

Name: _____ Due: _____

Lesson 1: What is the Bible, How Was It Written, and Why Can We Trust It?

DF_NT1_The_Bible (Zion Free Lutheran Church, Tioga, ND)



After completing the lesson the student will be able to:

- Understand what the Bible is and how it was written
- Know the unifying theme of Scripture
- Know some of the common objections to the Bible and responses to them

WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

The word “bible” comes from the Greek word “biblia”, which means *book*. **Very simply put, the Bible is God’s Holy and Inspired Word.** 2 Timothy 3:15-16 says,

"and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness."

This means that the words in the Bible are all God’s, but that He used men to write them down. **God ‘breathed’ the words through men.** The Bible was written by men by the inspiration and direction of the Holy Spirit. This is an incredible truth! What you hold in your hand is God’s Word to all of us. Furthermore, since it has been inspired (breathed out) by God Himself, and since God cannot lie, we know that His Word is completely true. For this reason, we can have complete trust and confidence that what it teaches is good and true.

The Bible is unlike any other book; it is written by **40 different authors** over a period of some **1600 years**. It describes both the beginning and the end of time. It contains the world’s most wonderful love story—God’s love of man. This is God’s own testimony, where He reveals Himself to us. Christians believe not only that the Bible *contains* God’s Word, but that it *is* God’s Word: Every word of Scripture is inspired by God Himself. Martin Luther stated it well, **“You must deal with Scripture in such a way that you think just as God Himself has spoken.”**

1. What Greek word do we get the word "Bible" from?
2. Simply put, what is the bible?
3. How would you respond if someone told you that "The Bible only *contains* God's Word."?

WHAT IS THE COMPOSITION OF THE BIBLE?

The Bible can be divided into 2 major sections, the *Old Testament* and *New Testament*. **The word testament means covenant.** It is a word describing an agreement or contract between two parties.

The Old Testament is composed of 39 books and contains the account of God and His people from the Creation of the earth to some 400 years before Christ's birth. It is full of history, poetry, prophecy, and law. **The Old Testament believer's hope was in a promise that God made to His children– God promised that a Messiah would come to deliver them and then reign with righteousness.**

The New Testament contains 27 books and letters written over a period of approximately 60 years (between the 30s A.D to the early 90's A.D.). It gives accounts of many people and events, but **it concerns itself with a single person in particular. That person is Jesus Christ!** The New Testament can be simply divided into the Gospels, history, and epistles.

4. How many books are in the Old Testament? What is the promise God made His children in the Old Testament?
5. How many books are in the New Testament? What single person does the New Testament concern itself with?

THE THEME OF SCRIPTURE

It is important to remember that both the Old and New Testaments are both equally God's Word. The crucial difference is that **the Old Testament looks *ahead to Jesus*, and the New Testament looks *back to Jesus***. But the "thread" of Jesus Christ is what unites the Old and New Testaments together, and we must not forget that fact. The Bible is not just good advice or instructions to live a moral life (although it also teaches us these things). **The unifying theme of scripture is, first and foremost, *the story of God saving humanity in Christ Jesus*.**

The Old Testament describes the *covenant* between God and the people of Israel ("covenant" = "testament"). They were to be His special people. Israel was to serve and worship God alone. In response to God's love and care, His people (Israel) were to live in obedience and faith to God's laws and His ways. **But as we see time and time again in Scripture, Israel failed to love and obey God with their whole heart, soul, mind, and strength.**

But a new hope entered in with a new covenant. **This new covenant is described in the pages of the New Testament, and is made possible through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.** Israel was unable to obey God's laws perfectly, but Jesus perfectly obeyed all of them, fulfilling God's covenant for us. It is because of His perfect obedience that we have eternal life offered to us. **This message -- Christ's life, His death, and His resurrection in order that we may receive eternal life -- is the *good news* of the New Testament.** In fact, the reason why the first 4 books of the New Testament are called *the Gospels* is because **"the Gospel" also means "good news."** The four Gospels describe events, teachings, and effects of Jesus' life here on earth, all of which are *good news*!

6. What is the unifying theme of Scripture?

COMMON OBJECTIONS TO THE BIBLE

Objection #1: The Bible has been copied so many times, it's unreliable.

Our Bible was written centuries ago, but its truth is eternal and applies to all of time. We do not actually have any of the original documents penned by Moses, Paul, or any of the others, but we do have copies of the originals. We call these copies *manuscripts*. **Sometimes skeptics (people that doubt the truth of the Bible) say that the copies have changed so much from the originals that you really cannot trust the Bible.** But a search of the evidence proves the skeptics wrong.

