

Introducing the Bible

Three Reasons to Know the Scriptures (a.k.a. the Bible)

1st Reason: The Scriptures exist to make God known. How do the Scriptures do that? By communicating God's *actions*, God's *will*, and God's *character*. Each of these—God's actions, God's will, and God's character—are communicated *through the Scriptures*. Without God communicating these to us, we wouldn't know much about Him. We could make very general inferences about Him from creation—that He is powerful and charged with creative capacities. And we could even *infer* that He is concerned with justice—and that's why human beings have a conscience. But beyond this kind of *reasoning from the created order*, we have the written word of God (i.e. the Scriptures/the Bible). Scripture is essential for knowing God—His actions, His will, and His character.

2nd Reason: The Scriptures exist to bring us to faith & salvation. The word of God brings us to faith in Jesus Christ. The gospel of John presents Jesus as "the way to eternal life". Through *Christ* believers are reconciled to God (Col. 1:22). This is the heart of *the gospel* message. The word *gospel* literally means 'good news'. The good news is the message that *Jesus Christ has reconciled the people of faith to God for all eternity*. This message is communicated through the preaching and teaching of *the Scriptures*. The Apostle Paul puts it this way: "faith comes from hearing, and hearing through *the word of Christ*" (Rom. 10:17). So, without the written word—without the Bible—we wouldn't have a source of authority outside the messenger to confirm the truthfulness of the message. The Berean Christians of Acts 17 provide us with an excellent example of the need to search God's written word to *confirm the truth*.

3rd Reason: Scripture exists to mold our being into the likeness of Jesus (i.e. sanctification). In various ways, the Scriptures communicate God's moral judgments. In other words, they communicate God's law. *Knowing* God's law is one thing. *Obedying* God's law is another. As we've already stated, the written word of God plays a key role in bringing us to faith. And alongside the written word, we need the power of the Holy Spirit to write the law of God on our hearts (see Jeremiah 31:31-34; 2 Corinthians 3:3). This enables us to *properly* obey God's will. *Proper* obedience springs not merely from our sense of *obligation* (which is *normal* obedience), but *proper* obedience *flows from our hearts* (Matthew 9:13). It's important to realize that God's plan of salvation (including our sanctification) was determined by God *before* He created the world. The Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 1:4: "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight". So then, God chose *to make us holy* here-and-now *through His Word*. Paul says in Ephesians 5:25-26: "...Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her *to make her holy*, cleansing her by the washing with water *through the word*".

Summary: Scripture exists to make God known. Scripture exists to bring us to faith & salvation. And Scripture exists to mold our being into the likeness of Jesus. For those reasons, there has been a constant call around the globe for Bibles. When we approach the Bible, we need to approach it *rationally* in order interpret it correctly—like the Berean's of Acts 17. But we also need to approach the Bible *existentially*—i.e. listening with our conscience—so that the Scriptures might mold our being into the likeness of Jesus. As believers, we ought to crave *a deeper understanding of who Christ is*. And at times, that will demand rigorous thinking (the rational). We should also crave *a greater sense of Christ's presence and providence in our lives*. And so we need to listen to the Scriptures *with our conscience* (the existential). Real immersion in Scripture is not occasional—it requires constant practice. Sitting and reading the Bible is only a fraction of what it means to be *immersed* in Scripture. Our goal in reading the Scriptures is to learn to *think* and *speak* the Scriptures *as our own native language*. And a gifted teacher will aid us in that endeavor. As we learn to *immerse ourselves in Scripture*, the power of God's word will become more and more evident in our lives—evident to us, and evident to those around us.

What is the Bible?

A Collection of Divinely Inspired Writings

Divine—from God.

Inspired—men were aided by the Holy Spirit as they spoke and wrote the words of Scripture (the Bible).

Scripture—writing; often used of ancient religious writings.

Bible or Canon—a complete collection of writings.

66 books of the Protestant Bible—39 in the Old Testament (OT) & 27 in the New Testament (NT).

Judeo-Christian Manuscript Tradition—manuscripts of the ancient Hebrew tradition (OT Prophets) and of the ancient Christian tradition (NT Apostles).

Various Judeo-Christian manuscript traditions—Catholic, Protestant, Eastern Orthodox, etc.

Dating—the original manuscripts were written between 1500 BC & 95 AD (approx. 1,600 yrs.).

Authors—36 human authors of the Bible (this estimate is derived from the ESV Study Bible).

Summary: The Bible is **divinely inspired - historically accurate - meditation literature**.

