).

### **Persecution**

The disciples had every reason not to believe. By acknowledging their faith in the resurrection, they became subject to fierce persecution. They must have been absolutely convinced that Jesus had risen from the dead. They had no doubts. Anybody with doubts would not have willingly suffered as they did.

Compare the behaviour of the apostles before and after Jesus' resurrection. They had deserted and fled when Jesus was arrested (Matthew 26:56). Peter crept back but when questioned he denied he had ever known Jesus (John 19:15–27). The others did not have the courage to appear at all. Less than three months later, they were all willing to stand up in public and proclaim the resurrection. They rejoiced when they were persecuted (Acts 4:1–21; 5:29–42).

It is amazing to think that a defeated little band of cowards meeting in an upper room one day could, a few months later, be a powerful force withstanding great persecution. Something had convinced these men.

Simon Greenleaf, Royall Professor of Law at Harvard University, has written

They had every possible motive to review carefully the grounds of their faith, and the evidences of the great facts and truths which they asserted . . . It was therefore impossible that they could have persisted in affirming the truths they have narrated, had not Jesus actually risen from the dead.

### **The missing body**

Perhaps more than any other reason, the missing body provides ample evidence for the resurrection. The Jews desperately wanted to stop the young Christian movement. They could have done so easily by simply producing the body. In his first public speech in Jerusalem, Peter spoke about Christ's resurrection (Acts 2:24,32). But no one came forward to contradict Peter's claim.

After all, the tomb had been under guard (Matthew 27:62–66; 28:11–15). Because of the guard, the body could not have been taken by anyone other than the Jews or Romans, and apparently neither knew where it was. Therefore Jesus must have been raised.

### **The stone**

A very large stone was placed across the entrance to the tomb (Matthew 27:60; Mark 16:4). Such tombs were very common in Israel at that time and many have been studied by archaeologists. They have concluded that the stone probably weighed between one and two tonnes and that the stone stood on a ramp which was gently inclined *toward* the tomb. So to seal the tomb, the stone was pushed down the slope. But to open the tomb was very difficult and required several strong men.

### **The Roman Guards**

The Jewish leaders asked Pontius Pilate (the Roman procurator) for military guards to be posted at the tomb so Jesus' body could not be stolen (Matthew 27:62–65). It is estimated that a Roman guard unit consisted of between 4 to 16 soldiers. Once the guards were posted, no one would dare attempt to remove the stone covering the entrance.

But while the Roman soldiers were on guard, an angel appeared (Matthew 28:2–4), caused an earthquake and rolled back the stone. When the chief priests heard what had happened, they attempted a cover up. They bribed the guards to say the disciples had stolen the body during the night while the guards were asleep!

Leaving a night watch or sleeping while on guard required the death penalty under Roman law. (Compare the jailer's reaction in Acts 16:25–28 when he thought his prisoners had escaped.)

Furthermore, the tomb had been officially sealed (Matt 27:66) and to break the seal without permission would also have been punishable by execution. Even if the disciples could have rolled back the huge stone without waking the Roman soldiers, would they have been willing to defy the Roman authority and fight the guards just to steal the body? Given their actions a few days earlier, it is hardly likely!

### Some theories to explain it away

**Swoon theory** Jesus could have fainted, revived and escaped from the tomb.

**Hallucination theory** All the eye-witnesses hallucinated.

**Wrong tomb theory** The disciples went to the wrong tomb.

**Hoax theory** The disciples stole the body.

**Theft theory** Thieves stole the body

**Official coverup theory** Either the Romans or Jewish authorities took the body.

Can you explain why each of these theories cannot be true?

### Conclusions

All the evidence points to the truth of Jesus' resurrection. Three days after he was dead and buried, Jesus was resurrected as he said he would be (Matthew 16:21; 28:6).

We can have hope and faith as a result. Jesus' rising from the dead is evidence of a future resurrection of faithful people (1 Corinthians 15:12–22,51–55).



## Homework

Read John chapter 20

1. How do these verses show that the disciples were not expecting the resurrection of Jesus?
2. What do we learn from the grave clothes being found neatly folded (v7)?
3. Does v19 show the disciples were still doubting? What convinced them that Jesus was truly raised from the dead?
4. What evidence is there in this passage that Jesus did not have an ordinary body after his resurrection?
5. Why is Christ's resurrection so important if the Bible is to be believed?

## Session 5

# Bible prophecy

---

Another remarkable evidence for the inspiration of the Bible is prophecy. The Bible contains many prophecies about Israel and the surrounding nations. Some were fulfilled almost immediately, some were fulfilled hundreds of years later, some are still being fulfilled today, and some are yet to be fulfilled. Fulfilled prophecy shows that the Bible must come from a powerful God who knows the future.

### Predicting the future

People have always wanted to predict the future to reduce their fear and anxiety about the unknown and an uncertain tomorrow. This desire has been satisfied by priests, astrologers, prophets, fortune tellers, and the like since the dawn of civilization. In Bible times, there was a range of methods used.

- Augury: using animal entrails
- Hepatoscopy: using animal livers
- Auspices: using the flight of birds
- Astrology: using stars and planets
- Oracles: often ambiguous answers by priests or priestesses to specific questions

Today we have

- horoscopists
- tarot card readers
- palmists
- tea leaf readers
- clairvoyants

Nostradamus, who was born in 1503, is one who claimed to be a prophet. He wrote a large number of quatrains (four line paragraphs) which together formed his book of prophecy. The quatrains are very vague and mystical. Despite this many people

have endeavoured to interpret them as prophecies of significant events such as World War 2 or the deaths of famous people. However, such interpretations are highly subjective.

Bible prophecy is different. It is clear and specific and usually not open to interpretation. The Bible claims that the prophets were inspired by God in what they wrote:

Prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

(2 Peter 1:21)

## Bible prophets

A Bible prophet did not just foretell the future, but was God's messenger in commanding, encouraging and warning his people. Sometimes this involved relaying God's plans and intentions for the future, but sometimes a prophet's message did not involve any prediction. However, in this session, we will look only at prophecies which predicted events in the future.

