



# Exploring Christianity:

## Introduction to the Bible

**iFOLLOW**

Meeting with Jesus

The iFollow Discipleship Series

## About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

### Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

### Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

### Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

### Credits

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## Introduction to the Bible

*This presentation is designed for people who have not yet come to a point in their spiritual journey where they have decided to become a follower of Jesus.*

### Learning Objectives

1. Learn the overall story told in the Bible, in one brief overview
2. Discover some of the possible ways of interpreting this story
3. Consider the authority and inspiration of the Bible and what they might mean to you

### Content Outline

1. General outline of the Bible
2. The story line
3. How to interpret the Bible
4. Authority and inspiration

### Background Material for the Presenter

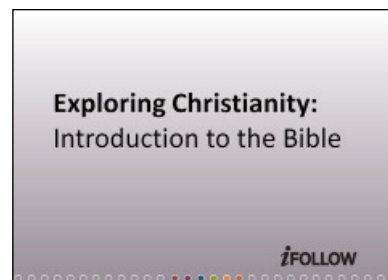
A Kindergarten teacher was observing her classroom of children while they were drawing. She would occasionally walk around to see each child's work. As she got to one little girl who was working diligently, she asked what the drawing was.

The girl replied, "I'm drawing God."

The teacher paused and said, "But no one knows what God looks like."

Without missing a beat, or looking up from her drawing, the girl replied, "They will in a minute."

Oh the confidence of childhood! It never even occurred to this little girl that someone wouldn't believe her or that she didn't know what she was doing. She simply assumed that she had what it took to picture God and that people would appreciate the finished product. After all, it's her experience of God so who can argue with that?



It's this same sense of personal authority that exudes from the book called The Holy Bible. This most widely read book in the history of the world continues to inspire millions of people as they look for a picture of God to include within the portrait of their lives. And the fact that there are so many differing pictures might say something about the differing authors included in this Book.

## General Outline of the Bible

The Bible as we have it today is divided into two sections, the Old Testament which has 39 different documents and the New Testament with 27. These 66 documents are traditionally called “books” even though they are almost never published as separately bound volumes. This canon of Scripture has been generally accepted by Christians as the inspired Word of God since the 3rd century.

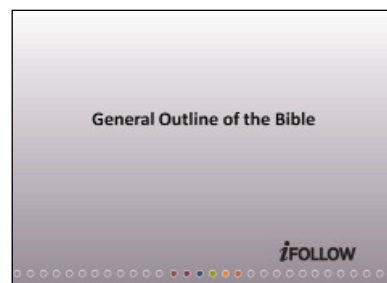
The 39 documents that comprise the Old Testament were originally written in Hebrew from about 2000 B.C. until about 450 B.C. Jews also accept this collection as Scripture and Muslims accept the first five books.

The 27 documents of the New Testament written in ancient Greek are seen as additional Scriptures by Christians. They were written from about 45 to 70 C.E. with perhaps one or two being written as late as 90 C.E.

These documents are not uniform in character. The shortest is only one page while the longest is more than 100 pages. They are of various literary types, including history, narrative, poetry, prophecy and personal letters. Within these genres, there are numerous clear examples of fiction; parables, dreams, and so forth. Sometimes, it is not easy to quickly exactly what a passage is intended to be; history, poetry, fiction, nonfiction.

These 66 books of the Bible were originally written in three different languages: Hebrew (most of the Old Testament), Aramaic (a sister language to Hebrew used in parts of two Old Testament books), and Greek (all of the New Testament). These documents were authored and compiled by very diverse individuals—poets, kings, prophets, priests, shepherds, farmers, fishermen, a tax collector, a physician, scribes—from the very common to the elite, the intellectual to the uneducated. These very different people wrote over the course of 1,000 years and came from different nations and cultures.

In spite of this amazing diversity, there are common themes that run through seemingly disparate documents; stories about God and God's dealing with people, haunting stories, unbelievable stories of success and failure, passion and persistence. And not only stories about God but also about humanity—the formation of human civilization, a movement, a



heritage—stories with our own fingerprints all over them, showing us not only God but also ourselves in relationship with God and one another.

