



# SUPPLEMENTAL LESSON TWO: WHAT IS THE BIBLE AND HOW DO WE STUDY IT?

## FACILITATOR NOTE

This lesson focuses on the Bible and how important a book it really is. You will spend time looking at how special of a book it is and also address common questions that are associated with the Bible. These are great questions for conversation and you should spend time working through them with the class participants. If you don't address them in this setting, then the class participants will find somewhere to address them, and the world has some answers for them that they are ready to share if we don't help them. You will also have time to discuss with the class how to get down into a deeper study of God's Word. There is a world of difference between reading the Bible and allowing the Bible to read you. Help your class participants come to know the difference.

## PRAYER

Spend time in prayer with the class. Allow for requests and center your prayer on this lesson.

## LESSON

### I. WHAT IS SO SPECIAL ABOUT THE BIBLE?)

The Bible can be a mystery sometimes. Many questions surround it: its authority, who wrote it, how it was written, etc. But no one can question the impact that the Bible has had on the world. No matter what one believes about the Bible, there is no doubt that this is an amazing book. Here is a book that was:

- Written over a 1,600-year span (from 1500 BC to AD 100).
- Written over 40 generations.
- Written by over 40 authors from every walk of life, including kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesmen, etc.
- Written in a variety of places, including a wilderness, dungeon, palace, while traveling, and in the rigors of a military campaign.
- Written during times of war and peace.
- Written during moods of joy and despair.
- Written on three continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe.
- Written in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.



There is no book on earth that has been more analyzed, studied, translated (in over 1,600 languages), circulated (in over 95% of the world in the differing languages and dialects), purchased (most purchased book in the world for the last 50 years), debated over, and criticized than the Bible. Yet, the Bible speaks with amazing *unity* on hundreds of controversial topics. There is no book in history that can claim such awesome credentials.

The New Testament often comes under great scrutiny concerning its reliability and accuracy. What is interesting is that other ancient works do not come under the same scrutiny, but are widely accepted without question. There are some 5,686 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament in existence today. If we were to compare these numbers with other ancient Greek writings it would look like this:

Author	Date Written	Earliest Copy	Approximate Time Span between original & copy	Number of Copies	Accuracy of Copies
Lucretius	died 55 or 53 B.C.		1100 yrs.	2	----
Pliny	A.D. 61-113	A.D. 850	750 yrs.	7	----
Plato	427-347 B.C.	A.D. 900	1200 yrs.	7	----
Demosthenes	4th Cent. B.C.	A.D. 1100	800 yrs.	8	----
Herodotus	480-425 B.C.	A.D. 900	1300 yrs.	8	----
Suetonius	A.D. 75-160	A.D. 950	800 yrs.	8	----
Thucydides	460-400 B.C.	A.D. 900	1300 yrs.	8	----
Euripides	480-406 B.C.	A.D. 1100	1300 yrs.	9	----
Aristophanes	450-385 B.C.	A.D. 900	1200 yrs.	10	----
Caesar	100-44 B.C.	A.D. 900	1000 yrs.	10	----
Livy	59 BC-AD 17	----	???	20	----
Tacitus	circa A.D. 100	A.D. 1100	1000 yrs.	20	----
Aristotle	384-322 B.C.	A.D. 1100	1400 yrs.	49	----
Sophocles	496-406 B.C.	A.D. 1000	1400 yrs.	193	----
Homer (Iliad)	900 B.C.	400 B.C.	500 yrs.	643	95%
New Testament	1st Cent. A.D. (A.D. 50-100)	2nd Cent. A.D. (c. A.D. 130 f.)	less than 100 years	5,600+	99.5%

This is simply amazing! The internal consistency (comparison of text from one manuscript to the next) of the New Testament manuscripts is about 99.5% textually pure. You also have to take into account that there are over 19,000 ancient manuscript copies in Syriac, Latin, Coptic, and Aramaic languages. That brings the total of ancient New Testament manuscripts to over 24,000. There are no other ancient manuscripts that can boast those numbers and textually consistency/reliability. NONE! There are also no ancient manuscripts that have as early a copy to corroborate the original as those of the New Testament (a fragment of the Gospel of John dates back to around 29 years after the original would have been written).



