



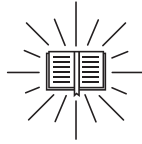
THE
MENTORING
PROJECT

THE BIBLE AND HOW TO READ IT



DAVID SCHROCK

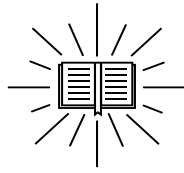
**THE BIBLE
AND HOW
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INTRODUCTION: READING THE BIBLE IS NOT EASY

“I open this book to meet with Jesus.”

Those are the words, written in gold letters, that sit atop my first Bible — an NIV Application Study Bible. When I was in high school, I received this Bible as a gift, and it became the first of many I would read, underline, understand, and misunderstand. Indeed, I wrote that little phrase on the front cover a few years after I began a daily habit of reading the Bible. And I embossed it there because, in college, I needed to remind myself that reading the Bible is not merely an academic exercise; it is an exercise of faith seeking understanding. Bible reading is, therefore, for doxology (praise) and discipleship (practice).

Or at least, that is how we *should* read Scripture.

Through the centuries that followed the completion of the Bible (something we will consider below), there have been many approaches to reading Scripture. Many of them have come from faith and have led to great understanding. As Psalm 111:2 reminds us, “Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them.” And thus, studying God’s Word has always been a part of genuine faith. Yet, not all approaches to reading the Bible are equally valid or equally valuable.

As history shows, some genuine Christians have pursued the Bible in less than genuine ways. Sometimes various Christians have verged on the *mystical*, dabbled in the *allegorical*, or undercut the authority of Scripture with the *traditional*. Corrections, like the Protestant Reformation, were necessary because men like Luther, Calvin, and their heirs returned the Word of

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God to its proper place in the church, so that those in the church could read the Bible in the proper way. For the fact remains that the Bible is the source and substance of every healthy church and the only way to know God and to walk in his ways. And this is why reading the Bible and reading it well matters so much.

Not surprisingly, the Bible has often been attacked. In the early church, some attacks came from leaders within the church. Bishops like Arius (AD 250–336) denied the deity of Christ, and others like Pelagius (AD ca. 354–418) denied the grace of the gospel. In more recent centuries, the Bible has been attacked by skeptics who say, “the Bible is the product of men,” or rendered obsolete by post-moderns who relegate Scripture to “one of many ways to God.” In the academy, biblical scholars often deny the history and truthfulness of Scripture. And in popular entertainment, the Bible, or verses taken out of context, are more likely to be used for tattoos or spiritual taglines than for explanations of the world and everything in it.

Put all this together, and it is understandable why reading the Bible is so hard. In our post-Enlightenment world, one that denies the supernatural and treats the Bible like any other book, we are invited to stand over the Bible critically and question what it says. Just the same, in our sexually-deviant culture, the Bible is outmoded, and even hated, because of the way it stands against modern religions such as LGBT+ affirmation. Even when the Bible is treated positively, figures like Jordan Peterson read it through the lens of evolutionary psychology. Thus, it is difficult to simply read the Bible and meet with Jesus.

When I wrote myself that reminder on the front of my Bible, I was a college student taking classes from professors of religion who denied the divine inspiration of Scripture. Instead, they demythologized the Bible and sought to explain away its supernaturalism. In response, I began learning where the Bible came from, what was in the Bible, how to read the Bible, and how the Bible should inform every area of life. Thankfully, in a college that aimed to erase faith, God grew my trust in him as I sought to understand God’s Word on its own terms.

That said, by delving into the academic disciplines of theology and biblical

A mystical reading of Scripture finds multiple layers of meaning hidden in the text.

An allegorical reading of Scripture takes difficult passages and gives them spiritual interpretations (e.g., Israel’s execution of the Amalekites becomes an ethical command to kill sin).

A traditional reading of Scripture places the doctrines of men on the same level as Scripture (e.g., Roman Catholicism).

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interpretation (a subject often described as “hermeneutics”), I needed to remind myself that the chief goal of reading the Bible is communing with the triune God. God wrote a book so that we would know him.

And in what follows, it is my prayer that God would give you a truer understanding of what the Bible is, where it came from, what is in it, and how to read it. Indeed, may he give all of us a deeper knowledge of himself as we delight ourselves in his words of life.

In pursuit of knowing the God of the Bible, this field guide will answer four questions.

1. What is the Bible?
2. Where did the Bible come from?
3. What is in the Bible?
4. How do we read the Bible?

In each part, I will answer the question with an eye towards building up your faith, not just giving historical or theological information. And at the end, I will join these parts together to show you why reading the Bible every day is so vital for knowing God and walking in his ways. For indeed, this is why the Bible exists: to reveal in words the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If you are ready to know him more, then we are ready to talk about the Bible.

1

WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

The answer to this question is manifold, for the Bible has played a multifaceted role in shaping the world. In addition to being “the Word of God written” (WCF 1.2), the Bible is also a cultural artifact, a bulwark for civilization, a literary masterpiece, an object of historical inquiry, and sometimes a target for ridicule. Yet, for those who treat the Bible as a priceless treasure, and for churches who build themselves upon the fullness of its counsel, the Bible is more than a book for inspiration or religious devotion.

The Bible is, as Hebrews 1:1 begins, the very words of God which were spoken to the fathers by the prophets “long ago, at many times and in many ways.” Indeed, God spoke to his people in ancient times, but writing hundreds of years after God spoke to Israel out of the fire (Deut. 4:12, 15, 33, 36), the author of Hebrews could say, “in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.”

In this way, the Bible is not just a religious book deposited all at once. Nor is it a work of literature with no traction in history. Rather, the Bible is the progressive revelation of God, which perfectly interpreted his acts of salvation and judgment in the world. And more, the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament played a unique role in preparing the way for the eternal Word to take on flesh and dwell among us (John 1:1–3, 14), and the twenty-seven books written after his ascension bore testimony to Christ’s life, death, resurrection, and exaltation. Even today, the Word of God continues to accomplish his purposes of redemption, even as the revelation of God’s Word came to a close at the end of John’s Apocalypse (see Rev. 22:18–19).¹

For this field guide, we will not delve into all the ways the Bible has shaped the world and has itself been shaped by the world.² Instead, our time will be

By the Numbers

The Bible is the [best-selling book of all time](#), with more than 80 million copies printed every year.

The [American Bible Society](#) estimates that there are 900 translations of the Bible in the English language.

[Wycliffe Bible Translators](#) estimates that 3,658 [language](#) have some portion of the Bible.

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spent answering the theological question: What is the Bible, as the church has received it? To that question, I will offer three answers — one that comes from the Protestant confessions, one that comes from the biblical canon, and one that comes from the testimony of the Holy Spirit who inspired the Bible.

