

# ***USING SCRIPTURE IN THE CLASSROOM***

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## **What goals are we trying to accomplish?**

- Basic knowledge: division into Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, chapters and verses, how to look things up.
- Know the basic narratives: Creation, Exodus, Exile, Jesus' life and ministry, death and resurrection, the church of the apostles, etc.
- Be able to identify different types of literature: myth, legislation, history, prophecy, prayers and songs, narrative, letters, apocalyptic, etc.
- Be able to distinguish between truth and falsehood, fact and myth.
- Place Scripture in context. What was the historical situation? What was the intent and purpose of the writer? How does it fit with the rest of Scripture?
- Knowing how revelation in Scriptures is related to the teachings and practice of the Church.
- Familiarity with using the Bible to enhance / support their faith.
- Understanding how to use the Bible in liturgy and prayer.

## **Some activities that help accomplish these goals.**

- Using Bible stories from picture books to help young students to explore the text.
- Background to the Bible, e.g. teaching about everyday life, geography, contemporary history. (Crafts and projects are one strategy.)
- Learning about specific Biblical characters.
- Skits and plays, manipulatives and projects that help them to internalize the stories of the Bible.
- Timelines and charts in order to observe development from one era / situation to another.
- Memorization, e.g. the list of books in the Christian Scriptures, a psalm, specific verses such as the Beatitudes.
- Bible search games and other techniques to discover what is in the text.
- Practice in distinguishing myth from fact.
- Investigation of how Judaism is lived today.
- Exploration of how the Scriptures were written and collected.
- Exploration of how specific teachings / passages have been developed in the doctrine and practice of the Christian church.
- Using Scripture in prayer.

- Discussion, e.g. asking questions such as “What does this text say to you?” “How does it affect your faith?” “Would your faith be different if this wasn’t in Scripture?”

## ***TYPES OF RESOURCES AVAILABLE***

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### ***Bibles***

In our program, we use the *Read and Learn Bible* in First and Second, available through the American Bible Society.

We have the *Catholic Children’s Bible* in Third and *Breakthrough Bible* or the NABRE in Fourth through Eighth.

### **Books for background on the Bible**

You can find Bible maps online or on the shelves. There are also other Bible resources online or on the shelves. Please ask what you are looking for.

There are some books available to help students begin to understand what life was like in “Bible Times.”

There are also books available with strategies or activities to use with students.

### **Retelling of Bible Stories**

These books are usually intended for younger children and they help them to understand the stories in a familiar way.

We also have manipulatives and puzzles so that children can explore and also retell the stories as part of play.

### **Books for Background on the Hebrew Scriptures**

We have several books available that help students understand more about Judaism and festivals such as Passover.

### **Bible activities / exercises / games**

Examples of these include both paper, digital and online games.

### **Biblical Drama and Skits**

A number of books contain ready-made skits that students can act out in class.

### **Videos related to Scripture**

Videos available include dramatizations of books of the Bible, ‘composite’ stories such as *Jesus of Nazareth*, which draws upon all four gospels.

There are also some animated series. Please ask what would be the most appropriate for your goals and your audience.

## ***FINDING THINGS IN THE BIBLE***

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This can look like a daunting task - since the Bible is composed of scores of books that range in style, purpose, time of composition and accessibility. However, it is possible to help children know their way around and fairly young students can quickly become familiar with where things are.

### **THE BASIC STRUCTURE**

The Hebrew Scriptures, or the **Old Testament**, as we know it, are structured as follows:

The **Pentateuch** or **Torah** - the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures. These include:

**Genesis.** The primeval history - chapters 1-11, the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the story of Joseph.

**Exodus.** The story of the redemption from Egypt and the giving of the Covenant on Sinai.

**Leviticus.** The regulations for life and worship in ancient Israel.

**Numbers.** The story of the wandering in the desert for forty years.

**Deuteronomy.** A series of addresses by Moses recounting their history and how they were to live.

The **Historical** Books. Note that "history" is not necessarily factual accounts in these books. They are written more as theological statements than what we would consider to be history.

