



# **BASIC BIBLE STUDY**

Basic Bible Study (Grow Resources)  
Copyright 2016 by Hope Church (S)



All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior written permission of the church.

Bible quotations taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION® NIV® ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by the International Bible Society.  
All rights reserved.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Session 1</b> What Makes the Bible so Unique?	3
<b>Session 2</b> How the Bible Was Put Together and An Overview	8
<b>Session 3</b> The Bible and Our Lives	15
<b>Session 4</b> Studying the Bible by Books and Passages	18

## SESSION 1:

### WHAT MAKES THE BIBLE SO UNIQUE?

The Bible is the greatest and the most unique book ever written. In terms of literature, history, and theology, it is a great work that surpasses any other literary work. Within its pages, we see the contents of the Old and New Testaments blending together to tell the main story of a loving God redeeming mankind. What is even more amazing is the way it was produced, preserved and proclaimed.

“The Bible has been analyzed far more than any work in the history of the world” (Muncaster 1996, 5).

#### **The Bible is the revealed Word of God**

Although God used humans to write the Bible, He is its ultimate author. This is the claim that the Bible made for itself:

#### **2 Timothy 3:16-17**

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 Peter 1:21**

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

In the Old Testament, phrases such as “And God spoke to ...”, “the word of the Lord came to ...”, and “God said” were recorded more than 2,000 times. The Bible itself claims to be a record of the words and deeds of God. The Bible views itself as God’s Word. Therefore when we read the Bible, it is God speaking to us through its pages.

#### **The Bible is unique in its unity**

The Bible was written under conditions of extreme diversity:

Time period – The Bible was written over a period of 1,600 years (more than 60 generations).

Authorship – The Bible was written by more than 40 human authors who came from a variety of backgrounds. Most of the authors also did not know each other.

Locations – Different parts of the Bible were written in three different continents: Asia, Europe and Africa.

Languages – The Bible was written in three different languages: Hebrew (Old Testament language), Aramaic (common language of the Ancient Near East until the 6<sup>th</sup> century) & Koine Greek (New Testament language)

Under such diverse circumstances, it would be next to impossible for something to have a consistent message and theme. Yet in spite of such diversity, there is unity within Scripture as different parts of the Bible are able to harmonise with each other. A very important thing that unifies the Bible is the common theme of God’s plan of salvation for mankind through the Person of Jesus Christ. The Bible’s harmony and consistency in spite of it being written under such diverse circumstances points to the fact that God must have orchestrated its writing.

#### **The Bible is unique in its enduring popularity**

The Bible is the all-time bestseller in human history, having been read by more people and published in more languages than any other book. It is also a widely distributed book. In the year 2000 alone, the Bible Societies throughout the world distributed 633 million Bibles or Scripture portions ([http://www.biblesociety.org/wr\\_360/sdr\\_2000.htm](http://www.biblesociety.org/wr_360/sdr_2000.htm)). It has been translated into more than 1,800

languages and dialects. When Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press in 1454, the Bible was the first book to be printed. The Bible's enduring popularity is evidence of its inspiration.

**The Bible is unique in its indestructibility**

God has been faithful in upholding His word such that it has been able to survive against all odds. The apostle Paul declared:

**2 Timothy 2:9**

... But God's word is not chained.

The Bible is indestructible over time. Over time, many great works of history and literature have disappeared, with very few manuscripts existing. The earliest extant copies of most great works were only completed hundreds of years after the original. The Bible has many more copies that were written much closer to the actual events. The following table gives a comparison:

<u>Major existing manuscripts</u>	<u>Number of early records</u>	<u>Period of time between event to first existing manuscript</u>
Gallic Wars – Julius Caesar	10	1,000 years
Pliny the Younger – History	7	750 years
Herodotus – History	8	1,300 years
Illiad – Homer	643	500 years
The New Testament	24,000+	25 years

The Bible was originally written on perishable papyrus scrolls, and copied and re-copied by hand for hundreds of years before the printing press was invented. Yet the process of manual copying did not result in errors in the Bible's contents. The Bible has more manuscript evidence supporting its accuracy of translation than any ten pieces of ancient literature combined.

The Bible has also survived extensive persecution. No other book has experienced as much persecution as the Bible. Ever since Emperor Nero initiated a persecution against Christians in 64 A.D., empire-wide persecution of Christians became commonplace. Many people have tried to ban, burn or discredit the Bible. During the eighteenth century, the French infidel Voltaire confidently boasted that in a hundred years from his time, Christianity and the Bible would be destroyed. Fifty years after his death, in 1828, the Geneva Bible Society used his press and residence to produce Bibles.

**The Bible is unique in its fulfilment of prophecies**

The Bible fulfils prophecies accurately and extensively. It contains more than one thousand prophecies, and 668 are known to have been fulfilled. There are still three prophecies that have yet to be confirmed, but none have ever proven to be false. The unfulfilled prophecies relate mainly to the Second Coming of Jesus and the end times. The prophecies of the Bible involved specific people, events to happen, and circumstances relating to events. Prophecies were made about both imminent and future events.

