



The
JOURNEY

STEP FIVE

THE BIBLE

DIG DEEPER

THE BIBLE'S COMPOSITION

Overview

The Bible is the Word of God, and is the one and only Scripture for Christians. It has two main sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. Within this division there are 66 individual books.

As a whole, the Bible offers a comprehensive account of God's relationship with humanity, spanning 1500 years and was composed by at least 40 human authors, who were guided by the Holy Spirit. As we engage with its pages, we discover not only the historical account of God's dealings with His people but also a living Word that speaks to our own lives and circumstances today.

The Old Testament

The Old Testament (also known as the Hebrew Bible) recounts the creation of the world by God and the establishment of His covenants with humanity, particularly through figures like Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David.

It also chronicles the history of the Israelite people, from their enslavement in Egypt to their liberation under Moses' leadership and their journey to the Promised Land. It contains the conquering of this land, the time of Judges, the rise of the monarchy, and the civil war that split Israel in two. It tells of Israel and Judah's fall to the powers of Assyria and Babylon, their time in captivity, and their eventual return to their homeland.

Throughout this narrative, prophets (such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and many others) emerge to guide and admonish the people, calling them to faithfulness and warning of the consequences of disobedience. Ultimately, the Old Testament points forward to the coming of the Messiah (Jesus), whose arrival would fulfill God's promises and bring the possibility of salvation to everyone in all nations.

The New Testament

The New Testament focuses primarily on the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It begins with the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) which offer unique perspectives on Jesus' ministry and serve as the cornerstone of Christian faith. The Acts of the Apostles follows the spread of Christianity after Jesus' ascension, detailing the early church's growth and the missionary journeys of the apostles.

The New Testament also includes epistles or letters written by early Christian leaders such as Paul, Peter, James, and John. These letters often address various theological, ethical, and practical issues facing the newer Christian communities, which remain relevant today. Lastly, the book of Revelation, by the apostle John, provides apocalyptic visions showing the ultimate triumph of God's kingdom and the promise of a

new heaven and earth.

THE BIBLE IS RELIABLE

Historical Accuracy

The historical accuracy of the Bible is a foundational aspect of our faith, as it provides us with a reliable record of God's interactions with humanity throughout history. The Scriptures frequently mention real people and places that have been confirmed by archaeological discoveries and external historical sources. These corroborations lend credibility to the Bible's authenticity and reliability as a historical document.

Moreover, the customs and cultures described in the Bible align with what we have learned from other historical records and ancient sources. The intricate details provided in biblical narratives offer insights into the daily lives, traditions, and practices of ancient civilizations, providing valuable historical and cultural context.

One compelling aspect of the Bible's historical accuracy is its detailed accounts of events that occurred centuries ago. These narratives often parallel known historical events and timelines, further validating the Bible's reliability as a historical source. Over time, archaeological excavations and scholarly research have unearthed artifacts and inscriptions that confirm the historical accuracy of biblical accounts.

- For instance, the existence of King David, once questioned by skeptics, has been substantiated by an archaeological finding called the "Tel Dan Stele", which references the "House of David." This discovery provides tangible evidence supporting the biblical narrative and affirms David's historical reign as king of Israel.
- Similarly, the New Testament mentions various rulers and political figures whose existence and roles have been confirmed by archaeological artifacts and historical documents. One notable example is Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, whose name appears on the Pilate Stone and other inscriptions. These archaeological findings corroborate the biblical accounts of Pilate's involvement in the trial and crucifixion of Jesus Christ.
- In addition, the geographical details provided in the Bible often correspond with known landmarks and regions, corroborating its accuracy as a historical and geographical source. For instance, descriptions of travel routes, city locations, and topographical features align with archaeological findings and ancient maps, offering hard evidence of the Bible's reliability in depicting ancient landscapes.

In summary, the historical accuracy of the Bible underscores its reliability as a trustworthy source of historical information. As we study the Scriptures, we gain deeper insights into the rich tapestry of human history and God's providential involvement in shaping the course of events. The archaeological and historical

evidence supporting the biblical narrative strengthens our faith and confidence in the truth of God's Word.

