

Basics of the Bible NCC New Believers

Here is short document that will help you get familiar with the Bible! We hope you find it helpful.

We believe that the Bible is God's word given to us, for our good, to help us and teach us, which makes it for us our highest authority on God, salvation and living out our faith. We believe that the Bible is *inspired*, or as Paul writes in 1 Timothy 3:16, it was *breathed out by God*. Which means this: we don't think that God came down to earth and the Biblical authors took dictation of him literally speaking like some religions think. But we believe that God the Holy Spirit, inspired -intentionally influenced - each different author, to write certain things, in certain times, through different voices, and genres to capture what God wanted to be said in his word. And so, we trust in the truth of what has been persevered in our modern Bibles - (more on that below).

The Bible's Structure

The Old Testament

The Old Testament is the Jewish Bible. It records the history of the God's people through many different types of literature – narrative history, poems, proverbs, laws, etc. It is broken down into 4 main parts.

The Pentateuch – the first 5 books of the Bible, where we learn about creation, the fall, and the initiation of God redemptive plan, working out through Abraham's descendants,

The History Books – overview of Isreal's history for a period of about a 1000 years, the

Wisdom Literature – poems, prayers, explorations of living in God's world,
the Prophets – God, through people, correcting his people and pointing them to the coming Messiah.

Jesus said in Luke 24, that all the Old Testament, points to Him and in his life, he fulfills all the promise and hopes of the Old Testament. Below are quick summaries of each book in each section. For more on the books of the Bible, check out the **Bible Project** on Youtube. They have an awesome library of videos that describe in more details the books of the Bible.

The Pentateuch – This is the first 5 books of the Bible the origins of the world, God’s people, and the law.

Genesis - Describes creation, the first rebellions against God, and God’s choosing of Abraham and his offspring

Exodus - God rescues the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and leads them to the Desert of Sinai, where He gives them laws by which to live

Leviticus - God sets up laws for the Israelites, mostly regarding holiness and worship, so that he might dwell with them and they with him

Numbers - Because of rebellion and disobedience, the Israelites have to wander in the wilderness for 40 years before entering the promised land

Deuteronomy - Moses makes three farewell speeches just before his death, recapping their history and warning the Israelites against further mistakes

History - the history of God’s people, the Israelites, as they move into the promised land, Canaan, and through cycles of rebellion, judgment, repentance, God’s faithfulness, establish a nearly 500-year kingdom

Joshua - After Moses’ death, Joshua leads Israel’s army and conquers much of the promised land

Judges - The new nation of Israel falls into a series of failures, during which God raised up leaders called “judges”

Ruth - A story of love and loyalty between two widows is a ray of light in an otherwise dark period in Israel’s history

1 Samuel - Samuel was a transitional leader between the time of the judges and that of the kings. He appointed the first king, Saul, who failed before God and later tried to prevent David from taking the throne

2 Samuel - David, God’s chosen king, brings the nation of Israel together, but after committing adultery and murder, he went through a series of family and national crises

1 Kings - Solomon succeeds David as king and at his death civil war tears the nation apart. The kings that follow are mostly bad, and the prophet Elijah has dramatic confrontations with King Ahab

2 Kings - Continues where 1 Kings left off, recording the rulers of the divided kingdom. Because the northern kings never followed God consistently, Israel was destroyed by an invader. The south, Judah, had some good kings, but was eventually taken into exile by Babylon

1 Chronicles - Opens with a genealogical record, and records many events from the life of David

2 Chronicles - Records the history of the rulers of Judah, emphasizing the good ones and often paralleling the books of Kings

Ezra - After being held captive in Babylon, the Jews were eventually allowed to return to their homeland. Ezra, a priest, was among the first to return

Nehemiah - Nehemiah also returned from Babylon, though after the temple was rebuilt. He helps to restore the protective wall around Jerusalem and joins Ezra in leading a religious revival

Esther - A courageous Jewish queen keeps her people from being killed while they were exiled in Persia

Wisdom Literature – these poetic writings concentrate on some big questions about pain, God, life, and love.

Job - A godly man wrestles with God after great suffering, and deals with the question “Why?”

Psalms – Though of as the prayer book of God’s people, these prayers and songs cover a wide range of emotions and circumstance. They lead us to know about God and show us how we can relate to God

Proverbs – A book offering wise advice on living well in God’s world. A central theme is living in “the fear of the Lord” – ultimately knowing God is God and we are not. The sayings are not direct promises, but generalities of a well ordered world.