Some examples of fulfilled prophecies:

- Exile as a result of disobedience – Moses prophesied that God's people would bear the consequences of foreign domination and exile if they continually disobeyed His commandments (Deuteronomy 28:49-50). Jeremiah also made a similar prophecy (Jeremiah 25:9-11). What they prophesied was eventually fulfilled. After the death of King Solomon, Israel was divided into two kingdoms: the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Israel fell into apostasy and all her kings were evil. In 722 B.C., the Assyrians conquered her and exiled her population. Judah lasted a little longer because a few of her kings were righteous. Nevertheless, the influence of the evil kings prevailed and she too fell into apostasy. In 587 B.C., King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon conquered her and exiled her population.
- Promise of restoration – At around 700 B.C, when Jerusalem was at the height of power, Isaiah prophesied that a king named Cyrus would order the city would be rebuilt (Isaiah 44:28).

Subsequently, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon captured and destroyed Jerusalem in 587 B.C. and exiled the majority of the population. In 537 B.C., Persia defeated Babylon and King Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1). Archaeologists have discovered a stone cylinder that records the events of King Cyrus' reign, including his decree to the Jews to return to rebuild Jerusalem and its temple.

- Prophecy of destruction – In 30 A.D., Jesus gave a detailed prophecy regarding the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem (Matthew 24:2). This prophecy was fulfilled in 70 A.D., when the Roman general Titus invaded Jerusalem in order to quell a Jewish rebellion. In the process of the invasion, the city and its temple were burnt down.
- Prophecies regarding the Messiah – In the Old Testament, there are more than three hundred prophecies regarding the Messiah that were fulfilled in the Person of Jesus. Some examples of fulfilled prophecies are shown in the table below:

Explanation	Passage of prophecy	Passage of fulfilment
Jesus would be born in Bethlehem	Micah 5:2	Matthew 2:1
Jesus would enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey	Zechariah 9:9	Matthew 21:1-7
Jesus would be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver	Zechariah 11:12-13	Matthew 26:14-16
People drawing lots for Jesus' clothes	Psalms 22:18	John 19:23-24
Jesus being given vinegar to drink	Psalms 69:21	John 19:28-30
Jesus' legs were not broken in order to hasten His death before the Passover Feast, since He was already dead	Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12	John 19:31-33, 36
Jesus was pierced	Zechariah 12:10	John 19:34, 37

### The Bible is unique in its contribution to archaeology

Many people have attempted to use archaeology to discredit the Bible, but they failed. One such person was Sir William Ramsay, one of the greatest archaeologists in history. After spending thirty years trying to disprove the Bible, his conclusion was that Luke was "... one of the greatest historians of all time." Sir William Ramsay became a Christian. Today, virtually all reputable archaeologists and historians regard the Bible as an important and credible historical document.

Archaeological findings have verified some of the events and places recorded in the Bible. Some examples of archaeological findings:

- The existence of Sodom and Gomorrah – These were two cities that God destroyed because of their extreme wickedness (Genesis 19:24). Recent excavations of Tel Mardikh (known to be the site of the Empire of Ebla) uncovered thousands of tablets that mention about these cities.
- Sennacherib's prism – The Bible records that King Sennacherib of Assyria captured many cities of Judah and laid siege on Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:13ff). In 1830, Colonel Taylor discovered a clay prism in the ancient ruins of Nineveh. This prism contained the annals of King Sennacherib. On one section of the prism, Sennacherib boasted that he shut up "Hezekiah the Judahite" within Jerusalem his own royal city "like a caged bird." (Source: <http://www.bible-history.com/empires/prism.html>)
- The Dead Sea scrolls – In 1947, a number of ancient scrolls were discovered in eleven caves in the Qumran region near the Dead Sea. These scrolls were hidden by a Jewish sect known as the Essenes before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. They were written in Hebrew and contain copies of almost every Old Testament book, with the exception of Esther. When compared to present-day Hebrew copies of the Old Testament, these scrolls demonstrated almost letter-to-letter accuracy. Thus, they confirm the Bible's accuracy.

## The Bible is unique in its scientific accuracy

Although the Bible is not a book on science, it is scientifically accurate, and the advance of science has repeatedly confirmed the Scriptures.

Some examples of the Bible's scientific accuracy:

- The spherical shape of the earth – Before scientists discovered that the earth was spherical in shape, this fact was already stated in the Bible. In **Isaiah 40:22**, Isaiah declared that *He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth...*
- Stars are too numerous to be counted – After the telescope was invented, Ptolemy and other scientists tried to count the number of stars in the sky. But many years later, they held that the number of stars was too numerous to be counted. This fact was already declared in **Jeremiah 33:22**, ... *countless as the stars of the sky and as measureless as the sand on the seashore.*
- Circumcision on the eighth day – In Genesis 17:12, God specifically instructed Abraham to circumcise newborn males on the eighth day. Scientists later discovered that by the eighth day of birth, the body produces enough of the element prothrombin to prevent haemorrhaging (Source: <http://www.apologeticspress.org/articles/2204>).
- Creation events confirmed by science – The events recorded during creation have been confirmed by science:

Scripture	Explanation
Genesis 1:1-2	The earth was initially covered with a thick layer of gas which did not allow light to penetrate. This was probably the condition of planets of a similar mass and temperature as the earth's. Science accepts the initial conditions stated in the Bible: dark, formless and void.
Genesis 1:3	The atmosphere became translucent enough to allow light to reach the water surface, causing the photosynthesis essential for plant life.
Genesis 1:11	Scientists agree that the first life form to appear on earth was vegetation. Light, water and large amounts of carbon dioxide are essential for the growth of vegetation.
Genesis 1:20	Scientists agree the first animal life was in the sea, with birds following. This is according to the biblical record that God created the sea creatures and birds first before creating terrestrial animals and humans.