Books and Authors of the Bible – The OT (1500 BC to 400 BC with 28 identified authors)

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy: authored by Moses as literary whole (Torah)

Joshua: unknown authorship

Judges: unknown authorship

Ruth: unknown authorship

1 & 2 Samuel: unknown authorship

1 & 2 Kings: unknown authorship

1 & 2 Chronicles: authored by Ezra

Ezra: authored by Ezra

Nehemiah: authored by Ezra and Nehemiah

Esther: unknown authorship

Job: unknown authorship

Psalms (collection of 150): David - 73; Asaph - 12; sons of Korah - 11; Solomon - 2; Moses - 1; Ethan - 1; Herman & Korah - 1; 49 Psalms are of unknown authorship

Proverbs: contains content from Solomon, Agur, and Lemuel

Ecclesiastes: unknown author

Song of Songs: authored by King Solomon

Isaiah: authored by Isaiah the Prophet

Jeremiah: authored by Jeremiah the Prophet

Lamentations: unknown authorship (Rabbinic tradition identifies Jeremiah as the author)

Excluding Jonah, the following books are eponymous (named for their author): **Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah** (unknown), **Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Malachi**

Intertestamental Period (400 BC to 1 AD non-inspired writings called Apocrypha & Pseudepigrapha)

Some Christian Bibles (Canons) include writings from this time period. But these books are clearly *not* of divine origin—they are of human origin *only* (extra-biblical/non-canonical writings). Some of these writings, however, provide very significant historical information (e.g. the Maccabees).

Books and Authors of the Bible – The NT (50 AD to 95 AD with 8 identified authors)

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John: these four books are collectively called the Gospels—they describe the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Each book is eponymous. Note that Matthew & John were included among the Twelve. And Luke is the only non-Jewish (Gentile) author in the Judeo-Christian Canon.

Acts: authored by Luke (also wrote the of the Gospel of Luke).

Romans; 1 & 2 Corinthians; Galatians; Ephesians; Philippians; Colossians; 1 & 2 Thessalonians; 1 & 2 Timothy; Titus; Philemon: these thirteen books were all authored by the Apostle Paul (Pauline corpus).

Hebrews: unknown author (authored by Hellenistic Jewish Christian who knew Timothy, Paul's disciple)

James: James the brother of Jesus (technically the *half*-brother of Jesus since Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit. Also note that this is not the James who was one of the Twelve.)

1 & 2 Peter: authored by the apostle Peter (the early leading spokesman of the Twelve).

1-3 John: authored by the Apostle John (authored the Gospel of John. John was the closest to Jesus.)

Jude: authored by Jude the brother of Jesus (also the brother of James).

Revelation: authored by the apostle John (also authored the Gospel of John and 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John).

Here are technical terms surrounding our core beliefs about the Bible

Inspiration—men wrote the text as the Holy Spirit aided them (a.k.a. divine inspiration).

Revelation—the text communicates God's actions, will, and character *to us*.

Full vs. Partial vs. Non-Inspiration—Is the Bible totally inspired? Or are only *parts* of it are inspired? Or is the Bible *not* inspired at all? Note: This is a question of authority. Do men and women *today* have the right to decide what is *truly* inspired in the Bible and what isn't? Or is the canon of Scripture—which has been preserved and handed down to us—*fully* inspired and *fully* authoritative? To deny the full inspiration and authority of the Canon (the Bible) is spiritually destructive.

Concurrence—while of divine origin, the text *also reflects* the mind and emotion of the human author.

Superintendence—while reflecting the mind and emotion of the human author, it is *God* who ultimately communicates *His will* through the written word.

Dictation Theory—a false idea claiming that *all* the authors of Scripture were *passive recipients* as God either dictated every word to them or took control of their faculties (*some* are dictated, Mt. Sinai)

Inerrant—the *original meaning* of the text is without error (i.e. the information is true & trustworthy).

Infallible—the meaning of the text is unfailing (i.e. God's Word *never fails*—it *endures forever*).

Perspicuity—while deeply profound, the text is very clear (i.e. there are no secret/mystical meanings).

Self-interpreting—the meaning of the Bible is found *within the Bible itself* (cross referencing).

SCAN Acrostic

The SCAN acrostic concisely communicates some core beliefs about the Bible. It can be helpful to use the SCAN acrostic to evaluate the way other teachers treat the Bible. If a teacher (tradition) does not treat the Bible in the manner outlined below, *then we ought to be extra-critical of their interpretations*.

Sufficient—the Bible contains all that we need to know for salvation and godly living.

Clear—the Bible can be simply understood; it does not require special knowledge or mystical intuition.

Authoritative—the Bible is from God; therefore it is true and binding on the human conscience.

Necessary—God's Word is essential both for salvation and sanctification (spiritual growth).