It is important to see prophecy from God's perspective. The Bible portrays him as the *controller* of future events. He knows the future because he will make it happen. In this way, Bible prophecy is *history in advance*.

There are different types of prophecy. Some are "short-term" and fulfilled in the lifetime of the prophet. Many are "long-term" and extend beyond the prophet's lifetime. A prophet often proclaimed a combination of both, the short-term fulfilment providing evidence of the truth of the long-term prophecy. Many prophecies have a dual fulfilment, a partial short-term fulfilment and a more complete long-term fulfilment.

Two tests were applied to see if a prophet was genuinely from God. The first test concerned the teaching of the prophet:

If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them", you must not list to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deuteronomy 13:1-3)

Isaiah also stated

When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists . . . To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this [God's] word, they have no light. (Isaiah 8:19-20)

## The Bible Prophets

Year B.C.	EVENTS	PROPHET
1500	EXODUS	Moses
1400		
1300	JUDGES	
1200		
1100		Samuel
1000	Saul David Solomon Kingdom split	David
900		Elijah Elisha, Joel ?
800	KINGS OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH	Jonah Amos Micah, Isaiah, Hosea Nahum, Zephaniah
700	Assyrian Captivity of Israel	Jeremiah, Habbakuk Ezekiel, Daniel, Obadiah
600	Babylonian Captivity of Judah	Haggai, Zechariah
500		Malachi
400		
300		
200	Maccabees	
100		
0	Jesus born	Jesus

The second test was whether the prophet had shown the ability to predict the future before.

You may say to yourselves, “How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?” If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.

(Deuteronomy 18:21–22)

The prophet... will be recognized as one truly sent by the LORD only if his prediction comes true. (Jeremiah 28:9)

So a true prophet was one who taught things consistent with the rest of God’s revelation and who gave a short-term prophecy which came true.

The accurate fulfilment of Bible prophecies gives great credibility to the Bible’s claim of inspiration. It also gives us confidence in prophecies not yet fulfilled.

## Prophecies about Israel

Israel is the subject of more prophecies than any other nation, simply because the Jews are God’s special people. Their entire history has been foretold including events which have taken place in the 20th century. The existence of the people of Israel, the Jews, and the existence of the nation in its biblical land can be considered to be evidence for the reliability of the Bible.

In 1897 at the first Zionist Congress in Basle, Switzerland, a Jew named Theodore Herzl proposed a Jewish homeland in the land known at that time as Palestine. It was under the control of Turkey and formed part of the Ottoman empire. At that time, there was only a handful of Jews living in Palestine. With the Turks in control, Jews weren’t welcome.

Just 20 years later, at the end of World War I, the British evicted the Turks from Palestine and liberated Jerusalem. For the next 20 years, Britain clung tenaciously to the mandate over Palestine given it by the League of Nations (the forerunner to the United Nations). Slowly, Jews began to move back to the land of their ancestors. The pace of immigration increased rapidly after World War II and the atrocities of Nazi Germany, and many surviving Jews returned to Palestine. The enormity of Jewish suffering in what was to become known as “the Holocaust”, and the concern and guilt of many nations, led to the establishment of the State of Israel, proclaimed on 15 May 1948. This new

### Some prophecies about Israel

1. Israel's national birth was predicted by God to Abraham.  
 Genesis 15 ..... 2000 BC  
 Fulfilled through Abraham's descendants.
2. Israel's disobedience, scattering, preservation and revival was predicted by Moses.  
 Deuteronomy 28 ..... 1500 BC  
 Fulfilled: taken captive to Babylon in 600 BC, returned to land in 538 BC  
 Fulfilled: scattered in AD 70, returned to land in 20th century, nation reborn 1948.
3. Israel is a continuing witness to God's existence  
 Isaiah 43:1-2, 10-12 ..... 700 BC
4. Though scattered throughout the world, Israel would be preserved.  
 Jeremiah 30:10-11; 31:10 ..... 600 BC  
 Fulfilled: The Jews have survived the Spanish inquisition, the Russian pogroms, the Nazi holocaust, and many other attempts to destroy them. Throughout their history, God has preserved a remnant of his people.
5. They would return to the land and regain control of Jerusalem.  
 Luke 21:24-31 ..... AD 30  
 Fulfilled: nation reborn 1948, Jerusalem recaptured 1967.

### History of Israel

<b>2000 BC:</b>	Abraham, the father of the Jews
<b>1400 BC:</b>	Israel invades and conquers Canaan and is established as a nation.
<b>1000 BC:</b>	King David
<b>605 BC:</b>	Jews taken captive to Babylon
<b>538 BC:</b>	Jews return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city
<b>AD 70:</b>	Romans capture Jerusalem. Jews scattered throughout the world.
<b>AD 1882:</b>	First wave of Jewish immigration as a result of Russian pogroms.
<b>AD 1897:</b>	1st Zionist congress in Basle, Switzerland
<b>AD 1900:</b>	a handful of Jews living in Palestine; Turks in charge.
<b>AD 1904:</b>	Second wave of Jewish immigration.
<b>AD 1917:</b>	British capture Palestine; Jews begin to move there.
<b>AD 1945-1948:</b>	many Jews who survived WW2 migrated to Palestine.
<b>AD 1948:</b>	state of Israel proclaimed
<b>AD 1948-:</b>	many wars with Arabs; Israel maintains independence; Jews migrate in large numbers.
<b>AD 1994-:</b>	attempted peace settlements with surrounding Arab nations.

State of Israel was established nearly 1900 years after the Jews had been exiled by the Romans.

The nation has survived against incredible odds with its hostile neighbours seeking to destroy it on numerous occasions. The most notable of these wars occurred in 1967 when an extraordinary event took place. The city of Jerusalem, divided since partition of Palestine in 1948, and out of Jewish control for nearly 1900 years, was once again united and brought under sovereign Jewish control.