## The Bible is the love story of God redeeming His people

God's original intention was to create a people in His image to have a relationship with Him. After Adam and Eve sinned, God chose a nation (Deuteronomy 6:7-9). When Israel disobeyed God and rebelled against Him repeatedly, God offered His son Jesus to die for the sins of the world and to redeem mankind (John 3:16). Throughout the Bible, we are able to know God's character, love, thoughts and actions.

## The Bible is all about Jesus Christ

The theme of the Bible is God saving man through His son Jesus. The accounts of Jesus are found in the New Testament, but the Old Testament contains numerous prophecies concerning Him:

**Luke 24:27**

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

**The Bible transforms lives**

The Bible has the power to transform the lives of individuals, regardless of age, gender, nationality, ethnic origin, culture, social status, occupation, intellectual capacity, family background and environment:

**Hebrews 4:12-13**

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

The Bible is a unique book, and no other book has such credentials as the Bible has. In fact, no other book even comes close.

*"England has two books, the Bible and Shakespeare. England made Shakespeare, but the Bible made England" (Victor Hugo)*

## SESSION 2:

### HOW THE BIBLE WAS PUT TOGETHER AND AN OVERVIEW

The word “canon” is not found in the Bible, but the root of the word is taken from 1 Kings 14:15 and Job 40:21. It originally meant “reed”, but later came to mean “measure”, “standard” or “measuring rod.” “Canonisation” is the process by which ancient religious documents were measured against certain criteria in order to be recognised as inspired Scripture and therefore the authoritative standard for belief and conduct.

#### The Old Testament Canon

Long before the inception of the church, the Palestinian Jews had already recognised the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament as sacred scripture. The priest and scribe Ezra had collected and compiled the books after the Babylonian Exile.

Since Christianity had its roots in Judaism, the church accepted the Old Testament as sacred scripture and used it as the basis for instruction and teaching. Jesus and the apostles had a high view of the Old Testament and recognised it as Scripture:

#### John 10:35

If he called them ‘gods,’ to whom the word of God came—and the Scripture cannot be broken

#### 2 Timothy 3:16-17

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.

#### The New Testament Canon

By the close of the First Century A.D., there were many ancient religious documents in circulation throughout the early church. Not all the documents were inspired by God, and not all of them were useful for edifying the church. Some of them were in fact written by people using the apostles’ names, while others advocated false teachings. The early church had the responsibility of canonisation – testing and recognising which books were inspired and to be considered as inspired Scripture and which were not.

The church did not come up with the criteria for including books into the New Testament Canon. Instead, it recognised the books that were inspired from their inception. The Holy Spirit guided the church in the canonisation process. The church came up with criteria for canonicity:

- Apostolicity – The book had to be written by an apostle or by someone in close relation to an apostle in order to raise it up to apostolic level, since these were the people in positions of authority and they were entrusted with the teachings of Jesus.
- Universality – The book had to be received, collected, read and used universally by the Christian community. The criteria showed that the people of God universally accepted the book. For example, Paul’s letters were read and followed throughout the churches.
- Orthodoxy – The teachings of the book had to be consistent and in overall unity with the theme and message of other books in the Bible. For example, Jesus is recognised as the only Son of God throughout Scripture. In 2 Peter 3:16, Peter acknowledged Paul’s epistles as Scripture, of the same status as Old Testament Scripture.
- Spiritual contents – The contents of the book had to reflect the transforming power of God; they had to be of spiritual character in order to warrant it a place in Scripture. This criterion helped to eliminate writings that were spurious (not genuine or not proceeding from the stated source). For example, the author of the Infancy Gospel of Thomas was claimed to be Thomas. However, its

contents were hardly spiritual. They were very much like fairy tales and did not portray Jesus in a very positive light as a child.

- Inspiration – The book had to have internal evidence of inspiration. This was the final test for all New Testament books. The central subject of the book had to be Christ, and the ethical and spiritual effect of the books on the lives of people had to be different from that of other writings.

During the Second Council of Carthage in 397 A.D., the New Testament Canon was closed, with the current twenty-seven New Testament books.

### The Apocrypha

During the Council of Trent in 1564, the Roman Catholic Church added fourteen books to the Old Testament. These books were known as the Apocrypha, which means “hidden” or “concealed”.

The names of these apocryphal books are:

1	I Esdras	8	Baruch
2	II Esdras	9	Song of the Three Holy Children
3	Tobit	10	History of Susanna
4	Judith	11	Bel and the Dragon
5	Additions to Esther	12	The Prayer of Manasseh
6	Wisdom of Solomon	13	I Macabees
7	Ecclesiasticus	14	II Macabees

They were originally included in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (known as the Septuagint of LXX). The Christian community in general did not accept them as canonical scripture for the following reasons:

- They contained false doctrines – Some of the books teach doctrines and uphold practices that are contrary to the canonical Scripture. For example, lying is sanctioned, suicide and assassination are justified, magical incantations and prayers for the dead are taught and approved.
- They contained errors and inaccuracies – These books contained many historical, geographical and chronological errors. At times, they even contradicted themselves, canonical scripture and history.
- The Jews never recognised them – It is universally acknowledged that the apocryphal books never had a place in the Hebrew canon, and the Palestinian Jews never recognised them as canonical scripture. They were written during the “Four hundred years of silence,” the time between the writing of Malachi and the ministry of John the Baptist. The Jews believed that there were no inspired prophetic utterances during this period of time.
- The early church never recognised them – The apocryphal books were not found in any catalogue of Canonical Books during the first four centuries of the church.
- They lacked the divine element – The apocryphal books did not have the distinctive element which gave Scripture the divine nature; for example, prophetic power and religious atmosphere.
- The writers did not claim divine inspiration and authority – In fact, some writers even disclaimed divine inspiration and authority.
- None of the writers spoke with a message from God.