Homer's *Iliad* and Julius Caesar's *Caesar's War Commentaries* are probably some of the best documented works, and were written relatively close to the time of the new testament. Did you know that we have many more copies of the New Testament than either of these other works? **We have 10 known copies (or manuscripts) of *Caesar's War Commentaries*, and 643 of the *Iliad*. But when it comes to copies of the New Testament, we have over 31,000 ancient New Testament manuscripts!** Further, the earliest New Testament manuscripts can be dated from 35-60 years from the actual events they describe. In comparison, 500 years lapsed between Homer and the first copy we have of his work, and some 950 years for the work of Julius Caesar.

Another interesting fact about these documents is their accurate copying. Since no automated printing presses existed in biblical times, all documents had to be copied by hand. By comparing the manuscripts to one another we can determine how much the text is distorted or changed. **The *Iliad* has 764 lines that are different, which is a 5% distortion rate. That means that in one of every 20 lines we are unsure of what Homer exactly wrote.**

How about the Bible and its 24,000+ copies? **In the entire New Testament, there are 40 lines that are distorted, or 1/5 of 1% (.2%). That means that 99.98% of the text is the same, which is 25 times better than the *Iliad*!** It is also important to know that in the .2% of lines distorted, all are related to numbers, names, and other items that in NO WAY affect Christian doctrine, practice, or the history of the New Testament. Do not allow anyone to tell you the Bible is not a reliable historical document! It is by far the *most reliable* of any ancient document from around that time period.

Objection #2: Jesus being God was added much later

We have documentation that eyewitnesses of events from the New Testament were still alive when sections of the books and letters of the Bible were being copied and shared with others. **This is important because it means that certain claims, such as Jesus's claim to be God, were not added later but were claims of the earliest Christians.** In addition to the Bible, there are also external verifications of this by a Jewish Historian named Josephus, as well as a letter we have of a Roman ruler. **Neither were friendly to Christians, so the fact that they agree that Jesus claimed to be God is strong evidence that the eyewitnesses of Jesus were telling the truth.** In fact, it would be really hard to explain why the Jewish leadership would make plans with the Roman Authorities (who they hated) to kill Jesus, if Jesus had not actually claimed to be God.

Objection #3: The Apostles made it all up

We know from sources other than the Bible, like those mentioned before, that (1) Jesus was a real man, (2) that the Jews and Romans executed him, and (3) that there was an empty tomb three days later.

Still, people will argue that even if the Bible is the same as when the authors wrote it, and even if all the miracles and the resurrection were not added later, it just means that the Disciples made the whole thing up.

Here are 4 reasons it doesn't make sense the Disciples made it up:

1. The writers of the New Testament are **very open about their flaws**. If you are going to start a religion in which people must look to you to teach them about a deceased leader, would you portray yourself as a coward, ignorant, or oblivious? Because that's the way the disciples often look in the Gospel accounts.
 2. There were literally thousands of **witnesses who could have disproved the disciples' claims** about Jesus's teaching.
 3. Hundreds of **witnesses saw Jesus** after he rose from the dead.
 4. **Twelve out of Thirteen Apostles died for their faith**. The thirteenth Apostle, the Apostle John, was imprisoned on an island called Patmos. People will die for a lie they think is the truth, and people will die for a lie because of mental instability, but it is insane to think 13 men would throw away their lives, sometimes dying brutally, without a single one breaking under the pressure, and admitting it was all a lie, to save themselves.
7. Read Luke 24:25-27 & John 20:31. What is the primary point of Scripture? (In other words, what is the "thread" that holds all scripture together?)
8. The Bible is distinct in what it is and how it was written. According to 2 Timothy 3:15-16 and 2 Peter 1:21, what makes it distinct?
9. Have you ever heard anyone object to the Bible being true? If so, what were their objections, and how might you answer them?

10. Why does it matter that the Bible is true and is God's Word?

STUDENT & PARENT QUESTION: *for the student and a parent to discuss and answer together*

11. In this lesson, we talked about answers to “common objections to the Bible.” Talk about them together, and identify which of the answers/reasons is most helpful to you.

Student & Parent Signature: *By signing below, we affirm (1) this lesson is complete and that (2) we completed the “Student & Parent Questions” section together.*

Parent Signature: _____ Student Signature: _____