These stories are not delivered in a linear logic. They do not constitute a textbook or manual or encyclopedia of philosophy, theology or morality. They are all over the board, messy, chaotic, jumping back and forth with imagination, passion, fury, and hope. They're about encountering God in the middle of feast and famine, good and bad governments, changing economies, disappointing marriages and dysfunctional families, poignant moments and exhilarating victories, deep friendships and bitter betrayals. Let's take a closer look at the story line of Scripture.

Another thing that may seem strange to someone first reading the Bible. It uses an ancient system for finding things instead of the page numbers that are so familiar to us in books today. This is because the Bible existed as a written document long before the invention of the printing press and with the hand-copied versions there was no way to make sure that every page was precisely the same. So chapters and verses have been added to the Bible over the centuries. They are not part of the original text, but they provide a common system for finding a particular sentence or paragraph. They continue to be used because there are so many different translations of the Bible into many modern languages and various printings and editions. Page numbers are impossible to keep uniform.

## The Story Line of the Bible

Before the beginning of everything we think of as “the universe,” there was God, a creative, intelligent, conscious, communicating, dynamic, caring entity whose magnitude goes beyond our limits of perception and imagination. God created the universe, using time, space, matter, energy ... and something more. When God created our planet and populated it with life, God chose to insert something of His own self into the mix: into human beings, God breathed His own “breath of life,” His own “image.”

This mysterious endowment brought with it a unique ennoblement and a unique responsibility unlike that given to any other animal or organic or inanimate matter: human beings were made capable of freedom, consciousness of being conscious, with conscience, wisdom, creativity, love, communication, civilization, virtue. But this endowment also made them vulnerable to rebellion, pride, foolishness, destructiveness, hatred, division, and self-centeredness. They were given choice and choice has an “up” side and a “down” side; there is “Column A” and “Column B,” there is that which is good and there is the other choice.

So, being neither robots nor prisoners, these free human beings early on failed to fulfill the full promise of their primal innocence and natural nobility, and with the development of the first civilizations it was clear that human beings had a self-destructive bent. One feature of their self-destructiveness was their tendency to lose contact with God, to live

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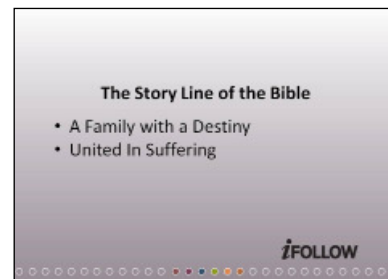
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life without reference to God, to throw away their spiritual compass and get lost. That didn't mean they became irreligious; in fact, they seemed incurably religious, incapable of numbing or obliterating their spiritual faculties, at least not for very long. Rather, their estrangement from their Creator meant that they innovated as best they could, developing religions as varied as their cultures and their landscapes. In fact, by 2000 B.C., each social entity on earth had developed its own religion to explain its mysteries, solve its problems, bolster its power, vilify its enemies, and so on. The assumption on planet earth was that there were many gods, each having power over certain territories or certain natural phenomena (the sun, the moon, fertility). Some of their forms of worship were beautiful and honorable, but many became base and degrading, including horrific human sacrifice, sexual exploitation, and the like.

**A Family with a Destiny:** Into this situation of religious pluralism, with a welter of religions mixing beauty and horror, truth and misunderstanding, God communicated with a Semitic shepherd living in modern-day Iraq, then known as Chaldea. The man's name was Abraham. He was given a sense of destiny, that he would be the father of a great family, and that his descendants would bring spiritual blessing and enlightenment to the whole world. Key to this enlightenment was this revelation: There were not many gods, but only one. And this God could not be adequately represented by any of the standard images (idols), but was greater than the stars and the sea, more majestic than the sky and the mountains, because all things were created by this God. Not only that, but this God was deeply concerned about the ethics, morality, social justice, and personal integrity of human beings, Himself being ethical, moral, just and pure. A real contrast to the capricious god-concepts of Abraham's neighbors, gods whose vices were as exaggerated as their powers!



