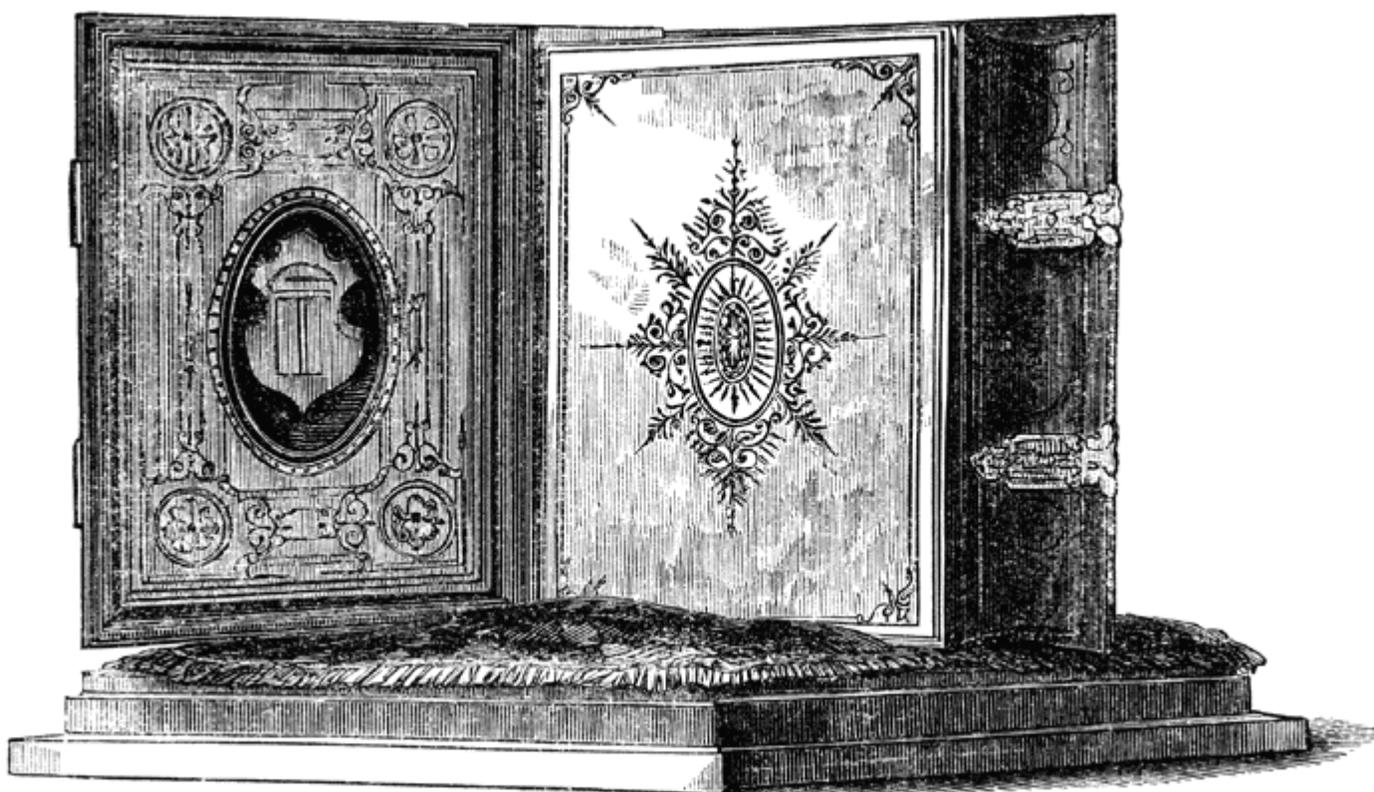


# The Holy Scriptures

*A study of the Christian Bible*



Study Guide for Seekers, Catechumen, Confirmands, and all Christians

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# Part One: What is Revelation?

## The desire for God to be revealed

The Christian Faith is a faith based on **revelation**. Revelation is the idea that **God** is involved in the world and communicates to us concerning his will and desires for our lives. This is opposed to ideas such as **deism** which sees God as remote and uninvolved.

