

SESSION 4 – THE BIBLE

PART 1 – *BREAKING OPEN THE WORD* (29<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME)

CHECK-IN FROM LAST SESSION

Questions, comments, concerns (in person and online)

MATTHEW 22.34-40 (THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT(S))

<sup>34</sup> When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered, <sup>35</sup> and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. <sup>36</sup> “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” <sup>37</sup> He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ <sup>38</sup> This is the greatest and first commandment. <sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ <sup>40</sup> On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

WHAT IS THIS GOSPEL READING TELLING US?

(1) WHAT DOES IT SAY ABOUT GOD?

(2) WHAT DOES IT SAY ABOUT US?

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN AND THE KINGDOM OF EARTH?

See also:

Exodus 20.1-17  
Deuteronomy 5.6-21

Mark 12.28-24  
Luke 10.25-28

PART 2 – THE BIBLE (PART 1)

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WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

There is a lot in a name. The word *Bible* comes from the Greek word *ta biblia* and the Latin word *biblia*. Translated it means “the books” or “the little books.” Both imply then that it is a collection of several books collected into one. You might recognize the Greek and Latin roots in a similar word (the *library*).

Some fun facts about the *Bible*. It is, by a far margin, the most published book in human history. In the last half century, there have been nearly 4 billion copies (3.9 billion). Its closest competitors in the same period (roughly) include *The Works of Mao Tse-Tung* (820 million) and Harry Potter at 400 million.

It is also the most translated book in history (in whole and in part). By some estimates parts of the Bible can be found in over 3000 languages (at least one of its books can be found in 3,312 languages), the New Testament has been translated (completely) in over 2000 languages, and the Christian Bible (both Old and New Testaments) can be found in 670 languages. It also has nearly 64,000 hyperlinks!

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EXERCISE 1

Name three things that you already know about the *Bible*. Name at least one thing that you would like to know about it (that you would like answered tonight).

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WHERE DOES IT COME FROM AND WHO WROTE IT?

The Bible, as we now have it, comes from many different sources. Many of the stories, hymns, laws, poems, and other forms of literature that make up the Bible come from ancient sources (over 3000 years ago). The earliest records that we have that at least parts of our Bible were written down date from about 900 B.C. While the newest books of the Bible are most often dated towards the end of the first century A.D. (100 A.D.). So, it took about 1000 years to write down and assemble all the books of the Bible.

As a book, many scholars would date the book of *Job* (right in the middle of the Old Testament) as the oldest “book” of the Bible. However, this is, for many reasons, still largely debated today. By comparison, most scholars would date the book of Revelation (the last book of the New Testament) at the end of the first century (or early second century) A.D. (between 95 and 110 A.D.).

As Christians, certainly as Catholics, we believe that the Bible is a *divinely inspired*. Put simply, while it was clearly written by people over many centuries, that God, through the Holy Spirit guided these many, many authors throughout history. These authors, in communion with the Holy Spirit (participating with the Holy Spirit) mediated the Word of God into human form.

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SOMETHING OLD AND SOMETHING NEW

The Christian Bible is divided into two *testaments*. The Old Testament tells us the story of Israel. As the book is organized, from the time that creation was *created* until a period just before Jesus Christ was born (about 2 or 3 centuries before Christ was born). The New Testament tells us story of Jesus Christ and the early Church.

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ASIDE:

B.C. MEANS *BEFORE CHRIST*. IN SOME PUBLICATIONS, AND CERTAINLY IN ACADEMIC CIRCLE WE MIGHT FIND B.C.E. MEANING *BEFORE COMMON ERA*. IN THE WEST, THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST INVOLVES MORE THAN JUST A DIVISION WITHIN THE BIBLE, WE ACTUALLY RESET THE WORLD'S CALENDAR BECAUSE OF HIM.

A.D. COMES FROM THE LATIN *ANNO DOMINI*, MEANING *YEAR OF THE LORD*. THE CALENDAR IS CALCULATED BACKWARDS FROM THE YEAR OF THE LORD. LIKE C.E. MANY SCHOLARS TODAY USE B.C.E (*BEFORE COMMON ERA*) TO DESCRIBE THE SAME THING.

IN OTHER WORDS, OUR HISTORY, LIKE THE BIBLE IS CONSTRUCTED, ORGANIZED AND UNDERSTOOD IN RELATION TO JESUS CHRIST!

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DISCUSSION POINT 1

What is the meaning of the word *testament*?

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THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament is organized into four (4) major division in the Christian Bible.