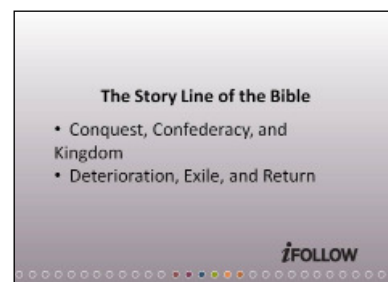
These were radical ideas, though they may seem commonplace to us, which is proof of Abraham's ultimate influence. They took generations to accept. But God was patient; these creations were made to be free, so they could not be pushed or forced. They had to learn at their own pace, so direct intervention (via some extraordinary spiritual experience such as a vision, a voice, a dream) was always delicate. Additional interventions came, though, at critical times, to Abraham's son Isaac, Isaac's son Jacob (who was later renamed Israel, this name becoming the "family name" of the Jewish people to this day), and Jacob's son Joseph. The family was guided to a land of their own at the east end of the Mediterranean, where this new understanding of God could be nurtured in relative peace and stability. Eventually, the clan grew quite large, and God apparently planned a difficult experience to solidify their identity and more deeply root these new beliefs in this family of people, and through them, in the human family as a whole.

**United In Suffering:** God used a famine to drive them from their land to Egypt, where they would either assimilate into Egyptian culture and squander their destiny or inten-

sify their distinct family identity as refugees, and not only as refugees, but eventually, as an oppressed, enslaved minority group as well. These shared sufferings did their work, and after about four hundred years in Egypt, their identity was strong, their spirit was still (barely) unbroken by their hardships, and their unique faith in one supreme God was embedded deeply within them. God intervened again, calling a uniquely prepared man named Moses to liberate these special people from their oppression and enslavement and return them to their homeland, which had been unseen by them for four centuries.

The return took much longer than one might expect, because God did not want the land resettled by halfhearted followers. It was essential that they maintain a vigorously distinctive identity and vibrant spiritual vitality as they reentered their homeland. During this difficult but formative time, the family wandered as nomads in the harsh wilderness between Egypt and Palestine. It was during this nomadic period (called the Exodus) that formal public worship of God began. Additionally, the moral standards of this community of faith became codified during these years, most notably in the Ten Commandments. No wonder Moses is remembered as such an important figure in the family history of the Jewish people, since he led the people through this amazing passage.

**Conquest, Confederacy, and Kingdom:** A generation later, a reinvigorated younger generation completed the conquest of their homeland. (Other tribes had moved into the land during their absence.) The extended family now consisted of twelve clans, and they formed a loose confederacy that was frequently challenged by neighboring nations, sometimes overcome, and subsequently reformed several times over the next several hundred years.



Eventually this loose confederacy evolved into a rather short-lived monarchy, a development about which later biblical writers were ambivalent. Their first king, Saul, was a disappointment. Their heroic second king, David, initiated their “golden age,” around 1000 B.C. His son Solomon was another disappointment as a king (although the famous Golden Temple was built during his reign) and Solomon’s son was such a weak and insecure ruler that civil war broke out, and the nation was divided into northern and southern kingdoms.

**Deterioration, Exile, and Return:** God repeatedly intervened in this deteriorating situation. Sometimes, God gave people strong dreams to get their attention. Other times, they had other spiritual experiences. Occasionally, remarkable miracles occurred. Some people had a special sensitivity to God and became spiritual leaders called prophets. Their writings in the Bible record the context and content of the messages they received from God and passed on to the people.

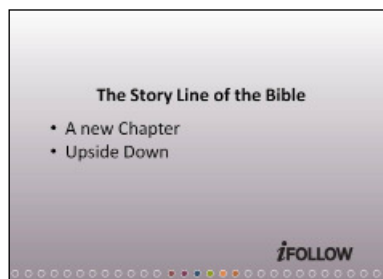
In this divided and weakened condition, the descendants of Israel became an easy target for rising empires to their north. Eventually, from about 700 to 550 B.C., both the northern and southern kingdoms were conquered. Many survivors from the south were deported to Assyria where they became servants in various capacities. Seventy years later,



two leaders, Nehemiah and Ezra, gained permission to repopulate their homeland and led the refugees (most of whom had been born in exile) back to rebuild their capital city, Jerusalem.

Through all these hardships, these people never completely lost faith. Nor did they allow their faith to lose its distinctiveness. Of all people in the world, they alone believed in one supreme, good Creator, and they sought to remain faithful to that vision. The era of the great Hebrew prophets ends with the story at this point, about 450 B.C.