According to the Confessions

In 1517, a German monk with a mallet nailed 95 Theses to the Wittenberg Castle Door.³ Martin Luther, a trained theologian and studious pastor was concerned with the way the Roman Catholic Church had misled him and others to believe that righteousness was achieved through an endless maze of sacraments, instead of faith alone in the finished work of Christ alone — all by the grace of God. Indeed, by his study of Scripture, Luther had become convinced that the Roman Catholic Church had lost the gospel and its message of justification by faith alone.⁴ Accordingly, he ignited the Protestant Reformation with his 95 Theses.

In the decades that followed, the Protestant Reformation recovered the gospel and its source, the Bible. Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, which affirmed the Bible's divine origin and authority *but also* put church tradition on the same level as the Bible, men like Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli began to teach that the Bible was the only source of inspired revelation. Whereas the Roman Catholic Church taught that God spoke through two sources, the Bible and the Church, the Reformers rightly affirmed Scripture as the only source of special revelation. As Luther famously stated,

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by evident reason—for I can believe neither pope nor councils alone, as it is clear that they have erred repeatedly and contradicted themselves—I consider myself conquered by the Scriptures adduced by me and my conscience is captive to the Word of God.⁵

Indeed, Luther's advocacy for the Bible as God's Word was echoed by all the Reformers. And today, the heirs of the Reformation continue to hold Scripture as God's inspired and authoritative Word. And the best place to see that conviction is in the confessions that came from the Protestant Reformation. For instance, the Belgic Confession (Reformed), the Thirty-Nine Articles (Anglican), and the Westminster Confession of Faith (Presbyterian) all affirm the formal principle of the Reformation: *Sola Scriptura*. Yet, to cite only one confessional tradition, I will offer my own: The Second London Baptist Confession (1689).

In the opening paragraph of the first chapter, the Baptist ministers of London confessed their faith in God's Word.

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1. The Holy Scriptures are the only sufficient, certain, and infallible standard of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience. The light of nature and the works of creation and providence so clearly demonstrate the goodness, wisdom, and power of God that people are left without excuse; however, these demonstrations are not sufficient to give the knowledge of God and his will that is necessary for salvation. Therefore, the Lord was pleased at different times and in various ways to reveal himself and to declare his will to his church. To preserve and propagate the truth better and to establish and comfort the church with greater certainty against the corruption of the flesh and the malice of Satan and the world, the Lord put this revelation completely in writing. Therefore, the Holy Scriptures are absolutely necessary, because God's former ways of revealing his will to his people have now ceased.

In this statement, they affirmed the sufficiency, necessity, clarity, and authority of Scripture. These four attributes of Scripture articulate the way all Protestants think about the Bible, for this in fact is the way the Bible speaks about itself. And thus, the Bible is more than the church's book, or a collection of religious books, or even a library of inspiring literature about God. The Bible is "The word of God written" (WCF 1.2), and those in church history who have taken the Word of God seriously have treated it as the Word of God in human words. And they have done so because they believe the testimony of Scripture itself.

According to the Canon

As helpful as confessions like the Second London are, Protestants do not merely believe that the tradition(s) of the church or the testimony of men is sufficient to develop any beliefs about the Bible. Instead, we believe Scripture itself bears witness about itself. For instance, 2 Timothy 3:16 says that all Scripture is "God-breathed" (*theopneustos*). Likewise, 2 Peter 1:19–21 identifies the Holy Spirit as the source for everything written by the prophets. In context, Peter even suggests that the words of the prophets are more certain than his own experience on the Mount of Transfiguration, when he heard the audible voice of God (2 Pet. 1:13–18). Paul too, in Romans 15:4, says, "whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." In short, Scripture bears witness to itself as God's inspired Word.

Just the same, the New Testament bears witness to Jesus Christ and shows how all the promises of God find their answer in him (2 Cor. 1:20). That is to say, Scripture is not an end in itself. Rather, it is "a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation" (BFM 2000). The Christ-centered nature of the Bible explains why you cannot go a single paragraph in the New

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Testament without finding a reference to the Old Testament. The Law, the Prophets, and the Writings — the three parts of the Hebrew Bible — all point to Christ. And Christ identifies himself as the subject of the Old Testament (John 5:39) and the one to whom all the scriptures point (Luke 24:27, 44–49).

Equally, Jesus anticipates the way in which his own departure will be followed by the Spirit coming to bear witness about him (see John 15:26; 16:13). In a series of instructions on the night before he died, Jesus told his disciples that he would go away, but that he would send the Holy Spirit (John 16:7). This Spirit of truth would remind them of everything he said and would enable his witnesses to bear the truth about him. In this way, we believe the Bible is God's Word because the Bible tells us so.

According to the Testimony of the Spirit

But not so fast! If the Bible is its own source of authority and authenticity, how do we know it is not some type of pre-modern propaganda? Doesn't this line of reasoning run into the fallacy of circular reasoning? And isn't this why individuals and churches go looking for some authority outside the Bible? Those are important questions, but the best answer returns us to the source of God's revelation, namely the Spirit of God who has spoken in his Word.

In short, an argument for the Bible *from the Bible* is an example of circular reasoning. But this line of argument does not mean it is a fallacy. For in fact, all claims to authority are broadly circular. If the Bible claims to be authoritative while also proving its authority from something outside of the Bible, then that person, institution, or entity to which the Bible depends becomes the authority over the Bible. And hence, the Bible is not ultimately authoritative. Rather, it is authoritative to the degree that the greater authority permits it to have authority. This was the error of the Roman Catholic Church who granted authority to the church to decide what books would be in the Bible and authority to interpret the Bible on the basis of its long-held traditions.

By contrast, John Calvin and the Reformers spoke of the Bible's "self-attestation."⁶ The Bible is the Word of God because the Bible declares itself to be so, and its legitimacy is found in the way that its testimony is proven by all that it says about everything else. Equally, because the Holy Spirit who inspired the Bible continues to impress its truthfulness onto souls who hear it today, we can know that the Bible is God's Word. In other words, because the origin of the Bible (an objective reality) and one's confidence in the authenticity of the Bible (a subjective belief) both come from the same source (the Holy Spirit), we can have real confidence that the Bible is God's Word. As the Reformer Heinrich Bullinger put it,

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If therefore the word of God sounds in our ears, and there the Spirit of God shows forth his power in our hearts, and we in faith do truly receive the word of God, then the word of God has a mighty force and a wonderful effect in us. For it drives away the misty darkness of errors, it opens our eyes, it converts and enlightens our minds, and instructs us most fully and absolutely in truth and godliness.⁷

Those willing to listen to the authors of Scripture will find a unified testimony of some forty men, writing in three different languages (Hebrew, Greek, and some Aramaic) over the course of fourteen hundred years. The likelihood that such a composition could be crafted cogently by human authors alone is impossible. Still, the visible evidences of literary unity are powerful, but we remain dependent on the living God to reveal himself to us. And therefore, the testimony of the Spirit is ultimately what causes us to believe the Bible (John 16:13).