Why has Israel survived? Because God said it would. Consistently through the prophets, God repeated his intention that despite their wickedness and despite his punishment of them, ultimately he would remember the promises which he made to their faithful ancestors, and bring them again to their own land.

The attempts to bring lasting peace to the Middle East will certainly fail. One of the consistent stumbling blocks to peace in the region is the status of the city of Jerusalem. God, through the prophet Zechariah, says of Jerusalem:

I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling . . . I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves. (Zechariah 12:2-3)

## **Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones**

*Reference: Ezekiel 37:1-14*

Ezekiel prophesied in about 590 BC when the nation of Israel was in captivity in Babylon. He gave many fascinating prophecies, including this vision of a valley of dry bones. The well-known Negro spiritual song "Dem dry bones" refers to this prophecy. It is a very clear prophecy with each element of the prophecy being clearly explained.

Ezekiel's vision was of a collection of dry bones lying at the bottom of a valley. The bones come together and were covered with tendons, flesh and skin but the bodies which were formed remained dead. Then breath entered the bodies and they become a vast living army.

In verses 11-14, the prophecy is explained. It depicts Israel's revival in two stages.



**Vision**

bones  
dried bones  
bones come together  
breath in bones

**Meaning**

house of Israel  
hope gone, cut off  
Jews return to land of Israel  
spirit of God in Jews

The prophecy is unambiguous and clearly explained. The Jews were to be gathered out of many nations around the world and become one nation in the land their ancestors originally lived in, the land of Israel. This is precisely what has happened over the past century.

No other nation has maintained a national identity after more than 1800 years of exile. But no other nation has had these prophecies made concerning their history. Other nations which have been dispossessed of their land have lost their identity within a few years. What has happened to Israel is extraordinary. The Jews are a standing miracle, a monument of fulfilled prophecy. The fact that their history was predicted so accurately shows the Bible is God's book.

We have only seen the first stage of Ezekiel's prophecy fulfilled. Israel has returned to their land as predicted, but they remain a secular nation uncommitted to God. God's spirit does not yet dwell in them. A survey conducted in the mid-1980s revealed that most Israelis do not consider that God is responsible for their current position and survival in the land. These prophecies



**Luke 1:30–33**

How many common ideas can you find between Ezekiel 37:24–28 and Luke 1:30–33?

indicate they are yet to become a religious nation relying on God and obeying him.

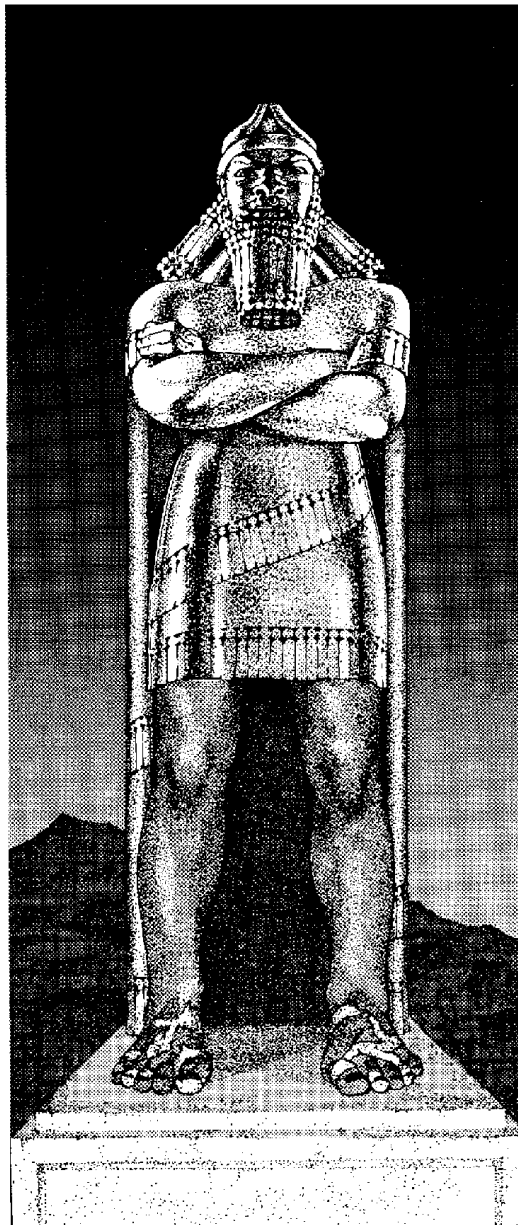
The last stage in the prophecy is described in verses 24–28. After the Jews turn back to God, they will have a new king “David” who will rule over them forever in peace. Luke 1:30–33 makes it clear that this king will be Jesus who was a descendant of the earlier King David of Israel. He is to sit on David’s throne in Jerusalem.

We can be confident that the Jews will turn back to God and that Jesus will return to be king because the first part of this vision has been fulfilled. The Jews are back in the promised land as predicted in the Bible.

## **Vision of world empires**

One night about 600 BC, Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, had a dream. The dream seemed unusually vivid and it concerned him. First Daniel told the King what the dream was (see Daniel 2:31–35). Nebuchadnezzar had seen a large statue composed of different metals. As he watched, he saw a stone which had been cut (but not by human hands) strike the image on the feet and destroy it. The metals broke in pieces while the stone grew into a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

Then Daniel told him what it meant (see Daniel 2:36–45). The four metals of the image represented four empires that would arise. The statue’s head of gold represented Nebuchadnezzar himself and his kingdom of Babylon. The other empires were



gold head  
**BABYLON**

silver  
breast & arms  
**MEDO-  
PERSIA**

bronze  
belly & thighs  
**GREECE**

iron legs  
**ROME**

iron & clay feet  
**DIVIDED  
NATIONS**

**Nebuchadnezzar's image**

Head of Gold	Babylon	626–539 BC
Chest and Arms of Silver	Medo-Persia	539–330 BC
Belly and Thighs of Bronze	Greece	330–63 BC
Legs of Iron	Rome	from 63 BC
Feet of Iron and Clay	Nations today	

A stone came and destroyed the image and grew into a great mountain. This is the kingdom of God which replaces the kingdoms of men.

Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome.

The history of Israel has followed the pattern of this prophecy. From the time of Daniel, there were four empires which ruled Israel: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. After the Roman empire, the Jews were scattered around the world. Now that Israel is back in their land, there is no dominant empire, but a mixture of strong and weak nations represented by the statue's feet of iron and clay.

The one phase of the prophecy yet to be fulfilled is the shattering of the statue by the rock cut out of a mountain without human hands and the mountain which fills the earth. Daniel says this represents the kingdom of God which replaces the kingdoms of men. Because the rest of the prophecy has been fulfilled, we can be confident that this last phase will be fulfilled too.

So the prophecy ends with a similar scene to Ezekiel's valley of dry bones: a time when God's kingdom will be in the earth. Putting the two prophecies together we can see that this will occur when Jesus returns to be king on David's throne in Jerusalem, ruling in righteousness and peace.



## Session 6

# Reading carefully

---

Despite being written by many different authors over a period of 1600 years, the Bible does not contradict itself. In this session we examine some of the extraordinary internal consistency of the Bible and look at the alleged contradictions and how they can be explained. We also consider the exciting discovery of “Bible echoes”.

### Internal consistency

One thing you will notice as you start to read the Bible regularly, is that its message is remarkably consistent. Despite being written by many different authors, from all walks of life, over a period of about 1600 years, the basic message is the same. Of course, this is what you would expect from a book inspired by God.

The Bible is also consistent in the little things, the apparently trivial details. There are many examples in the Bible where different passages support each other, providing “undesigned coincidences”. The idea is best seen by examples.

### Goliath the giant

- Numbers 13:33     There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight.NKJV
- Joshua 11:21–22     At that time Joshua went and destroyed the Anakites from the hill country ... No Anakites were left in Israelite territories; only in Gaza, Gath and Ashdod did any survive.
- 1 Samuel 17:4     A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. He was over nine feet tall.

These passages were written by three different authors at three different periods of history. Yet they match each other perfectly. The first passage shows that when Israel entered the promised land there were many giants there (the sons of Anak, or Anakites). The second passage shows that Israel destroyed nearly all of these giants, but left a few in three towns: Gaza, Gath and Ashdod. The third passage casually mentions that the giant Goliath's home town was Gath. He must have been descended from one of the Anakites. There is a ring of truth about these three passages. They sound more like accurate history than contrived fiction.

### **Healing in the evening**

In Matthew 8:16 we read

When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick.

Why did they come in the evening? Matthew does not tell us. But Mark records the same incident and says that it was on a Sabbath (Mark 1:21). In another passage (Matthew 12:10) we learn that there was a belief among the Jews that it was not lawful to heal on the Sabbath. We also know that the Jews counted 6pm as the end of one day and the start of the next. So the Sabbath ended at 6pm and after that, in the evening, the people brought the sick people to be healed. Putting these passages together, the explanation is clear.

Again, the incident has the ring of truth. Matthew reports that the healing took place in the evening without saying that it was a Sabbath. If the story was contrived, these little details may have been overlooked.

### **Ahithophel the traitor**

Once King David was walking on the roof of his palace when he saw a beautiful woman named Bathsheba bathing. He requested that she come to him and she became pregnant. David arranged for her husband Uriah to be moved to the frontline of battle where he was killed. David then married Bathsheba. When confronted with his sins, he was filled with remorse and asked God to forgive him. You can read the full story in 2 Samuel 11–12.

Sometime later, David's son Absalom conspired to seize the

throne for himself. David fled with his loyal followers. David's chief advisor, Ahithophel, remained in Jerusalem and offered his advice to Absalom. The competing armies fought, Absalom was killed and his army defeated. Thus David retained the kingship. The full story is given in 2 Samuel 15–19. The Bible says this second incident was God's punishment for the first (2 Samuel 12:11–12).

One curious incident in these events is that Ahithophel was a traitor and that Absalom expected him to be willing to change sides (2 Samuel 15:12). This is surprising because David described him as his familiar friend in whom he trusted (Psalm 41:9). It was so unexpected to David, that he never got over it (Psalm 55:12–14). So why did Ahithophel change sides and how was Absalom so sure that he would?

The answer is found by comparing 2 Samuel 11:3 and 23:34,39. In these verses we learn that Ahithophel was the father of Eliam who was the father of Bathsheba and that Uriah and Eliam had both been in David's guard. So the girl with whom David committed adultery was Ahithophel's granddaughter and the man whose murder David organized was Ahithophel's grandson by marriage and probably a friend of his son. It seems Ahithophel was seeking revenge.

When Absalom had captured David's palace, he asked Ahithophel what to do next. He said "Go and lie with the concubines of David on the roof of the palace" (2 Samuel 16:20–22). In other words, "Pay him back. He stole another man's wife; now you steal his!" What's more it was on the roof of the palace, the same place David had seen Bathsheba.

Such a fascinating story hidden beneath the text could not have been contrived. The Bible didn't tell this story, but it's there in the background for us to search out. The internal consistency of the Bible shows it has the ring of truth.

## **Contradictions?**

For every person who starts to read the Bible, there must be hundreds who say "Read the Bible? No way! It's too full of contradictions." This is important because if the Bible were full of contradictions then it would not be true, and it would not be worth reading.

It must be said that the charge is most often made by those

who are openly enemies of the Bible or those who have little or no knowledge of what it does say. The thing about alleged contradictions is that they are often shown to be in harmony after a bit more careful reading or study. Apparently, few who claim the Bible is full of contradictions take the trouble to check things out thoroughly before opening their mouth or putting pen to paper.

### **The sign on the cross**

When Jesus was crucified there was a sign above his head. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John say what was on the sign. As the four statements are not identical, does the Bible contradict itself? Let's look at how each gospel records what was written on the sign.

Mt 27:37	This is Jesus	the King of the Jews
Mk 15:26		the King of the Jews
Lk 23:38	This is	the King of the Jews
Jn 19:19	Jesus of Nazareth	the King of the Jews

Does each writer have to record everything? Is it not likely that the sign said "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews"?