**A New Chapter:** During the next 450 years, the Greek empire flourished and receded, and the Roman empire rose, subjugating the Jewish people as they did the whole Mediterranean world. The Jewish people showed inspiring courage and faithfulness to God during these times of political and religious persecution. (Stories of their courage and faith are told in several documents that are considered historically reliable by Protestants but not accepted as part of the Bible, although Catholics and Anglicans include it as a kind of third testament. These documents are known as the Apocrypha.)



Into this milieu was born Jesus, later to be called the Christ or Messiah (meaning Liberator or Savior). After thirty years of obscurity, Jesus came into the public eye, presenting Himself as an itinerant Jewish rabbi, with a difference. The religious world of his day was polarized—much as ours is—with the rigid religious conservatives on one side (the Pharisees) and the more lenient religious liberals on the other (Sadducees).

Jesus refused to be slotted anywhere on their continuum. He said that a time of change had come, a new chapter was beginning, a whole new era in the spiritual life of the human race was being launched. With the memory of the great golden age of King David far behind them (far, but not forgotten), and with the oppressive grandeur of the Roman kings around them, Jesus announced a new kingdom, the kingdom of God.

**Upside Down:** Everything about this kingdom was upside down. In it, the poor and meek were the winners, not the rich and aggressive. In it, some prostitutes and tax collectors were far ahead of many priest and Pharisees. Children and women were given unheard-of status, and God was brought nearer than ever before: Jesus said that in this new era of the kingdom of God, God could be known as a loving, caring, compassionate father and that even rebellious runaways would be warmly welcomed home.

The crowds flocked to hear this message. Reports of miraculous healings were commonplace, although Jesus himself tried to keep them quiet. Naturally, the religious establishment felt threatened, and so they conspired with the Roman authorities to have Jesus arrested and killed. Their plot succeeded through the help of an insider, one of Jesus' twelve prime students (called disciples or followers), and one Friday afternoon, Jesus was crucified and buried.



**Surprises:** Three days later, reports began to spread that the grave was empty, and that Jesus had risen from the dead. At first, not one of the disciples believed these rumors, but in the coming days, one by one and in larger groups, they claimed to have encounters with the risen Jesus. Then occurred perhaps the strangest event of all.

Remember, for two thousand years the descendants of Abraham had guarded their faith, kept their distinctiveness, monitored their faithfulness, resisted all pressures to intermarry or adopt the religious practices of other nations or in any way allow their unique commitment to monotheism to be polluted or diluted. Isolation, separation, distinction were at the core of their being. And now, the disciples report, Jesus is telling them to bring the good news of this new kingdom to the entire world, to every nation, every religion, every culture, every language. Further, they came to understand that Jesus' death had not been a colossal accident, but rather was part of God's plan: in some mysterious way, as Jesus suffered and died, he was absorbing and paying for the wrongs of the whole human race. Now, the whole human race could receive forgiveness and reconciliation to God: it would be as simple as asking, seeking, and entering an open door.

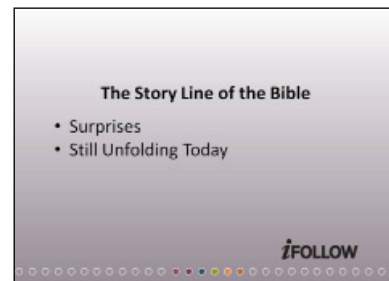
**Still Unfolding Today:** If Jesus was right, the one true God wasn't just for the descendants of Abraham anymore. Belief in, relationship with, and experience of the one true God was to permeate the whole world, like yeast slowly rising in bread, or like seeds subtly planted in the soil. The time had come to open the doors to everyone. There would be a thousand problems, Jesus said. It would be messy, with plenty of mistakes and no shortage of opposition. It would take time, a long time. But they should not give up until every person hears the "good news" that God loves them all, wants to welcome them into His family, and wants to involve them in the ongoing spiritual story of the human race.

The New Testament concludes with the story of the spread of that message and the creation of faith communities all over the Mediterranean world. And that story continues to unfold today.

## Interpreting the Story

So how should one go about reading this story? How do we understand the Bible? Is it possible to know if what we understand is the correct understanding? Why is it that so many people come up with so many different interpretations of Scripture? And everyone thinks they're right.