In sum then, God has spoken and his words are found in the sixty-six books of the Bible. Or at least, those are the books that Protestants recognize in their Bible.

Discussion & Reflection:

1. How would you answer the question “What is the Bible?” How would you put the above material in your own words?
2. Was anything that you just read new or surprising to you? What challenged you?
3. How does the truth that the Bible is God’s very Word affect the way you read it?

2

WHERE DID THE BIBLE COME FROM?

When we talk about the Bible, we are talking about the books of the biblical canon. As R. N. Soulen has defined the term, a canon is “collection of books accepted as an authoritative rule of faith and practice.”⁸ In Hebrew, the word canon comes from the word *qaneh*, which can mean “reed” or “stalk.” In Greek, the word *kanon* often has the idea of being a rule or principle (see Gal. 6:16). Connecting both languages, Peter Wegner notes, “Certain reeds were also used as measuring sticks, and thus one of the derived meanings of the word [*qaneh*, *kanon*] became ‘rule.’”⁹

Books of the Apocrypha

- (1–2) 1–2 Esdras,
- (3) Tobit,
- (4) Judith,
- (5) Esther 10:4–16:24,
- (6) Wisdom,
- (7) Ecclesiasticus
- (8) Baruch and the Epistle of Jeremiah,
- (9) Song of the 3 Children**
- (10) Story of Susanna**
- (11) Bel and the Dragon**
- (12) Prayer of Manasseh,
- (13–14) 1–2 Maccabees

** Additions to Daniel

And so this explains the background of the word. But what about canonicity? How does a book “make the cut,” so to speak? That question is vital for understanding the Bible, the church, and who authorizes whom.

In answer to this set of questions, it is tempting to think that the church authorizes the Bible and decides what books should be in the canon. This is what the fourth session at the Council of Trent did in recognizing the books of the Apocrypha, and it is also what Dan Brown did, when he imagined in his best-selling novel, *The Davinci Code*, that the Emperor Constantine chose four Gospels and hid the rest. Even the language of the Apocrypha (the hidden things) hints at this kind of thinking, but actually it is misguided.

As we noted above, the source of the Bible is God himself, and the Spirit is the one who moved the authors to write what they wrote, so that from the time of Pentecost onward (Acts 2), the Holy Spirit illumines the minds of biblical readers. To measure twice before cutting once, the church did not authorize the books that would compose the canon, the churches (led by the Spirit)

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recognized the books of the Bible as being inspired by God and authoritative over them. In other words, the church did not create the Bible; the Bible, as the Word of God, created the church. This is a simple distinction, but one with massive implications.

What we think about the biblical canon will largely determine how we read the Bible. Are the books of the Bible the work of God, recognized by men? Or is the canon (the Bible) the work of men, who are devoted to God? Roman Catholics answer that one way, Protestants another. And they answer the question differently because they understand the authority of the church differently.

Put succinctly, going back to the first centuries of the church, individual assemblies had to decide what letters, Gospels, and apocalypses were inspired by God and which were not. And from those decisions came a recognized canon. In fact, such decisions are even seen in Scripture itself. For Paul himself could say, “If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord” (1 Cor. 14:37). Conversely, anyone that didn’t recognize his words should not consider himself spiritual (i.e., as having the Spirit).

Likewise, Paul challenges the church at Thessalonica to receive his words as coming from the Lord (2 Thess. 3:6, 14). And Peter, for his part, recognizes Paul’s words as being from God (2 Pet. 3:15–16), just as he declares earlier that the commandment of the Lord Jesus comes “through the apostles” (2 Pet. 3:2). John also follows suit when he declares that, “We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error” (1 John 4:6). John is contending against false teachers, and he says that those who are of the Spirit know how to hear the voice of the Spirit (cf. John 10:27).

All in all, the New Testament teaches us that the Word of God was not something *actively* decided by the church. Rather, the Word of God was something *passively* recognized by the church. And this is why the words of the apostles and prophets were confirmed by works of the Holy Spirit (Heb. 2:4). Indeed, Paul can say in 2 Corinthians 12:12 that the signs and wonders performed in the midst of the people were given by God, so that the people would know that he was sent by the Lord and spoke true words.

In truth, discerning the truthfulness of the apostles and their teaching was what the early church had to do. And over the course of three centuries, from the resurrection of Christ to the Easter Letter of Athanasius in 367 AD, every local church, and churches in communication with one another, had to either

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receive or reject vast numbers of manuscripts. But importantly, during that period, when the New Testament canon was being composed, its composition was a process of reception, not creation. And more, because the Old Testament canon was not in dispute during the days of Christ, this served as a solid foundation on which to build the New Testament canon.

In the rest of this section, I will offer three reasons for each testament as to why we can have confidence in the Bible we hold in our hands today.

Old Testament

The New Testament bears consistent testimony that the books of Moses (*Torah*), the words of the Prophets (*Naviim*), and the Psalms or the Writings (*Ketuvim*) were the canonical books of the Old Testament.¹⁰ For this reason, “there is little to no [scholarly] dispute about the core of the Old Testament we see the New Testament use.”¹¹ Nevertheless, let me offer three reasons why we should have confidence that these additional fourteen books of the Apocrypha are withheld from the canon.

1. *First, by the time the books of the Apocrypha had been written, the Spirit of God had stopped speaking.*

As noted by multiple sources, the Spirit of God no longer spoke after Malachi. For instance, the Babylonian Talmud declares, “After the latter prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi had died, the Holy Spirit departed from Israel, but they still availed themselves of the voice from heaven” (Yomah 9b). Likewise, the historian Josephus notes in *Against Apion*, “From Artaxerxes to our own times a complete history has been written, but has not been deemed worthy of equal credit with the earlier records, because of the failure of the exact succession of the prophets” (1.41). Similarly, 1 Maccabees, one of the Apocryphal books, understands its own time period as being devoid of prophets (4:45–46). Thus, it is clear that the things written between Malachi and Matthew did not contain inspired Scripture.