### **Jesus clears the temple**

In the Bible, Jesus is twice recorded as having cleared the temple of traders. John 2:13–16 records an incident at the start of his preaching while Matthew 21:12–13 has an incident near the end of Jesus' life. To state unequivocally (as some do) that this is a contradiction is very strange. The simplest explanation is that there were two occasions, not one. This idea is confirmed by a comparison of the context of the two passages.

### **The ring of truth**

Explaining a few cases does not prove anything, but it does show that some alleged contradictions can be harmonised perfectly with a little careful reading and thought.

A contradiction occurs when the truth of a fact is denied or two statements are made which are contradictory. This is not true of the things many people claim to be contradictions. Different reports can highlight certain (different) features and omit others, without being contradictory. Over the centuries, many Bible



‘contradictions’ have been alleged. Careful thought and study have discovered harmony behind most of these.

It is our contention, from what has gone before, that as the Bible is the word of God, it is true. Thus it is not contradictory, and so we wait in faith for further knowledge or discoveries to harmonise any remaining ‘contradictions’. We suggest that this is a very reasonable approach to take in the light of past experience.

If all the books of the Bible told exactly the same story and every detail fitted together perfectly, we would probably conclude it was a fabrication, a cooked up story that hangs together. True stories don’t tend to be like that. The Bible is not like that either. There are places where it is difficult to make the details from one part fit in with another part. And this is what you would expect from real life. Real life is full of situations that appear contradictory. Only when you learn all the circumstances do you realise that these real life ‘contradictions’ are not contradictory at all. The Bible has that ring of truth about it.

#### Can you explain these?

**Sacrifice or not?** In Hosea 6:6, God says “I desire mercy and not sacrifice”. But God had told them to sacrifice!

**Did Saul inquire of the Lord?** Compare 1 Samuel 28:6; 1 Chronicles 10:13–14.

**Which country?** Compare 2 Samuel 8:13 with 1 Chronicles 18:12. (NIV corrects the discrepancy.)

**How did Judas die?** Compare Matthew 27:3–5 with Acts 1:18.

### Bible echoes

One of the exciting things in Bible reading is finding in one part of the Bible an “echo” of an idea from another part of the Bible. These often help us understand more about what God is telling us. Finding Bible echoes usually only comes about after you become very familiar with the Bible.

One example is the “failure of the firstborn”. To the Jews, the firstborn son of the family was very important. Under the Jewish law of inheritance, he was entitled to a double portion.

**Bible echo: In the wilderness**

List as many people as you can who were leaders of God's people and spent a period of time in the wilderness?

Why do you think this happened?

Despite this, not one of the successful men of the Old Testament is said to be a firstborn. Every firstborn male of the Old Testament, who might have had a position of honour, was in some way a failure. Only after reading the Bible through many times do you notice this sort of thing. The reason for this remarkably consistent theme is that God is teaching us something: important people in human affairs are not necessarily important to God. The world had to wait for God's own firstborn son to be born before it could see a successful firstborn.

This also provides additional evidence for the inspiration of the Bible. If the Bible writers were not inspired, what made them all combine to produce this instructive piece of harmony? They certainly didn't do it deliberately, because none of them draws attention to it.

Bible echoes also keeps Bible reading a fascinating occupation even after you have been reading it for years. Stay alert and you might find another Bible echo, a concealed theme, buried deep in the pages of Scripture, waiting to be unearthed.

## How readest thou?

It is one thing to read the Bible through,  
Another thing to learn and read and do.  
Some read it with desire to learn, and read  
But to their subject pay but little heed;  
Some read it as their duty every week,  
But no instruction from the Bible seek;  
While others read it with but little care,  
With no regard to how they read or where;  
Some read it as history, to know  
How people lived two thousand years ago,  
Some read it to bring themselves into repute,  
By showing others how they can dispute;  
While others read because their neighbours do,  
To see how long it takes to read it through.  
Some read it for the wonders that are there,  
How David killed a lion and a bear;  
While others read it with uncommon care,  
Hoping to find some contradiction there.  
Some read as though it did not speak to them  
But to the people at Jerusalem.  
One reads it as a book of mysteries,  
And won't believe the very thing he sees;  
One reads with father's specs upon his head,  
And sees the thing just as his father said;  
Some read to prove a pre-adopted creed,  
Hence understanding but little as they read,  
For every passage in the book they bend  
To make it suit that all-important end.  
Some people read, as I have often thought,  
To teach the Book, instead of being taught;  
And some there are who read it out of spite,  
I fear there are but few who read it right.  
One thing I find, and you may find it too,  
The more you read, the more you find it true;  
But this to find, an open eye is needful,  
With often prayer, and humble heart all heedful;  
The man who reads with pride or inattention,  
Will only find full causes of dissension,  
The man who reads with modest penetration,  
Will find the joy of comfort and salvation.

## Homework

1. In Matthew 5:1 – 7:29, we find Jesus’ famous “Sermon on the mount”. Matthew 5:1 tells us it was spoken “on the mountain”. A similar sermon is recorded in Luke 6:17–49. But Luke 6:17 says it was spoken “on a level place”. Some have said this is a contradiction. How can we explain it?
  
2. 1 Samuel 13:19–21 explains how the Philistines planned to keep the Israelites a subject nation. How does this help explain 1 Samuel 17:48–51?
  
3. How many things in the following paragraph may be untrue?

Some shepherds out in the fields at night saw angels singing in the sky. They were told about a new baby and quickly went to Bethlehem to see Jesus. At about the same time, three kings followed a star across the desert to Bethlehem where they found baby Jesus in the stable.

Check the details in Luke 2:1–20 and Matthew 2:1–12.

## Session 7

# Interpreting the Bible

---

God has revealed himself to us in the Bible and he wants us to understand his message. In this session, we will look at how you can go about interpreting the Bible for yourself. We will introduce some ideas and methods which will help you interpret the Bible accurately and confidently. We will look at the great variety of literary styles used in the Bible and how you can decide what is figurative and what is literal.