Revelation itself starts with the idea of relationship. One of God’s primary attributes is love (1 John 4:8) which makes God relational, and because human beings are both rational and made in **God’s image** we’re capable of entering into a mutual relationship with God. Like any relationship this one involves some form of interaction and communication. When God interacts directly in the world we often call that a **miracle**, and when God communicates something directly to us we call that revelation. Revelation has four main categories: Jesus, **special revelation**, **private revelation**, and **natural revelation**.

In the primary Christian sense **Jesus Christ** is God’s revelation because he is God who walked on earth. He is the “image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15) and said that if we’ve seen him then we’ve “seen the Father”. (John 14:9) If we want to know who **God the Father** is, what he is like, and what he desires for us and our world, we can look principally to Jesus who showed us the true nature of God.

Secondarily, however, we must ask how we are able to know anything at all about Jesus. This is where special revelation comes in. Jesus is revealed in the **Holy Scriptures** (or the **Bible**) which are the special revelation to the Church. This is true not only of the New Testament which records the words and works of Jesus with apostolic teaching, but also the Old Testament which pointed towards Jesus. (Luke 24:27; John 5:39) Historically this type of revelation included the sayings of prophets, dreams, visions, visits by angels, and the overall **inspiration** of the Bible. The Scriptures are the primary and ultimate form of this type of revelation.

Throughout history Christians have also testified to rare and occasional instances of special revelation given to individuals. This is private revelation. Though it is a version of special revelation, it is not authoritative for the entire **Church** but is in fact under the discerning judgment of the Church. (1 Cor 14:37-38; 1 John 4:1)

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our children forever, to observe all the words of this law. Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?" Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?" No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.  
*Deuteronomy 29:29 – 30:11*

### Types of Revelation

Jesus	Special	Private	Natural
Jesus is the primary and ultimate revelation about who God is and his desires for us.	This is revelation given in special circumstances by God such as via angels, dreams, and prophets. The Holy Scriptures are special revelation, for even the parts not directly revealed are still considered to be directly inspired.	Private revelation is similar to special revelation in method but is given for an individual only and not the Church. These types are under the discerning judgment of the Church.	This is what we can discern about God from the creation around us and by use of human reason.

Finally, some specific aspects about God can be discerned from creation and human reason, (Rom 1:18-21) and this we call natural revelation. This is the most uncertain variety as it relies on human interpretation of a world which has been effected by what we call **sin**. We must also be careful at drawing complex conclusions from a few observations of nature and so this type also doesn't have the authority to override special revelation of any type. What use is it then? It's helpful in bolstering our understanding of special revelation when that revelation needs clarification. Theologians often debate the proper role and scope of this revelation.

Q. What help is there for us?  
 A. Our help is in God.

Q. How did God first help us?  
 A. God first helped us by revealing himself and his will, through nature and history, through many seers and saints, and especially the prophets of Israel.

Q. How was this revelation handed down to us?  
 A. This revelation was handed down to us through a community created by a covenant with God.

