

Summer Study -- A Bible Overview With a Jesus Focus

Lesson 1: Overview

Introduction to this Study

Once again, I have set what I think is a worthy goal for which I feel totally inadequate--to provide a 30,000-foot, ~10-week view of the Bible that adds value for personal study by those mature in Bible study while providing a foundation for those less familiar upon which to build a love for God's Word. But just as in other efforts where the Holy Spirit has guided me, I have faith that this effort will not be in vain. In fact, credit for anything good in any of my efforts (and this) is to the Holy Spirit; any errors or "not so goods" are mine.

The Holy Spirit used Bible study (to which Cher lovingly dragged me kicking & screaming) to convince me of Scripture's divine inspiration and therefore the validity & truth of all it contained. I came to see the Bible in terms of a "spider web" whereby every passage connects directly or via other connections to every other.

As we progress through this study, please provide feedback to help me best serve YOUR personal study.

Introduction to the Bible

What makes the Bible special? As Billy Graham put it: Let me give you three reasons why the Bible is unique:

- First, it, and it alone, leads us to Jesus Christ. Why is this important? Because Jesus was more than just another great religious teacher or philosopher; He was God in human flesh. He demonstrated it by His life — and He proved it by His resurrection from the dead.
- Second, the Bible is unique because it tells us how God wants us to live. Why are we here, and how are we supposed to live? The Bible tells us — and your life will never be the same once you understand this.
- Finally, the Bible is unique because it gives us hope for the future. This world is not all there is to life; when we know Christ, ahead of us is heaven! Don't turn your back on God, and don't reject the salvation He offers you any longer. Instead, discover the Bible for yourself, and through its pages discover the new life Christ offers you — now and forever.

Bible facts:

- The Old Testament was written mostly in Hebrew.
- The New Testament in 1st century (*koine*) Greek, which was used across the known world then, but has greatly changed to the Greek used today. Koine Greek used all capital letters & did not have punctuation or even spacing between words (talk about a challenge to translate!) The final form of the chapter & verse divisions we have today were not widespread until the 16th century A.D.
- There are numerous translations, which vary from word-for-word to paraphrased. Generally, the more accurate the translation to the original words, the less readable you may find it. The popular New International Version (NIV) stands about midway between the two extremes.
- The Bible was written over ~1,500 years by ~40 different authors from a culture significantly different from ours; understanding of their cultural influences will enhance your understanding of the Bible.
- Despite its' age, the Bible is loaded with guidance & lessons for today--a key focus of any Bible study!

Revelation & Inspiration

The Bible is an ever-expanding revelation of God & His love for us. When you love someone, you want to know as much about them as you can. The more you seek to return the love that our Triune God has shown us, the more likely you will be driven to spend more time in the Bible to know ever more about each member of the Trinity. Every time you read/re-read Scripture, consult commentaries or other sources, or discuss in a group or as occasion arises, you will likely gain new insight that boosts growth in faith & impacts your walk with Christ.

Creation itself reveals the existence of God to all people by “general” revelation. But that is insufficient to give “that knowledge of God, and of His will, which is necessary unto salvation.” (Westminster Confession)

The sufficient “special” revelation is exemplified by **Matthew 16:16-17**: Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by My Father in heaven.”

Whereas, revelation is concerned with the giving of truth, divine inspiration refers to the recording of truth. It means that God preserved the writers from recording error when they wrote the various parts of Scripture. All of the things they recorded are accurate. The words were actually said and the events actually happened.

Inspiration is also needed for understanding: “We acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the word.” (Westminster Confession)

Reliability of the Bible (see attached charts on ancient documents & New Testament)

- Old Testament (OT): Hebrews’ rigorous oral tradition, testimony within the New Testament (gospels, Acts, Hebrews, Romans, 2 Peter), Dead Sea Scrolls (oldest from ~250 B.C) & ever-expanding archaeological evidence all support that the OT we have today is accurate to what was originally written.
- New Testament (NT): has more manuscript authority than any other piece of literature from antiquity.

Bible Outline

Old Testament (groupings may vary per different sources)

- The Law (*Torah*): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
- History: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I & II Samuel, I & II Kings, I & II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther
- Poetry & Wisdom: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Solomon
- Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel
- Minor Prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

New Testament

- Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John
- History of the Early Church: Acts
- Letters of Paul: Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon
- Other Letters: Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude, Revelation

Study Focus

There are numerous perspectives, story lines & themes upon which one may focus in Bible study that are valuable for gaining knowledge & understanding of God. However, such is not the end purpose of any study; rather knowledge & understanding should help grow your faith and deepen your personal relationship with each member of the Trinity.

