

BIBLE M.A.P. #1
(Meaningful : Accessible : Practical)
Scriptures: Hosea 4:1-2, 6a: Psalm 119:1-8: 2 Timothy 2:15, 3:16:
Luke 24:25-27

Today, we're going to begin to talk about the Bible. We're going to keep it really basic. Some of what we'll talk about you will already know. Some of it will be new to you. All of it, I hope, will be helpful. Our goal is to make the Bible become more meaningful, more accessible and more practical for you. That's why we're calling the series *Bible MAP*.

Let's begin with a couple of Scripture verses that talk about the purpose of the Bible. Second Timothy 3:16 (NLT)

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.

In New Testament Greek, that phrase "*inspired by God*" literally means "*God-breathed*". All Scripture is God-breathed. Now, what does that mean? First Peter 1:20-21 helps us out here.

Above all, you must realize that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet's own understanding, or from human initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God.

So when we say that the Scriptures, that the Bible, is "*inspired*" by God we are saying that although it was written by human hands, the Holy Spirit was at work within those writers when they wrote, and so their writings became, in fact, the actual word of God.

So here is a third Scripture to consider. It tells us what we are supposed to do with this Word of God. Second Timothy 2:15 (Amplified Bible).

"Study and do your best to present yourself to God approved, a workman [tested by trial] who has no reason to be ashamed, accurately handling and skillfully teaching the word of truth."

Now put these three Scriptures together and you discover why it is so important for us to read and to understand the Bible. First. The Bible is God's Word to us. It is God breathed. That makes it a different kind of book than any other book in the world.

Second. Because it is God-breathed what it teaches us is true. That's important because knowing the truth gives you a frame of reference so you can discern what is right and what is wrong. That enables us to discern God's voice from the clamouring, competing and often very loud voices of our culture.

Third. The Bible teaches us what is wrong in our lives. If we don't know what's wrong in our lives, how we can fix the problem? The Bible is really the Creator's Operating Manual, but unlike some IKEA products I've bought, the contents comes with all the parts included!

Fourth. The Bible teaches us what is right.

- It teaches us about how to be in a right relationship with God;
- How to be in a right relationship with God's creation;
- How to have right relationships with other people;
- It teaches us about right action – about things like justice, forgiveness, integrity, and truth.

Fifth, knowing our Bible, anchors our lives so we don't drift along with no purpose, and no goal. The Bible is a roadmap. It tells us where we came from, where we are, and where we're going.

Now given all that, here's the problem. The Gallup organization has been surveying what Christians know about the Bible for a long time. In May 2010, George Gallup concluded this:

“(Christians) revere the Bible but, by and large, they don't read it”

Four years later, in 2014, the Barna Group, which is a much respected Christian research organization, released a report called *"The State of the Bible"*. It found that although 81% of adults considered themselves highly, moderately or somewhat knowledgeable about the Bible. Only 43% - less than half - could actually name the first five books of the Bible. 57% couldn't answer that fairly basic question correctly! OK. Let's prove that Presbyterians are better than that. What are the first five books of the Bible? Say them with me. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

The same survey found that although most people own a Bible,

Only 37% read it "once a week or more" & 26% said they "never read the Bible at all".

Research results like those from different research organizations, are so consistent, that the magazine *Biblical Archeology* has concluded:

“One of the most serious problems facing the Church in the 21st century is the problem of Biblical illiteracy.

Translation. We suck at knowing our Bibles. Add to that the well-researched statistic that the average Christian, prays for less than 7 minutes a week – that’s less than one minute a day - and it raises a very critical and painful question. Where is our passionate spirituality as Christians? I mean, can we honestly expect other people to take God seriously when we who claim to be his people obviously don’t? So why aren’t we reading our Bibles more? Why aren’t we praying more? Is this why Christianity in North America is in such a terrible state compared with so many other countries in the world? Is this why we see declining numbers in our churches? Is the problem in the Church not the unchurched outside its walls, but the churched inside its walls?

