

Journey of Faith



In Short:

- The Bible has a unique history and nature.
- Scripture is the inspired word of God.
- Scripture must be interpreted carefully.



same message but focused on issues specific to the parish's Spanish-speaking community.

At the end of the weekend, the young priest marveled at how the pastor had brought the message of God's love to each one of the diverse groups in the way that best met them where they were in life.

The Bible was written with this same purpose in mind: sharing God's truth with every kind of Christian. The Bible:

- Delivers important truths about God.
- Tells us about the history of our faith and our **salvation history**.
- Reveals God's promise of everlasting life.

Like the parish pastor did in the story, the Bible's task is to deliver God's message of love to many different groups of people; in fact, *to all people for all ages!* You may be very familiar with the Bible, or you may only have a passing knowledge of some of the stories. Either way, today is an opportunity to discover the Bible in a new way.

What Is the Bible?

The **Bible** is a collection of books and writings by many different authors. Many of these stories were passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth long before anyone wrote the stories down. When the stories were written down, the authors came from different backgrounds, so the books originated with a variety of languages. These stories, also called **Scriptures**, were all written for different reasons but have the common purpose to try to share the

The Bible

When the pastor of a southwest Colorado parish asked his newly ordained associate to be present with him at each of the weekend Masses, the new priest welcomed the idea. It would be a great way for him to get a glimpse of the diverse groups of people he would be serving.

The youth choir led the music at the Saturday evening Mass for an assembly largely made up of young people, many of whom came with their friends. At the beginning of his homily, the pastor had the entire church laughing with a humorous story. Then he related the Gospel reading directly to the lives of young people.

At the 8 AM Mass on Sunday morning, the pastor led a senior and middle-aged assembly in the singing of traditional hymns. While the pastor's homily stressed the same truths, he was brief and took a no-frills approach.

The celebration at 10 AM was a different experience as well. The assembly of old and young prayed and sang in both Spanish and English.

There was much handholding and hugging among the gathered faithful. The homily also stressed the

story of God's relationship with his people. The story of our faith and of our relationship with the one, true God is also called our salvation history.

How Is the Bible Divinely Inspired?

When we say the books of the Bible were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, or **divinely inspired**, we mean that God in some way influenced the work of the authors. That doesn't mean God dictated the books word for word to biblical authors. It means that the authors allowed the Holy Spirit to work through them. Through these authors, God shares with us what we need to know for our salvation, our eternal life with God.

The Catholic Church believes that readers of the Bible must keep the meaning or purpose of a particular passage in mind rather than accepting every passage as literal fact. The Church, with the help of Scripture scholars, makes a distinction between truth and fact. While the Bible is **inerrant** (without mistakes) with regard to the truths it teaches because it has been divinely inspired, everything in the Bible is not fact.

For example, Genesis is not meant to be read as a scientific description of creation. It was a profession of faith in the goodness of God and his creation. These are the truths we learn from the first several chapters of Genesis:

- God created the world.
- Everything God created was good.
- Man and woman were created in the image and likeness of God.
- Man and woman are the caretakers, or stewards, of God's magnificent creation.
- God's love for man and woman is perfect.

How Is the Bible Organized?

The Bible is divided into the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word **testament** means "agreement" or "covenant." The Old Testament is a collection of sacred writings about the covenant between God and our Jewish ancestors in faith, the Israelites. These books were written over a period of about 900 years, and they record important events and experiences of the Israelite people as they come to know Yahweh, the one true God.

The New Testament is about God's covenant—through Jesus Christ—with God's people. The New Testament doesn't replace the Old Testament, it's the continuation and fulfillment. That's why it can be hard to fully grasp the meaning of the New Testament without knowledge of the Old Testament.

Read Exodus 19:3–8.

- *What did God promise our ancestors in faith in this covenant?*



The Old Testament

The books of the Old Testament can be grouped to help us understand the journey of God's Chosen People. Each book has a particular purpose and was written in a unique style. There are forty-six books in the Old Testament of the *New American Bible*, revised edition (also called the NABRE).

- The **Pentateuch** ("five books" in Greek), is the first five books of the Old Testament. It is sometimes called the **Torah**, meaning "Law." While Moses is said to be the author of the Torah, these books come from many generations of oral tradition and tell us about the journey of the Israelites to become the people of God through Abraham.
- The **Historical Books** contain poetry, proverbs, and songs, all of which study the meaning of life. They look at the same issues we struggle with today: human suffering, human destiny, good and evil, and right and wrong.
- The **Prophetic Books**, through divine inspiration, speak for God about important situations facing the Israelites. The prophets often speak of the need for repentance and the coming of the Messiah.

Read Hebrews 10:15–18.

- *What are some of the promises of the new covenant?*



The New Testament

After the resurrection of Jesus, his followers spread the good news by preaching. There were several years of oral tradition before the early Christians preserved their words in writing. By the end of the first century after Christ, nearly every one of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament were written.