**Joshua.** The settlement of the Promised Land.

**Judges.** Life in Israel before the establishment of the monarchy.

**1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings.** The story of Samuel, Saul, David and the establishment of the monarchy.

**1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah.** Chronicles records the long period from the reign of Saul to the return from Exile. Ezra and Nehemiah were the two persons most responsible for the reorganization of Jewish life after the Exile.

**Ruth.** The story of King David's ancestor.

**Esther.** The story of the Jews in Persia.

**Lamentations.** An eyewitness account about the destruction of Jerusalem and the beginning of the Babylonian Exile.

**Apocrypha** or Deuterocanonical books. These were written in Greek and not in Hebrew. While they are considered to be worthy and inspired writings, Jews do not consider them part of the Bible, so they are not included in the

Protestant versions. At the time of Jesus, the “Bible” was not so formally organized and these were considered inspired writings and have always been included in the Catholic tradition.

**Judith, Tobit, and Baruch.**

**1 and 2 Maccabees.** The story of the revolt against Greek occupation and the establishment of the Jewish Commonwealth in the second century BC. (Includes the story of Hannukah.)

**Wisdom** writings. These writings have a variety of literary forms.

**Job.** A sort of novel, where Job suffers misfortune while continuing to believe in a just and merciful God.

**Psalms.** The songs for the Temple liturgy.

**Proverbs** and **Ecclesiastes.** Collections of sayings.

**Song of Songs.** A love poem also used as an allegory about our relationship with God.

Two books in this section are also apocryphal (not included in the Protestant or Hebrew Bibles.)

**Sirach** and **Wisdom of Solomon.**

**Prophets.** The prophets are divided into the “major” prophets and the “minor” prophets. This division has less to do with importance and more to do with the fact the four “majors” are longer and each required a scroll, and the twelve “minors” could all fit on one scroll.

Major prophets:

**Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel**

Minor prophets:

**Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi**

The **Christian Scriptures**, or the **New Testament**, are structured as follows:

The **Gospels.**

**Matthew, Mark** and **Luke** are the synoptics, since they follow the same basic outline. **John** shares some stories with the other three, but follows its own outline.

The **Acts of the Apostles** - the story of the early church.

The **letters.** The most prominent are by Paul. He probably wrote only

**Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1**

**Thessalonians** and **Philemon.** Some scholars argue that he also wrote

## **Ephesians and Colossians.**

The other letters ascribed to him were probably written by his followers.

**2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus**

Other letters were written by, or in the names of other apostles.

**1 and 2 Peter, 1,2, and 3 John, Jude**

The "Letter of Paul to the **Hebrews**" is described as "not a letter, not by Paul and not to the Hebrews." It is a theological treatise connecting the beliefs of Christianity to the faith and worship of Judaism.

**Revelation** was also written in the form of a letter. It is a book written to encourage the Christians who were undergoing persecution in the early church.

# TIMELINE :

(Before the Common Era - BCE - or Before Christ - BC)

3000-2000	1900-1800	1700	1280	1240	1000	970	930	722	597-587	539	516
Growth of Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations	Abraham leaves Ur (modern Iraq); age of patriarchs - Isaac and Jacob	Joseph cycle; Israel settles in Egypt	Moses and the Exodus (reign of Rameses II in Egypt)	Conquest and settlement in Canaan	David as king and establishment of Jerusalem	Solomon as king and building of First Temple	Split of United Kingdom into Judea (south) and Israel (north)	Assyria conquers and destroys the Northern Kingdom	Babylon conquers and destroys Judea and Jerusalem; Temple is burned and Exile begins	Babylon conquered by Cyrus of the Persians; Jews return to Judea	Rebuilding of Temple in Jerusalem

**AD** stands for *Anno Domini*, the 'Year of our Lord' in Latin. Also known as the "Common Era" since non-Christians now use this calendar