## Books and divisions of the Bible

The Bible is made up of sixty-six books, consisting of thirty-nine in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New Testament. It is divided into different types of literature:

### The Old Testament

#### The Law (the foundation of the Hebrew faith)

Book	Author	Original audience	Approximate time of writing	Place of writing
Genesis	Moses	Children of Israel	1445 – 1400 B.C.	The Sinai Desert
Exodus	Moses	Children of Israel	1445 – 1400 B.C.	The Sinai Desert
Leviticus	Moses	Children of Israel	1445 – 1400 B.C.	The Sinai Desert
Numbers	Moses	Children of Israel	1445 – 1400 B.C.	The Sinai Desert
Deuteronomy	Moses	Children of Israel	1445 – 1400 B.C.	The Sinai Desert

#### The Historical Books (the record of Israel's spiritual growth and decline)

Book	Author	Original audience	Approximate time of writing	Place of writing
Joshua	Joshua	Children of Israel	1400-1370 B.C.	Unknown
Judges	Samuel	Children of Israel	1043-1004 B.C.	Unknown
Ruth	Unknown	Children of Israel	1318-1013 B.C.	Unknown
1 Samuel	Unknown	Children of Israel	1050-750 B.C.	Unknown
2 Samuel	Unknown	Children of Israel	1050-750 B.C.	Unknown
1 Kings	Prophet Jeremiah	Jewish exiles	590-570 B.C.	Unknown
2 Kings	Prophet Jeremiah	Jewish exiles	590-550 B.C.	Unknown
1 Chronicles	Ezra the priest and scribe	Jewish returnees	450-425 B.C.	Judah
2 Chronicles	Ezra the priest and scribe	Jewish returnees	450-425 B.C.	Judah
Ezra	Ezra the priest and scribe	Jewish returnees	457-444 B.C.	Judah
Nehemiah	Ezra the priest and scribe	Jewish returnees	457-420 B.C.	Judah
Esther	Unknown	Jews in Persia	464-435 B.C.	Persia

#### The Poetical Books (a presentation of the worship of the Lord and individual faith)

Book	Author	Original audience	Approximate time of writing	Place of writing
Job	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Psalms	King David, Sons of Korah, Asaph, King Solomon, Moses, Ethan, and anonymous authors	Children of Israel	1430-430 B.C.	Various places
Proverbs	King Solomon, Agur, Lemuel	Children of Israel	950-700 B.C.	Israel
Ecclesiastes	King Solomon	Children of Israel	Before 940 B.C.	Israel
Song of Songs	King Solomon	Children of Israel	Around 965 B.C.	Israel

#### The Major Prophets (the Lord's revelation of His blessings, judgments, and promises)

Book	Author	Original audience	Approximate time of writing	Place of writing
Isaiah	Prophet Isaiah	People of Judah	740-680 B.C.	Judah

Jeremiah	Prophet Jeremiah	People of Judah	627-582 B.C.	Judah and Egypt
Lamentations	Prophet Jeremiah	Jewish exiles	586-584 B.C.	Unknown
Ezekiel	Prophet Ezekiel	Jewish exiles	593-571 B.C.	Babylon
Daniel	Prophet Daniel	Jewish exiles	605-530 B.C.	Persian Empire

### **The Minor Prophets (the Lord's revelation of His blessings, judgments, and promises)**

<b>Book</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Original audience</b>	<b>Approximate time of writing</b>	<b>Place of writing</b>
Hosea	Prophet Hosea	Israel	755-710 B.C.	Israel
Joel	Prophet Joel	Judah	830-820 B.C.	Judah
Amos	Prophet Amos	Israel	760-753 B.C.	Israel or Judah
Obadiah	Prophet Obadiah	Judah	586-553 B.C.	Unknown
Jonah	Prophet Jonah	Israel	780-750 B.C.	Israel
Micah	Prophet Micah	Judah	730-710 B.C.	Judah
Nahum	Prophet Nahum	Judah, Nineveh	663-620 B.C.	Judah
Habakkuk	Prophet Habakkuk	Judah	612-607 B.C.	Judah
Zephaniah	Prophet Zephaniah	Judah	630-607 B.C.	Judah
Haggai	Prophet Haggai	Jewish returnees	520 B.C.	Judah
Zechariah	Prophet Zechariah	Jewish returnees	515-470 B.C.	Judah
Malachi	Prophet Malachi	Jewish returnees	432-420 B.C.	Judah

### **The New Testament**

#### **The gospels and Acts (the good news of Jesus the Messiah and history of the spread of Christianity)**

<b>Book</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Original audience</b>	<b>Approximate time of writing</b>	<b>Place of writing</b>
Matthew	Apostle Matthew	Jewish Christians	Late 50s or 60s A.D.	Probably Syria
Mark	John Mark (cousin of Barnabas)	Gentile Christians	Late 50s or 60s A.D.	Rome
Luke	Luke the physician	Theophilus	Early 60s A.D.	Possibly Rome
John	Apostle John	Gentile Christians and non-believers	80-90 A.D.	Probably Ephesus
Acts	Luke the physician	Theophilus	Early 60s A.D.	Possibly Rome