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THE PENTATEUCH (5)

Penta (meaning “five” in Greek), the word *Pentateuch* composes the first books of the Old Testament. These books in Hebrew are also known as the *Torah*, which means the Law. When Jesus speaks about the *Law* this is what he is speaking about. The Torah means the *Divine Law*, that which was given to the ancient Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai, and later explained in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Including the Ten Commandments there are 613 commandments in the Old Testament.

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GENESIS: CREATION OF THE WORLD, THE GREAT FLOOD (NOAH – COVENANT), THE STORIES OF ISRAEL’S ANCESTORS (ABRAHAM – COVENANT), ISAAC, JACOB, AND JOSEPH).

EXODUS: MOSES, MOUNT SINAI – COVENANT

LEVITICUS: PRIESTLY CODE, AND HOLINESS CODE

NUMBERS (IN HEBREW: THE WILDERNESS): FROM SINAI TOWARDS THE PROMISED LAND

DEUTERONOMY (MEANING SECOND LAW): MOSES’S SERMONS AND HIS *LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT*.

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THE HISTORICAL BOOKS (12 + 4)

These books cover about a thousand years of Israel’s history. From their triumphant and hard-fought entrance into the Promised Land (under Joshua) to the time of the Maccabean Revolt (about 135 years before Jesus Christ).

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JOSHUA

JUDGES

RUTH

1 AND 2 SAMUEL

1 AND 2 KINGS

1 AND 2 CHRONICLES

EZRA

NEHEMIAH

ESTHER

1 AND 2 MACCABEES\*

1 AND 2 ESDRAS\*

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THE WISDOM BOOKS (4 + 2)

The so-called Wisdom books contain a mix of poetry, songs, sayings, and proverbs to convey a wide variety of teachings. In general, we can class this literature into two categories: High – the teachings that lead us to consider the meaning of life itself, our relationship with God, the very essence of our existence. Low – reflects the wisdom of everyday life. Wisdom literature includes both. Together they deal with subjects like right from wrong, good, and evil, the purpose and reality of suffering, and more.

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JOB

PSALMS

PROVERBS

ECCLESIASTES (*QUOHELETH*)

SONG OF SOLOMON (*SONG OF SONGS*)

WISDOM OF SOLOMON (WISDOM)\*

ECCLESIASTICUS (THE WISDOM OF JESUS SON OF SIRACH) \*

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THE PROPHETS (17 +1)

In the Old Testament the “prophets” generally concerns those prophets with a book named after them. Moses is also considered a prophet. We can also trace the stories of certain prophets in the Historical Books (for example, David and Nathan).

Biblical prophecy is not unique to either the Jewish or Christian religion. In fact, we can find elements of prophecy in all major religions. However, the idea that prophecy has something to do with the future (like modern-day doomsday prophets) is a relatively new phenomenon to prophecy. Prophecy in the Old Testament, like the New Testament and other ancient religions is related to knowing and doing the will of God. In the Old Testament its major themes include a universal call to repentance, and the hope for a *messiah*.

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ISAIAH

JEREMIAH

LAMENTATIONS

EZEKIEL

DANIEL

HOSEA

JOEL

AMOS

OBADIAH

JONAH

MICAH

NAHUM

HABAKKUK

ZEPHANIAH

HAGGAI

ZECHARIAH

MALACHI

BARUCH\*

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DEUTEROCANONICAL BOOKS (CATHOLIC OLD TESTAMENT)

Depending upon the translation and type of Bible that you have, you may notice a fifth kind of book called *deuterocanonical*. Your Bible may also have a subtitle “with *apocrypha*,” or a “Catholic” Bible. The first Christians included Jews, Greeks and Greeks who had become Jewish (Greek speaking Jews). Before Jesus Christ Judaism was far more diverse than we might assume (much like it is today). Synagogues tended to use two different types of Jewish Scriptures (the Jewish Bible). The Masoretic Text was the authoritative Jewish text (in Hebrew). The Septuagint (LXX) was the authoritative Greek text. In short, they were different. They were different for two reasons. The first, was that there is always something lost and gained in translation. There were and are ideas in every language that do not have direct translations into other languages. The second, is that the Greek version, which the early Church adopted as its own, contained seven (7) extra books, all of whom are typically dated in the last centuries before Jesus Christ (about 300 to 150 years just before Jesus Christ). While these books depict many things, they give us a sense, as prophetic, historical and wisdom books of Judaism under Roman rule – complete with *messianic expectations*.

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THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament is organized into five types of books. All these books were written either in the first century A.D. (the same century as Jesus) or early in the second century.

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THE GOSPELS (4)

The word “gospel” means the “news” or the “good news.” While they have a lot in common with one another, they were written at different times, by different authors, and for different communities. All the Gospels were written initially in Greek and then translated into many, many different languages. The Gospels themselves tell a “narrative” of Jesus’s life on earth, including, where and when he was born, how and where he conducted his ministry, his followers, his death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven.