*Book of Common Prayer p.845, 846*

**Our need for God to be revealed**

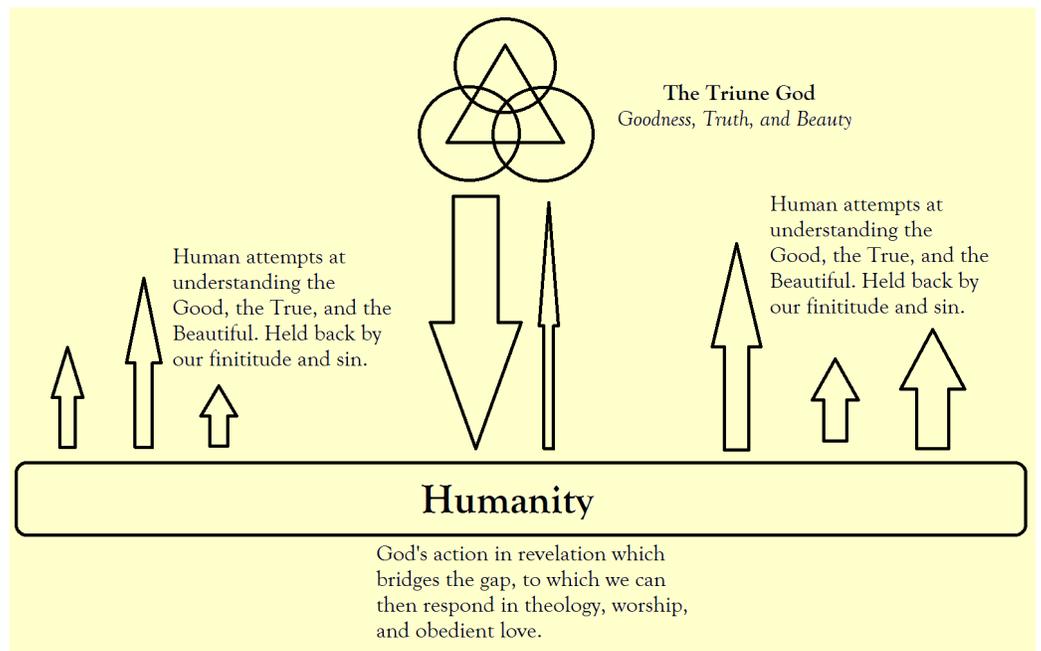
But do we need this special revelation?  
 Can't humanity discover God for ourselves? No.

We have two insurmountable problems with doing it ourselves. First is the "distance" between God and us. God is infinite and we are a limited creation. We are no more able to comprehend God by our own ability than a pet animal could comprehend

human philosophy. In addition, even the level of comprehension we'd be able to attain is hindered by sin, which has separated us from God beyond what was originally intended. Our tools are both inadequate and broken! It's like being near sighted without glasses and trying to use the naked eye to see the terrain on the moon.

Without special revelation we'd have a disjointed assortment of human opinions about God. This is, in fact, what we find to be the human religious experience. As we look into the religions of the world we see each has unique sets of ideas which often contradict each other: Is God one or many? Does sin really exist or is it a state of mind? If there is "evil" what's the solution? Do we need an outside salvation or can we attain it ourselves? Either one religious tradition must be right, or all must be wrong in enough core ways as to be impossible to understand the true nature of reality without oversimplifying them all. Therefore if one is right, it can only be right by virtue of special revelation, this is the only question that ultimately matters: whose revelation is true?

Christians believe God has chosen to reveal himself primarily in the God-man Jesus Christ through the recorded revelation of the Holy Scriptures. This is also why natural revelation is deficient by itself. It relies on our inadequate abilities and doesn't take the hindrance of sin into account. God must act first to bridge the gap, and only once he does can we respond to God with our understanding and in proper worship.



**The ability for God to be revealed**

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being,

*Hebrews 1:1-3*

But is God able to bridge this gap? Yes!

God is not limited as we are and so is not constrained by the same limitations in communication. In the same way a child may not be able to fully understand everything about physics, a good teacher can communicate the basics to the child in a way they can understand. As the child understands more they will build on what they learned, but the original foundation would remain true. In terms of our connection with God we are perpetually in a childlike state of

knowledge. Though it's true there is much beyond our ability even with God's help, that doesn't mean we're cut off from any level of understanding or certainty.

In being the perfect teacher God has the ability to communicate with us on a level we can understand, and what is communicated is true. In the ultimate sense Jesus Christ is the full revelation of God, however in a secondary and important sense the Holy Scriptures form the revelation of God to the Church about Jesus and God's revelation to ancient **Israel**. Through this revelation the Church has indeed come to some definite conclusions about many things, even though there are still many mysteries about God and reality we may never fully know.

God is willing and God is able, so we must make a decision only on where this special revelation is to be found. For us Christians, we believe it is found in the Bible.