Major Stages in Bible Translation

(1) Transliteration: One of the early stages in Bible translation is called transliteration. *Transliteration* is converting the *original* letters or characters into the letters or characters of a different writing system (e.g. Greek letters to English letters). At this point, the text below is still in the *original* language, but the text has been transliterated.

Matthew 4:8-9 transliterated:

palin diablos paralambenei lian upsilon oros deiknusin pasas basileias kosmou doxan eipen panta doso ean person proskuneses

(2) Equivalency: An important stage after transliteration is called equivalency. *Equivalency* is assigning an equal meaning to the text as was present in the original language. Generally speaking, there are two approaches for formulating equivalency: (1) **formal** equivalency and (2) **dynamic** equivalency. Formal equivalency seeks to maintain (as much as possible) a *word-for-word* translation. Dynamic equivalency seeks to maintain a *thought-for-thought* translation. Here is the main distinction between the two: A thought-for-thought translation includes a little more interpretive input from the translators. This is often very helpful and accurate. But this approach can carry with it a slightly higher potential for misrepresenting the *original* meaning. It is important to recognize, however, that *both* approaches involve interpretation. One approach places the emphasis on capturing the *words* of the author (formal equivalency), while the other emphasizes capturing the *thoughts* of the author (dynamic equivalency). The benefit of a dynamic approach is flexibility with language—which can encourage greater readability. An example of this would be the NIV as compared with the NASB. Many contemporary readers will find the NIV (a dynamic equivalency) to be a more readable translation than the NASB (a formal equivalency). But many readers simply prefer the Bible they are most familiar with.

Here is a very literal rendering of Matthew 4:8-9:

again takes along him the devil into mountain high unusually and shows to him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them and said to him these to you all i shall give if ever having fallen down you should do an act of worship to me

Formal equivalency rendering (NASB):

Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if you fall down and worship me."

Dynamic equivalency rendering (NIV):

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

Formal	Dynamic	Paraphrased	Language Resources
New King James Version (NKJV)	New International Version (NIV)	The New International Readers Version (NIRV)	Biblehub.com
New American Standard Bible (NASB)	New Living Translation (NLT)	The Message (MSG)	Biblegateway.com
English Standard Version (ESV)		The Living Bible (TLB)	StudyLight.org

Bible Interpretation (Biblical Hermeneutics)

Historical-grammatical method of interpretation means that we understand the Scriptures by grasping the texts historical setting and also its literary form (grammar). This method of interpretation stands in contrast to mythological, allegorical, and mystical interpretive approaches.

Authorial intent means that we understand the Scriptures by understanding the author's intended meaning—i.e. What did the author intend when he wrote the text? Literary form, historical setting, expectations of the audience, etc.—all these factors contribute to our understanding of authorial intent.

Relativistic interpretation means that the text is not treated as a coherent and rational whole. A relativizer might say: The meaning that *really matters* is the meaning *we give* to the text. Extreme forms of relativistic interpretation may even reject the law of non-contradiction—claiming that *real* contradictions can both be true. This is a spiritually destructive approach to biblical interpretation. Our faith does indeed *transcend* human rationale, but the Bible is a rationale and coherent whole.

One meaning, many applications: this means that we understand each passage to have *one central meaning*. But the text may indeed have *many applications*. Let's observe this principle in Matthew 5:13: "You are the salt of the earth." That passage has *one clear meaning* with *several applications*.

Salt has these four qualities: it preserves, it seasons, it generates thirst, and it permeates. That's four different applications from one passage: (1) Disciples *preserve* the word of God from being corrupted by the world (Psalm 12:7)... (2) Disciples *season* the world with the presence of Christ (2 Cor. 2:15)... (3) Disciples prompt others to *thirst* after God's righteousness (Matt. 5:6)... (4) Disciples *permeate* the world with the truth of the gospel (Matt. 25:19). Multiple *applications* are not multiple *meanings*. If we interpret this passage within its larger context, then we can discern one central meaning: *Followers of Jesus Christ become his representatives in the world*. One meaning, many applications.

The synthesis principle is generally referred to as *cross-referencing*. Technically, there are different types of cross-referencing (e.g. explicit vs. implicit comparisons)—but the synthesis principle typically refers to the comparison of *explicit* meanings. In this process, we bring together (synthesize) the explicit teaching of one Bible passage with the explicit teaching of other Bible passages. And there are different reasons for doing this (e.g. avoiding contradictions, deriving ethical norms, etc.). The synthesis principle (a.k.a. cross-referencing) is a core activity of systematic theology. **The better we understand the whole Bible, the more accurately we can interpret individual passages.** For example: "Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and that is enough.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, Show us the Father?'" That was John 14:8-9. If we don't compare that passage with the *whole teaching of Scripture*, then we might think Jesus is saying he *is* the Father—which is clearly *not* a biblical teaching.