By focusing on connections from every book of the Bible (especially the Old Testament) to Jesus, you will gain:

- Greater appreciation for the total interconnectivity & consistency of God’s Word;
- Greater wonder at the beauty and love in God’s plan from before Creation for our eternal life with Him; to
- Deepen your worship and joy during your daily walk with Jesus Christ.

Reliability of The New Testament		
Issue	New "Scholars" Contend	Lee Strobel's* Response
Timeframe Written (assuming the later written, the less accurate it is)	Written in late 2nd century - Lack of arch. evidence - Postulated written from myths & legends developed since Christ	Within one generation of Christ - 2nd century manuscripts cite NT - Meticulous accuracy w/in Acts supports Luke as author/historian - Artifacts support NT language was language of daily life & widespread literacy
Literary Format Change in "literary form" = change in author = edited/changed material	Material was passed by word of mouth until written down - By the time the NT was written down, "playing telephone" had undermined the reliability & validity of what was written. - Forms include aphorisms, parables, similitudes, predictions, miracles - Viewed current texts as merger of historic human Jesus and myths of His divine nature: texts are not history literature but history of religion and dogma - An author (e.g., Paul, Isaiah) would not change the form in which he/she wrote; ex: present/future tense, poetry/prose, etc	Insufficient time between Christ & NT for legends/myths to develop - Folklore takes many generations - Jewish culture required teacher's actual words to be preserved/passed - Jewish use of poetry made it easy to memorize (lots of OT is in poetry; Jesus also taught w/ poetical form) - Albright: ("Only modern . . . ") p 68 - Change in literary form is not a clear delineation of different authors (e.g., Eisenhower was three people-- general, President, pres of Columbia) => In such a culture, legend could not have developed in such a short time
Additional Gospels	More than four Gospels - Additional gospels are valid - Deletion of the other gospels was arbitrary; perhaps because they did not agree with prevalent theology	Our four are the ONLY valid Gospels - All four written within one generation of Christ; the others all came ~100-250 years later & were not accepted by early church - These others do not offer early, reliable info beyond what is in NT
Reliability of the New Testament	New Testament is not reliable - (imo) If you don't believe in Jesus, you won't believe the NT	New Testament is reliable - Bibliographical Test - Internal Evidence Test - External Evidence Test
Comments (imo)	- if you can't accept the NT as true, then you must provide an alternative explanation, even one that itself has flaws - (??) Can "Scholars" get PhDs and renown without something new?	

*Lee Strobel: *The Case For Faith*

Reliability of Ancient Documents			
Bibliographical Test	Criteria	Ancient Texts	Bible
How well do documents reach us from the past? How reliable are the copies we have?			
- How many manuscripts have survived?	The more the better	- Thucydides: 8 - Aristotle: 49 - Caesar: 9-10 - Josephus: 9-11 - Iliad: 643--2nd to NT	- 5,600+ Greek manuscripts - NT: 20,000 - 1975: 200 manuscripts (90 NT) found - Ryland Papyrus ~120 A.D.; frag of John's Gospel agrees with modern translations
- How consistent are they?	Fewer discrepancies across multiple copies the better		- 1975 find: shows NT transmitted in relative purity - Biggest source of variation is spelling - Differences in meaning of text are minor & don't deal with theological truth
- What is the time interval between the original and extant copies?	Less Time the better	- Thucydides: 1300 yrs - Aristotle: ~1400 yrs - Caesar: 1000 yrs - Josephus: ~1000 yrs	- Time between original and extant evidence is small (<100 yrs)
Internal Evidence Test How credible is the text?	- Credible witnesses? - How close were they?	- Sir W. Ramsey traveled Paul's journeys (1881) to disprove reliability of Acts--came to belief & rated Luke as historian of the first rate - James, Peter, John, Jude, etc. also testified to being eyewitnesses & speaking truth - Jewish culture required testimony of two reliable, agreeing witnesses; God gave us more than required - NT authors cited common knowledge to others; surely would draw rebuke if not true, as other eyewitnesses were still alive - The number of independent witnesses + nature & integrity support their reliability - Incidents cited that many would have hid - Authors willingly suffered for their beliefs	
External Evidence Test Do other sources confirm the internal testimony?	Do other docs substantiate the accuracy, reliability & authenticity?	- Eusebius & Irenaeus wrote what they heard from friends of John that agrees with Gospel authorship - Greek, Roman & Jewish documents support key elements of life, ministry & death of Jesus (p86) - Archaeology has confirmed countless passages	
=> NT has more manuscript authority than any other piece of literature from antiquity => If one discards the Bible as unreliable then must discard all the literature of antiquity			