Prophetic Fulfillment

The Bible contains hundreds of prophecies that have been fulfilled accurately over time, supporting its divine inspiration and reliability. All of these prophecies have either been fulfilled, or will be fulfilled in the future.

- The Old Testament contains many prophecies about the coming of the Messiah, such as Isaiah 53, which describe in detail the life, suffering, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- Peter Stoner, a professor of mathematics and astronomy, wrote "Science Speaks." In this work, Stoner applied the principles of probability to the prophecies about Jesus. Stoner selected eight specific prophecies about the Messiah and conservatively calculated the probability of any one person fulfilling all eight by chance are 1 in 10^{17} (1 in a hundred quadrillion). Further, the odds of 48 of the prophecies Jesus fulfilled are 1 in 10^{157} .
- Historical and Geopolitical Predictions: The Bible also has prophecies about nations rising and falling, major historical events, and big changes in the world. These predictions cover a long time and different cultures, and they've come true in history, showing that the Bible is right about how things happen and that God is in control.
 - The Fall of Babylon: In the book of Isaiah, written several centuries before the events occurred, the prophet Isaiah foretells the fall of Babylon, one of the most powerful empires of ancient times. Isaiah describes Babylon's downfall in vivid detail, including its conquest by the Medes and the subsequent desolation of the city. This prophecy found fulfillment in 539 BC when the Persian king Cyrus the Great captured Babylon, as recorded in historical sources such as the Cyrus Cylinder.
 - The Destruction of Tyre: Ezekiel, another Old Testament prophet, prophesied the destruction of the ancient Phoenician city-state of Tyre. Ezekiel's prophecy, detailed in Ezekiel 26, predicts that many nations would come against Tyre, resulting in its complete destruction and abandonment. Despite its reputation as an impregnable fortress, Tyre faced successive sieges and was eventually razed by Alexander the Great in 332 BC. The fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy is documented by both biblical accounts and historical sources.
- End Times Prophecies: In addition to past fulfillments, the Bible also contains prophecies concerning future events, including the culmination of history and the establishment of God's eternal kingdom. These eschatological (end times) prophecies provide believers with hope and assurance of God's ultimate victory over evil and the fulfillment of His redemptive purposes for humanity.

Manuscript Evidence

The Bible boasts an impressive array of manuscript evidence that underscores its authenticity and reliabil-

ity unlike any other ancient document. This evidence not only provides a strong foundation for the Bible's historical accuracy but also highlights its consistency over time.

The New Testament stands out with over 5,800 Greek manuscripts, a staggering number that far surpasses any other ancient work. What's remarkable is that some of these manuscripts date back to just a few decades after the original texts were written. This close proximity to the source material is crucial because it minimizes the potential for errors or alterations creeping into the text over time. Additionally, there would have been eyewitnesses still alive who could have refuted them if they were changed or falsified!

Comparing this wealth of manuscript evidence to other renowned ancient writings, such as the works of Homer and Herodotus, reveals a stark contrast. Homer's famous epics, the Iliad and the Odyssey, for instance, have fewer than 2,000 surviving manuscripts, with the earliest copies dating to around 500 years after the original composition. Similarly, the historical accounts penned by Herodotus, often hailed as the "Father of History," have approximately 8 manuscripts, the oldest of which were produced about 1,300 years after Herodotus wrote.

Such disparities highlight the exceptional preservation of the biblical texts and the meticulous efforts of scribes and copyists in transmitting them faithfully through the centuries.

Additionally, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the 20th century provided a groundbreaking revelation. These scrolls, containing some of the oldest known manuscripts of the Old Testament, predate the time of Jesus by centuries. Discovered between 1947 and 1956 in the Qumran caves near the Dead Sea, the Dead Sea Scrolls include approximately 900 manuscripts, comprising biblical texts, apocryphal writings, and sectarian documents. Among them are fragments of every book in the Hebrew Bible (except for the book of Esther). The oldest of these scrolls date back to around 250 BCE, providing unparalleled insight into the textual history of the Old Testament.