Think about the contrasting ways people approach the Bible. Some say, just read it, believe it, and obey it. Nothing else matters beyond that. Whatever it says, that's God's truth. This is a very literal approach and many people engage in it. Reading the Bible is



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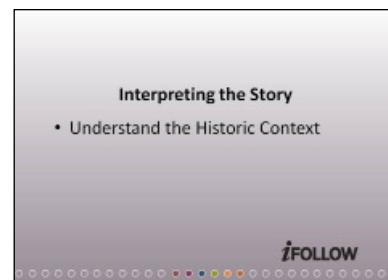
very simple to them. No interpretation required other than reading the words and applying them.

The problem with this approach is that it ignores the fact when there is a document, such as the Bible, the reader has to interpret those words. Interpretation cannot be ignored. Human language requires interpretation. This is particularly true when the reader does not know the language in which the Bible was written—which is about 99 percent of readers—and must read a translation. So the issue isn't whether or not scripture should be interpreted but what the quality of the interpretation is; good or bad.

The point is, when we sit down to read the Bible, we invariably bring to those texts all that we are, with all our experiences, culture, and prior biases toward various words and ideas. We can't read in a vacuum. So that reality raises questions about whether or not we are reading and understanding what the authors intended to convey. The most strictly literal approach is not good enough to get to that heart.

Because God chose to speak His word through human words in history, every book and story recorded in the Bible has historical particularity and context. In other words, each document is conditioned by the language, time, and culture in which it was originally written (and in some cases also by the oral history it had before it was written down). This necessitates the need to interpret as accurately as possible. We can't simply read the words and think that we will understand the points of the story unless we engage with the integrity of all that was brought to that story in the first place.

**Understand the Historic Context:** In order to understand the words we read in the Bible we must understand the history surrounding the particular document we are reading. This is the way Bible scholars describe this task: "In speaking through real persons, in a variety of circumstances, over a 1500-year period, God's Word was expressed in the vocabulary and through patterns of those persons and conditioned by the culture of those times and circumstances. That is to say, God's Word to us was first of all his Word to them. If they were going to hear it, it could only have come through events and in language **they** could have understood." We need to know what the text said to its original readers before we can possibly understand what it means today. "Thus the task of interpreting involves the student/reader at two levels. First, one has to hear the Word they heard; he or she must try to understand what was said to them back **then and there**. Second, one must learn to hear that same Word in the **here and now**." (Fee and Stuart, p. 18; emphasis added)



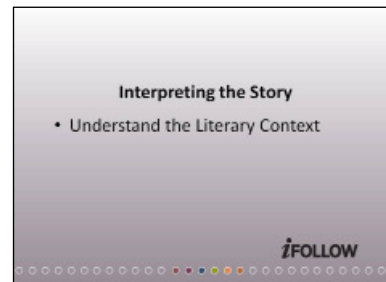
How does someone who is not an archaeologist or historian get this context? There are a number of standard reference books which provide this information. They are called commentaries, Bible encyclopedias and Bible dictionaries. There are also versions of the Bible that include brief notes about this kind of information as footnotes and introduc-

tions to the Bible documents. These are called “helps” and often have been authored by well-known evangelists, preachers and scholars.

**Understand the Literary Context:** In order to understand a specific statement or verse in the Bible, it is essential to see all of the other Bible verses related to that topic as well as to understand the reason the particular statement is included in the document or “book” of the Bible in which you are reading. “One of the most important aspects of the human side of the Bible is that to communicate His Word to all human conditions, God chose to use almost every available kind of cultural communication: narrative history, genealogies, chronicles, laws of all kinds, poetry of all kinds, proverbs, prophetic oracles, riddles, drama, biographical sketches, parables, letters, sermons, and apocalypses. To interpret properly the ‘then and there’ of the biblical texts, one must not only know some general rules that apply to all the words of the Bible, but one needs to learn the special rules that apply to each of these literary forms (genres). And the way God communicates His Word to us in the ‘here and now’ will often differ from one form to another. For example, we need to know **how** a psalm, a form that was often addressed **to God**, functions as God’s Word **to us**, and how psalms differ from ‘laws,’ which were often addressed to people in cultural situations no longer in existence. **How** do such ‘laws’ speak to us, and how do they differ from the moral ‘laws’ which are always valid in all circumstances?” (Fee and Stuart, p. 20) These are the questions Bible scholars have puzzled over for centuries and they are essential to interpreting Scripture.