167	63	6 BC	30 AD	40	42?	52	62	64-67	70AD	80-85	90-120
After a rebellion against the Greeks, Jews rule themselves for about 100 years	Roman general Pompey conquers Palestine and Rome eventually sets up a 'client state' under the Herodian kings	Jesus of Nazareth is born	Jesus is crucified by the Roman authorities. He rises on the third day.	Christian mission outside Palestine begins.	Saul (Paul) is baptized in Damascus.	First Thessalonians (earliest existing letter by Paul) is written	James of Jerusalem is killed	Peter and Paul die in Rome under the Emperor Nero	The Temple of Jerusalem is destroyed by Titus (later Emperor); Gospel of Mark written at Rome	Matthew is written at Antioch; Luke/Acts is written in a Gentile community	The Gospel of John is written

## HOW SCRIPTURE WAS WRITTEN:

Writing it down and calling it 'canonical' is the last step.

First, *Something Happens!*

Definitive and remarkable.

*Nothing like this has ever happened before!*

*This changes everything!*

*This didn't just happen to me; it happened to **us!***

*This is going to take some time to process.*

Second, *We have to think this through....*

Reflection upon the remarkable extraordinary.

*This could only be God acting.*

*Why did God do this?*

*What does it mean for us?*

*What does it mean for everyone? (Because this is pretty unusual.)*

Third, *Telling the tale.*

Communicating and retelling what happened. Drawing out the connections and the implications. In an oral culture, some embellishment to connect it to other aspects of the culture.

*Let me tell you what God did.*

*Let me tell you why God did it.*

*Let me tell you what this means for us.*

Fourth, *Writing it down.*

Often in a time of community stress, writing down the account so that it won't be lost.

*Everyone should know what happened.*

*This event defines us; it has to be remembered.*

*If you lose your history, you lose yourself.*

*If you lose sight of this, you lose sight of who God is - and what God has done.*

Fifth, *Community agreement that this tells what God has done.*

Usually informal agreement. Not decided by vote as much as commonly accepted.

*This, written under the guidance of the Spirit, tells us about God and God's life with us.*

*This is what we treasure and pass down to our children.*

*This guides and shapes our community for all time.*

*Succeeding generations can encounter God through this account and know God's life with them.*



## ***THE BIG THEMES***

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### **God creates**

God creates the world and calls it good. God has power over creation. God orders creation. Humanity is created in God's image. Humanity is loved and good. Humanity has a purpose.

### **Sin is possible and has happened.**

Humanity has the possibility of turning away from God because humanity is free. (God wants us to love God and if we aren't free, we can't choose to love. But our choices can also violate our purpose. We can choose against God.)

### **God chooses a man/woman; a tribe; a nation.**

In the story of Abraham and Sarah, God calls them and they respond in faith, believing in God's promises of a great nation springing from their descendants. Thus unrolls the story of the patriarchs and matriarchs in Genesis: Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and his wives, Jacob's sons (the twelve tribes of Israel.)

### **God keeps promises; God rescues; God redeems.**

In the escape from Egypt, the tribes of Israel realize that God does not forget a promise. In the redemption from slavery, they become a people, a nation, chosen by God.

### **God makes a covenant.**

At Sinai, God makes a covenant with Moses and the people. They are to live in holiness with God by obeying the covenant. They accept this in gratitude for the redemption. If they keep the covenant, they will receive their inheritance, the Land.

### **People are pretty good at violating the covenant.**

People forget that all they have is a gift from God. They don't take the covenant seriously. They forget true worship of the one God. They stray and worship other gods. They oppress the poor. Prophets arise who urge people to return to full observance of the covenant and who warn of dire consequences if it is violated.

### **Disaster can fall; God can rescue from disaster.**

The invasions of first the Assyrians and then the Babylonians are seen to be allowed by God due to the violations of the covenant. Yet, through God's guidance and intervention, the people can return from Exile and rebuild their Land and the Temple and rededicate themselves to the true worship of God.

