

How Do Catholics Approach Bible Study?

A two week introduction!



Reading: Acts 8:26 - 31

Introduction to Bible Study

- Week #1
 - What is theology?
 - What is the Bible?
 - What is the relationship between Tradition and the Bible?
 - Interpreting the Bible vs. Personal Reading
 - Whirlwind tour of the Old and New Testament



Introduction to Bible Study

- Week #2
 - Are faith and science compatible?
 - How did the Bible get written?
 - What do we mean when we say the Bible is the inerrant word of God?



Introduction to Bible Study

- Class format
 - Scripture reading
 - Questions and maybe answers
 - New material
 - Small group discussion
 - Closing prayer



Introduction to Bible Study

Questions from last week?

- We talked about Christian Anthropology
 - Comments or questions?



Introduction to Bible Study

- What we are doing here is “theology”
 - Faith seeking understanding (St. Anselm)
- Both parts are required!
 - Head knowledge without faith is pretty useless...
 - Knowing about God is not the same as knowing God!
 - Faith without knowing about God can lead to idolatry...
 - I will interpret my experiences of God based on what I assume I know about God!



Introduction to Bible Study

- What is the Bible?
 1. A library of books that teaches the truth about God and our relationship with God.
 - God has acted and is active in our world!
 2. The Bible is a sure place to meet God.
 3. The Bible is *not* a history book!
 - There is history in the Bible, but teaching history (or science) is not the point of the Bible.



Introduction to Bible Study

- Is it important that the Bible is not a history or science book?
 - YES! Because people misuse the Word of God much too often!
 - The creation stories are not about the science of *how* the world, man, or woman was created. They are much more than this!
 - The Gospels are not newspaper reports of the words Jesus spoke. They are much more than this!



Introduction to Bible Study

- Ok, so what difference does it make that we can find God in the Bible?
 - The Christian journey is one of growing closer to God. This journey is complex and counter-cultural. We need to listen to God often if we are going to grow closer to God.



Introduction to Bible Study

- What difference does it make that the Bible is a library and not a single book?
 - The library was developed over a 2,000 year period. The vast majority of the books of the Bible were first told as stories, and only written down when communities were forced to do so by circumstances.



Introduction to Bible Study

- Who decided which books to include in the library?
 - Each of the books of the Bible were initially circulated individually to communities. The books that fed the faith of the community were cherished, passed on, and collected. This process continued until a somewhat “official” list of books was settled on in the last half of the fourth century with the writing of the Latin version of the Bible called the Vulgate.



Vulgate is the Latin translation done by St. Jerome in the late 300's. Jerome started writing the translation in 382.

Introduction to Bible Study

- The Bible and Tradition
 - So, for the first 300+ years of Christianity, there was no definitive Bible.
 - The Bible is the product of church tradition.
 - First an oral tradition ...
 - Then written ...
 - Then collected into a definitive list (or canon).
 - What does the Catholic Church teach about Tradition and the Bible?



Introduction to Bible Study

- One common source
 - “Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, then, are bound closely together and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing and move toward the same goal. Each of them makes present and fruitful in the Church the mystery of Christ, who promised to remain with his own ‘always, to the close of the age.’”

(CCC 80)



Introduction to Bible Study

- Two distinct modes of transmission
 - “*Sacred Scripture* is the speech of God, as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit.

And [Holy] *Tradition* transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. It transmits it to the successors of the apostles so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound, and spread it abroad by their preaching.”

(CCC 81)



Introduction to Bible Study

- Personal Reading vs. Private Interpretation ...
 - *Personal reading*: No one can listen to God for you! God can and does speak to people through the Scriptures.
 - *Private Interpretation*: In the Catholic Church, it would be inappropriate for me to represent personal insights as official Church teaching.
 - "... interpreting Scripture is ultimately subject to the judgement of the Church ..." (CCC 119)



The Bible Library



Law - 5 books

History 16 Books



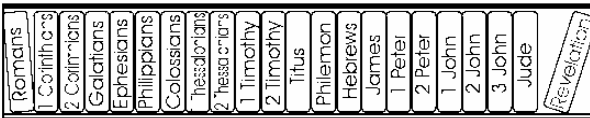
Poetry 7 Books

Prophecy 18 Books



Gospels 4 Books

History



Letters 21 Books

Apocalyptic

Introduction to Bible Study

- A Library of Books
 - *Developed over a 2,000 year period*
 - *46 Old Testament Books*
 - *27 New Testament Books*



Introduction to Bible Study

- Catholic vs. Protestant Bibles
 - The Catholic Old Testament comes from the Septuagint, a Greek Translation of Hebrew Scriptures that occurred between 300 and 200 B.C.
 - After the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., the Jewish leadership was struggling for survival. Sometime near 100 A.D. the Jewish canon was defined at 39 books.