### The Bible interprets itself

The key to easier (not easy) understanding of the Bible is found within its own pages. Our tendency is to not look far enough for answers within the book when we encounter something we do not understand. A basic principle in reading the Bible more effectively lies in this simple fact:

*Your questions about what the Bible teaches are answered in the Bible.*

Answers are found near and far. Look in the same chapter or surrounding chapters:

Jesus' explanation of the parable of the Sower  
Matthew 13:3–8 compare Matthew 13:18–23  
(note they are not adjacent)  
Nebuchadnezzar's vision of the image  
Daniel 2:31–45

Sometimes it is helpful to look in other books of the Bible too (especially New vs Old Testament).

How long was Moses in Midian?  
Exodus 2:15; 3:1–4 compare Acts 7:30–31

### **Finding answers**

#### **DO**

- Look first to the Bible for answers to questions
- Read all of the Bible to find answers to your questions
- Write down your question (it may be a while before you get an answer)

#### **DON'T**

- Expect quick answers
- Look at isolated passages and draw conclusions

## **Why the Bible is difficult to read**

If you find the Bible difficult to read, it's probably because it is difficult to read! Once we accept this fact and realize that God has a purpose for it, then frustration turns to challenge. Millions of readers work on the Sunday Crossword puzzle. How many spend a few minutes to unlock small puzzles of Scripture?

After all, God wrote the book and has told us

As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:9)

In fact, God has given us a Bible which contains some things which are clear on first reading, and some things which he has deliberately made difficult.

It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings. (Proverbs 25:2)

## **Why did Jesus speak in parables?**

The disciples posed this question to him in Matthew 13:10. His answer reveals that it is a separation process.

“The knowledge of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.”

In other words, by speaking in parables he was sifting out the people who were not willing to search out their meaning. (If you wonder if this is fair, consider Paul's comment in Romans 9:18–21.)

### How does one gain understanding?

1. By application of time and energy.  
Social status or financial position will not give anyone an advantage over another. Understanding requires a purchase 'without money'.  
Isaiah 55:1–3; Proverbs 23:23
2. Slowly!  
God never revealed anything all at once and has always taught a sure slow effective method of achieving a task. You cannot speed-read the Bible.  
Hebrews 1:1; Exodus 23:29
3. With faith  
We must ask God through prayer to help us understand. Understanding is assured if we believe and are patient.  
Matthew 7:7–8; James 1:5–6

### Literary styles

The Bible is written using many different literary styles. God has chosen to use a great range of literary styles, probably because different styles appeal to different people and because some styles are better for conveying certain ideas than others. Some Bible books contain examples of different literary styles within the same book. Some of the literary styles found in the Bible are given below.

#### Narrative

Stories of people, events and nations are narrated in many Bible books. However, the Bible is not intended to be a general history and the events recorded are highly selective. The sections of the Bible which are narrative are usually the easiest to read. For example, the book of Esther is a wonderful story to read right through in one sitting.

*Examples:* Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1&2 Samuel, 1&2 Kings, 1&2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts

#### Laws

God gave laws to Israel via Moses when they were camped at Mt Sinai after crossing the Red Sea. Reading Israel's

laws is obviously not as easy as reading stories about people and events. However, it is worth understanding what God required of Israel. Although many of the laws are no longer applicable, they do teach us what God is like and help us understand what he requires of us.

*Examples:* Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Ezekiel

### **Genealogies**

The Bible records several genealogies. These are lists of names over many generations, showing lines of descent. For example, Jesus' genealogy shows he was a descendant of David. Most modern versions print genealogies in a list making it easy to follow the structure of the list.

*Examples:* 1 Chronicles 1–9, Matthew 1, Luke 3

### **Poetry**

Hebrew poetry is found in many of the books of the Old Testament. Some books are written entirely in poetry. Hebrew poetry does not rhyme in the way some English poetry does. Instead, it is based on the structure of the text. A common form of poetry is **parallel (or rhyming) thoughts**.

For example, Psalm 95:1–6.

1. Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD;  
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.
2. Let us come before him with thanksgiving  
and extol him with music and song.
3. For the LORD is the great God,  
the great King above all gods.
4. In his hand are the depths of the earth  
and the mountain peaks belong to him.
5. The sea is his, for he made it,  
and his hands formed the dry land.
6. Come let us bow down in worship,  
let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.

Each of these verses consists of a couplet (two lines). In some verses, the couplet consists of lines which mean almost the same thing, but expressed in different words (e.g. v1,6). Other verses have related things expressed in the two lines (e.g. v4).

Another common poetic structure is an **acrostic poem**. This is a poem based on the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. For example, in Psalm 145 each of the verses consists



### Common poetic structures in the Bible

#### **Synonymous parallelism**

Second line repeats or reinforces first line.

e.g. Psalm 95:1,6.

#### **Antithetical parallelism**

Second line contrasts the first line.

e.g. Psalm 95:4,5.

#### **Synthetic parallelism**

Second line adds to the first line.

e.g. Psalm 95:2.

### Types of Psalms

**Laments** e.g. 3, 42, 44.

**Thanksgiving** e.g. 118, 124.

**Hymns of praise** e.g. 33, 100, 104.

**Salvation history psalms** e.g. 78, 105, 136.

**Psalms of celebration or affirmation** e.g. 2, 50, 72, 89, 144.

**Wisdom psalms** e.g. 36, 112, 133, Proverbs 8.

**Songs of trust** e.g. 11, 91, 131.

of one couplet which begins with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet (v13 contains two couplets). Psalm 119 consists of 22 stanzas, each consisting of 8 couplets; the couplets within each stanza begin with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

It is helpful to understand something of the poetic structure as it makes a difference in how we interpret poetry.

It is also important to recognise when the Bible is using poetry, because the sort of language used in poetry is often figurative. For example, Psalm 91:4 speaks of God having wings and feathers, meaning he will protect us as a bird protects her young.