Now why is this lack of Bible knowledge such a problem? Let us look at what the Bible itself says. In the Old Testament prophecy of Hosea, here is the charge God brings against Israel, his chosen people. (4:1-6 NLT):

Hear the word of the Lord, O people of Israel! The Lord has brought charges against you, saying: “There is no faithfulness, no kindness, no knowledge of God in your land. . . My people are being destroyed because they don’t know me.”

Wow! Given those statistics I just shared with you, are we in fact destroying ourselves and the Christian faith we hold so dear?

So let’s talk some more about the Bible. The English word Bible comes from the Latin words “*biblia sacra*” which means “*Holy Book*”. That’s why we call it, “The Holy Bible.” The Greek translation of the Latin, by the way, is not “the holy book” but “**the holy books**”.

By the year 223 AD/CE, the Old Testament and the New Testament together were already known as “The Bible.” The Latin for Bible is *biblia*, from which we get the word “bibliography”. A bibliography, as you know, is a list of writings that share a common theme or topic. This is another reminder that “The Bible” is not simply one book. It is a series of different “holy” books with a common theme. That common theme is this:

The Bible is the story of God’s revelation of himself to humanity and of how humanity interacts with God.

Statistically, the Bible is a series of 66 books, written by 40 different authors, over a period of some 1500 years. But here’s where that verse about the Scriptures being inspired by God is important. Inspiration means that all of the different parts of the Bible fit together like a jigsaw puzzle to

create a big picture of God as Creator, as Saviour, and as ever-present Spirit. To have such a unity in so many books, written over such a long period of history, is, I suggest to you, only possible through the inspiration of God. In fact, Acts 20:27 reminds us that the Bible contains, **“the whole counsel of God”** (NKJV). That’s why it worries me when people want to ignore the parts of the Bible they don’t like without using proper methods of biblical interpretation.

Now let me give you an easy way to remember how many books are in the Bible. Remember, as I do this, that the total is 66. Take the word OLD. It has 3 letters and the word TESTAMENT, it has 9 letters. Put the 3 and 9 side by side and you get 39. There are 39 books in the Old Testament. Now take the word NEW with 3 letters and the word TESTAMENT with 9 letters. Multiply those numbers. $3 \times 9 = 27$. There are 27 books in the New Testament. Add 39 and 27 and you get 66 books in the Bible. OK. Next week there will be a pop quiz on this!!

The Bible, as you all know, is divided into two sections. The Old and the New Testaments. You only have to look in the list of contents in your Bible to notice that the Old Testament is much larger than the New Testament and covers a much longer period of time. So let’s talk about the word TESTAMENT. The word TESTAMENT refers to a document that the authors have sworn to be true. So when you sign your own last will and testament you are swearing that what you have said is true. In the same way, the authors of the Bible are the witnesses who bear testament that what they have written is true.

Another word that is sometimes used for TESTAMENT is the word COVENANT. That’s why, in some Christian traditions, you may hear someone refer to the Old Testament Scripture readings as, “A reading from the OLD COVENANT” and the New Testament readings as “A reading from the NEW COVENANT. The word COVENANT is actually a strong clue to help us understand the content of the Old and New Testaments. The OLD COVENANT refers to the agreement God made with the Hebrew people, the Israelites, summed up in the words of God to Abraham in Genesis 17:7, near the beginning of the Bible.

“(God says) I will confirm my covenant with you and your descendants after you, from generation to generation. This is the everlasting covenant: I will always be your God and the God of your descendants after you.”

This covenant that God had sworn to, is the same one he affirmed to Moses, and the people of Israel, after their exodus from slavery in Egypt. Exodus 6:7a (NLT):

“I will claim you as my own people, and I will be your God.”