Yet, despite all these facts, many questions still remain when considering the Bible. Why? Because no other book in all of history calls us to question ourselves and follow a path that does not focus on ourselves. Consider these questions:

- **How do we know the Bible comes from God?**
- **How do we know the Bible is reliable?**

Questions like these arise often when we encounter individuals who are not sure they believe in God. They are not sure that the Bible is really from God. From this perspective, they can see the Bible as a book of religious folklore and myths; or they might even give it more credit as a historical document.

- **What do you think?**
- **How would you answer them?**

Interestingly, more and more Christians question the authority and reliability of Scripture. It is not uncommon to find within the walls of a church building people who believe that the Bible has some things that come from God, but that it was still written by man and is not all from God and filled with errors. There are generally three different Christian approaches to Scripture:

- 1) **Fundamentalist View** – Believe that the Bible is the complete Word of God and should be followed at all times for all issues. This view holds that God spoke directly to the writers of the Bible and they wrote it down word-for-word. They believe that the Bible is free from error and should be understood at face value. So, if the Bible says the universe was created in 6 days, it was 6 days.
- 2) **Conservative View** – This view holds that the Bible is the inspired Word of God (the authors were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write what they wrote). The Bible is historical and has spiritual truths that God wants His people to know. Therefore, conservatives believe that the Bible has complete authority about moral and spiritual issues, but may not have the same authority when it comes to things like science. Conservatives believe that when interpreting the Bible one must know and understand the context of the time it was written and the people who wrote it. While there are spiritual truths from God in the Bible, not everything written in Scripture is literal or relevant to us today. They believe the Bible answers the “why” questions, but not always the “how” questions.
- 3) **Liberal View** – Liberals believe that not everything in Scripture is relevant to us today and that not everything written in the Bible is true or literally happened. Instead, the Bible should be considered a guide but that it was written by humans who made mistakes or had agendas. The authors may have experienced God in some way and were simply trying to put it into words. Therefore, we should use great caution in how we approach and interpret the Bible. They believe much of what is read in Scripture is symbolic and/or poetic and that the truths it teaches are not necessarily literal but spiritual. For instance, the miracles of Jesus’ can teach us about His power but they didn’t actually happen. Therefore, they approach the Bible to gain spiritual insight but do not take it literally.

- **What do you think?**



- **Where do you lie in this spectrum?**
- **Which of these descriptions would you most associate the Bible with?**
  - *Actual word of God, should be taken literally*
  - *Actual word of God, multiple interpretations possible*
  - *Inspired by God, not to be taken literally*
  - *Ancient book of fables, history, precepts*
  - *Don't know...*

**Let's read the following passages together:**

- Proverbs 30:5-6
- Romans 15:4
- 2 Timothy 3:16-17
- Hebrews 4:12-13
- 2 Peter 1:20-21
  - According to these passages, how should we view and approach God's Word?

**What is Biblical Inerrancy?**

The inerrancy of Scripture does not mean there are not grammatical errors or difficulties found in Scripture. Instead, it claims "Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to the fact." In other words, it is without error or fault in all its teaching. What is spoken by God as truth in one portion of His Word will remain true in another. As Wayne Grudem says in simple terms, "The Bible always tells the truth, and it always tells the truth concerning everything it talks about." The Bible doesn't tell us every fact about every subject, but what it does tell us is **true**.

- **Do you agree? Why or why not?**

**What does Jesus say about Scripture (the Bible)?**

The Authority of Scripture begins with Jesus, who considered the Old Testament to be the Word of God.

