



“Understanding the Bible”

Section 1: What is the Bible?

Unit 1.1: Beginning with the Basics



I) Introduction to the Class

- This Biblical Basis class is entitled “*Understanding the Bible*,” and we will seek during this study to cover with a broad brush stroke the most frequently asked questions about God’s Holy Word.
- This study will start with the essential facts of Scripture and develop into a more comprehensive picture each week. This approach will enable new believers to follow along while mature believers are still challenged. The class will also be taught in five (5) total sections: Section 1 – *What is the Bible?*; Section 2 – *How Did We Get the Bible?*; Section 3 – *What is the Message of the Bible?*; Section 4 – *Why Can We Trust the Bible?*; and Section 5 – *How Should We Read the Bible?* Each section will have several units, and one unit will be taught during each one-hour session together.

II) Basic Biblical Facts & Figures

- Let us begin this study by stating the obvious: *The Holy Bible is the most fascinating book in human history*. Its facts, figures, and nature clearly set it apart from any book ever written. Here is just a basic numeral look at the surprising substance of the Bible according to *Wilmington’s Guide to the Bible*:
 Total Books of the Protestant Bible: **66**; Books in the Old Testament: **39**;
 Books in the New Testament: **27**; Shortest Book in the Bible: **2 John**;
 Longest Book in the Bible: **Psalms**; Total Chapters in the Bible: **1,189**;
 Chapters in the Old Testament: **929**; Chapters in the New Testament: **260**;
 Middle Chapter of the Bible: **Psalm 117**; Shortest Chapter in the Bible: **Psalm 117**;
 Longest Chapter in the Bible: **Psalm 119**; Total Verses in the Bible: **31,173**;
 Verses in the Old Testament: **23,214**; Verses in the New Testament: **7,959**;
 Shortest Verse in the Bible: **John 11:35**; Longest Verse in the Bible: **Esther 8:9**;
 Approximate Total Words in the Original Biblical Manuscripts: **600,000**;
 Approximate Total Words in Today’s English Bible: **800,000**;
 Approximate Total Time Period the Bible was Written: **More than 1,500 Years**;
 Continents the Bible was Written On: **3 (Africa, Asia, Europe)**;
 Original Languages the Bible was Originally Written In: **3 (Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic)**;
 Approximate Total of Unique Biblical Authors: **More than 40**
- In addition to these remarkable facts, what makes the Bible so transcendent is its combination of *unity* through *diversity*. It has a unified theme (revelation of God, salvation through faith in Jesus Christ) while remaining diverse with its authors (kings, prophets, philosophers, fisherman, farmers, shepherds, poets, scholars, priests, physicians, statesmen, tent-makers), the places they wrote from (wilderness, dungeons, palaces), the times they wrote in (war, desolation, peace, prosperity, restoration), and the moods they were in as they wrote (joy, despair, inspiration, defeat, hope).

III) Scaling the Biblical Structure

- At the most basic level, the Bible is separated into two sections: The Old Testament and the New Testament. The word “testament” refers to a contract or covenant between God and man. The old covenant represents the mosaic law that God established with Israel, and the new covenant represents the church that God established through the sacrificial death and supernatural resurrection of Jesus Christ. Each book is organized in chapters (big numbers) and verses (small numbers) for ease of reference. Also, it is important to note that the Bible is not arranged chronologically. Instead, it is organized according to genre, author, and even book length from longest to shortest in some areas.

- Here is a helpful overview of biblical genres in the order they are placed in the biblical canon:
 - Law** (5) – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy (a.k.a. “The Pentateuch)
 - History** (12) – Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther
 - Poetry & Wisdom** (5) – Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon (a.k.a. Song of Songs)
 - Major Prophets** (5) – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel
 - Minor Prophets** (12) – Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi,
 - Gospels & Acts** (5) – Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts
 - Pauls Letters** (13) – Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon
 - General Letters** (8) – Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude
 - Apocalyptic** (1) – Revelation (NOTE: Daniel has apocalyptic content but is listed as a major prophet)

IV) Identifying the Biblical Authors

- Ultimately, God is the founding author of Scripture. However, through the inspiration of His anointing Holy Spirit, He divinely guided more than 40 different human authors from diverse backgrounds to contribute to the biblical books. Moses was a shepherd; Solomon was a king; Isaiah was a prophet; Ezra was a priest; Matthew was a tax-collector; Luke was a physician; John was a fisherman; and Paul was a Pharisee, scholar, and tent-maker. Despite these authors writing over the span of 15 centuries from three different continents in three different languages, there remains no contradiction in the one unified message of God’s revelation to mankind culminating in the life and work of Jesus Christ.

V) Tracing the Biblical Timeline

- Although the following dates are approximated by biblical historians, below is a helpful timeline of major shifts in God’s eternal plan as it unfolds in Scripture according to the *Holman Illustrated Bible Handbook*: 1) Prologue: Creation, Fall, Promise of Salvation; 2) God Builds His Nation (2000-931 BC); 3) God Educates His Nation (931 BC – 586 BC); 4) God Keeps a Faithful Remnant (586-6 BC); 5) God Purchases Redemption and Begins the Kingdom (6 BC to AD 30); 6) God Spreads the Kingdom Through the Church (AD 30 – Present); 7) God Consummates Redemption and Confirms His Eternal Kingdom (Future); 8) Epilogue: New Heaven and New Earth (Eternity).

VI) Searching for Biblical Symbols

- To understand the nature and blessing of the Bible, let us take a closer look at the symbols that Scripture uses to describe itself. The Bible claims to be a **lamp** that lights our path (Psalm 119:105), the spiritual **milk** we need to grow in faith (1 Peter 2:2), a **sword** to use in the battle of spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:17), and a **seed** that bears fruit in the mind and heart of a believer (Luke 8:11).

VII) Mapping out the Biblical Message

- The reason that **John 3:16** is such a popular verse is because it sums up the entire message of the Bible. It says *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”* In these few words we see God’s power as Creator, God’s love for His creation, God’s holiness that demands atonement for creation’s sin, and God’s Son Jesus Christ who sacrificially accomplishes this atonement and offers salvation to whoever will have faith in Him.

VIII) Taking a Biblical Stance

- As Southern Baptists we are known as “people of the book,” and we are not shy about our stance on the authority of Scripture. According to the Baptist Faith & Message 2000, we believe that the Holy Bible is *“divinely inspired”* as *“God’s revelation of Himself to man.”* We also believe the Bible is a *“perfect treasure of divine instruction”* because *“it has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter.”* Due to its character, we believe the Bible is *“the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried.”*