

Week 2 – Discovering God’s Word

“God’s Word” – the Bible

Christians believe that God reveals himself to us in a special way through the Bible – the written record of people’s real experiences of God, handed down through the generations, in a way which still speaks to us today. This is why Christians describe the Bible as God’s Word, or The Word of the Lord.

WHAT is the Bible? “Bible” comes from a Greek word meaning “books”. The Bible is a collection of 66 books, written at different times by different people, containing many different kinds of writing – history, poetry, law, letters, stories, legends, visions, prophecy, biography, theology – each revealing God to us in their own unique way, and each with their own truth to tell.

It is the all time world bestseller, translated into more languages than any other book, and read by millions of people.

The **Old Testament** (39 books) contains the Jewish scriptures, and tells the story of God’s involvement with the Jewish people (Israel).

The **New Testament** (27 books) describes the birth, life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and all that it means for us.

WHO is the Bible about? God. The whole Bible is about people’s real experience of God in their lives.

WHY was it written? To share that experience with other people, so that they will come to know and trust God too. For example:

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. *But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.*” (John 20:30-31)

HOW was it written? It began with collections of stories, and teachings of great religious leaders, often passed on by word of mouth. In time they were written down and made into precious books. For such ancient texts, the quality and reliability of the Bible manuscripts is exceptionally good.

WHERE did it all happen? Mostly in the area east of the Mediterranean, covered by modern Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. Paul later went on missionary journeys to Turkey, Greece, Crete, Cyprus, Malta and Rome. Archaeology has found evidence of many places and events described in the Bible.

WHEN did it happen? The story of the Jewish people really begins with Abraham, around 2000 B.C. King David lived about 1000 B.C. Jesus was born about 6 B.C., and lived until his crucifixion and resurrection in 30 A.D.

Most of the New Testament books were written between 20 and 70 years after Jesus’ death and resurrection, though some were probably based on earlier sources.

God in the Old Testament

Some of the ideas people had about God in the Old Testament can be misleading – when they thought God cared more about the Israelites than other people, or condoned the loss of innocent lives. But the Old Testament shows us that –

- God is the source of all life, our Creator. He is all-powerful, and has the last word on all things.
- God is actively involved in the world, actively working through history.
- He is the God of ordinary people, caring especially for the weak and vulnerable.
- He wants a world full of honesty, justice, equality, freedom, and peace.
- If people put their trust in God, he will guide and care for them always.
- Even when people turn away from God, and do wrong time and again, he always wants them back, and is always ready to forgive.

God in the New Testament

The New Testament tells us about Jesus. Jesus himself is God. He says, “The Father and I are one.” To discover what God is like, we need only to look at Jesus. What do we see?

- He mixed with ordinary people, from every walk of life, including those who were rejected by society.
- He spent all his time helping, supporting and encouraging people.
- He brought healing and comfort to people who were ill or sad or vulnerable.
- He urged people to turn to God, and promised that God would forgive them.
- He went through terrible pain and suffering, for our sake, on the Cross.
- He overcame death with his resurrection. He overcame evil and hatred with love.
- He promised he would always be with us, through the Holy Spirit.

Reading the Bible

The secret of reading the Bible is to ask, what can I learn from this passage? What does it say about God? What is God trying to say to me?

Here are a few suggestions which may help ...

- Use a modern translation, such as the New Revised Standard Version, in an edition which is comfortable to read and to hold.
- It's best to get to know the New Testament first. Perhaps start with Luke's gospel, and then move on to read Acts.
- Reading a little each day is a good habit to get into. Some people find it helpful to follow daily Bible reading notes which you can get regularly through All Saints'.
- Listen carefully when the Bible is read in church, and perhaps re-read the passages when you get home.
- “The Bible Guide” by Andrew Knowles provides a great commentary on the whole Bible. It's easy to read, and it also helps to explain any difficult passages.