2. *Second, the early church made a clear distinction between canonical and non-canonical books.*

From AD 382–404, Jerome translated the Bible into Latin. In time, his translation became known as the Latin Vulgate, a term signifying the common language of the people.¹² In his translation work, he came across the “Septuagintal plus,” the extra books included in the Greek translation of the Old Testament.¹³ Sensing a need to translate from the original Hebrew, and not rely solely on the Greek translation, he quickly discerned that not all of the books found in the Septuagint were of equal value. Thus, he limited the ca-

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nonical books to the thirty-nine found in today's Protestant Bibles.¹⁴ In turn, he accepted the apocryphal books as having a place for historical instruction, but not for determining doctrine.¹⁵ The canonical books alone possessed such authority.

In the centuries that followed until the Reformation, Jerome's distinction between canonical and non-canonical books was largely lost. As his Latin translation became the people's book, Apocryphal books were often included.¹⁶ Accordingly, the medium formed the message, and the Apocrypha became part of the accepted canon. This inclusion would sponsor erroneous doctrines in the Roman Catholic Church, doctrines like praying for the dead (2 Macc. 12:44–45) and salvation by almsgiving (Tobit 4:11; 12:9). We can see why the early church made a clear distinction between canonical and non-canonical books.

3. *Third, the Reformation recovered the Hebrew Bible.*

When Reformers like Martin Luther began championing *Sola Scriptura* ("Scripture alone"), the question of canon returned. And among Protestants, the Apocrypha was returned to its proper place — a selection of books useful for their history, but not for authoritative doctrine. This is evident in the way that Luther, Tyndale, Coverdale, and other Protestant Bible translators followed the distinction of Jerome, and relegated the Apocryphal books to appendices in their respective Bible translations.¹⁷

By contrast, the Council of Trent (1545–63), recognized these books as authoritative for doctrine and condemned anyone who would question their place. Additionally, the first Vatican Council (1869–70) reinforced the point and argued that these books were "inspired by the Holy Spirit and then entrusted to the church."¹⁸ This divide still stands between Protestants and Roman Catholics. Yet, for reasons stated above, it is best to follow Jerome's distinction that the books of the Apocrypha are neither necessary nor appropriate for establishing doctrine. Rather, they are merely helpful for providing historical background to the story of God's work among the people of Israel.¹⁹

New Testament

If the New Testament confirms the books of the Old Testament, what confirms the books of the New? At first blush, this question seems to be more challenging. But just as Jesus and the early church could recognize that the Scriptures came from the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:19–21; cf. 2 Tim. 3:16) over against those books that did not come from the Spirit, so too the early church could recognize Gospels and Epistles that came from the apostles and those that did not.

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1. *First, the origins of the canon can be seen in the New Testament itself.*

For instance, in 1 Timothy 5:18 Paul cites from Moses and Luke, referring to both of them as Scripture: “For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ [Deut. 25:4] and, ‘The laborer deserves his wages’ [Luke 10:7].” Similarly, Peter associates Paul’s letters with Scripture (2 Pet. 3:15–16). And this reference comes right after Peter states, “that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles” (2 Pet. 3:2). In other words, Peter understands the apostles to be carrying the very words of Christ, and he associates the apostles with the holy prophets. In sum, then, the New Testament itself bears witness to the apostolic writings as God’s Word.

2. *Second, as with the Apocrypha, the other books written in the centuries after Christ do not measure up.*

As Köstenberger, Bock, and Chatraw note, the *Letter of Ptolemy*, the *Letter of Barnabas*, and the Gospels of Thomas, Philip, Mary, and Nicodemus, all demonstrate themselves to be “leagues apart” from inspired Scripture.²⁰ For instance, citing the most famous extra-biblical Gospel, they write of the Gospel of Thomas:

This book is not a Gospel in the pattern of the four Gospels of Scripture. It has no story line, no narrative, no account of Jesus’s birth, death, or resurrection. It contains 114 sayings allegedly attributed to Jesus, and though some of them sound like things you might hear in Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, many of them are strange and bizarre. Broad consensus places its writing in the early to late second century, but it never factored into canonical discussions at any time. In fact, Cyril of Jerusalem specifically warned against reading it in the churches, and Origen characterized it as an apocryphal gospel. The following statement [from Michael Kruger] sums it up: “If Thomas does represent authentic, original Christianity, then it has left very little historical evidence of that fact.”²¹

3. *Third, the early church quickly arrived at a canonical consensus.*

Indeed, by multiple factors the early church came to a shared consensus of the canon over the course of many generations. While Christian books like the *Letter of Barnabas* and *The Shepherd of Hermas* were appreciated, and occasionally read in some churches, they were not confused with Scripture. Like with the Apocrypha, Jerome noted that these “ecclesiastical” writings were good “for the edification of the people but not for establishing the authority of ecclesiastical dogmas.”²²

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Throughout the first few centuries after Christ, there was a growing list of recognized books. Indeed, as listed here, the church not only cited the apostles in their sermons, letters, and books, but they would occasionally list the books as well (e.g. the Muratorian Canon).²³ And thus, “the books of the New Testament were recognized (not selected) as cream that had risen to the top, used by churches because they were seen to have unique and special value.”²⁴ To cite Jerome once more,

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are the Lord’s team of four, the true cherubim (which means ‘abundance of knowledge’), endowed with eyes throughout their whole body; they glitter like sparks, they flash to and fro like lightning, their legs are straight and directed upward, their backs are winged, to fly in all directions. They are interlocked and hold on to one another, they roll along like wheels within wheels, they go to whatever point the breath of the Holy Spirit guides them.

The apostle Paul writes to seven churches (for the eighth such letter, that to the Hebrews, is placed outside the number by most); he instructs Timothy and Titus; he intercedes with Philemon for his runaway slave. Regarding Paul I prefer to remain silent than to write only a few things.

The Acts of the Apostles seem to relate a bare history and to describe the childhood of the infant church; but if we know that their writer was Luke the physician, ‘whose praise is in the gospel’ we shall observe likewise that all their words are medicine for the sick soul. The apostles James, Peter, John and Jude produced seven epistles both mystical and concise, both short and long—that is, short in words but long in thought so that there are few who are not deeply impressed by reading them.

The Apocalypse of John has as many mysteries as it has words. I have said too little in comparison with what the book deserves; all praise of it is inadequate, for in every one of its words manifold meanings lie hidden.²⁵

Criterion for Accepting NT Canon

Apostolic Authority. Every book of the New Testament came from an apostle, or had apostolic authority behind it.

The Rule of Faith. The books were tested against the Old Testament revelation and the teaching of Jesus.

Universal Acceptance. While acceptance began with local churches, the canon formed as local churches “compared notes.”

Self-Attestation. Ultimately, the Spirit of God bore witness to the Word.

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In this list, Jerome gives us the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, but he also hints at their respective glories. And thus, it moves us to consider why the canon matters.