### **God saves.**

*Yeshua* or Joshua is Jesus' name in Hebrew. It means that "God saves." God's culminating action in history is the incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth and his redeeming death on the cross.

### **God chooses a people, creates a church.**

The saving work of Christ is for all people, not just the nation of Israel. In a sense "all are chosen" and the Good News of salvation is meant for the whole world.

## ***HOW CATHOLICS INTERPRET SCRIPTURE***

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### **BASIC PREMISES**

- 1) The Bible is a collection of many types of literature compiled over more than a thousand years.
- 2) The Bible is a reflection of the cultures and contexts of those who wrote it.
- 3) We do not live in the same culture or the same context.



- 4) The Bible is valuable to people of faith as a testimony to God's action in human history and the response of the community of faith to God.
- 5) In order to uncover the message of the Bible, modern readers need to:
  - a) Attempt to understand the original context and purpose.
  - b) Become aware of the modern "filters" and prejudices that we bring to the text.
  - c) Apply the meaning of the text to our contemporary situation.

*Readers today, in order to appropriate the words and deeds of which the Bible speaks, have to project themselves back almost twenty or thirty centuries - a process which always creates difficulty.*  
p. 30-31, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, The Pontifical Biblical Commission.

- 6) The Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit guarantees that it is true. It does not guarantee that it is all fact.

## THE QUESTION OF HISTORICITY

From *The Historicity of the Gospels* - Pontifical Biblical Commission, 1964

Of the many elements at hand they reported some, summarized others, and developed still others in accordance with the needs of the various churches. They used every possible means to ensure that their readers would come to know the validity of the things they had been taught.

From the material available to them the Evangelists selected those items most suited to their specific purpose and to the condition of a particular audience. And they narrated these events in the manner most suiting to satisfy their purpose and their audience's condition.

Since the meaning of a statement depends, among other things, upon the context in which it is found, the Evangelists reported Christ's deeds and words in varying context, choosing whichever one would be of greatest help to the reader in trying to understand a particular utterance. Hence the exegete must try to ascertain what the Evangelist intended by reporting a certain saying or event in a particular manner or a particular context.

**The truth of the Gospel account is not compromised because the Evangelists report the Lord's words and deeds in different order. Nor is it hurt because they report his words, not literally but in a variety of ways, while retaining the same meaning.**

## REGARDING FUNDAMENTALISM

From *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* - Pontifical Biblical Commission, 1993

Fundamentalist interpretation starts from the principle that the Bible, being the Word of God, inspired and free from error, should be read and interpreted literally in all its details. **But by "literal interpretation" it understands a naively literalist interpretation, one, that is to say, which excludes every effort at understanding the Bible that takes account of its historical origins and development.** It is opposed, therefore, to the use of the historical-critical method, as indeed to the use of any other scientific method for the interpretation of Scripture.

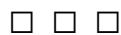
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Fundamentalism is right to insist on the divine inspiration of the Bible, the inerrancy of the Word of God and other biblical truths included in its five fundamental points. But its way of presenting these truths is rooted in an ideology which is not biblical, whatever the proponents of this approach might say. For it demands an unshakable adherence to rigid doctrinal points of view and imposes, as the only source of teaching for Christian life and salvation, a reading of the Bible which rejects all questioning and any kind of critical research.

The basic problem with fundamentalist interpretation of this kind is that, refusing to take into account the historical character of biblical revelation, it makes itself incapable of accepting the full truth of the Incarnation itself. As regards relationships with God, fundamentalism seeks to escape any closeness of the divine and the human. **It refuses to admit that the inspired Word of God has been expressed in human language and that this Word has been expressed, under divine inspiration, by human authors possessed of limited capacities and resources.** For this reason, it tends to treat the biblical text as if it had been dictated word for word by the Spirit. **It fails to recognize that the Word of God has been formulated in language and expression conditioned by various periods. It pays no attention to the literary forms and to the human ways of thinking to be found in the biblical texts, many of which are the result of a process extending over long periods of time and bearing the mark of very diverse historical situations.**

Fundamentalism also places undue stress upon the inerrancy of certain details in the biblical texts, especially in what concerns historical events or supposedly scientific truth. **It often historicizes material which from the start never claimed to be historical.** It considers historical everything that is reported or recounted with verbs in the past tense, failing to take the necessary account of the possibility of symbolic or figurative meaning.