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MATTHEW: RIGHTEOUSNESS AND TEACHING

MARK: JESUS THE SUFFERING SERVANT

LUKE: JESUS HEALS, HIS CONCERN FOR THE POOR AND THE MARGINALIZED. IT IS CLOSELY LINKED TO THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

WE CALL THE FIRST THREE, THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS – THEY ARE A SYNOPSIS OF JESUS’S MINISTRY.

JOHN: THE GOSPEL OF JOHN PRESENTS THE MYSTERY OF JESUS. THE GOSPEL IS ORGANIZED IN SEVEN SIGNS, AND SEVEN “I AM” SAYINGS OF JESUS. IT IS CLOSELY LINKED TO THE BOOK OF REVELATION.

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ACTS OF THE APOSTLES (1)

Acts of the Apostles chronicles the early life of the Church. It is organized into two parts. The first section focuses on the Apostle Peter and ministry in Jerusalem. The second part focuses on the ministry of Apostle Paul who brought the Gospel to the Greek (pagan) world, and who contributed more writings to the New Testament than any other writer.

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THE LETTERS OF SAINT PAUL (7 + 7)

Paul was a Greek speaking Jew (a Pharisee) and an early convert to Christianity. In Acts of the Apostles (early on) he is responsible for the persecution of the Church. He was present at the Church’s first martyr (Saint Stephen) and admits of this in his later letters. He contributed more, in terms of content, to the New Testament than any other writer. His works are generally

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ROMANS

1 AND 2 CORINTHIANS

GALATIANS

EPHESIANS\*

PHILIPPIANS

COLOSSIANS\*

classified into two categories. The letters that he wrote, and those attributed to him (but not likely written by him).

1 AND 2 THESSALONIANS\*

1 AND 2 TIMOTHY\*

TITUS\*

PHILEMON

HEBREWS

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THE PASTORAL LETTERS (7)

The pastoral letters (or epistles) are attributed to or were written by Apostles other than Saint Paul.

JAMES

1 AND 2 PETER

1, 2 AND 3 JOHN

JUDE

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THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The book of Revelation is closely related to the Gospel of John especially in terms of its style. Like the Old Testament book *Daniel*, it is apocalyptic (it deals with the end of times). While difficult to interpret, certainly it does not tend to a literal interpretation, the book tells the story of a persecuted and faithful Church, a cosmic battle between good and evil, and Christ's eventual triumph over all things evil. As a book filled with hope, the promise of salvation and the glory of God it is a fitting end to the 73 books that precede it!

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HOW DO WE INTERPRET THE BIBLE (IN WHOLE AND IN ITS PARTS)

What does it say about God?

What does it say about us?

As Catholics, we are not inclined to a literal interpretation of the Bible. In addition to the questions we have already posed we ask:

1. What is the historical context of this passage? When was this most likely written? What did it mean to those for whom it was written?
2. What cultural, linguistic, and historical events influenced this passage?

3. What type of writing is it? Is it a song, poetry, a story, a proverb?
4. What was the author's purpose, intent, and inspiration for the passage?

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WHY READ THE BIBLE?

Saint Jerome, the first to translate and write commentaries on the Bible in Latin, wrote that "ignorance of scripture is ignorance of Christ." Imagine receiving a love letter from your wife or husband, a letter from our mother, father, son or daughter – how many times would you read it if you were locked away in prison or forced to work in a foreign land? Better yet, imagine receiving an email from your boss, if you did not bother to read it, how long would you keep your job?

Archbishop Richard Smith in his Pastoral Letter, *Living in the Word* (September 2017) asked all the faithful to do three simple things with respect to the Bible – *The Word of God*.

1. Listen to the Word of God. In Romans 10.17 Saint Paul reminds us that "faith comes from what is heard."
  - a. Read the Word of God daily
  - b. Read the Word of God together as family and friends
  - c. Pray with the Word of God at every meal
  - d. To create a space and time to do all of this in our homes
  - e. To discuss the Word of God with your friends and families, especially the Sunday readings and Homilies
2. Put the Word of God into Practice. In Session 3 we spoke about a faith life that has demands upon us – Catholic life is not a spectator sport. The Word of God does more than satisfy our spiritual curiosity, it informs how we live our lives.
  - a. Worship
  - b. Witness
  - c. Service

PART 3 – CLOSING REMARKS

1. *Journal Entries – notes for next week*
2. *Online followers*
3. *Listen to the Word of God*

4. *Session 5 – Prayer*

+Final Blessing