The descriptive-prescriptive principle means that we recognize when a text is *describing* an event rather than *prescribing* (commanding) a behavior. For example: When reading the Gospels and the book of Acts, we need to recognize that the content is primarily *de*-scriptive and not *pre*-scriptive. The Gospels were written to *describe* the ministry of Jesus. The book of Acts was written to *describe* major events in the history of the early church. Those books were not written primarily as *prescriptions* for the ordering of the local church. The Epistles (Letters to the Churches) were written explicitly to teach church members sound doctrine and proper conduct. We can and should find applications from *all* the books of the Bible. But we need to *recognize the context* of each passage. The context of each passage will heavily influence what we learn from it. **Context is king.** That's a good phrase to remember. The descriptive-prescriptive principle can guard us from false teaching and false expectations.

A **systematic inference** is different than cross referencing explicit meanings. A systematic inference *derives implicit meanings* from the text. The caution is that we derive meaning *inappropriately* and misrepresent the teaching of Scripture. If done well, however, systematic inferences can be very helpful.

For example: Exodus 9:12, "But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said to Moses." *What exactly did God do to Pharaoh?*

James 1:13 (NASB)

"When tempted no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil nor does He tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust."

Proposition 1: God does not tempt anyone to rebel against Him, nor does He force anyone to do evil.

Proposition 2: Everyone is enticed by their own sinful desires.

Romans 3:23 (NASB)

"For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God"

Isaiah 53:6 (NASB)

"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to His own way"

Proposition 3: When given the choice, every human being chooses to stray from God.

Hebrews 1:3 (NASB)

"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word."

Matthew 5:45 (NASB)

"He causes the sun to rise on the good and the evil, and sends rain on the just and the unjust."

Proposition 4: God sustains all life, and He is gracious toward every human being.

Romans 1:24 (NASB)

"Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another."

Romans 1:26 (NASB)

"Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts."

Romans 1:28 (NASB)

"Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, He gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done."

Proposition 5: God will give a person over to their own sinful inclinations.

Concluding Inference

The LORD *hardening Pharaoh's heart* is a word picture for the following circumstance:

God withdrawing His mercy from Pharaoh; thus giving Pharaoh over to his own sinful inclinations.

God was mercifully restraining *Pharaoh's own* wicked desires. Then, by withdrawing His mercy from Pharaoh, God actively permitted Pharaoh's own evil desires to become the sole influence of his actions. The Bible is full of warnings against *stubborn hearts*. And, in this passage, we see the consequences of a stubborn unrepentant heart.

This is a systematic inference *derived from* the explicit teaching of Scripture (implicit not explicit).

Harmonization refers to the process of explaining differences in parallel accounts (e.g. genealogies, measurements, eye-witness testimonies, etc.). Sometimes we see parallel accounts with differing details. These are commonly called “Bible difficulties”. For example: We read that Judas hangs himself in Matthew 27:5. In Acts 1:18 we read that Judas fell headlong, his body burst open, and his intestines spilled out. Which one is it? Harmonization is an attempt to explain (harmonize) these differences. It’s important to note that differences are not *of necessity* contradictions. A *real* contradiction *necessitates* the falsification of one or both passages. So then, if even *one* rational explanation can be offered, then the charge of contradiction is logically premature. For example: Matthew emphasizes *the hanging*, while Luke (in the book of Acts) emphasizes *the end result*—i.e. Judas’ bloated body fell from the branch and burst open.

Rational-Existential Bible reading means that we understand the Bible through *historical* and *grammatical* considerations (hence, the *rational*). And we also read the Bible as the word of God *speaking to our conscience* (hence, the *existential*). Rational study and existential reading are not mutually exclusive—they complement each other. When we rightly understand the context of a passage *through rational study*, then we can rightly discern the meaning of the passage—which will enable us to recognize its personal implications—it’s *existential impact*. But the Bible was not meant to be merely personal—it was meant to be communal. This means that God has chosen to reveal His will to us *within the context of community*. To fully grasp the meaning and power of Scripture, we need a community of believers (a church) to help us grow in knowledge & obedience. And as we grow in knowledge & obedience to the word of God, we gain an ever-increasing sense of His presence and His providence *in our lives*.