Jesus said that Scripture:

- Is eternal (Matthew 5:17-18)
- Is the Word of God (Mark 7:8-13)
- Never fails (Luke 16:17)
- Was fulfilled in Him (Luke 24:27, 31-32, 44-45)
- Cannot be nullified (John 10:35)

Jesus considered Scripture:

- Authoritative (Matthew 22:31-32 & Mark 12:35-37)
- A source of spiritual strength (Matthew 4:4-10)



Jesus could not endorse the New Testament (because it was not yet written), but He did lay the groundwork for it.

- Jesus designated his disciples as his witnesses and spokesmen (Luke 24:48, Acts 1:8, John 15:27)
- Jesus promised the disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 16:12-13)
- The writers of the New Testament recognized the inspiration of their words (Ephesians 2:20, 2 Peter 3:2, Hebrews 2:3-4, 2 Peter 3:15-16)

**THE BIBLE IS THE WORD OF GOD, or we are to be pitied above all humankind.**

## II. HOW DO WE STUDY THE BIBLE?

So, if we believe the Bible is the Word of God, how do we study it? How can we understand what the Bible says and apply its messages to our daily lives?

There is a parable about a man who would open his Bible and read whichever verse he saw first in order to seek God's will for his life? One day, as he was going through a difficult time with his family, he sought the Lord's guidance.

Opening his Bible, he pointed to a random verse. His finger rested on Matthew 27:5: "Then [Judas] went away and hanged himself." Puzzled by these directions, but still hungry for a word from God, he called a "do-over" and flipped to another page. He found himself looking at Luke 10:37: "Jesus told him, 'Go and do likewise.'" Flustered but chalking it up to coincidence, the man decided to give his method one last chance. Saying a quick prayer, he flipped the pages and placed his finger on John 13:27. There, staring up at him, was a command in Jesus' own words: "What you are about to do, do quickly."

There are good ways to approach studying the Bible and some not-so-good ways. The above parable demonstrates a not-so-good way. So, what are some good ways to approach studying God's Word?

### Three Essential Steps to Bible Study

#### 1) **OBSERVATION: What Does It Say?**

Whenever we open the Bible we must first start by simply looking to see what's there. This consists of reading slowly and carefully in order to answer the four "wh" questions: who, what, when, and where? It's always best to read the entire book (i.e. – Mark, John, etc.) rather than just a portion of it. Important things to observe when reading include:

- Look for repeated words, phrases, or ideas
- Determine who is speaking or writing
- Determine who is being addressed



- Determine the main characters
- Determine the setting or where it is this taking place
- Consider any comparisons, contrasts, or conditional statements?
- Determine whether or not there is a logical progression in the author's argument
- Consider atmosphere, moods, and emotion
- Look to the section divisions and words or phrases that link them together
- ASK YOURSELF: What don't I understand here?

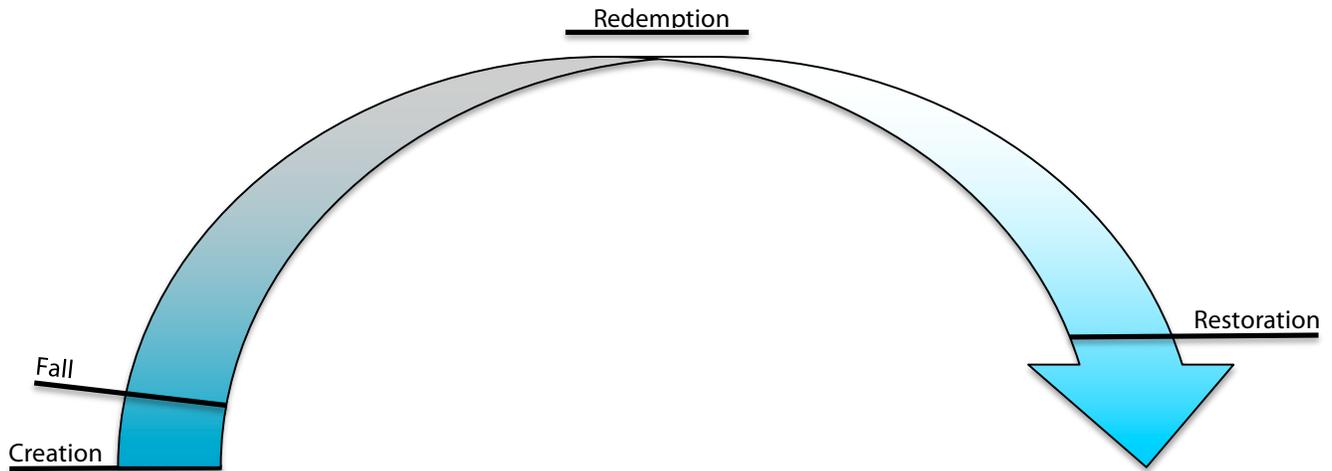
This is not as difficult as it may sound and the more you engage the Bible in this way, the more aware you become of these things. Practice makes perfect!