Why the Canon Matters

We have labored to answer the question, “Where did the Bible come from?” for a very basic reason: namely, how one understands the Bible’s formation, source, and contents determines how one reads — or doesn’t read! — the Bible’s message. Bible readers who are serious about knowing God cannot have confidence to believe what Scripture says or conviction to do what it commands unless they know that the Bible is the inspired and authoritative Word of God and not the fabrication of religious men. On this point, the biblical canon matters immensely. And as we finish this section, let’s expand on the importance of the canon with three implications.

1. First, the formation of the canon undergirds the unity of God’s Word.

Amazingly, Scripture was written by about forty human authors, over the course of roughly 1,400 years. But behind all of them is the one divine author who breathed out every word (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19–21). Indeed, the unity of Scripture is not found in a single deposit of information or a text devoid of literary tension. Rather, the unity of Scripture comes from the fact that the Bible “has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter” (BFM 2000). That is to say, over time God inspired a series of interconnected books, which came to form one unified-but-variegated revelation.

The formation of the canon, therefore, serves to undergird the unity of God’s Word, such that readers of the Book can know they are reading a drama of redemption. As God revealed himself to Moses, and then the prophets on the way to Christ, and the ministry of the apostles, there are tensions, events, and instructions that may appear contradictory. In one place, God says don’t eat anything unclean (Lev. 11); in another, he says the direct opposite (Acts 10). Bacon is back on the menu! If this appears disjointed or contradictory, that is only because one hasn’t yet learned how this part of the storyline unfolds.

In truth, the Bible is unified by a story and not by a set of timeless abstractions. And thus, understanding how the canon was formed through the ages of redemption reinforces confidence in the unity of Scripture. At the same time, it trains us to resolve legitimate tensions in the Bible by way of reading the Bible along the unfolding narrative of Scripture — a point we will consider below.

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2. *Second, the source of the canon undergirds the authority of God's Word.*

If the canon was composed over time, as God spoke to the fathers through the prophets at many times and in many ways (Heb. 1:1), and if the canon was closed because the full and final revelation of God has come in Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:2; cf. Rev. 22:18–19), then we must acknowledge that this book is unlike any other. Indeed, the debate over the canon matters because what Scripture says, God says. This was the point that B. B. Warfield made in a famous essay entitled, “‘It Says,’ ‘Scripture Says,’ ‘God Says,’”²⁶ and it can be found throughout the New Testament, where Jesus and his apostles appeal to Scripture as the authoritative Word of God.

For this reason, it matters that we know what is in the Bible *and what is not in the Bible*. For, as we will see, when we follow the Reformation principle of letting Scripture interpret Scripture (i.e., the analogy of Scripture), we must define and explain Scripture by other passages that are actually inspired by God. Biblical theology, “the discipline of letting Scripture interpret Scripture and reading the whole Bible according to its own literary structures and unfolding covenants,” depends on having a Bible with fixed boundaries.²⁷ To deny the canon, therefore, or to place canonical and non-canonical books on the same level leads to faulty interpretations and theological conclusions. Something I have labeled “the butterfly effect of biblical theology.”

3. *Third, the arrangement of the canon reveals the message of God's Word.*

If God is the source of the canon and the formation of its contents was under his divine providence, then we should not ignore the arrangement of God's Word. In other words, just as Paul can make a theological argument for justification by grace alone by simply recognizing the way that the law of Moses was added 430 years later to the covenant made with Abraham (Gal. 3:17), so we should recognize that the literary and historical arrangement of the biblical canon has interpretive significance. In other words, instead of seeing the Bible as a collection of books accidentally arranged, we should see how the whole canon reveals a message.

This is true in books like the Psalms and the Twelve, otherwise known as the minor prophets, but it is true with the whole Bible too. As Old Testament scholar Stephen Dempster has observed, “Different arrangements generate different meanings.” And thus, “on a larger scale, the interpretive implications of the different arrangements of the Hebrew Tanakh and the Christian Old Testament have been noted.”²⁸ Dempster's observation is critical for reading the Bible, even as it introduces a wrinkle that exceeds the bounds of this field guide.

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Dempster, along with others, have noted the way in which the Hebrew was arranged differently than the standard English Bible. The former has twenty-two books, the latter thirty-nine. To date, there are no publishers that have offered an English Bible arranged like the Hebrew. Nevertheless, awareness of this difference is worthwhile. For not only does the Hebrew arrangement predate the English order, but this literary arrangement tells a theological story and provides a “hermeneutical lens through which its contents can be viewed.”²⁹

Finally, it should be said that this difference in canonical arrangements should not pose challenges to our confidence in Scripture, but it should remind us of the way Scripture came together. When we compare one passage with one another, one part of the Bible with another, arrangement does matter. And this will be most evident as we come to Part 4 (How should we read the Bible?), but before going there, we have one more question to answer: What is (not) in the Bible?

Discussion & Reflection:

1. How did this section strengthen your faith in God’s Word?
2. How would you respond to a friend who thinks the books of the Apocrypha carry equal authority as the sixty-six canonical books?

3

WHAT IS (NOT) IN
THE BIBLE?

I will not attempt to answer this question in the positive here, for to answer “What is in the Bible?” would require a full engagement with all sixty-six books. Indeed, there is a need for such engagement and there are many helpful resources on that point, including Study Bibles,³⁰ Bible surveys,³¹ and most profitably, biblical theologies. The reason why I believe biblical theologies are most helpful is that they do more than survey what is in the text; they provide a lens by which we can read Scripture and understand its overarching message. Of all the good books on the subject, I would begin with these three.

- Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (2002)
- Jim Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (2010)
- Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology* (2015)

While a positive biblical theology will help anyone know what is in the Bible and how it fits together, it is equally important to know what is *not* in the Bible. That is to say, if we come to the Bible with wrong expectations, we are susceptible to misreading Scripture or to give up reading Scripture entirely, because it does not match our preconceived ideas. However, if we can clear away some false expectations of Scripture, it will prepare us to read the Bible well.

And to help us avoid misreading the Bible, let me offer five considerations from Kevin Vanhoozer. In his illuminating book, *Pictures at a Theological Exhibition: Scenes of the Church’s Worship, Witness, and Wisdom*, Vanhoozer reminds us that the Bible is a communication from God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to the people made in his image. In other words, it is not merely a religious text or handbook for spiritual living. Rather, citing J. I. Packer, he summarizes the Bible in one sentence: “God the Father preaching God the Son in the power of God the Holy Ghost.” And with this positive statement in place, he provides five things the Bible is not.³²

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1. Scripture is not a word from outer space or a time capsule from the past, but a living and active Word of God for the church today.
2. The Bible is both like and unlike every other book: it is both a human, contextualized discourse and a holy discourse ultimately authored by God and intended to be read in canonical context.
3. The Bible is not a dictionary of holy words but a written discourse: something someone says to someone about something in some way for some purpose.
4. God does a variety of things with the human discourse that makes up Scripture, but above all he prepares the way for Jesus Christ, the climax of a long, covenantal story.
5. God uses the Bible both to present Christ and to form Christ in us.