The Old Testament, then, is primarily the story of God’s sworn relationship with his chosen people, a people through whom God intended to bless the whole world. That happened, of course, when Jesus Christ came out of that nation. But the Israelites broke faith with God, they did not keep their part of the covenant, they disobeyed him, and so God gave his people a new word through the prophet Jeremiah Ch.31:31-34 (NLT):

“The day is coming,” says the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. ³² This covenant will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant, though I loved them as a husband loves his wife,” says the LORD.

³³ “But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel after those days,” says the Lord. “I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴ And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, ‘You should know the Lord.’ For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already,” says the Lord. “And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins.”

The Old Testament leads us, in those terms, right into the New Covenant. The New Testament is the record of this new covenant which is sealed, Scripture says, **“by the blood of Christ.”** You all know the words of Jesus about this. We hear them every time we celebrate the Lord’s Supper. Luke 22:20 (NLT):

After supper, he took another cup of wine and said, “This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you.”

Now this is important. We cannot understand the New Testament without a knowledge of the Old Testament. That’s why I get so alarmed when I hear people say that the Old Testament is no longer relevant. That is not true. We

simply cannot understand the new covenant without understanding the old covenant. Do you remember what the risen Jesus said to his disciples after he showed them the nail prints in his hands and feet?

“When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms (i.e. in the Old Testament) must be fulfilled.” 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

Let’s remember that at that point, there was no New Testament. It hadn’t been written yet. Every time Jesus talked about the Scriptures he was talking about the Old Testament. Jesus is saying, in effect, if you want to know God’s plans and purposes, if you want to understand who I am, why I have come, and what I will do for you, you will find it in the Old Testament. That’s why it is so important for us as Christians to know not just the New Testament but the Old Testament as well.

Now let’s honestly admit that for modern people the Old Testament is much more difficult to understand than the New Testament, but that is not an excuse for ignoring it, or for writing it off as irrelevant. If Jesus took it seriously, and affirmed its value, and confirmed it as the Word of God, surely we have to do the same thing.

Now one final point and then we’ll wrap this up for today. We often call the Bible ***“the Scriptures”***. We say “Our Scripture lesson for today is . . .” The word SCRIPTURE is from the Latin word ***scriptura*** which simply means a writing or a religious text. Scripture is not just a Christian word. It can be applied to the writings of any religion. But over time, the word Scripture became capitalized and it began to be used specifically to refer to the Old and New Testaments. To emphasize this even more, people started to talk about the “Holy” Scriptures. The word “holy” means ***“set apart”***. The Scriptures are ***“set apart”*** from all other religious writings, and from all other books. In other words, the Bible is unique. Why? Because its’ words are ***“God-breathed”***, God inspired. And so we return to the Scripture we started with. Second Timothy 3:16:

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.

Knowing that. May you look differently at this wonderful book we call The Bible. Next week we’ll begin to dig deeper into the Bible.

PASTORAL PRAYER

God,

We thank you for your Word;
For your powerful Word, that called creation into being:
For the content of your Word, that is filled with truth:
For the teaching of your Word, given to guide our lives:
For Jesus the living Word, who took on our humanity and lived among us:
For your eternal Word, that will stand forever.
Thank you, for your Word.

Thank you for your Word, spoken into our lives;
by faithful Sunday School teachers, Bible study leaders and ministers:
by godly parents and grandparents:
by friends and brothers and sisters in Christ.

Thank you for your Word, and for its accessibility;
for the writers of the Bible, who recorded it faithfully for us:
for bible translators who have put the original languages of the Bible into the
languages of every nation:
for bible scholars who have helped us to understand its themes and
rhythms.

Today we pray your Word into the lives of all those who need a word from
you.

We pray comfort for the mourning:
hope for the desperate:
light for those living in darkness:
healing for the sick:
forgiveness for the sinner and salvation for the lost.

All this we pray in the name of Jesus, the living Word, and in the power of
the Holy Spirit, the spirit of truth. Amen.