

## The Bible: A Brief Introduction to Key Terms and Concepts

1. Bible is from the Greek word *biblion* meaning book, a word derived from the Phoenician city Byblos which exported papyrus from which paper for books was made. The term can be used to refer to the sacred writings of any religion, including Judaism's reference to the Old Testament (OT).
  - a. The Bible: coined in the medieval ages for the sacred writings of the OT & New Testament (NT).
  - b. The Scripture(s): meaning "writing(s)," is the historic Judeo-Christian name for the specific literature that the church embraces as divine instruction.
  
2. Biblical authority refers to the trustworthiness of the truth and teaching of the Scriptures, resulting from the Divine authorship, that should instruct and direct Christians in matters of faith and practice.

*Consider--on what basis do you decide what to believe and how to behave?*

  - Reason/intellect: "as I have thought about this, I concluded..."
  - Emotion/sentiment: "I feel that..." or "I sense that..."
  - Anthropology/sociological survey: "the majority of people prefer ..."
  - History/precedent: "we have always done it that way"
  - God's revelation: God has communicated through the prophets, Jesus and the Bible. God's involvement is the basis for the Bible's continuing authority to shape our lives! (John 17:17 "your word is truth.")
  
3. Revelation refers to the disclosing of something previously hidden or unknown. In Christian theology, it is the activity of God to make known His identity, power and will so that we can respond.
  - a. General revelation: affirms that God indicates His existence in a wide variety of universally available ways, such as in nature, the human conscience, the moral impulse, and our religious nature (see Ps. 19 and Rom. 1:20). These alert us to God's existence but are insufficient for restoring our lost relationship with God.
  - b. Special revelation has the unique role of calling people to a renewed relationship with God and communicating the solution to our sin and separation.
    - i. Jesus Christ (the Word Incarnate): In John 1:14, we are told: "The Word became flesh." Jesus is the ultimate miracle. He taught about God's Kingdom and through His death and resurrection he established the way for salvation.
    - ii. The Scripture (the Word inscripturated) is the written preservation of God's historical and verbal communication of His work, will and ways. God continues to work through it!
  
4. Grace Chapel's Article of Faith #1—The Bible (regarded as a historic and orthodox Christian understanding):
  - *We believe that the Bible, consisting of sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, was given by Divine inspiration and is the Word of God (2 Tim. 3: 16-17; 2 Peter 1: 19-21; 1 Thes. 2: 13).*
  - *That it constitutes the only perfect rule and final authority in all matters pertaining to Christian faith and practice (Acts 17:11; Isaiah 8:20).*
  
5. Inspiration is the process or means by which the Scripture is "God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16, "All Scripture is God-breathed..."). While it is a product of the Creator-Spirit's work, the Spirit chose to work through the instruments of human beings, but rarely through mechanical forms of dictation and transcription.
  - Usually it was written by people who were addressing special concerns and who reflected their personality and historical context (and even occasionally quoted other sources). At the same time the human authors had the benefit, often unconsciously, of being moved, guided and superintended by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit carried along the writers as they wrote, as the wind carries a ship along the sea (image in 2 Peter 1:21).
  - The Scriptures are the collaboration of the Divine and the human, of the perfect God and of redeemed but imperfect people, thus having a dual nature. Exactly how that works we can't explain, as it entails mystery. Yet, both the OT and NT view the words of Scripture as God's own words.
  
6. Canon of Scripture is the list of books recognized as worthy to be included in the sacred writings of the worshipping community. The 39 OT books and the 27 NT books were gathered and recognized as one

collection, forming the Bible. FF Bruce points out that “Authority precedes canonicity.” The church’s early and devoted usage of these books reflected the respect and role credited to them.

