 Faith Confirmed 2019

THINKING ABOUT THE BIBLE

The Bible (from Koine Greek τὰ βιβλία, tà biblía, "the books") is a canonical collection of texts written over many hundreds of years by many different people who lived in the Middle East, Africa and Southern Europe around the Mediterranean Sea. Essentially, it tells the story of God, and his relationships with people over several thousand years. Many Christians consider the whole canonical text of the Bible to be divinely inspired. The oldest surviving complete Christian Bibles are Greek manuscripts from the 4th century. At St Mary’s Church we revere the Bible as the source of our Christian knowledge but believe it is to be interpreted in the light of tradition and reason. At St Mary’s Church we use the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) for Bible readings and study.

**Why is the Bible special?**

* The Bible is the world’s number one best-seller each year.
* This book has been translated into more languages than any other book in history.
* Millions of Christians the world over come to the Bible each week or each day in church services, in small groups and on their own.
* The Bible’s teachings about God and humanity lie at the root of our entire civilization.
* Christians believe that, through this book, God has spoken to us in a unique way and, through this book, he still speaks to us today.
* Christians often refer to texts from the bible as ‘scripture’ or ‘God’s Word.’

**What does the Bible say about itself?**

*‘All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.’* (2 Timothy 3.16)

*‘Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the Lord,*

*and on his law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.’* (Psalm 1.1-3)

*‘Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.’*

(Psalm 119.105)

*‘Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit,*

*which is the word of God.’* (Ephesians 6.17)

**Testament, Covenant and Relationship**

For Christians the Bible is very significant because it tells us the truth about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We believe that God caused the Bible to be written for our learning, although it was not always written down. For many hundreds of years, stories, like those of creation, would have been passed on orally from one generation to the next, as part of the heritage of that group. Over time those accounts were engraved upon stone tablets and later scrolls made from skin. It was a very long time before the books of the Bible were arranged as we have them today – which included a process of redaction and editing. During Hebrew history some Old Testament books were compiled, bringing together different traditions. We see this is evident in the book of Genesis, where different writing traditions refer to God in different ways, such as God, The Lord (God) and Yahweh.

The collections of books that make up the Bible reflect the lives of different people at different periods in their developing history and culture. They are arranged into two distinct sections. The Old Testament has 39 books, (The Apocrypha – an additional collection of 10 books – this is found in the NRSV we use) and the New Testament. The words Testament and Covenant basically mean the same thing, they are all about relationship. The old ‘relationship’ with God as revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures was originally the story of the Jewish people and their nation. But the new relationship, the New Testament is for all people, when God became human, born among us, named Jesus or ‘Emmanuel’ – God is with us. Basically, the Bible is a faith Library.

**Reading the Old Testament**

The Old Testament is a library of books written and collected over more than 1,000 years (which is longer than St Mary’s Church has stood – from 1066 / William the Conqueror until now!) Many of the books were collected and added to gradually over this period. The Old Testament is written mainly in Hebrew (with a little Aramaic). As a whole, the Old Testament tells the story of the nation of Israel and God’s relationship with the nation. The different sorts of books in the library need to be read in different ways. You will need help to understand the Old Testament and the context of each text because of the different cultures from which it comes. You will find the following books in the Old Testament library:

* Law
* History
* Prophecy
* Songs
* Wisdom.

**Reading the New Testament**

The New Testament is a library, like the Old Testament – but with not as many sorts of books. It was written in Greek and was composed within 60 – 120 years of Jesus’ death and resurrection. The New Testament was written by Jesus’ disciples and by the first generation of Christians who followed. The New Testament tells the story of Jesus and the early Church. The books in the New Testament library are:

* Four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke & John)
* Acts (by the same author as Luke’s Gospel)
* Letters to the early Churches, also known as ‘Epistles’

 (by Paul, Peter and others)

* Revelation.

**How to read the Bible**

Read the Bible in a form you can understand and try to use a modern version. Don’t try to read from start to finish, Genesis to Revelation, for that can be too much to take in or comprehend in one go and would take a very long time! But likewise, try and avoid using the Bible like a lucky dip, when again it is easy to read a passage or a verse out of context. Try to listen to what God is saying to you as you read the Bible.

**Different ways of reading the Bible**

Many Christians use Bible reading notes which offer a reflection on the meaning of the verses you read. Alternatively, read a book of the Bible at a time and use a concordance or other text to help you understand the meaning for background. (Tom Wright ‘For Everyone’ has produced an excellent series of Bible commentaries that are worth working through as he unpacks the texts of scripture). Use your imagination and think yourself into a passage. You may like to meditate on a single verse. But avoid taking each verse out of the context of the wider narrative.

**For reflection**

Thank God for Scripture! Include a short Bible reading in your daily prayer time.