Despite this vast temporal separation, the Dead Sea Scrolls exhibit striking consistency with later copies of the Old Testament, affirming the remarkable accuracy and fidelity in the transmission of biblical texts over millennia.

What this discovery really did was disprove all the critics who had been saying the Old Testament had been changed after Jesus to fit the Christian narrative that Jesus was the Messiah. In fact, the Dead Sea Scrolls proved the Old Testament has been the same since well before Jesus physically walked the earth.

In summary, the extensive manuscript evidence, particularly in the case of the New Testament and the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, serves as a compelling testament to the Bible's textual integrity. It underscores the meticulous care taken by ancient scribes and modern scholars alike in preserving and

transmitting the sacred scriptures, ensuring that the message of the Bible remains faithfully preserved for generations to come.

Archaeological Agreement

Archaeologists have repeatedly confirmed details found in the Bible through discoveries, from the existence of cities and kingdoms to specific practices and events.

- Archaeologists have unearthed numerous ancient cities and kingdoms mentioned in the Bible, providing concrete evidence of their existence. From Jerusalem to Babylon, these archaeological sites corroborate the biblical accounts of their prominence and influence in ancient times.
- Confirmation of Biblical Characters: Archaeological discoveries have authenticated the existence of individuals mentioned in the Bible, spanning kings, prophets, and other notable figures. Inscriptions and monuments bearing the names of biblical personalities, including King David, Cyrus the Great, Nebuchadnezzar II, Herod the Great, and King Hezekiah, provide tangible evidence of their historical existence. These findings underscore their significance within ancient civilizations.
- Excavations at Jericho and the discovery of its ancient walls provide fascinating insights into the biblical account of the city's conquest in the Book of Joshua (disproving skeptics).
- The Pool of Bethesda, mentioned in the Gospel of John as a place where Jesus healed a man, was discovered in the 19th century, validating the New Testament's descriptions (again disproving the skeptics).

Archaeology has continually shed light on the Bible's historical and cultural contexts, corroborating its accounts and supporting its reliability. While skeptics are always raising questions and objections, over time the Bible remains undefeated.

What The Bible Claims About Itself

The Bible is not a collection of books made to say something about itself that it actually does not. Instead, in both the Old and New Testaments, it contains numerous internal claims regarding its divine inspiration, authority, and purpose. The Bible presents itself as from God, and indeed as the Word of God.

- 2 Timothy 3:16, *"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."*
- 2 Peter 1:16, 20-21, *"For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty."
"Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."*
- Psalm 19:7-8, *"The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart."*

The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes."

- Isaiah 55:11, *"So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."*
- Hebrews 4:12, *"For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."*

These claims are consistent throughout the Bible and provide a framework for its significance in the lives of believers.

Infallible And Inerrant

Because of all this and more, we believe the Bible can be described by two fairly technical words: Infallible and inerrant.

We believe the Bible is infallible in that it is inspired by God and won't fail to achieve the purpose for which God intended: as a wholly trustworthy guide to salvation, faith, and practice. We can fully rely on the Bible's teachings for our beliefs and actions.

We also believe the Bible to be inerrant in its original manuscripts, meaning they contained no errors or contradictions. In the rare instances where doubt arises about the alignment of our current Bible with the originals, good study Bibles clearly point these out. Thus, we have 100% confidence in the accuracy and reliability of the Bible we possess.

This principle of biblical inerrancy underscores our conviction that the Scriptures, as inspired by God, are completely reliable and trustworthy in conveying divine truth. When we affirm the inerrancy of the Bible, we are asserting that they are indeed "God breathed" (2 Tim 3:16). Further, we believe that the Bible's teachings are consistent and harmonious, forming a cohesive and unified message from beginning to end.

It's important to recognize that affirming biblical inerrancy does not mean that we ignore or dismiss apparent discrepancies or challenges within the text. Rather, it invites careful study, interpretation, and reconciliation of seemingly conflicting passages. Through diligent scholarship and reliance on the Holy Spirit's guidance, we seek to understand and apply the teachings of Scripture in our lives. Often, upon further study, we find that passages that seem at first to contradict each other have very simple and reasonable explanations.