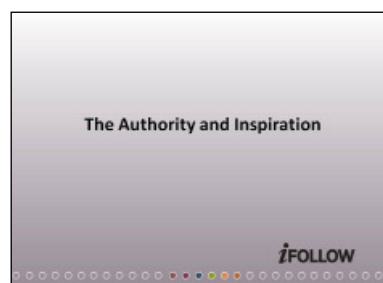
Again, the way you get all the right kind of information about the texts and stories of Scripture is by utilizing the standard tools of Bible study: a good Bible dictionary (that defines the many different words in the Bible), a good Bible handbook (that gives much of the cultural context of the stories), a good translation of the Bible, and good Bible commentaries (verse-by-verse descriptions of the best scholarship relating to each Bible passage).

And there’s also no substitute for the discipline of simply asking good questions as you read the Bible. Two kinds of questions: who wrote this, when was it written, where was it written, what kind of document is it, and why was it written? These questions are attempting to get at the original meaning and setting. **Literary context** refers to the principle that words only have meaning in sentences and sentences only have meaning in relation to preceding and following sentences and paragraphs. How does the material before and after explain this statement? A good question to ask as you read the Bible: What’s the point? Careful observation is crucial; the choice and meaning of words, the grammatical relationships in sentences, why this particular description. What was the author trying to communicate?



## The Authority and Inspiration

But when it's all said and done, there must be something deeper and more significant about the story line of the Bible than choice of words and grammatical structures. One well-known pastor writes, "Many of the people who come to the church I serve don't believe in the Bible when they come. They're skeptical. I don't tell them they have to believe it. I just try to present it. I try to be honest about the parts that confuse me. I try to focus on the parts that are abundantly clear and profitable (and I am quite certain that my lifetime will end before I reach the last of those things!). And over time, I notice that people come to share my respect for and trust in the Bible as a needed, dependable, enlightening, unique, challenging, fascinating resource for spiritual seekers ... a book with God's fingerprints all over it and his breath behind the words." (McLaren 2003, p. 244)



What's the authority behind the Bible? How could stories written by frail and faulty human beings about God and God's dealing with the human family have authority? Maybe there's something to be said for integrity and authenticity, being real with the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly, the successes and the failures, the faithfulnesses and betrayals, the ups and the downs. One thing is for sure, the Bible doesn't gloss over much. It doesn't whitewash the stories. It tells it all in its attempts to describe how God intersects with humanity, how the Creator attempts to reconcile with a rebellious family, how the Redeemer tirelessly and passionately and tenaciously works to bring about trust and hope and restoration to what God has always wanted for the world. Isn't there a certain amount of authority that comes from this kind of transparency and honesty?

The Bible is a "book with God's fingerprints all over it and his breath behind the words." It has been one of the most revered and beloved and used resources for spiritual seekers down through the ages. It is a source of comfort and hope, of challenge and rebuke, of encouragement and support, a mirror for growth, a light to show the path. It refuses to let you sit still. It prods you to move forward, to take action, to engage dialogue, and to launch into adventure. It continually challenges your picture of God and your experience of life. And in the end, maybe all that is enough to find in it true authority and inspiration.

## Handout in this Package

1. Participant's Notes



## Additional Resources

Ball, Bryan (2007). *Can We Still Believe the Bible?* Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association.

Brothers, Greg (2002). *Quick Start to the Books of the Bible*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association.

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Cahill, Thomas (1998). *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels*. New York, NY: Nan A. Talese.

Fee, Gordon D. and Douglas Stuart (1981). *How To Read the Bible for All It's Worth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Gugliotto, L.J. (2000). *Bible Study Handbook*, Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

Marshall, David (2004). *The Battle for the Bible*. Grantham, UK: Stanborough Press.

McLaren, Brian D. (1999). *Finding Faith: A Self-Discovery Guide for Your Spiritual Quest*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

McLaren, Brian (2003). *The Story We Find Ourselves In: Further Adventures of a New Kind of Christian*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Nichol, F.D. Editor (1966). *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

Richards, H.M.S. (2003). *Walking Through the Bible*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association.