#### **The epistles (letters to churches and individual Christians)**

<b>Book</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Original audience</b>	<b>Approximate time of writing</b>	<b>Place of writing</b>
Romans	Apostle Paul	The church in Rome	54-58 A.D.	Corinth
1 Corinthians	Apostle Paul	The church in Corinth	54-58 A.D.	Ephesus
2 Corinthians	Apostle Paul	The church in Corinth	54-58 A.D.	Macedonia
Galatians	Apostle Paul	The churches in Galatia	48-50 A.D.	Corinth or Syrian Antioch

Ephesians	Apostle Paul	The churches in Asia Minor	60-63 A.D.	Rome
Philippians	Apostle Paul	The church in Philippi	60-63 A.D.	Rome
Colossians	Apostle Paul	The church in Colossae	60-63 A.D.	Rome
1 Thessalonians	Apostle Paul	The church in Thessalonica	51-53 A.D.	Corinth
2 Thessalonians	Apostle Paul	The church in Thessalonica	51-53 A.D.	Corinth
1 Timothy	Apostle Paul	Timothy	62-66 A.D.	Macedonia
2 Timothy	Apostle Paul	Timothy	66-67 A.D.	Rome
Titus	Apostle Paul	Titus	62-67 A.D.	Neapolis, Corinth or Macedonia
Philemon	Apostle Paul	Philemon	60-63 A.D.	Rome
Hebrews	Unknown	Jewish Christians	60-70 A.D.	Unknown
James	James, the half-brother of Jesus	Jewish Christians	45-50 A.D.	Jerusalem
1 Peter	Apostle Peter	Gentile Christians in Asia Minor	63-64 A.D.	Rome (referred to as "Babylon")
2 Peter	Apostle Peter	Gentile Christians in Asia Minor	67-68 A.D.	Rome
1 John	Apostle John	Christians in Asia Minor	85-90 A.D.	Probably Ephesus
2 John	Apostle John	The "chosen lady" & children, or a local church	85-90 A.D.	Probably Ephesus
3 John	Apostle John	Gaius	85-90 A.D.	Probably Ephesus
Jude	Jude, the half-brother of Jesus	Christians in general	66-80 A.D.	Probably Jerusalem

**Apocalyptic literature (victory of Christ and the church over sin and the world)**

<b>Book</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Original audience</b>	<b>Approximate time of writing</b>	<b>Place of writing</b>
Revelation	Apostle John	Seven churches in Asia Minor	81-96 A.D.	Patmos

Overview of the Old Testament

Old Testament Time Line	
Secular History	Great Pyramid built at Giza c. 2500   Reign of Hammarabi c. 1800   Hittite Empire c. 1750–1200
B.C.	
Biblical History	c. 2167 Abraham born   c. 2000–1800 Events in life of Job   c. 1527 Moses born
Secular History	Hittites conquer Babylon c. 1525   Death of Tutankhamen c. 1352   Iron Age begins c. 1200
B.C.	
Biblical History	Exodus from Egypt c. 1445   Hebrews enter Canaan c. 1406   Period of the Judges c. 1375–1075
Secular History	Troy destroyed during the Trojan War c. 1183   First Olympic Games c. 776   Birth of Homer c. 750
B.C.	
Biblical History	David becomes king c. 1010   First temple completed c. 959   Israel falls to Assyria c. 722
Secular History	Babylon falls to Persia c. 539   Parthenon built in Athens c. 447–432   Alexander the Great conquers Egypt c. 332
B.C.	
Biblical History	Judah falls to Babylonia c. 586   Exiles return to Jerusalem c. 538   [Intertestament Period of 400 years]
Secular History	Greek translation (Septuagint, LXX) of Hebrew Scriptures c. 250–150   Judas Maccabeus leads revolt against Antiochus IV c. 166   Roman conquest of Britain 43
B.C.	
Biblical History	[Intertestament Period of 400 years continued]   Jesus born c. 5

(The Nelson Study Bible, 1997)



## SESSION 3:

### THE BIBLE AND OUR LIVES

Having learnt about the uniqueness of the Bible and getting a brief overview of Bible, the next important step is personal application. As Christians, we are to live our lives according to God's ways rather than our old ways or the ways of the world. How do we know what God's ways are and how He wants us to live in order to be pleasing to Him? The Bible shows us God's ways and also reveals to us what pleases God and what displeases Him; it is our manual for the Christian life. We need to learn how to get spiritual food from the Bible. This involves Bible reading, using devotional Bible study guides and memorising scripture.

#### **The effect of the Bible on our lives**

When we live by the principles written in the word of God, we experience the following benefits:

##### Purification

Paul describes the word of God as water (Ephesians 5:26). It has the effect of washing and cleansing our spirits (John 17:17).

As we study the word of God, it makes us aware of sin by exposing it (Psalm 119:9, 11). It can even expose the motives of our hearts (Hebrews 4:12). When God's word convicts us of sin, we should respond by repenting and turning away from it with the help of the Holy Spirit. It is only then that our lives will be purified from sin. As we know the word of God well, we would know what are the thoughts, attitudes, words and actions that displease Him. We would hate sin and keep away from it.

The word of God gives us the power to overcome sin. The more we hide the word of God in our hearts, the more spiritual resources we will have available to deal with the sins and problems we face. Victory over sin would be easier and faster, and we would require less counselling.

##### Steadfastness

The word of God is the foundation of our spiritual lives. If our faith is built firmly on God's word, we will stand firm when the storms of life come in the form of opposition, persecution or distractions. But when God's word is not our foundation, we will fall and lose our zeal and love for God when the storms of life come our way (Matthew 7:24-27).