Ecclesiastes - Explores how life without God leads to despair and a sense of meaninglessness

Song of Songs - Celebrates romantic and physical love

Prophets – God spoke through prophets when the kings ruled in Israel and Judah. While sometimes they predict future events, the prophets primarily called God’s people back to Him

Isaiah - The most poetic of all the prophets, Isaiah analyzed the failures of Israel and the nations around Israel and pointed to a future Messiah who would bring peace

Jeremiah - *Jeremiah lived a difficult life, but firmly spoke to the people of Judah before Babylon destroyed the nation*

Lamentations - Jeremiah’s warnings about Jerusalem came true and Lamentations records five poems of sorrow for the fallen city

Ezekiel - Ezekiel spoke to the Jews who were captive in Babylon, using dramatic stories and parables

Daniel - A captive in Babylon, Daniel rose to the office of prime minister. Despite political pressure, he lived a model life of integrity and prophesied about the future, and the coming Messiah

Hosea – God told Hosea to marry a prostitute so that Hosea lived out his message: that Israel had committed spiritual adultery against God, and yet God was radically committed in love to them.

Joel - Beginning with a disastrous locust plague, Joel foretold God's judgment on Judah. And He foresaw a day coming when God would pour out His spirit on all people.

Amos - Amos preached to Israel about materialism at the height of its prosperity

Obadiah - *A warning to Edom, a nation bordering Judah, about pride?*

Jonah - Jonah reluctantly went to Ninevah and found Israel's enemies responsive to God's message

Micah - Micah exposed corruption in every level of society, but closed with a promise of forgiveness and restoration

Nahum - Long after Jonah had stirred Nineveh to repentance, Nahum foretold the mighty city's total destruction

Habakkuk - Habakkuk addressed his book to God, not people, discussing the problems of suffering and justice

Zephaniah - Zephaniah focused on the coming day of the Lord, which would purge Judah, resulting in a remnant used to bless the entire world

Haggai - After returning from the Babylonian captivity, the Jews began rebuilding the temple of God. But before long they set aside that task to work on their own homes and Haggai reminded them to put God first

Zechariah - Writing about the same time as Haggai, Zechariah also urged the Jews to work on the temple. He used a more uplifting approach, describing how the temple points to the coming Messiah

Malachi - The last Old Testament prophet, Malachi faced a nation that had grown indifferent. He sought to stir them from apathy

The New Testament

The New Testament is the part of the Bible that describes the life of Jesus and what he accomplished in his life, death, and resurrection. And then in light of all that, the New Testament gives us wisdom about how to live our life.

Gospels and Acts - the first four books of the New Testament are the gospels, which are accounts of Jesus' life and ministry. While many stories from the gospels overlap, each has a different focus and different audience and together they create a complete picture of Jesus' teachings and miracles. Acts covers the events of the early church in the first 30 years after Jesus ascended to Heaven.

Matthew - Written to a Jewish audience, this Gospel links the Old and New Testaments. It presents Jesus as the Messiah promised in the Old Testament, emphasizes Jesus' authority and power, and focuses on the kingdom of God

Mark - Mark's gospel stresses action and gives a straightforward, enthusiastic account of Jesus' work on earth

Luke - Luke, a doctor, provides many details of human interest, especially in Jesus' treatment of the poor and needy

John - John has a different, more reflective style than the other gospels. He spends a large portion of the book on Jesus' teachings during the last days of His life. He says his goal was to prove that Jesus was the Son of God (John 20)

Acts - Acts includes many significant events that shaped the early church. Letters - the early church was nourished by apostles who set down their beliefs and messages in a series of letters

Paul's Letters: These are letters written by a man named Paul - a man who was killing Christians until Jesus showed up and saved him - to a bunch of different churches that he started. They describe what we believe about Jesus and how to live life in light of what Jesus has done.

Romans - This is probably Paul's most theologically rich letter. Romans sets forth theology in very a logical, organized form, as he unpacks the gospel and how to live in Christian community

1 Corinthians - Takes up the problems of a church in Corinth: marriage, factions, immorality, public worship, spiritual gifts, and lawsuits

2 Corinthians - Paul wrote this follow-up letter to the first, addressing other concerns and to defend himself against a rebellion led by certain false apostles

Galatians - This letter deals with legalism and shows how Christ came to bring freedom, not bondage to rules

Ephesians - Ephesians discusses our position in Christ as believers and how we should live as Christians

Philippians – Sometimes called the Joy Letter, this letter stresses that joy can be found in any situation

Colossians – This letter tells us that faith in Christ is complete and that nothing needs to be added to what Christ did

1 Thessalonians – Paul wrote this letter to a church to give direct advice about specific problems

2 Thessalonians - This stronger-toned sequel to his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul goes over similar topics and addresses the church's questions about Christ's second coming

1 Timothy - A leadership manual for Timothy, a young man Paul mentored

2 Timothy - Offers Paul's final words to his young assistant

Titus - Titus was left in Crete to pastor the churches. It was a notoriously difficult place to nurture a church. Paul's letter gave practical advice on how to go about pastoring there

Philemon - Paul urged Philemon, owner of runaway slave Onesimus, to forgive his slave and accept him as a brother in Christ

Pastoral Letters: These letters were written by other church leaders to different groups of Christians

Hebrews - No one knows who wrote Hebrews, but it was probably written to Jewish Christians in danger of slipping back into Judaism. It interprets the Old Testament, explaining many Jewish practices as symbols that prepared the way for Christ and how Jesus is the greater fulfillment of all the OT hopes and promises.