- The **four Gospels** are portraits of Jesus that come from different oral traditions and were written for different communities. Each gives us unique insight into the person Jesus.
- The **Acts of the Apostles** is an account of how the early Christian communities lived and grew.
- The **thirteen Pauline epistles**, or letters, and the **Book of Hebrews** are attributed to St. Paul or his followers.
- The **seven Catholic letters** are attributed to other apostles.
- The **Book of Revelation** was composed as a message of hope for Christians who were being persecuted. It is often misinterpreted as a prediction of the future, but its actual purpose was and is to comfort Christians with the promise of Christ's ultimate victory over suffering and evil.

How Do We Find Out the Meaning of Biblical Passages?

The first thing we do is look at context, when something was written, and the surrounding text. When verses from the Bible are interpreted without looking at these elements, we risk taking them out of context and misunderstanding them.

We must also understand the time and culture of the biblical author. Remember that the biblical world was very different from our own; it must be studied and understood if the full message of the Bible is to come through. The parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32) becomes even more meaningful if we understand its context. While we realize the father in this story is a loving and forgiving man, the extent

of his love becomes even greater when we learn that upstanding men of Jesus' time never ran. Running was considered undignified and humiliating. This makes the father running to greet his son an even more powerful statement of unconditional love.

Knowing the literary form of a particular book of the Bible is also important. The Bible contains many literary forms: historical documentaries, epics, stories and parables, poems, hymns and songs, laws, letters, wisdom writing, prophecies, teachings, and prayers. Each form of writing has its own purpose and truth. If you can identify the form, it will help you understand the message God is communicating through the human author.

- *Can you recall a time when you were misunderstood because others failed to get the whole story or took something you said or did out of context?*



How Does the Church Help Us Understand the Bible?

Even with good knowledge of Scripture, we can sometimes be confused by passages that don't seem to fit in with Christ's message of love and forgiveness. When we take literary form and proper context into account, these passages make sense.

However, we must also realize that the faith of the Church grew and developed; it changed. The Old Testament and the New Testament were written over a period of about 1,000 years. Many of the Hebrews' teachings grew and developed as their knowledge of God became clearer. If we study the New Testament carefully, we can trace growth in the faith of the disciples as well.

As you become familiar with the Bible, you might find passages that contradict the faith we follow today. Church teachings are important because they help guide our knowledge of God as it is revealed through sacred Scripture.

The same Spirit that guided those original authors of Scripture enlightens us today as we seek the truth in God's word.

To find a book in the Bible, look at the table of contents in the front for the page number where the book begins. Then look for the chapter you want to read. Once you're in the right chapter, look for the verse number. Practice by looking for the verses below.

What do they tell you about faith or God?


Genesis 2:2

Psalm 8:2

1 Corinthians 13:4–8

Mark 10:13

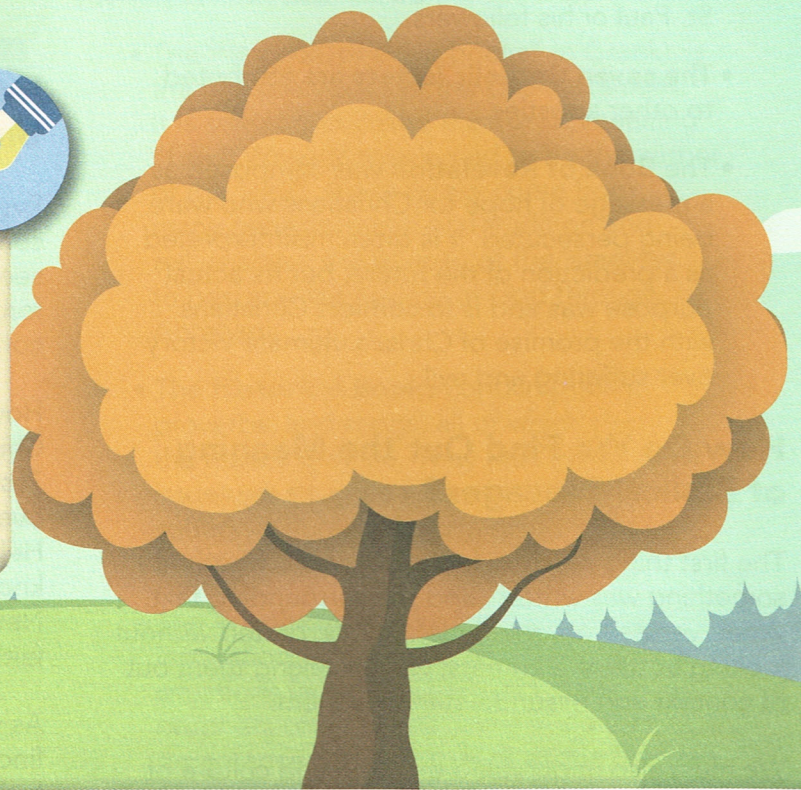
Luke 19:1–10



Reflect on one of your favorite Bible stories or passages. If you know how to locate it in your Bible, read it over again.

How do you interpret the passage?

Can the truth found in this passage be applied to your life today? How?



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