6 Questions for Interpretation

Historical Questions

1. **Who** was the author? *Nationality, background, personal character, etc.*
2. **Why** did he write the content? *Authorial intent.*
3. **When** did he write the content? *Historical circumstances, cultural norms, etc.*

Grammatical Question

4. **How** did he write the content? *Genre, literary structure, literary devices, parts of speech, etc.*

Meaning & Application Questions

5. **How** does this passage fit within the larger context of the story of redemption? *It’s improper to think about how a passage applies to us personally without first recognizing the place of the passage within the flow of biblical history. Remember: Context is king.*
6. **What** does this passage teach us? *The Bible is inexhaustive—i.e. we can always learn more from it! It’s short-sighted and often ineffective to try and formulate practical applications without first gaining an appreciation of the historical and grammatical context of a passage. Some applications might surface immediately, but many applications emerge over time as our knowledge and experience of Scripture accumulates. Remember: The Bible is meditation literature. Meditation takes time. And it requires steady repetition. The Scriptures reorient our lives by opening our eyes to see new depths of meaning and significance.*

Encouraging note: A good study Bible will answer most of these questions for you--so don’t be intimidated by the list. Just find a good study Bible and start reading. There is a list of resources at the end of this section. Spoiler alert: The ESV Study Bible has the most impressive study notes!

The story of redemption is the fundamental theme for interpreting the Bible. How did God redeem the world and humanity? The Bible provides a very detailed answer to that very specific question. In the Bible, we also learn about the character of God, we learn about Creation, we learn about ethics, and we learn many other helpful things as well. But the core theme of the Bible is *the Story of Redemption*—i.e. the actions of God to redeem the world and humanity. This theme orients everything else we glean from the Scriptures. Scripture is not *primarily* designed to teach us how to be successful in the world, or how to find a good spouse, or how to raise well-adjusted children, etc. That's an **excessively pragmatic** reading of the Bible. Neither is the Bible a mysterious book filled with hidden meanings. That's a **mystical reading** of the Bible. The teachings of Bible certainly do help us with practical concerns, and the teachings of the Bible are filled with spiritual power. *But the key to understanding the Bible is to recognize the redemptive work of God.* Keep in mind, the word 'story' and the word 'history' did not used to mean different things. Histories *are* stories. More recently, we tend to think of *stories* as playful illustrations, while *histories* are a collection of facts. But that way of thinking obscures the fact that *all* re-tellings *are* stories. Storytelling is inescapable—it's how we communicate with one another (see the resource labeled *Speech & the Imagination* for more on that subject).

Even before Creation, God planned to redeem the world and humanity (see Ephesians 1-2). And the Bible *tells the story* of how God accomplished His plan. The **major stages in the Story of Redemption** are not hard to map out. We can recite these stages in different ways, but the major stages are obvious. Here is one recital of the major stages: (1) Creation, Fall, and Re-creation... (2) Covenant... (3) Deliverance, Law, Rebellion, and Wandering... (4) The Promised Land and the Judges... (5) The Kings and Prophets of Israel and Judah... (6) The Exile and Return of the Jews... (7) The Messiah, the Church, and the New Jerusalem. These stages in the story of redemption trace God's involvement in human history. When we learn these stages, and are able to recognize them in Scripture, it will provide us with solid ground for interpretation. Within each of these stages there are **key people**. Learning the major stages in the story of redemption as well as the stories surrounding the key people is immensely gratifying—especially for the believer who hungers and thirsts for righteousness (Matthew 5:). So... start learning!

To Conclude...

The subjects we've covered can make the Bible seem a bit *overwhelming*, but we need to remember that the Bible was designed to be *meditation literature*. It was meant to be returned to again and again. It was designed to be *slowly digested* and *constantly repeated*—and not just *read* but *spoken* over-and-over-again. *The Scriptures reorient our lives by opening our eyes to see new depths of meaning and significance.* We also need to remember that not everyone is a gifted teacher. So then, we should seek-out gifted teachers and learn as much as we can from them. And even gifted teachers need the *community of believers* to properly understand & use biblical truth. Biblical insights are given in much the same way that manna was given to the Israelites in the wilderness: There is fresh manna every morning, but we have to be willing to *go-out-and-gather-it!*

Helpful Study Aides

Study Bibles—ESV & NIV Study Bibles are highly acclaimed. (Study Bibles are the best place to begin.)

Bible Dictionaries—Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary is highly acclaimed.

Bible Commentaries—Evangelical commentaries will be the most helpful. (alert for excessive bias)

Bible Charts—Holman Book of Biblical Charts, Maps, and Reconstructions is very useful.

Bible Handbooks—these contain background information for each book of the Bible. (Evangelical)

Bible Atlas—these contain maps associated with biblical events. (knowingthebible.net)