James – James, Jesus half brother, wrote this letter and in it emphasized the right kind of behaviour for a believer, discussing how people who call themselves Christians ought to act like it

1 Peter - Peter's letter comforted and encouraged Christians who were being persecuted for their faith

2 Peter - This letter focuses on problems that sprang up from inside the church and warns against false teachers

1 John - Focusing on words like light, love, and life, John elegantly explains basic truths about the Christian life

2 John - Warning against false teachers, John counselled churches on how to respond to them

3 John - Balancing 2 John, this companion letter mentions the need to be hospitable to true teachers

Jude - Jude gives a brief but fiery exposé of heretics

Revelation - The only New Testament book that concentrates on prophecy (or the future). It completes the story begun in Genesis, of the cosmic battle between good

and evil being waged on earth. It ends with a picture of a new heaven and new earth of which you will be part as a Christ follower.

Ways to read the Bible

The simplest way to just read the Bible, is to simply read it! We also believe that as you read the Bible the Holy Spirit helps you to understand and apply the truth of it to your life. So as you read, take time to pray and ask for the Holy Spirit's help.

But we want to help you get the most out of your time reading, so here are some help tips to do that!

- 1) **Context is key!** Sometimes we can get ourselves into trouble when we read one single verse out its greater context in the Bible. For example:
 - a. What kind of writing is it, a poem, a letter, a narrative, a proverb. Know this can help us understand how to read certain things. Is this a metaphor like in a poem, pointing us to a greater truth, is this a story showing a point, is this an instruction for us to do?
 - b. Read around what you are reading. Try reading the whole paragraph, or section, or in a smaller letter, even that if you can! This can give you insights into what is going on. For example:
 - i. Jeremiah 29:11 " For I know the plans I have for you says the Lord, plans to prosper you, to give you a hope and future." This makes for a good one liner, and its promises are true, but the context is that the people of God will have to wait another 70 years before God takes them out of exile!
- 2) **Use a method.** There are different helpful methods of reading that will help you organize your thoughts, here are two:
 - a. SOAP
 - i. S – scripture : write down what the scripture is
 - ii. O – observe: make observations about what is happening, who is the audience, what is the context, who's the main character, etc.
 - iii. A – apply : look for lessons, instructions, and insights, that help us live life the way God wants us to
 - iv. P – pray: take time to pray about what you read and ask God to help you apply it in your life.
 - b. 4 Questions
 - i. What does the passage teach me about God? We believe that God is ultimately the main character of the Bible. We can learn about his nature, his heart, his plans, his promises, how he does what he does. Look for what the passage is trying to teach you about God.

- ii. What does the passage teach me about me (human nature) in relation to God? The Bible also teaches us about ourselves. It can help us see things about how we related to God, sin that may exist in us, how we interact with God – in good and bad ways. Does this passages show me something about human nature?
- iii. What are the principles, instructions, insights, lessons, actions, etc, I am supposed to take from this passage? This might be direct commands found in the passages, like in Paul's letters, or it could be learning from questions 1 and 2. Do some thinking and find the lessons.
- iv. How does this passage lead me to the Gospel? We believe that all the Bible ultimately points us to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Where are the gospel themes, the gospel implication, the gospel threads, how the gospel empowers us, woven into this passage.

Authenticity of the New Testament

Research looking to into the contents of our modern versions of the Bible have shown that the Bibles we have today are 99.9% accurate to what the original authors wrote. The .1% variations we might have in our text are primarily minor spelling differences, and nothing that would affect any central doctrines. There are over 5800 Greek copies of the NT, comprising over 2.6 million pages, with the average size of the manuscript being 459 pages, and some manuscripts dating within 100 years of the originals. In comparison, the average classical Greek author, we have maybe 20 copies, with an average of around 1000 years between the original. In plain language, the evidence for the authenticity of the New Testament is overwhelming, and that's just the considering the Greek manuscripts. There are also 10000 Latin copies and over 5000 other ancient New Testament manuscripts. As well, the Early Church Fathers alone quote the New Testament in their writings around 1 million times. This would enable scholars to construct the New Testament many times over. All of this to say, we are quite confident that when you read your Bible, you are reading what Jesus actually said.

sources:

- <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/justintaylor/2012/03/21/an-interview-with-daniel-b-wallace-on-the-new-testament-manuscripts/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lEmch2OAh8>
- <http://www.csntm.org/>

We hope you will take time to dive into God's word and truly encounter the God of the word! If you have any questions, never be afraid to ask! There are also some great online Bible resources that you can use. Here are a few suggestions:

Blueletterbible.org

Biblegateway.com

Ccel.org