**Methods God has used in revelation:**

1. Voice from Heaven (Matthew 3:17)
2. Theophany/Christophany [apparent bodily manifestation] (Genesis 18:1-2)
3. Angels (Revelation 1:1)
4. Mysterious Writing (Daniel 5:5, 24-28)
5. Dreams (1 Kings 3:5)
6. Prophets (Jeremiah 46:13)

## Part Two: What is the Bible?

### Inspiration of the Bible

Once we establish that the Bible is revelation from God we can talk more fully about what the Bible actually is. Firstly, the Bible is inspired. Today we often use “inspired” to mean something is generally “meaningful” or “of high quality”. However the original idea of inspiration was that something had been “breathed into” by a spirit. When we say the Bible is inspired we don’t just mean it’s personally meaningful or high quality literature, but that the **Holy Spirit** was the driving force behind its text. The Bible is in fact literally called “God breathed”! (2 Tim 3:16 in Greek)

Q. Why do we call the Holy Scriptures the Word of God?

A. We call them the Word of God because God inspired their human authors and because God still speaks to us through the Bible.

*Book of Common Prayer p.853*

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.  
*2 Timothy 3:14-17*

Though theologians often debate the exact nature of this inspiration there are a few things that are more certain:

1. The Bible is inspired in whole (called **plenary inspiration**) and not just in part. In other words we don’t talk about “uninspired verses”. This also applies to the Old Testament which is just as much part of the Scriptures as the New Testament. In addition this means we can’t be “red letter Christians” in only following the recorded words of Jesus, for all the Bible is revelation of Jesus Christ to us to instruct us in salvation and Christian living.
2. This inspiration has a purpose: to instruct in salvation and the Christian life. In fact all **Episcopal clergy** vow to uphold the belief that the “Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and to contain all things necessary to salvation”. (*Book of Common Prayer* pp. 513, 526, 538)
3. God’s inspiration of the Scriptures worked with the human authors in some dynamic manner. We can see in the Scriptures different writings styles of the human authors. The Bible also contains cultural idioms which communicate God’s ideas within those contexts of those authors. Theologians disagree on the nature of inspiration, if it is **verbal** or **doctrinal**, but in neither case should it be normally seen as overly mechanical.

### **Theologians Debate:**

#### The Nature of Inspiration?

1. Are the Scriptures **verbally inspired**? This means the very words themselves are inspired. In some sense all the ideas in Scripture are inspired.
2. Are the Scriptures **doctrinally inspired**? This means inspiration only or primarily applies to the doctrinal ideas contained in the verses of Scripture.

#### If verbal, do the Gospels contain?

1. The *very words of Jesus*? (**impissima verba**) The **Gospels** record the exact words Jesus used.
2. The *very voice of Jesus*? (**impissima vox**) The Gospels record summarized teachings and sayings of Jesus that preserve the main truth of the exact words he used.

*Note: This can also be applied to the rest of the Bible outside the Gospels.*

## Authority of the Bible

Because the Bible is inspired by God then it carries God's authority in the same way that a letter from a king carries the authority of the king. It's not that the book itself has an independent authority, but that God exercises his authority through Scripture. (Bishop N.T. Wright, *The Last Word*, p.23) This is also why the Scriptures are (and must be) trustworthy. If they can't be trusted then they're a bad authority, and if they're a bad authority then that's an indicator they lack divine inspiration. If they lack inspiration then we're back to the original issue of where God has given his revelation to us. Remember, this is the only Jesus we can know, the one revealed in the Scriptures!

It's important to remember the difference between the text and our interpretation. People make errors in understanding and interpretation, but a problem with an interpretation is not the same as a problem with what is being interpreted. On a practical basis, then, when we debate **theology** we may question a human interpretation, but do not deny that the Scriptures themselves are trustworthy.

"The Church declares in the Nicene Creed that the Holy Ghost "spake by the prophets." This is the Catholic doctrine of Inspiration. In other words, the Scriptures not only contain but are the Word of God, and for the purposes of their inspiration have Divine authority throughout. How they came to possess this authority, i.e., the method of their inspiration, the Church does not define; but what the Church means by teaching that the Bible is divinely inspired is perfectly clear — that they have Divine authority. Such authority, if present at all, is absolute; and biblical inspiration does not admit of degrees."