## 2) **INTERPRETATION: What Does It Mean?**

Now that you've considered what the passage says you have to ask, "What does it *mean*?" It is the process of trying to determine what the author's main point and purpose for writing is. There are 5 **C**lues to look for:

1. **Context.** What does the text say? This involves looking at the near context (the verses immediately before and after the particular passage you are studying) as well as the far context (the paragraph or the chapter that precedes and/or follows the passage you're studying and the entire book itself).
2. **Cross-references.** How do other passages in the Bible shed light on the passage you are studying? CAUTION: Be careful not to assume that the same word or phrase in two different passages means the same thing and therefore reading into it a meaning that is not there.
3. **Culture.** What is the cultural context that the author is addressing and writing to? What role might that culture play in what is being shared and taught?
4. **Conclusion.** Based on these answers, what do I believe the author is saying? How would you paraphrase this passage? Write it out. CAUTION: Remember that a biblical author may be conveying more than one thought or idea in a lengthy passage.
5. **Consultation.** What have others said about this passage? Consulting Bible commentaries (plural), written by Bible scholars, can help you interpret Scripture.

One more important thing to consider in this step: Where does this passage fall in the story of redemption (**The Metanarrative: The Story Above the Stories** —See *Foundations – Supplemental Lesson One*)? How does it fit within the Bible's teaching as a whole? SEE IMAGE BELOW



The Bible is about God and the focus/center is on Jesus, the Messiah. With this in mind, here is a simple framework that may help you interpret the entire Bible with Jesus in view:

- Old Testament: **Anticipation** of Jesus
- Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John): **Manifestation** of Jesus
- Acts: **Proclamation** of Jesus
- Epistles (each book between Acts and Revelation): **Explanation** of Jesus
- Revelation: **Restoration** of God's People through Jesus

### 3) **APPLICATION: How Should I Respond?**

The ultimate goal in studying the Bible is to not only learn what it is saying, but how it matters to you and how you should respond to its teaching. The first two steps are about reading and studying the text. The last step is now allowing the text to read and study you. To fail to accomplish this step in Bible study is to make your efforts purely "academic". The Bible itself is clear about the importance of moving from knowledge and understanding to obedience. Consider these questions:

- What did I learn about God—His character, desires, purpose, will, promises, ways?
- What did I learn about myself, my relationships, the world?
- What did I learn about my relationship with God?
- How is God's plan of redemption evident in this passage?
- How does this passage increase my understanding of the Gospel?
- What changes do I need to make in my thinking or in my actions based on what I've studied?
- What should I be praying for in light of this passage?
- Is there any that I need to spend time meditating on in this passage?
- What implications does this passage have for the way I engage others?



The key to the Application step is putting into practice what God has taught you in your study. Although there may be multiple lessons you have learned in your study, make sure to be intentional about trying to apply at least one thing you learned in your daily walk with God. Remember, our spiritual growth is a lifelong process in which God's Spirit is transforming us into the image of Jesus Christ. Every step is necessary and a part of our journey. As you apply God's Word to your daily walk, you will find a growing relationship with Him as you come to know Him more intimately and as He transforms your life.