##### Spiritual growth

The word of God is our spiritual food (Matthew 4:4). Just as we need physical food in order to live and grow physically, we also need regular intake of spiritual food so that we can grow spiritually. When we have regular intake of the word of God, it builds us up spiritually so that we become spiritually mature (Acts 20:32). When we meditate on it, our minds will be renewed (Romans 12:2). When we put it into practice, we will be transformed into Christ-likeness.

##### Equipping for ministry

The word of God equips Christians to serve God. It teaches what is right, rebukes us when we go wrong, corrects us by directing us along the right paths and trains us in righteousness so that we can stay on track on the right paths (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The word of God is our primary manual when we want to be equipped to serve God, rather than the methods and practices of man. Man's methods and practices may change with time, but the principles of God's word are eternal.

##### Guidance

God revealed Himself and His will to us through His word (Exodus 24:12). When we don't have a good understanding of the Bible, we would make wrong decisions because we would decide according to our fleshly desires instead of according to God's will. But when we have a good understanding of the word of God, we will be able to know God's will and we will make decisions according to it (Psalm 119:133).

God's word also gives us insight, wisdom and understanding beyond that of people who are older than us or have more education than us (Psalm 119:98-99).

By meditating on the word of God, we will be able to know and appreciate God's will and apply it to important decisions that we need to make. As a result of doing things God's way, we will be prosperous and successful (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1-3).

Since having regular spiritual input from the word of God is beneficial to us, we should be aware of the various ways in which we can get spiritual food from the Bible on a personal level.

### **Following a Bible reading plan**

A Bible reading plan shows us portions of the Bible that we are to read on a daily basis in order to complete reading the entire Bible within a given time. For example, most Bible reading plans help us to complete reading the Bible in one year if we follow them faithfully and consistently.

The purpose of following a Bible reading plan is to give us breadth of knowledge of the Bible. When we follow a Bible reading plan, we would typically read between three to four chapters per day. Without sufficient time in one day to meditate on such a large amount of scripture, we are not likely to go deep in our knowledge of the chapters read for the day. However, we can easily have an overall picture of the chapters we read and eventually, the whole Bible. With breadth of knowledge, we will have an idea of where to find things in the Bible, including events, promises, prophecies and stories.

Some examples of online Bible reading plans:

<http://www.navpress.com/Magazines/DJ/BibleReadingPlans.asp>

[http://www.backtothebible.org/devotions/bible\\_guides.htm](http://www.backtothebible.org/devotions/bible_guides.htm)

<http://www.bibleplan.org/>

[http://www.heartlight.org/devotionals/reading\\_plans/](http://www.heartlight.org/devotionals/reading_plans/)

<http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/readingplans/>

Some ways in which the Bible can be read:

- Beginning to end – This way of reading is simple and straightforward as we read the Bible book-by-book from Genesis to Revelation.
- Chronologically – This method brings us through the events of the Bible as they occurred in chronological sequence.
- Mixture – For people who prefer variety, this way incorporates portions of different parts of the Bible into the daily readings. For example, there are readings from both the Old and New Testaments within the same day. Some Bible reading plans even include passages from the books of Psalms and Proverbs into each daily reading.

### **Devotional Bible study guides**

If we are new to the Bible, there are guides help to make the work of devotional Bible study less overwhelming. Typically, they consist of daily readings, with some Bible verses to meditate on and a devotional write-up for each reading. Some may even include questions on the passage in order to help us study and reflect on it properly.

Some devotional Bible study guides that we may use are:

- Daily bread (RBC Ministries) – This is a free devotional, available in both hard and soft copy. It can be found at the following website: <http://www.rbc.org/odb/odb.shtml>
- Daily bread (Scripture Union) – This devotional is available in both hard and soft copy. The hard copy may be purchased while the online version is free. It can be found in the following website: <http://www.dailybread.org.uk/>
- My utmost for His highest – This is a classic devotional, written years ago by Oswald Chambers and still in use even today. The hard copy may be purchased at Christian bookshops, while the soft copy may be found at: <http://www.myutmost.org/>
- Spurgeon's daily meditations – This is another classic devotional, written by Charles Spurgeon but still widely used today. There are two daily readings, one to be read in the morning and the other at night. It may be found at: <http://www.spurgeon.org/daily.htm>

- Devotional books and Bibles – Some books are written for devotional reading and study. For example, “Men of the Bible” (by Robert D. Wolgemuth and Ann Spangler) and “Women of the Bible” (by Ann Spangler and Jean E. Syswerda) are about Bible characters. Each daily reading is about one particular character. Several Christian publishing companies have produced devotional Bibles. The One-Year Bible by Tyndale House Publishers arranges passages according to the dates in which they are to be read.

### **Memorising scripture**

Memorising Scripture is important because we may sometimes find ourselves in circumstances where we are in need of input from the Bible, but no Bible is available. It is also a good way of internalising the word of God so that we can meditate on it.