- The word “canon” (initially meant rod, rule or measuring stick, but also came to mean list) appears to have been first used referring to a NT list by Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, in a letter circulated in 367 AD.
- The OT books were written roughly over a 1000 year period, about 1400-400 BC. The 3 part division of the Law, the Prophets and the Writings comprised the 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestinian canon, the Bible of Jesus, who presupposed its divine authority (for example, Matt. 4:4 and Deut. 8:3).
- The 27 books of the NT were all written within 2 generations of Jesus--all by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century.
- The 4 NT Gospels were combined in one continuous harmony and circulated by Tatian in 165 AD.
- Paul’s letters were circulated as a collection, not singularly, from the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century onward.
- By 200 AD, Irenaeus and other church leaders had a well-established canon of OT and NT books (all NT books except Hebrews and Revelation) for both teaching the church and warding off various heresies.
- The 3 qualifications for NT canonicity were: a) widely accepted and used in worship gatherings, b) provided spiritual insight, and c) written or authorized by closest companions of Jesus, his apostles.
- Contrary to “popularized notions,” the pressure on the church to firm up its canon did not come from a desire to present a socially or politically acceptable theology, but rather from cults who pedaled rival lists.
- 15 books, called the Apocrypha by Protestants and the Deuterocanonical books by Roman Catholics, appeared between 300 and 100 BC. Jerome and Luther denied them sacred status but regarded them as valuable. They have great importance for understanding Judaism in the several centuries before Jesus.

7. The original biblical texts, historical reliability and “textual criticism”

- Original texts: please don’t despair that we don’t have any of the original biblical texts. The truth is that we have a wealth of well-preserved historical documentation (more than 5000 Greek manuscripts of the NT in part or in whole). The most important go back to 350 AD, and some portions go back before 150 AD.
- This is in stark contrast to other highly regarded ancient historical works:
  - Caesar’s *Gallic War* (written near 50 BC)—only 9 or 10 good texts exist, of which the oldest is 900 years later.
  - Tacitus’ *Histories* and *Annals* (written near 100 AD)—depend entirely on two manuscripts, one from the 9<sup>th</sup> century and the other from the 11<sup>th</sup> century.
  - *The History of Thucydides* (c. 460-400 BC) is known to us from eight texts, the earliest belonging to around 900 AD.
- Textual criticism: Since we don’t have the original copies and there are some differences among the later copies, the work of text criticism is to determine the original text in those places where manuscripts are not all in agreement. This is *usually* relatively easy, given the number of manuscripts that can be compared in light of well-established principles of textual criticism (this is NOT similar to the highly toxic “higher criticism” of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that arose from faulty philosophic and naturalistic assumptions).

8. Translations: Unless you are reading your Bible in the original languages (Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic) you are using a translation, of which there are 4 common types.

- a. Word for word (“essentially literal”) versions, which strive to translate the exact words of the original-language text. i.e. ESV, NASV, NKJV, KJV, RSV and NRSV.
- b. Thought for thought (dynamic equivalence) versions, which seek to reproduce the ideas of the original text in ways that a modern speaker would say them. i.e. NLT, CEV, NCV and GNB.
- c. Paraphrase versions, which try to find creative new ways to express the general idea of the verse. i.e. The Message, The Living Bible and Phillips’ NTME.
- d. Mixed version (i.e. NIV and TNIV) combines word for word and thought for thought.

9. Bible study (and interpretation): Good, basic Bible study begins with good, basic, intelligent reading skills that lead to comprehension. But then it moves to obedience, for the goal is to apply the principles of Scripture to real life. Here are 3 basic steps, plus a 4<sup>th</sup> step that needs to be pursued frequently:

- a. Observation: what does it say? Look closely at the words, phrases and composition to accurately grasp the content. What do you learn about the context?
- b. Interpretation: what does it mean? What did it mean “then and there” and what does it mean “here and now”? Are there key concepts or principles that have enduring, transferable meaning? (Hermeneutics seeks to establish the principles and methods of interpretation.)

- c. Application: what difference does it make? Are there changes to one's life that need to occur? It is here that the Holy Spirit can supply courage and transformative power.  
(and sometimes) d. Correlation: what other biblical passages relate?
10. Bibliography—suggested materials
- o How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, Zondervan, 1981.
  - o The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable? F. F. Bruce, IVP, 1968.
  - o The Canon of Scripture, F. F. Bruce, InterVarsity Press, 1988.
  - o Grasping God's Word: A Hands-on Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible, J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, Zondervan, 2001.
  - o The Last Word, N. T. Wright, Harper 2005.
  - o Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense, N. T. Wright, HarperCollins, 2006.