*Rev. Francis J. Hall, Theological Outlines III.1.iii*

This also doesn't mean authority works the same way in all places. The Bible isn't a law book though it does contain laws. Instead there are many types of writings found in the Bible such as law, poetry, proverbs, occasional letters, and visions. The details of this will be covered later but for now think of authority this way: once the interpretation is done, whatever the final story, idea, command, etc. that God is communicating has God's authority behind it as it applies appropriately.

This authority makes the Scriptures the primary authority in the Church. **Tradition** and **Reason** are interpreters. And where Church Tradition also has additional content, it forms a secondary level of authority.

"We must believe God, who has given us the right understanding, since the Holy Scriptures are perfect, because they are spoken by the Word of God and the Spirit of God"

*-St. Irenaeus, Adv. Her. 2.47 (d. c.108 AD)*

"And the God-man himself originates the New Testament and approves the Old. And, as we must acknowledge him to be true, so no one can dissent from anything contained in these books."

*-St. Anselm, Cur Deus Homo, II.22 (d. 1109 AD)*

Q. How do we recognize the truths taught by the Holy Spirit?

A. We recognize truths to be taught by the Holy Spirit when they are in accord with the Scriptures.

*Book of Common Prayer p.853*

### **The Myth of the "Three-legged Stool":**

This idea of three equal legs of a stool: Scripture, Tradition, and Reason is often attributed to Richard Hooker, who is one of the more important figures in Anglican history and shaped much of Anglican theology during the late 16th century. However Hooker didn't believe there were three equal sources of religious truth. What he said was:

*"Be it in matter of the one kind or of the other, what Scripture doth plainly deliver, to that the first place both of credit and obedience is due; the next whereunto is whatsoever any man can necessarily conclude by force of reason; after these the voice of the Church succeedeth. That which the Church by her ecclesiastical authority shall probably think and define to be true or good, must in congruity of reason overrule all other inferior judgments whatsoever."* (*Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, V.8.2)

Note that Scripture is primary, afterwards is individual reason, and finally is the "voice of the Church". It is also important to remember that Hooker wrote before the enlightenment era and our modern conception of "reason". Reason was instead basic logic and rational thought, not a separate body of knowledge. Reason in the former sense certainly plays a role, but only one of interpretation. This is similarly true of Tradition. The Church is the pillar of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15) and the Tradition of the Church guides us in our individual interpretation.

## Parts of the Bible

Although we think of the Bible as one book, it's really a collection of different types of books. There are three broad divisions of these books: **Old Testament**, **Apocrypha**, and **New Testament**. There are also several other divisions within each. Remember that chapter and verse divisions were not original, these are helps we've added to the text to make using the Bible easier and have become standardized.

The Old Testament is the collection of books written about God's interaction with humanity before Jesus focusing primarily on ancient **Israel**, God's **covenant** people he brought out of

Q. What is the Old Testament?

A. The Old Testament consists of books written by the people of the Old Covenant, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to show God at work in nature and history.

*Book of Common Prayer p.853*

One). For Christians it is important to remember that the Old Testament is just as much an inspired part of Scriptures as the New. The God of both Testaments is the same! Though how exactly various Old Testament passages apply in the Christian life is something theologians continue to debate.

### **Books of the Old Testament:**

#### The Torah (Law)

**Genesis** – Creation, Fall, Abraham, Patriarchs.

**Exodus** – God through Moses brings Israel out of Egypt.

**Leviticus** – Worship regulations for Israel.

**Numbers** – Israel in the wilderness to the conquest of Canaan.

**Deuteronomy** – God's covenant with Israel and stipulations for obedience.

#### History

**Joshua** – Conquest of Canaan, establishing Israel in the land.

**Judges** – Pre-monarchy period of "Judges" who ruled Israel.

**Ruth** – Story of Ruth living in Israel and God's providence in the world.

**1&2 Samuel** – The rise of King David and the United Kingdom of Israel.

**1&2 Kings** – History of King Solomon to the Babylonian Captivity.

**1&2 Chronicles** – Overarching history of ancient Israel creation to exile.

**Ezra** – Israel after the exile.

**Nehemiah** – Rebuilding after the exile.

**Esther** – Story of Esther living in exile and God's providence in the world.

Q. What are the Holy Scriptures?

A. The Holy Scriptures, commonly called the Bible, are the books of the Old and New Testaments; other books, called the Apocrypha, are often included in the Bible.