Most modern versions of the Bible print poetry showing its structure in verses, stanzas, etc. This makes it easy to decide if a passage is poetic or not.

*Examples:* Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

### **Proverbs**

The book of Proverbs is a collection of proverbs about many aspects of daily living. In general, they have not been arranged in any particular order.

### **Prophecy**

A large part of the Bible contains prophecy. In fact, almost every book of the Bible contains some prophecy. Much of this is written as poetry although some of it is in prose. Usually, a prophecy was of immediate relevance to the people to whom it was first given. So when we read prophecy, it is important to ask “how would the original readers have understood this?” Placing prophecies in their context prevents the common mistake of looking for modern ‘fulfillments’ in prophecies which were never intended.

Many prophecies have two fulfillments. They had an initial fulfilment shortly after they were given, and they have a longer-term fulfilment. For example, Jeremiah and Ezekiel wrote at the time the Jews were in captivity in Babylon and predicted that the Jews would return to their own land of Israel. (For example, Jer 30:1–3; Ezek 20:41–42.) This was fulfilled when the Jews did return to Israel at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. However, they were later scattered throughout the world and the prophecy was fulfilled a second time when the Jews returned to Israel to establish the modern nation of Israel in 1948. See Chapter 5 for more details of these prophecies.

The biblical prophets did not only foretell the future. The word translated “prophecy” can mean to foretell or proclaim. The prophets were God’s spokesmen and they proclaimed his message to the people as well as predicted the future.

<b>When studying prophecy...</b>
Ask the following questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. How would the original readers have understood this?</li><li>2. Was it fulfilled shortly after being given?</li><li>3. What evidence is there that it is to be fulfilled in the future?</li></ol>

### Apocalyptic prophecy

Apocalyptic prophecy is a particular style of prophecy which is highly symbolic. It often involves strange animals representing nations or organisations.

*Examples:* Daniel, Zechariah, Revelation

### Letters

The New Testament contains a number of letters written by the apostle Paul and others. Some of the letters are to churches and other groups of people, and some are to individuals. When reading a letter, it is worth remembering that often the letter is a reply to a previous letter. It is rather like listening to one side of a telephone conversation! Because the letters were written to a specific group of people and often deal with specific problems, it is sometimes helpful to look at who the people were and what problems are addressed in the letter. The letters have been preserved because they have something to teach us about dealing with our difficulties.

The biblical letters follow the standard format for ancient letters. Many thousands of letters have been uncovered from the time of the New Testament and they generally follow the same structure:

1. Name of writer
2. Name of recipient
3. Greeting
4. Prayer wish or thanksgiving
5. Body of letter
6. Final greeting and farewell.

<b>When studying letters . . .</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Find out about the recipients (e.g. use a Bible dictionary)</li><li>2. Read the whole letter through in one sitting (use a modern version).</li><li>3. Make notes about<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● recipients</li><li>● writer's attitudes</li><li>● purpose of the letter</li><li>● letter's natural divisions</li></ul></li></ol>

*Paul's letters to churches:*

Romans, 1&2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians,  
Philippians, Colossians, 1&2 Thessalonians

*Paul's letters to individuals:*

1&2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon

*Other letters:*

Hebrews, James, 1&2 Peter, 1,2&3 John, Jude

## Literal and figurative language

How do you decide if a given part of the Bible is literal or figurative? The Bible does contain much figurative language, but if you take it on balance, about 95% is literal and only a very small part (overall) figurative. It can be adopted as a maxim for the Bible, as for any book, that it should be taken literally unless there is a direct statement or very strong indirect evidence that it is indeed figurative.

For example, whenever Jesus described a story he told as a “parable” or said “The . . . is like . . .”, it is clear—not literal.

In other places the use of metaphor is clear. For example Isaiah 11:1 says “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse”. Now Jesse was the father of King David. Describing him as a stump is an obvious metaphor. The verse is a reference to a descendant of Jesse. The rest of the chapter makes it clear that it is referring to Jesus Christ, who was descended from King David.

The general principle is that the Bible should be understood literally unless there is a good reason not to.

Literal or Figurative?
Are the following passages symbolic or literal? How can you tell? Exodus 14:21–22 Zechariah 13:1 Zechariah 14:2 Matthew 5:13 Revelation 20:14

## **Basic principles for interpreting the Bible**

1. Study every passage within its literary context. Literary context includes both a text's immediate setting (the verses around it) and its relationship to the entire book.
2. Recognise that the social, historical, and cultural environment of a biblical passage differs from that of today, and then try to understand a passage in light of those differences.
3. Translations often reflect the translator's understanding. Therefore, when studying a passage, compare several versions to try and discover the most likely meaning of a word or phrase.
4. Interpret any single passage in light of what the author has written elsewhere.
5. Interpret the Bible as a whole. That is, interpret the Bible in light of the entire message of the Bible.

## Homework

1. Read Isaiah 40:27–31.

(a) What is the passage teaching us?

(b) All but one verse consists of one or more poetic couplets. Which verse is different?

2. Read Ecclesiastes 12:1–8.

(a) What shows the passage is an allegory?

(b) What is it about?

(c) Interpret each of the symbols.

## Session 8

# Bible study tools

---

In this section we introduce a number of Bible reading and study tools which are available to help us read and understand the Bible. These range from simple tools like Bible dictionaries to more complicated tools such as concordances and lexicons.

### **Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias**

Dictionaries of the Bible give information about a wide range of Bible subjects arranged alphabetically. Suppose you just read about King Darius in Daniel and you want to know more about him. Your Bible dictionary will have an article about Darius including the verses you have just read and other Bible references. It will probably introduce information from history and archaeology as well.

A Bible encyclopedia is similar except it usually has more detailed articles about more subjects and is published in several volumes.

Remember that dictionaries and encyclopedias are the work of uninspired men and women commenting about inspired Scripture passages. Such reference books are very useful, but they should always be read carefully with an eye toward scepticism. Verify or disprove what they suggest for yourself, from the Scriptures.