A fun challenge for beginners is to resolve this apparent contradiction: how did Judas Iscariot (who betrayed Jesus) die? Did he die as Matthew 27:3-10 says, or as Acts 1:18-19 says? OR... is there an easy explanation and harmony between these two?

In practical terms, the doctrine of inerrancy informs our approach to reading and interpreting the Bible. We approach the Scriptures with humility and reverence, recognizing the authority of God's word over our lives. We engage in prayerful study, seeking to discern the intended meaning of the text within its historical, cultural, and literary context.

Furthermore, our confidence in the inerrancy of Scripture encourages us to trust its teachings and apply them faithfully in our lives. We believe that the Bible provides us with timeless truths and principles that are relevant and applicable to every aspect of our lives. As we study and meditate on God's word, we are transformed and renewed in our minds, shaping our beliefs, values, and actions in accordance with God's will.

Ultimately, our belief in the inerrancy of Scripture is not based solely on intellectual arguments or historical evidence, but on faith in the trustworthiness and faithfulness of God. As we submit ourselves to the authority of God's word, we are led into a deeper relationship with Him and empowered to live lives that honor and glorify Him.

FAQ'S ON READING YOUR BIBLE

What Bible Should I Use?

There are well over 100 different English translations and paraphrase Bibles out there, including a handful of very good ones. We most often use and recommend the NIV translation, which is the New International Version. The NIV is a good blend of a solid translation paired with good readability. An NIV study Bible would be a great place to start, and you can purchase one online or in a bookstore.

You can also access many Bible translations online, including the NIV. One great free app is YouVersion. You can find it with a simple search on Google's Google Play Store, Apple's IOS App Store, or at www.youversion.com.

Here's a brief analysis of the NIV alongside two other pretty good Bible translations, with an explanation of what they are, along with their strengths and weaknesses. Notice the NIV exists in the middle with the NASB being very literal to the original (and less easily readable), and the NLT being much more readable (and less literally translated).

NIV (New International Version)

- Release Date: First published in 1978, with subsequent updates/revisions.
- Strengths:
 - Balance: The NIV strikes a balance between formal equivalence (precision to the original

languages) and dynamic equivalence (readability in English), making it accessible to a wide range of readers while maintaining accuracy.

- **Clarity:** It aims to express the meaning of the original texts in clear and contemporary language, enhancing readability.
- **Popularity:** Widely used in churches and educational settings, the NIV is familiar to many Christians and readily available in various formats.
- **Weaknesses:**
 - **Interpretive Choices:** Some critics argue that the NIV's approach to translation involves interpretive decisions that may not always align with the preferences of all readers. This is true of all translations.
 - **Updates:** Like any translation, the NIV undergoes periodic updates to reflect advances in scholarship and changes in the English language, which may lead to differences between editions.
 - **Gender-Inclusive Language:** While intended to improve readability, the NIV's use of gender-inclusive language in certain passages has sparked debate among scholars and theologians regarding its accuracy and theological implications.

NASB (New American Standard Bible)

- **Release Date:** First published in 1971, with subsequent updates/revisions.
- **Strengths:**
 - Known for its literal translation approach, making it suitable for in-depth study and analysis.
 - Offers clarity and precision in rendering the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts.
 - Provides a faithful representation of the biblical languages, aiding scholars and serious students of the Bible.
- **Weaknesses:**
 - Its literal approach can sometimes result in less fluid or natural English expression.
 - May be perceived as less engaging or accessible for casual readers due to its formal style.
 - Occasionally this style may translate so literally that it misses some of the real meaning of the text. This is true in all translations of language.

NLT (New Living Translation)

- **Release Date:** First published in 1996, with subsequent updates/revisions.
- **Strengths:**
 - Strikes a balance between accuracy and readability, making it suitable for both personal devotional reading and group study.
 - Uses contemporary English to convey the meaning of the original texts in a clear and understandable manner.
 - Particularly appealing to new believers, youth, and those unfamiliar with traditional religious

language.