When Jesus was fasting in the wilderness for forty days, He overcame Satan’s temptation by quoting Scripture:

#### **Matthew 4:1-11**

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. <sup>6</sup>"If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 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." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

How to memorise a verse:

- Prepare a Scripture memory card – Write down the verse on a card (including Scripture reference). This facilitates the process of memorising as the Scripture memory card is useful for quick reference.
- Memorise the Scripture reference – This obvious step helps us to know which part of the Bible the verse is found in.
- Read through the verse several times – This helps us to get the details of the verse into our minds.
- Recite the verse without referring – This is the first step at memorising the details of the verse.
- Correct mistakes – We look at the verse to in order to identify and correct any mistakes. We should repeat the reciting and correction steps until there are no more mistakes
- Periodic review – When we are able to recite the verse without making any mistakes, it does not necessarily mean that we have memorised it. We have merely stored it into our short-term memory. In order to move the verse from short to long-term memory, we need to periodically review it. This means at specific intervals, we try memorising the verse. When we repeat this over a period of time, we will be able to store the verse in our long-term memory.

## SESSION 4:

# STUDYING THE BIBLE BY BOOKS AND PASSAGES

The Bible is a collection of many books: 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament. Books are the natural division of the Bible. There are many ways of studying the Bible, such as the study of characters or topics. These methods have their own benefits, but studying the Bible by books helps us to be more balanced as Christians and to see the Bible as a whole. In this topic, we will learn to study the Bible by books and by passages, which are sub-sets of books.

## Invest in good Bible study tools

Bible study tools us to get into the Bible and study it by providing for us in-depth information that are either not obvious from looking at the Bible passage or cannot be founding by reading the Bible. Bible study tools are not meant to replace studying the Bible for ourselves. It is worth investing in a good basic library of Bible study tools.

### Basics tools needed

#### Study Bible

- Choose a comprehensive one that is useful for personal study - a good system of cross-references and margin notes.
- Practically, choose a NIV version as many other tools are also available in that version.
- Examples: NIV Study Bible, Quest Study Bible, Archaeological Study Bible

#### Bible Dictionary and/or Bible Encyclopaedia

- A Bible dictionary explains many of the words, topics, customs and traditions in the Bible as well as gives historical, geographical, cultural and archaeological information. Background material is also given for each book of the Bible and short biographies of major people in the Bible may also be presented.
- A Bible encyclopaedia is like the above but it is more expanded and gives more details.
- Example: New Bible Dictionary

#### Bible Handbook

- This is a combination of an encyclopaedia and a commentary in a concise form. They give background notes, a brief running commentary and may include maps, charts and other helpful facts. It is used for quick reference while reading through a particular book of the Bible.
- Example: Halley's Bible Handbook, Willmington's Bible Handbook

#### Online Tools

- These are Bible study tools available online for free or downloadable.
- Example: [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com), [www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org), [www.bibleocean.com](http://www.bibleocean.com), [www.e-sword.net](http://www.e-sword.net)

### Advanced tools

#### Recent Bible Translations and Paraphrases

- 2 approaches to translation – formal equivalence/literal (render the text word-for-word) and dynamic equivalence (translate the meaning of the original in such a way that the target language wording will trigger the same impact in its hearers that the original wording had upon its hearers).
- A paraphrase is what one person believes the original says – not recommended for Bible study.
- Examples of literal translation: New King James Version, New American Standard Bible.
- Example of dynamic equivalence – New International Version, New Revised Standard Version.
- Example of paraphrase – The Message, New Living Translation, Living Bible.

## Exhaustive Concordance

- A concordance is a bible index of the Bible words; some Bibles have a condensed one.
- An “exhaustive” concordance lists every usage of every word in the Bible and gives all the references where that word may be found.
- Examples: Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance, NASB Exhaustive Concordance, Young’s Analytical Concordance to the Bible.

## Topical Bible

- This is like a concordance except it categorises the verses by topics instead of words.
- Example: Nave’s Topical Bible.

## Commentary

- This is a scholarly collection of explanatory notes and interpretations on the text of a particular Bible book or section.
- The best way to use a commentary is to refer to it AFTER you have done your OWN study, using it to check your own findings with those of the commentators.
- Example: Tyndale Commentaries, NIV Commentary (2 volumes).

## Bible Software

- This is usually extensive containing various translations of the Bibles, commentaries, dictionaries, sermons, devotionals and bible studies.
- Example: Bibleworks, Logos Bible Software, QuickVerse, ILumina.

Other tools: individual commentaries on Bible books, Bible atlas, and Old and New Testament surveys.

## **Find the background information of the book**

After selecting a book of the Bible to study, one of the first things we need to do is to find the important background information. This would help us to better understand and appreciate the book. It would also help us to be more accurate in our subsequent interpretation.

Some important background information:

- Who is the author?
- Who are the recipients?
- Who are the main characters involved in the passage?
- When was the passage written?
- Where was the passage written?
- What was the purpose for writing?
- What was the historical context of the passage?

Some Bibles have summaries at the beginning of each book to give us background information. We can also find background information from Bible study tools like: Study Bibles, Bible handbooks, Bible dictionaries or encyclopaedias, online tools and software.

## **Divide the book into passages**

After finding the background information of a book, the next step is to identify the passages. Passages are natural divisions of the Bible and they contain a thought. Studying the Bible by passages is therefore a reasonable method of studying the Bible. It also helps to break down the study of whole books or chapters of the Bible into more manageable chunks, thus making Bible study less intimidating for beginners.

Some Bibles divide the book or chapter according to passages (or paragraphs). Identifying passages helps us to know where to study. A passage may consist of a few verses, and may even be spread over more than one chapter in the Bible.

The best way to start off is to read the entire book in one sitting. It is often helpful to read through the book several times (at least three times) in order to get an overview of it and to get an idea of how the thoughts flow. After that, identifying the passages would be easier.