Indeed, getting the Bible right does not secure good interpretation or practice, but getting the Bible wrong will lead to errors large and small. So we should aim to rightly understand what Scripture is *and* what it is intended to do — namely, to lead us to Christ and make us like him. This means we must read the Bible with faith, hope, and love. Or to draw out the logical implications, we read the Bible with hope that the God who spoke in his Word will produce in us faith that leads to love.

Truly, no other book in the world can do that. And if we treat the Bible like any other book, we will misread it. Knowledge may increase, but faith, hope, and love will not. At the same time, if we do not give attention to the grammatical and historical nature of the Bible *as a book*, we are liable to misread its contents as well. Accordingly, we need to read the Bible wisely, but such wisdom depends upon knowing what the Bible is and what the Bible is not.

To return to Packer’s definition of Scripture, the Bible is the Father’s Word to us, inspired by the Spirit, to bring us to the Son, so that by God’s Word in human words we might know him and be conformed into his image. In this way, the Bible is a book given to illicit praise to the triune God (doxology) and to cultivate faith, hope, and love in God’s people (discipleship). And with these two orientations in place, we are now ready to consider *how* to read the Bible.

Discussion & Reflection:

1. Are you ever tempted to think wrongly about what the Bible is? Do any of the five items listed above describe things you think or have thought before?
2. Do you read the Bible “with hope that the God who spoke in his Word will produce in us faith that leads to love”? How might that change the way you engage with Scripture?

4

HOW SHOULD WE READ THE BIBLE?

As with the first three parts, the question at hand — how should we read the Bible? — requires more than can be offered here. Nevertheless, I will offer three practical steps for reading the Bible as God’s Word.

Discover the grammatical and historical context of the passage.
Discern where the passage is found in the covenantal history of the Bible.
Delight in the way that this passage brings you to a fuller knowledge of Jesus Christ.

These three “steps” can be described as the textual, covenantal, and Christological horizons of any given passage.³³ In order, each serves as a stepping stone towards uncovering the meaning of a text, its placement in redemptive history, and its relationship to God revealed in Christ. Together, they provide a consistent approach to reading any part of the Bible, for those who are willing to “study” the works revealed in God’s Word (Ps. 111:2).

Such a consistent approach is helpful, because understanding the Bible on its own terms takes work. Because every Bible reader brings his or her own preconceived notions to Scripture, any proper method for reading will help us see what is in the Bible and avoid putting our own ideas and interests into the Bible instead. To do that, I have found this threefold approach to be remarkably helpful.³⁴ So, we will look at each. Yet, before taking the first step, let me offer a word of encouragement to those just beginning to read the Bible for the first time.

Preparing to Read the Bible: Cultivating a Heart for God’s Word

While reading the Bible well takes discipline and skill, it begins with something far more basic — simply reading the Bible. Just as running precedes running well, and playing the piano at home precedes playing the piano for others, so too reading the Bible well begins with the simple act of reading.

Therefore, I would encourage anyone who is just beginning to read the Bible to trust God, ask for his help, and read with faith. God promises to reveal him-

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self to anyone who seeks him with a true heart (Prov. 8:17; Jer. 29:13). If you read Scripture, you will learn that we cannot seek God without his help (Rom. 3:10–19), but you will also discover that God delights to show himself to those who approach him with faith (Matt. 7:7–11; John 6:37). God is not stingy toward those who seek in faith.

Knowing that, those who read the Bible should pray and ask God to make himself known to them. The Spirit is the one who gives life and light, and because reading the Bible is a spiritual endeavor, new readers should ask for his divine aid. And then, with faith that he hears and answers such prayer, they should read, read, and read some more. Just as physical growth takes repeated meals and bodily motion before size and strength are registered in a body, so spiritual growth and biblical understanding take time too. Thus, the most important thing for reading the Bible is a willingness to cultivate a heart for God's Word. And there is no better place to do that than Psalm 119. If reading the Bible is new for you, take one stanza (eight verses) of Psalm 119, read it, believe it, pray it, and then begin reading the Bible.

Additionally, having a consistent time, place, and Bible reading schedule will make reading more enjoyable.³⁵ Over the years, I have learned that reading the Bible is not simply a habit to develop; it is a heavenly meal to enjoy. Just as we eat food for physical strength and pleasure, so Scripture should be enjoyed the same way. As Psalm 19:10–11 puts it, "More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward." With this promise in mind, let me encourage you to taste and see how good Scripture is. And as you read, I offer these next three steps to help you take full advantage of reading the Bible well.

The Textual Horizon: Discovering the Meaning of the Text

All good Bible reading begins with the text. And a key text for observing biblical interpretation in action is Nehemiah 8. Describing the action of the priests, who were commissioned to teach people of Israel (Lev. 10:11), Nehemiah 8:8 reads, "They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading." In historical context, the people needed a re-education in the ways of God when they returned from exile. Even before the exile, attention to the Law had been lost (cf. 2

Finding Our Location in the Bible

Literary Horizon. Because the Bible is written with grammar, syntax, and literary structures, we must begin with the literary nature of the passage. This is like the street address.

Covenantal Horizon. Because the Bible unfolds through covenants, we must discern the covenantal address of the text. This is like the city.

Canonical Horizon. Finally, because the whole Bible is one unified narrative of redemption, we must see how the passage contributes to the whole. This is like the state.

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Chron. 34:8–21), and now delivered from captivity, the sons of Israel were not much better off. Hebrew had been lost in the exile; Aramaic was the new *lingua franca*, and so Nehemiah had the Law read and the priests “gave the sense” of its meaning.

Like Ezra himself (Ezra 7:10), these Levitical leaders helped the people understand and apply the Law of God. As the Law commanded them to do (Lev 10:11), they were explaining what the Law meant. And thus we have a true example of biblical exposition, where line by line, the text is explained. In particular, the meaning of a passage is found in the prose, the poetry, and the propositions found in sentences, stanzas, and strophes. In short, reading the Bible begins by paying attention to the literary and historical context of a given passage.