- Weaknesses:
 - Critics argue that its dynamic equivalence approach (readability) sacrifices some precision and theological depth for readability.
 - While highly accessible, it may not always capture the nuance and subtlety of the original languages as effectively as more literal translations.

Where Should I Start?

The Bible is not like most other books, as there are 66 individual books inside. You certainly can start at the beginning, like other books, if you'd like. However, we recommend that you start in the Book of Luke. Luke was writing to Gentiles (that's us!) and he particularly highlights Jesus' inclusivity of women and the poor, along with the message that salvation is for everyone, regardless of social status or ethnicity.

How Often Should I Read?

We often answer this question with another question: How often do you need food? Most people eat at least once a day. God's Word nourishes our souls, just as food sustains our bodies. We take food in daily, and we should take in God's Word daily.

Pro Tip: Schedule your reading time, just as you would for anything else important in your life. Many people do it first thing in the morning, but others are better at night, or even on their lunch break. Be sure it's a time you can protect and keep as consistent as possible.

Jesus often withdrew to pray in solitary places, seeking alone-time with God.

- Mark 1:35, *"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed."*
- Luke 5:16, *"But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."*
- Luke 6:12, *"One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God."*
- Luke 22:41, *"He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed."*

These verses illustrate Jesus' practice of seeking solitude for prayer and time alone with God. If Jesus set time apart to be with God in His busy schedule, we should do the same in both our Bible reading and prayer.

How Much Should I Read?

Quality is better than quantity when it comes to reading the Bible.

We suggest reading one chapter a day. Reading slowly and thoughtfully is the way to go. You might read the same chapter multiple times, asking yourself three questions along the way: "What does this say?" "What does this mean?" and "How can I apply this today?"

How Does Reading My bible Impact My Relationship With Jesus?

Just as any personal relationship requires an investment of time (you can't microwave a relationship), it's the same in our relationship with Jesus. If you want a deeper relationship with Jesus, you'll spend time reading, meditating on, and even memorizing verses in the Bible. The motivation for all these things is not obligation, pride of accomplishment, or "box checking" but rather to spend time with Jesus in order to get to know Him better.

Along with prayer, reading the Word of God is one of the best things you can do to set a firm foundation of growth for your Christian life.

BASIC DISCIPLESHIP STEP FIVE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Ice Breaker Questions

Growing up, what role did the Bible play in your family? What were your thoughts on it? How did these thoughts change over time?

How much of the Bible (if any) have you read? Do you feel like it's hard to read? Does the fact that the timeline is not totally linear throw you off at all?

Question 1 - *The Bible's Composition*

How comfortable are you with the overall format of the Bible? Do you have any questions about the big picture?

Question 2 - *Prophetic Fulfillment*

What comes to mind when you hear the words "Old Testament?" What parts of the Old Testament are you most familiar with, and what parts are you the least familiar with?

Question 3 - *Manuscript Evidence*

Are you already comfortable and familiar with how the New Testament is ordered? (Gospels, Acts, letters, Revelation)

Question 4 - *Historical Accuracy*

Is the historical accuracy of the Bible easy or challenging for you to accept and why?

Question 5 - *Prophetic Fulfillment*

Have you ever read Isaiah 53? If not, let's do that together now, and take turns reading it!

Question 6 - *Prophetic Fulfillment*

Do these numbers make sense to you or leave you scratching your head? If you had the chance to play Powerball with these odds, would you take it? Why or why not?

Question 7 - *Manuscript Evidence*

Why do you think it is so important that the words of the Bible we have today match the words of the originals when they were written?

Question 8 - *Archaeological Agreement*

What do you think it would feel like to be an archaeologist and find something that literally confirms part of the Bible, especially something that had long been questioned?

Question 9 - *FAQs on Reading Your Bible*

Are you reading a chapter in your Bible each day? When/where is best for you?



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