### **Summarise the passage**

After selecting a passage a passage to study, we need to read through it thoroughly first, then we do a summary of the passage. A summary is a brief r sum  of the passage. We should ensure that we include all parts of the passage in proper balance, not giving too much space to one part while overlooking other parts. Our summary should include all the important points and must be briefly, but clearly stated using our own words.

### **Go into the details of the passage**

This step will help us to get the treasures of what God is trying to communicate to us through His word. There are several things that we need to take note of when we go into the details of the passage.

#### Identify repeated words

In the Bible, words that are repeated are words that are important because they emphasise something. When we encounter words that are repeated or highlighted in any way, we should find out the meaning of such words from a Bible dictionary and also find out the reason why these words are repeated.

#### Ask probing questions about the passage

By simply reading the passage, we can discover many things that are very obvious. However, certain things are not so obvious, and they require us to probe deeper in order to find the meaning of the passage. We therefore need to have an inquisitive mind to ask probing questions in order to find out things that are not so obvious in the passage. In such situations, we would commonly ask "Why" questions. For example:

- Why did the author/character in the passage mention about a certain incident?
- Why did the author/character in the passage use a certain word?
- Why did things happen in such a way?

#### Interpret the passage literally

Certain writings of the Bible employ word pictures like symbols, metaphors and similes in order to convey the meaning to readers in a graphic manner, but these are exceptions. Whenever allegory, parables, or other literary devices are used to communicate His Word, they would be presented to us in a very clear manner.

A major part of the Bible is written in a literal manner. The majority of events, places and things in the Bible are real and actual events that took place in history, not mythical or allegorical stories. When we study a Bible passage, we should therefore study it literally, looking for the single meaning of the passage. We should let the passage speak for itself and seek to understand what the author intended to communicate to the original recipients.

#### Take note of the context of the passage

We should never take a Scripture out of its context to make it say what we want it to say. We should instead look at context first from the perspective of the book being studied, the overall chapter, the paragraph, and the sentence. Try to stay away from giving individual words or meanings that reinterpret sentences, paragraphs, etc.

#### Seek the full counsel of God's Word

We should never solely base our interpretation of the passage on one or two verses, or on an obscure passage of Scripture. We should instead ensure that our interpretation is consistent throughout the whole Bible. This practice is based on the principle that Scripture never contradicts Scripture. Some Bibles have cross-references on the side margins or centre-columns. These cross-references refer us to other related passages of scripture so that we can check them for consistency. Some Bibles also

have footnotes that indicate other verses utilising the same words or phrases as that used in the passage we are studying. We can make use of these footnotes to compare and contrast how the words or phrases are used in other passages.

### **Come up with personal applications from the passage**

God gave us the Bible not so that we could increase in knowledge, but so that our lives could be cleansed and transformed. Application is therefore the most important part of Bible study. The objective of Bible study is really to move from the Bible into our lives and to make the Word an integral part of us. If we fail to apply what we learnt from the passage, we have really missed the point of Bible study. For this step, we need to ask ourselves the following questions: "What does it mean to me personally? What truths can I put into practice? What changes should I make to my life?"

#### Meditate on the passage

In Joshua 1:8, God commanded Joshua to meditate on the Word of the Law (God's word) day and night so that he would be prosperous and successful. In the same way, when Christians meditate on the word of God, they will reap great benefits.

According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, meditation refers to *engaging in contemplation or reflection, focusing one's thoughts on something*. If we meditate on God's word, we are allowing His love, commands, encouragement and values to rub on to us. When done for long enough, this would result in inner transformation that is reflected in the way we live our lives. We can meditate on God's word in the following suggested way:

Prayer: We commit to God the time of reflection, asking the Holy Spirit to open our spiritual eyes so that we may gain understanding and refreshment from the word of God.

Active involvement: We imagine ourselves to be one or more of the characters in the passage, or the author or the recipients of the writing. We can also imagine the things they were going through and the emotions they were experiencing. This helps us to be personally involved in the passage and to appreciate it better.

Personalisation: We personalise the passage by thinking about how each command, promise, example and word of encouragement etc applies to us.

#### Write down personal applications

The next thing to do is to think about what we will do about what we have read and meditated on in the passage. We allow the Holy Spirit to examine our lives and bring to our attention how the passage can apply to various areas of our lives. After that, we write out specific applications to our lives. Examples of how to find applications from the passage:

- Is there a Sin to confess?
- Is there a Promise to claim?
- Is there an Attitude to change?
- Is there a Command to obey?
- Is there an Example to follow?
- Is there a Prayer to pray?
- Is there an Error to avoid?
- Is there a Truth to believe?
- Is there Something to thank God for?

Our applications must be specific enough to be checked by our spouses, friends, or ourselves. If the applications we write are vague, we are unlikely to experience much life transformation. Examples of applications that are too general are: "I need to witness more, study the Bible more, pray more," etc. We should state specifically what God is leading us to do to get His truth into our lives. For example, if I discover that I am weak in spending devotional time with God, my application would be as follows: *I have been spending devotional time with God only 1-2 days per week. From this week onwards, I will spend devotional time with God for all seven days of the week for at least 15 minutes per day.* After meditating on the passage and writing down our application points, we end off in prayer, committing to God our personal applications and asking Him to help us obey His word.

### **Subsequent studies**

After studying a passage (ie summarising, going into details and coming up with applications), the next thing to do is to repeat the process with subsequent passages. An important thing to take note of is that a passage must always be related to the one before it or the one after it. When we study a passage in relation to the surrounding passages, it helps us to interpret the passage in its proper context.