## Websites

Bible Study Institute is an Adventist ministry for the general public directed by Lee Gugliotto, a Bible scholar and Seventh-day Adventist minister. It provides direct study programs as well as instructor's guides for seminars on how to study the Bible, including aspects of how to interpret the Bible. [www.biblestudyinstitute.org](http://www.biblestudyinstitute.org)

Gospel.com is an Evangelical parachurch ministry that provides a number of online services related to religion, including Bible Gateway, a search engine to find Bible texts that use specific key words or to look up texts by reference (book, chapter and verse). It was started in 1993 by a student at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich. Currently their database includes 23 English translations, eight Spanish translations and Bible Translations in 51 other languages. [www.BibleGateway.com](http://www.BibleGateway.com)

## Discussion Questions

1. What is your opinion of the Bible? How would you describe your previous experience with it?
2. What are your first reactions to the overview of the story line of the Bible?
3. How would you define “inspiration”?
4. The presentation spoke of “surprises.” What are some of the surprises you have found in the Bible, or have heard in this presentation?
5. Do you agree that it is important to understand the historical context of the Bible?
6. Do you agree that it is important to understand the literary context of the Bible? Why or why not?
7. Describe your understanding of the authority of the Bible. How is this different from or the same as that of your friends and family?

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## Group Activities

**Purpose:** To practice digging into the Bible and see what can be found.

**Preparation:** Have several Bibles in various versions, several different commentaries, handbooks, and dictionaries. Provide enough tables so that each break group of four to six individuals can work at a separate table. At each make sure there are at least two different commentaries, one handbook, one dictionary and several translations of the Bible. Also provide writing materials.

**Assignment:** Divide the group into teams of four to six individuals each and assign them each a table. Tell them they're going to have fun looking at one of the stranger stories in the Bible, just to see what they can find out. and whether there is anything inspirational in it, to them personally. Help them find the story of the rich man and Lazarus. (Luke 16:19-31) Have them read the story in different versions, look it up in their helps, and see what they come up with for historical context, literary context, and whether or not there is anything inspiring to them in the story.

Alternately, you could use a different Bible passage. Use the personality of your group to guide you. This is not meant to be too deep--just interesting. Stay away from passages that raise major theological issues beyond how to study and interpret the Bible.

**Debrief:** Ask each of the teams to report briefly on what they found. Discuss reactions, ideas and especially whether anyone found anything they like, and will use for inner growth.

**Time:** Allow the breakout groups 30-45 minutes for study, depending on their ease and experience in using the study tools, It will take 20 minutes or more for sharing reports from the breakout groups and general discussion. The total exercise will take an hour or two.



# Handout

## Introduction to the Bible

### Participant Notes

#### 1. General Overview of the Bible

The Old Testament has \_\_\_\_\_ books.

The New Testament has \_\_\_\_\_ books.

The Old Testament covers the historical period from  
\_\_\_\_\_ B.C. until about \_\_\_\_\_ B.C.

The New Testament covers the period from  
\_\_\_\_\_ until \_\_\_\_\_ A.D.

The three ancient languages used in the biblical documents are:  
\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

#### 2. The Story Line of the Bible

God is the \_\_\_\_\_.

God created human beings with a uniqueness: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The formation of religions came about because: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

God called Abraham and his descendents to make known what truth about God and the universe:

\_\_\_\_\_

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The history of much of the Old Testament involving the Israelites (the Hebrews) revolves around God wanting to shape and solidify their:

\_\_\_\_\_.

List the various instruments God used to help shape the Hebrews' sense of calling and destiny and identity:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Jesus came to announce the \_\_\_\_\_.

In what ways was Jesus' Kingdom different from the religious and secular worlds of His time?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What was the big Surprise that Jesus announced to his followers after his resurrection and that ended up shaping the whole direction of this Kingdom of God that impacts us even today?

\_\_\_\_\_

### 3. Interpreting the Bible

What are two ways people tend to interpret the Bible:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

List some important tools to use for biblical interpretation:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name two kinds of questions that are important to ask when reading Scripture:

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#### **4. The Authority and Inspiration of the Bible**

What gives the Bible its authority and inspiration?

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#### **5. My Personal Response**

I would describe my experience with the Bible as:

Nonexistent

Negative

Positive

Mixed

My approach to the Bible is:

Literalist

Historical and contextual

Personal application

Other \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to read the Bible for the following purposes, or to find answers to the following questions:

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