Introduction to Bible Study

- Jewish Canon
 - No “New Testament” books were included.
 - Seven books from the Septuagint were left out:
 - 1,2 Maccabees
 - Judith
 - Tobit
 - Baruch
 - Sirach
 - Wisdom (The Wisdom of Solomon)



Introduction to Bible Study

- Catholic vs Protestant Bibles
 - After the Reformation in 1530 A.D., the Protestants decided that they would only accept the 39 books that were in the Jewish canon.
 - The Council of Trent (1545 – 1563) responded by defining the Catholic canon as 46 books. This was consistent with the tradition since the early church.



Introduction to Bible Study

- Bible Translations
 - New Revised Standard Version & New American Bible
 - Word for word translations
 - New Jerusalem Bible & Good News Bible
 - Meaning for meaning translations
 - The Way & Readers Digest Bible
 - Paraphrased (avoid these for Scripture study)



BRING BIBLES!!

The Bible Library



Law - 5 books

History - 16 Books



Poetry - 7 Books

Prophecy - 18 Books



Gospels - 4 Books

History



Letters - 21 Books

Apocalyptic

Whirlwind Tour of the Bible Library

Torah, Pentateuch, or Law

- **Genesis** (1800 BC [oral] – 500 BC [written])
 - Tells of the beginning of the world from creation to the death of Joseph, son of Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham.
- **Exodus** (event = 1250 BC, written 550 BC)
 - Tells of the release of the Israelites from Egypt and their wanderings through the desert to Mt. Sinai.
- **Leviticus** (written 500 BC)
 - Priest's manual. Contains the sacrificial and ritual laws, moral teachings, and social teachings that the "Lord said to Moses."



Whirlwind Tour of the Bible Library

Torah, Pentateuch, or Law

- Numbers (600 BC)
 - Mount Sinai to the Israelites arriving at the plains of Moab, close to the Promised Land of Canaan.
- Deuteronomy (700 BC)
 - Combines the repetition of laws with an appeal to obey them.



Whirlwind Tour of the Bible Library

Historical Books (written 600 – 164 BC)

- Explore the living of the covenant in the Promised Land of Palestine (Canaan, Israel)

Wisdom Writings (written 600 – 200 BC)

- A minimum of interest in the great acts of divine salvation.
- A questioning attitude about the problems of life for all people (suffering, inequality, death)
- A search for how to master life and behave before God.
- A joy in the contemplation of creation and God.



Whirlwind Tour of the Bible Library

Prophets (written 750 – 400 BC)

- Essence of prophetic activity was to announce the Word of God concerning the immediate future, often by forecasting punishment or salvation.



Prophets are not fortune tellers!

Whirlwind Tour of the Bible Library

New Testament Gospels

- **Matthew** (early 80's AD)
 - Written to the Jewish Christian community.
- **Mark** (early 60's AD)
 - Written to suffering Gentile Christians.
- **Luke** (late 80's AD)
 - Written to both Jews and Gentile Christians.
- **John** (early 90's AD)
 - Written to inspire the Christian community to maintain their belief during troubled times.



Whirlwind Tour of the Bible Library

Acts of the Apostles (late 80's)

- Description of the life and work of the early church.

Letters

- Letters of Paul to Gentile Churches throughout much of the Roman Empire. Paul founded many of these churches (50 – 60 AD).
- Hebrews – Sermon urging the faithful to follow Jesus' example (written sometime between 61 and 95 AD).



Whirlwind Tour of the Bible Library

Letters

- James* - Corrects the misuse of Paul's teaching regarding 'salvation through grace alone.' (~70 AD)
- 1 Peter* – Do not retaliate against those who slander Christians. Live as Jesus taught (70 – 90 AD).
- 2 Peter* - Defense of Peter's teachings against pagan critics that encourages moral liberalism (80 – 90 AD).
- 1,2 John* - Oppose a movement that departed from the communities traditional beliefs about Jesus (~100 AD).
- 3 John* - discusses a problem with a church leader for a particular community (~100 AD).
- Jude* - Another letter against moral liberalism (50 – 100 AD)

(* = Referred to as catholic (in the sense of universal) epistles (letters))



Whirlwind Tour of the Bible Library

Revelation

- Probably composed over several years (65 – 96 AD).
- Apocalyptic (end time) literature. Written in “code” so that Christians (at that time!) would be able to decode the meaning, but not the Roman authorities.
- Some of the imagery built on images in Daniel, Zachariah, and Ezekiel.
- A popular form of writing from 200 BC – 200 AD.
- The “end time” was when the book was written!
- Not a popular book of the Bible until recently.



Reflection Idea

One of the central ideas we have discussed today is that the intent of Scripture is not to teach us history or science, but to teach us about God and our relationship with God.

Read the second creation story (Genesis 2:4 – 2:25) straight through to get an overall sense of the text. Then, read it again more slowly and pay attention to words or ideas that attract your attention (positive or negative) and relate to God and our relationship with God. Have an honest and humble attitude. Reflect on these ideas, ask God about them, and journal insights.



Introduction to Bible Study

- Next Week:
 - What does inspired, guided and inerrant really mean?