And importantly, this way of reading is not just produced outside of the Bible; it is actually found within. Deuteronomy and Hebrews both demonstrate biblical exposition, which is another way to describe reading the Bible with biblical precision and application. For instance, Deuteronomy 6–25 expounds the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5), and Hebrews is a sermon that expounds and relates multiple passages from the Old Testament.³⁶

On this basis, we can learn from Scripture how to read the Bible. And when we read the Bible we should begin at the textual horizon, where we pay careful attention to the intentions of the author, the historical context of the audience, and the aim of the book written from the author to the audience. In this way, we should first pay attention to what the author says (the textual horizon) and then when he says it (the covenantal horizon).

The Covenantal Horizon: Discerning the Storyline of God’s Covenant History

Zooming out from the textual horizon we come to the covenantal horizon, or what others have called the epochal horizon.³⁷ This horizon recognizes the Bible is not merely a catalog of timeless truths. Rather, it is a progressively revealed testimony about God’s redemption in history. It is intentionally written along the lines of a multi-faceted promise fulfilled in Christ. As Acts 13:32–33 says, “And we bring you the good news that what God *promised* to the fathers, this he has *fulfilled* to us their children by raising Jesus.”

In recent centuries this progressive revelation has been variously described as a series of dispensations or covenants. And while various traditions have understood the biblical covenants differently, the Bible is unmistakably a covenantal document, comprised of two *testaments* (Latin for “covenant”), and centered on the new covenant of Jesus Christ. Therefore, it fits the biblical

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storyline to understand it as a series of covenants. In fact, from an overview of the Bible, we can lay out redemptive history along six covenants, all leading to the new covenant of Christ.

- Covenant with Adam
- Covenant with Noah
- Covenant with Abraham
- Covenant with Israel (mediated by Moses)
- Covenant with Levi (i.e., the priestly covenant)Covenant with David
- The New Covenant (mediated by Jesus Christ)

These covenants are listed in chronological order and can be shown to possess organic unity, as well as theological development over time. For matters of reading the Bible, it is necessary to ask, “When is this text taking place, and what covenants are in force?”

On this question, it requires the reader to grow in his or her understanding of the covenants, their structure, stipulations, and promises of blessings and curses. In this way, the covenants function as Scripture’s tectonic plates. And knowing their contents provides a growing awareness of the Bible’s message, and how it leads to Jesus Christ.

The Christological Horizon: Delighting in God through the Person and Work of Christ

In Scripture there is from the beginning a forward-looking orientation that leads the reader to look for Christ.. That is to say, beginning with Genesis 3:15 when God promises salvation through the seed of the woman, all Scripture is written in italics — meaning, it slants forward towards the Son who is to come. As Jesus taught his disciples, all Scripture points to him (John 5:39) and so to interpret any portion of the Bible rightly, we must see how it naturally relates to Christ. This is what Jesus did on the Emmaus Road (Luke 24:27), and in the Upper Room (Luke 24:44–49), and what all his apostles continued to do and teach.

To see this method of reading the Old Testament Christologically, one can look at the sermons of Acts. For instance, on the Day of Pentecost Peter explains how the outpouring of the Spirit fulfills Joel 2 (Acts 2:16–21), the resurrection of Christ Psalm 16 (Acts 2:25–28), and the ascension of Christ Psalm 110 (Acts 2:34–35). Likewise, when Peter preaches on Solomon’s portico in Acts 3, he identifies Jesus as the prophet like Moses who is prophesied in Deuteronomy 18:15–22 (see Acts 3:22–26). More comprehensively, when Paul is put under house arrest in Rome, Acts 28:23 records how the imprisoned apostle expounded the Scripture, “testifying to the kingdom of God and

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trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.” Long story short, the sermons in Acts give many illustrations of how the apostles read the Old Testament Christologically.

Admittedly, this Christ-centered approach to interpretation can be misapplied or mischaracterized. But rightly understood, it shows how sixty-six different books find their unity in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Bible is unified because it comes from the same God, but even more it is unified because it all points to the same God-man, Jesus Christ. And because it is a human book with gracious promises to all humanity, all Scripture points to the long-awaited messiah who is the mediator between God and man.

To relate the three horizons then, every *text* has a place in the *covenantal* framework of the Bible that leads us to *Christ*. Hence, every text is organically related to the covenantal backbone of Scripture, and every text finds its *telos* in Christ through the progress of biblical covenants. And unless we bring these three horizons together, we fall short of understanding how to read the Bible. At the same time, the order of the horizons matters too. Christ is not transported back in time to Israel, nor should we simply make superficial connections between the red color of the thread in Rahab’s window (Josh. 2:18). Instead, we should understand the whole episode with Rahab (Joshua 2) in light of the Passover (Exodus 12), and then from the Passover we can move to Christ.

This Christ-at-the-end (*Christotelic*) presupposition is based on the exegetical conviction that all Scripture, all covenants, all typology leads to Jesus. And, accordingly, it has massive interpretive implications. It says that no interpretation is complete until it comes to Christ. Any application that comes to us from the Old Testament, which avoids the person and work of Christ, is fundamentally unsound. Equally, all New Testament applications find their source of strength in Christ, the covenant he mediates, and the Spirit he sends. Therefore, all true interpretations of the Bible must be drawn from the text and related to the covenants, so that they bring us to see and savor Jesus Christ.

This is how we should read the Bible — over, and over, and over again!

Fear and Fear Not, but Take Up and Read

As we finish this field guide, I can imagine that the earnest follower of Christ or the individual considering the claims of Christ may feel inadequate for the task of reading the Bible. And, in a counter-intuitive way, I want to affirm such feelings. Approaching God on Mount Sinai was a daunting reality. And though we have a mediator available to us today in the person of Jesus Christ, it remains a gracious and fearful thing to approach God in his Word

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(Heb. 12:18–29). In this way, we should approach the Word of God with reverence and awe.

At the same time, with Christ living to intercede for those whom he is calling to himself, we should not fear. God deals mercifully with sinners who trust him and seek him in his Word. Thus, reading the Bible is not a fearful activity. So long as we come humbly before God, it is filled with grace, hope, life, and peace.

In truth, no one is, in and of himself, sufficient to read the Bible. All true Bible reading depends on the triune God communicating himself to us *and* on us praying for grace to read God's Word rightly.

In a world filled with endless distractions and competing voices, even the chance and the choice to read God's Word is difficult. And thus, when we endeavor to pick up the Bible to read, we should do so with confidence that God can speak through the cacophony and we should do so with prayer asking God to help us. To that end, I offer this final word about Bible reading from Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556).

In a sermon encouraging the place of reading Scripture, he encouraged the repeated reading of Scripture, plus the need for reading Scripture humbly. As we go about reading the Bible, let these words encourage us to understand the Bible and to do so with patient humility and obedience, such that our profit from the Bible results in praise to the living God who still speaks by the Bible.