Fundamentalism often show a tendency to ignore or to deny the problems presented by the biblical text in its original Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek form. It is often narrowly bound to one fixed translation, whether old or present-day.

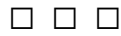


In what concerns the Gospels, **fundamentalism does not take into account the development of the gospel tradition, but naively confuses the final stage of this tradition (what the evangelists have written) with the initial (the words and deeds of the historical Jesus).** As the same time fundamentalism neglects an important fact: the way in which the first Christian communities themselves understood the impact produced by Jesus of Nazareth and his message. But it is precisely there that we find a witness to the apostolic origin of the Christian faith and its direct expression. Fundamentalism thus misrepresents the call voiced by the Gospel itself.

Fundamentalism likewise tends to adopt very narrow points of view. **It accepts the literal reality of an ancient, out-of-date cosmology, simply because it is found expressed in the Bible; this blocks any dialogue with a broader way of seeing the relationship between culture and faith.** Its relying upon a non-critical reading of certain texts of the Bible serve to reinforce political ideas and social attitudes that are marked by prejudices - racism, for example - quite contrary to the Christian gospel.

Finally, in its attachment to the principle "Scripture alone," **fundamentalism separates the interpretation of the Bible from the Tradition, which, guided by the Spirit, has authentically developed in union with Scripture in the heart of the community of faith. It fails to realized that the New Testament took form within the Christian Church and that it is the Holy Scripture of this Church, the existence of which**

*preceded the composition of the texts.*



The fundamentalist approach is dangerous, for it is attractive to people who look to the Bible for ready answers to the problems of life. **It can deceive these people, offering them interpretations that are pious but illusory, instead of telling them that the Bible does not necessarily contain an immediate answer to each and every problem.** Without saying as much in so many words, fundamentalism actually invites people to a kind of intellectual suicide. It injects into life a false certitude, for it unwittingly confuses the divine substance of the biblical message with what are in fact its human limitations.

## ***HOW THE LECTIONARY IS ORGANIZED***

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The Sunday and weekday lectionaries have different cycles. Over the course of three years, if one listened to all the readings, most of Scripture would be heard.

**The Sunday lectionary** is divided into three cycles - years A, B, and C. Each one of these years corresponds to one of the synoptic gospels.

Year A - Matthew

Year B - Mark

Year C - Luke

John appears in some Lenten selections, especially in year A and in the Easter gospels. Also, John 6, the Bread of Life discourse, is read during the summer in Year B. John's account of the Passion is always read on Good Friday, and his prologue ("In the beginning was the Word...") is read on Christmas morning.

The Old Testament readings don't follow a cycle on Sundays. These selections are chosen because there is some connection between them and the gospel reading. Sometimes the connection is not immediately obvious.

The New Testament (epistle) readings also follow their own cycle through the three years of the lectionary. For this reason, sometimes there doesn't seem to be much connection between this reading and the Old Testament and Gospel.

All three readings are more coordinated during Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter. These readings step out of the sequential cycle that we hear during Ordinary Time.

During the Easter season, the Acts of the Apostles appears as the first reading and the book of Revelation is the source of the second reading.

**The weekday lectionary** is organized on a two year cycle. Year I is read during odd numbered years and Year II is read during even numbered years. The gospels are the same for both cycles. The first reading can be from either the Old or the New Testament and follows a sequential cycle. As in the Sunday lectionary, the readings feature specific themes during Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter. ized by themes, rather than according to the plan for the general lectionary. There is a provision made to include readings for major feast days.