### **Case study: 1 Kings 15:9–14**

Use a Bible dictionary, footnotes and/or cross-references to answer the following questions.

1. What was an Asherah pole?
2. Where was the Kidron Valley?
3. What were “high places”?
4. What other Bible passages record the reign of Asa?
5. How can we explain the apparent contradiction between 1 Kings 15:14 and 2 Chronicles 14:3?
6. What lessons are there for us in this passage?

## **Commentaries**

A commentary is a book which follows the Bible order exactly, and adds comment on the interpretation of the text, historical details, etc., as it proceeds. Commentaries are certainly helpful in finding out how other people have understood the Bible. There are many commentaries available on the Bible from single books to sets of commentaries each consisting of many volumes.

When a passage is unclear to us, and following cross-references or words in a concordance has not shed any light on the passage, it is sometimes useful to consult a commentary to see how other Bible readers have interpreted the passage.

### **Example: Matthew 11:28–30**

Jesus said:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

From the Bible Background Commentary:

When a man carried a yoke he would carry it on his shoulders (cf., e.g., Jer 27:2); Judaism applied this image of subjection to obedience. Jewish people spoke of carrying the yoke of God’s law and the yoke of his kingdom, which one accepted by acknowledging that God was one and by keeping his commandments. Matthew intends Jesus’ words about rest as a contrast with Pharisaic Sabbath rules.



From the Tyndale New Testament Commentaries:

The yoke was sometimes in the Old Testament a symbol of oppression (Isa. 9:4; 58:6; Jer. 27–28), but was also used in a good sense of the service of God (Jer. 2:20; Lam. 3:27). Later it came to be used commonly in Jewish writings for obedience to the law—the ‘yoke of the law’ is one every Jew should be proud to carry. Such a yoke should not be oppressive, for after all the function of a yoke is to make a burden easier to carry. But . . . the law itself had become a burden, and a new yoke was needed to lighten the load. Jesus’ yoke is *easy*, not because it makes lighter demands, but because it represents entering a disciple-relationship with one who is *gentle and lowly in heart*. . . This attractive aspect of Jesus is a vital counterbalance to the sterner side seen in Matthew 7:13–27; 10:34–39; etc. To emphasise either to the exclusion of the other is to miss the real Jesus.

## Concordances

A concordance is simply an alphabetic list of all the different words that occur in a book and where they are to be found. For many years, Bible students have used Bible concordances. These large books are invaluable for serious study. With an exhaustive concordance to the Bible version you read, it is possible to locate any verse in the Bible provided you can remember at least one key word of the verse.

They are also useful in performing word studies. For example, if you are studying Abraham, a concordance will help you find all the passages in the Bible where Abraham is mentioned.

The most useful concordances are “exhaustive”. That is, they contain *every* word in the Bible. Non-exhaustive concordances contain a selection of the most important words. Some Bibles contain a limited concordance as an appendix.

Concordance exercises
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Find references to God as a “Rock” in the Psalms.</li><li>2. Where is the quotation “they shall run and not grow weary, they shall walk and not grow faint”?</li><li>3. Find references to the “Son of Man” in the gospels.</li></ol>

## Topical Bibles

A Topical Bible lists Bible passages relevant to themes. You can look up subjects such as “money”, “covenant”, “adultery”, “elders”, etc. Unlike a concordance, the passages listed do not necessarily contain the key word.

For example, one Topical Bible contains the following entry.

<p><b>Money</b></p> <p>    blessings of         Pr 3:2,10; 10:15,22; Ecc 10:19; Lk 16:9.</p> <p>    dangers of         1Ki 9:4–5; Mk 4:19; 10:21; Lk 12:33.</p> <p>    love of         Pr 23:4; Ecc 5:10; Ac 5:1</p> <p>    true wealth         Lk 16:11; 2Co 6:10</p> <p>    using religion for         2Ki 5:26; Eze 13:19; 2Co 2:17; 11:7</p> <p>    and the wicked         Ps 49; 73:18–20; Isa 53:9.</p>
---

## Lexicons

A Bible lexicon is an extended dictionary of the Greek words used in the New Testament or the Hebrew words used in the Old Testament. It is an alphabetical arrangement of the words with their definitions and a discussion on how they are used in Scripture.

The principal use of a lexicon is for understanding the precise meaning of a word. It also provides insight into how the given word is used elsewhere in Scripture.

### Exercise: Satan

1. What word is translated “Satan” in the Old Testament?
2. How else is this word translated?
3. How does this help explain the apparent contradiction between 1 Chronicles 21:1 and 2 Samuel 24:1?

### Case study: John 21:15–17

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?” “Yes Lord”, he said, “you know that I love you”. Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.” Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said “Take care of my sheep.” The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.”

Two different words are used for ‘love’ in this passage. Jesus uses one and Peter another. Looking it up in Strong’s Concordance we see that Jesus uses word 25 and Peter uses word 5368. The lexicon at the back of the concordance gives the words and their meanings:

*25. ἀγαπάω agapaō, ag-ap-ah'-o; to love (in a social or moral sense):—(be-) love (-ed.). Comp. 5368.*

*5368. φιλέω philēō, fil'-eh'-o; to be a friend to (fond of [an individual or an object]), i.e. have affection for (denoting personal attachment, as a matter of sentiment or feeling; while 25 is wider, embracing espec. the judgment and the deliberate assent of the will as a matter of principle, duty and propriety: the former being chiefly of the heart and the latter of the head); spec. to kiss (as mark of tenderness):—kiss, love.*

The first word involves a deeper, self-sacrificing love. The second is more of a friendly affection. Jesus was asking Peter whether he really loved him in the sense of being prepared to sacrifice his own desires. Peter was only prepared to say that he felt love for Jesus. A week or so before this conversation, Peter felt his life was threatened and to save himself he had denied he knew Jesus (see Luke 22:54–62). So now he was not prepared to say he was ready to love Jesus in the deeper sense because he felt he had previously let Jesus down.

Without knowing the Greek words translated “love” in this passage, the meaning of the conversation would be unclear.