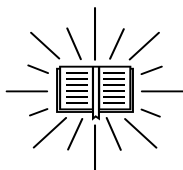
If we read once, twice or thrice, and understand not, let us not cease so, but still continue reading, praying, asking of other[s] and so by still knocking, at the last the door shall be opened, as Saint Augustine says. Although many things in the Scripture be spoken in obscure mysteries, yet there is no thing spoken under dark mysteries in one place, but the selfsame thing in other places is spoken more familiarly and plainly to the capacity both of learned and unlearned. And those things in the Scripture that be plain to understand and necessary for salvation, every man's duty is to learn them, to print them in memory, and effectually to exercise them; and as for the obscure mysteries, to be contented to be ignorant in them until time as it shall please God to open those things unto him. . . . And if you be afraid to fall into error by reading of Holy Scripture, I shall show you how you may read it without danger of error. Read it humbly with a meek and a lowly heart, to think you may glorify God, and not yourself, with the knowledge of it; and read it not without daily praying to God, that he would direct your reading to good effect; and take

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upon you to expound it no further then you can plainly understand it. . . . Presumption and arrogance [are] the mother of all error: and humility needs to fear no error. For humility will only search to know the truth; it will search and will confer one place with another: and where it cannot find the sense, it will pray, it will inquire of others[s] that know, and will not presumptuously and rashly define anything which it knows not. Therefore, the humble man may search any truth boldly in the Scripture without any danger of error.³⁸

Discussion & Reflection:

1. Did any of this section help you know how to read Scripture more faithfully?
2. Which of the three horizons was most helpful to you?
3. What's your plan for how to regularly read the Bible?



ENDNOTES

1. Sometimes this view of God's revelation ceasing at the end of the apostolic age is called cessationism. For a helpful discussion of this position, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts: What They Are and Why They Matter* (Nashville: B&H, 2018), 155–69.
2. For those interested in considering the Bible's place in America, as well as its impact on the citizens of this nation, Mark Noll's book, *America's Book: The Rise and Decline of a Bible Civilization, 1794–1911* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), is well worth the effort to read.
3. Stephen J. Nichols, *The Reformation: How a Monk and a Mallet Changed the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossways, 2007).
4. Admittedly, his own theology had not crystallized in 1517. But by 1520, he had come to a place of understanding and affirming the five solas of the Reformation: Salvation is by grace alone, by faith alone, in Christ alone, according to Scripture alone, all for the glory of God alone. Hence, *sola gratia, sola fide, solus Christus, sola Scriptura, and soli Deo Gloria*.
5. *LW* 32:112. Cited in Matthew Barrett, ed., *Reformation Theology: A Systematic Survey* (Wheaton IL: Crossway, 2017), ##.
6. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 1.7.5.
7. Quoted in Barrett, *Reformation Theology*, 172.
8. Richard N. Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 2nd Ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 37.
9. Paul Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 101.
10. The *Torah, Naviim, and Ketuvim*, make up the *Tanakh*, or the Hebrew Bible.
11. Andreas Köstenberger, Darrell Bock, and Josh Chatraw, *Truth Matters: Confident Faith in a Confusing World* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2014), 45.
12. Today, the word “vulgar” is associated with crude or offensive speech, but in Latin the word *vulgaris* had to do with common, or of the masses.

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Hence, the Vulgate was a Bible written in common speech.

13. F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 87–93.
14. More exactly, he numbered twenty-two books of the Hebrew Bible, taking the Minor Prophets as one book, and other English books (e.g., 1–2 Chronicles and Ezra–Nehemiah) as one book also. We will revisit this way of numbering below.
15. To be most precise, Jerome actually saw two kinds of books standing outside of Scripture — those that possessed an edifying effect for the church and others that were to be wholly avoided (Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 90). Thus, he writes in the preface to his commentary on Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs: “As the church indeed reads Judith, Tobit, and the books of Maccabees, but does not receive them among the canonical books, so let it read these two volumes for the edification of the people but not for establishing the authority ecclesiastical dogmas [i.e., church doctrine]” (Cited in Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 91–92).
16. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 98–100.
17. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 101–04.
18. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 105.
19. Interestingly, Bruce points out that many Roman Catholic scholars do recognize the “deuterocanonical” nature of the Apocrypha (Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 105). Nevertheless, Rome’s understanding of Scripture and tradition puts the Apocrypha on the same level as Scripture for deciding doctrine.
20. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 51–54.
21. Köstenberger, et al., *Truth Matters*, 52–53.
22. Cited by Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 228
23. The Muratorian Canon (ca. AD 190) listed twenty-one books from the New Testament. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 158–69.
24. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 50.
25. Jerome, *Epistle* 53.9. Cited in Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 225.
26. B. B. Warfield, “‘It Says:’ ‘Scripture Says:’ ‘God Says:’” in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, and (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1948), 299–348.
27. Biblical theology can be defined as “the discipline of letting Scripture interpret Scripture and reading the whole Bible according to its own literary structures and unfolding covenants.” <https://christooverall.com/article/concise/the-butterfly-effect-how-biblical-theology-makes-systematic-theology-more-or-less-biblical/>
28. Stephen Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 35.
29. Following Roger Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), Dempster, *Dominion and*

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Dynasty, 35, writes, “The oldest order was clearly that of the Hebrew canon, and there is strong evidence that this was the Bible of Jesus Christ.”

30. My study Bible of choice would be the *ESV Study Bible*.
31. Bible surveys provide information about the author, audience, and aim of every book in the Bible. Two excellent Bible surveys are Tremper Longman III and Raymond Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2006), and D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2005).
32. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Pictures at a Theological Exhibition: Scenes of the Church's Worship, Witness, and Wisdom* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 79–80.
33. These “three horizons” have alternatively been labeled textual, epochal, and canonical.
34. David Schrock, The Three Most Important Words I Learned in Seminary: “Textual, Epochal, Canonical” 9Marks, <https://www.9marks.org/article/the-three-most-important-words-i-learned-in-seminary-textual-epochal-canonical/>.
35. For a selection of good Bible reading plans, see the multiple reading plans offered by the ESV Bible Translation. Additionally, I have found Scripture Union’s E-100 (Essential 100 Challenge) reading plan to be the best place to introduce someone to the whole Bible. In 100 selections from the Bible, it leads the reader through the whole canon of Scripture.
36. Scott Redd, “Deuteronomy,” in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, ed. Miles Van Pelt (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 141; Dennis Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 167–97.
37. I prefer covenantal as it focuses on the Bible’s own terms, covenants instead of epochs.
38. Cited in Barrett, *Reformation Theology*, 184.



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