

The Bible (The Holy Scriptures)

What are the Holy Scriptures?

By God's grace, the Holy Scriptures are sanctified to serve as God's inspired Word and faithful witness to Jesus Christ and the gospel. They are the fully reliable record of God's revelation to humanity, culminating in his self-revelation in the incarnate Son. The Bible is therefore foundational to the Church and is viewed as infallible in all matters of faith and practice.

What is in the Holy Scriptures?

The Bible is made up of 66 books—39 in the Old Testament, and 27 in the New Testament. The Old Testament contains the record of God's creation of all things, the revelation of God's design and provision for humanity, humankind's original disobedience, God's covenant with Abraham, God's calling of Israel to be his people, God's law, God's wisdom, God's saving deeds, and the teaching of God's prophets who present God's promises. The Old Testament points to Jesus, revealing God's intention to redeem and reconcile the world through Christ in fulfillment of God's promises. The New Testament contains the record of Jesus' birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension, the Church's early ministry, the teaching of the apostles, and the revelation of Christ's return and the fullness of his eternal kingdom. The New Testament shows us God's ultimate purposes and their consummation. (2 Pet. 1:20; 1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Cor. 2:13; Gal. 1:12)

How are the Old Testament and New Testament related?

The Old Testament shows us God's covenant promises revealed first to Abraham, then to Israel. The New Testament reveals to the renewed people of God (the Church), the ultimate fulfillment of those covenant promises. The Old Testament prepared the people of God to recognize and receive the fulfillment of God's Word in Jesus Christ. It also shows how the people of God were to live by faith in the promises of God as Israel, a particular chosen people. The New Testament shows the church how to live by faith after the fulfillment of those promises by Jesus Christ and in hope of their ultimate consummation upon Christ's bodily return. (Heb. 1:1-2; Gal. 3:24-25).

What does it mean that the Holy Scriptures are "inspired"?

It means that the Bible is "God-breathed." The Holy Scriptures were given by the Holy Spirit through prophets and apostles and were preserved by the Spirit as the revelation of God and his acts in human history. They are not simply a collection of human opinion. Jesus gave his apostles authority to speak and teach for him, and a unique gifting from the Spirit to do so (Luke 9:2; Mark 3:14; Mark 16:20; Luke 22:35; Acts 16:10; Rom. 1:1; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10; 1 Thess. 4:2)

What does it mean that the Holy Scriptures are “the written word of God”?

Because the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit, it is rightly called the written word of God. Though God is revealed to us in his mighty works (including the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, the living Word of God), God’s works and will are made known to us through the inspired words of Scripture, the written word. The written word of God is to be understood and interpreted as the Word that belongs to Jesus Christ, who personally appointed authoritative representatives to preach and preserve in writing an authorized witness to him, empowered by the Holy Spirit. (1 Thess. 2:13)

Why is Jesus Christ called “the living Word of God”?

The fullness of God’s revelation is found in Jesus Christ, who not only fulfills the Holy Scriptures (the written word of God) but is himself the living Word of God. Ignorance of the written word is thus ignorance of Jesus, the living Word. We worship and pray to him, not to the Bible, for Jesus alone is the Way, the Truth and the Life. But he has given us his written word through his appointed apostles, and so we cannot truly know him apart from the Holy Scriptures. (John 1:1, 14)

What is the relationship between the Holy Scriptures and the living Word of God?

By the Holy Spirit, the Holy Scriptures put us in touch with Jesus Christ, the living Word of God. By the Spirit, the living Word of God can speak personally to his people in and through the Bible. Through the authoritative and infallible written word of God, we come to know surely and definitively who Jesus Christ is in relationship to the Father and the Holy Spirit. While the written word can be distinguished from the living Word, they can never be separated—they must always be treated together, for their ministries are inseparable in the Holy Spirit. (Heb. 1:1-2; 10:15-17; 12:25-27; John 5:39)

7.8 How should Christians interpret and teach the Holy Scriptures?

Just as the Holy Scriptures were not originally given through private understanding of the things they address, so they must not be understood (and translated, read, interpreted, preached, taught and obeyed) privately. Instead, the Bible is to be understood, conveyed and lived out in the community of the body of Christ, the Church. It is to be interpreted in its plain and canonical sense, respectful of the Church's historic and consensual reading of it. We do so taking seriously the providentially appointed form of human languages, times and circumstances in which the Bible was written. The Holy Scriptures are to be interpreted with Jesus Christ as their center, for he alone is the Living Word of God, the Son of the Father. (John 10:25; Luke 24:27; 2 Peter 1:20-21; Eph. 3:3; Gal. 1:12)

Isn't preaching also the word of God?

Yes. Preaching and other forms of Christian witness are also God's word when faithful to the living Word of God (Jesus Christ) and the witness of the written word of God (the Holy Scriptures). By the power of the Spirit, preaching gives to us what it proclaims—the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faith comes by hearing God's word in the form of faithful proclamation. (Mark 16:15; 2 Cor. 4:5; Rom. 1:15-16; 10:17)

How do Christians relate to the Holy Scriptures?

We expect God to use them uniquely to teach, rebuke, correct and train us to live in communion with God. The written word of God is God's gift to grow in us faith, hope and love for God, and to teach us how to live out that relationship in all we think, do and say. Therefore, on a regular basis, even daily, we seek to hear, read, study, learn and inwardly digest the Bible. By becoming intimately familiar with the whole of Scripture, seeing its parts in terms of the whole and its living Center, Jesus Christ, we will understand that the biblical story is our story as well. This encourages us to live in ways that conform to that story rather than to worldly influences. (Matt. 4:4; 2 Tim. 3:16; Rom. 10:17; Col. 3:16; Luke 4:4)

7.11 Does the Holy Spirit ever speak apart from the Holy Scriptures?

Since the Holy Spirit is not given to the Church apart from the Bible, true messages from the Spirit depend on the written word of God. This can be referred to “Prima Scriptura”. Since that word cannot be grasped without the Spirit, true interpretation of Scripture depends on prayer. However, just as the wind blows where it will, the Spirit may speak or otherwise work in people's lives in unexpected or indirect ways, yet always according to the Holy Scriptures, never contradicting, diluting or dismissing them. However, such direction of the Spirit can never become normative for the Church in the way Holy Scripture is and always will be. (John 3:8; Acts 8:29-31; Eph. 6:18; 2 Pet. 1:20-21; Num. 22:28)