*Book of Common Prayer p.853*

Egypt during the **Exodus**. The timespan covered includes creation, the calling of **Abraham**, the era of the **Patriarchs** (early tribal leaders of Israel), the Exodus where God gave the law, and the history of the divided Kingdoms of Israel and **Judah**. In addition the Old Testament contains Psalms for worship, Proverbs for living, other writings about living a wise and godly life, and the writings of various Prophets God sent to Israel and Judah to bring them back to his law and give them hope for future redemption in a **Messiah** (Anointed

#### Wisdom and Poetry

**Job** – Story of Job and wisdom on suffering.

**Psalms** – Poetry to be sung, Israel's "Hymn Book".

**Proverbs** – Wisdom for living a godly life.

**Ecclesiastes** – Reflections on when life doesn't "work".

**Song of Songs/Solomon** – Love poetry, reflections on love and marriage.

#### Major Prophets

**Isaiah** – 8th Century in Judah.

**Jeremiah** – 7th Century in Judah.

**Lamentations** – Lament for Jerusalem's destruction.

**Ezekiel** – Prophet of the Exile.

**Daniel** – Prophet of the Exile.

#### Minor Prophets

**Hosea** – 8th Century in Israel.

**Joel** – 9th Century in Judah.

**Amos** – 8th Century in Israel.

**Obadiah** – 9th Century in Judah.

**Jonah** – 8th Century to Nineveh (history, parable, both?)

**Micah** – 8th Century in Judah.

**Nahum** – 7th Century in Judah.

**Habakkuk** – 7th Century in Judah.

**Zephaniah** – 7th Century in Judah.

**Haggai** – After the Exile.

**Zechariah** – After the Exile.

**Malachi** – After the Exile.

Unlike the New Testament, the Old Testament has a debated **Canon**, and these debated books are often called the **Apocrypha** or **Deuterocanonicals**.

The Apocrypha is a varied collection of both additional books and additions to other books that are connected to the Old Testament. In the **Roman Catholic** and **Eastern Orthodox Church** they are considered part of the Old Testament and are kept together. In most **Anglican** Bibles (and some **Lutheran**) they are included as a separate section between the Old and New Testaments. Other Bibles, mostly printed for **Protestants**, omit these books entirely.

Within Anglicanism one finds people that hold both views. So what practically can we do with these books? Some guidance for us can be found in the **39 Articles** on page 868 of the **Book of Common Prayer** which says “And the other Books (as Hierome saith) the Church doth read for example of life and instruction of manners; but yet doth it not apply them to establish any doctrine”. In this we strike a middle road: they are not equal to the rest of the Old Testament in doctrine, but neither should Christians ignore them.

In fact they contain a lot of godly wisdom and so are very useful in guidance for Christian life.

### Books of the Apocrypha:

*The Following are those commonly found in modern printings of the Apocrypha. A = Anglican as per the 39 Articles; R = Roman Deuterocanonicals; E = Eastern Orthodox (varies)*

**Baruch** (A, R, E) – To Israel during the Diaspora. Baruch is the name of the scribe of the Prophet Jeremiah.

### Daniel [additions] (A, R, E)

**Bel and the Dragon** – Daniel challenges the pagan god Bel, slays a dragon, and includes another story of him in a Lion’s Den.

**Song of the Three Children** – Also contains the Prayer of Azariah. The song is a comprehensive Hymn praising God from all creation. It is in the Prayer Book as Canticles 1 and 12.

**Story of Susanna** – Daniel saves a young woman from three evil men who were spying on her and accused her of adultery.

**Ecclesiasticus** (A, R, E) – Also called *Jesus the Son of Sirach*. A book of wisdom similar to Proverbs.

**Epistle of Jeremiah** (R, E) – Baruch 6 in Roman Catholic Bibles. Expansion on the Baruch from the Prophet Jeremiah.

**1 Esdras** (A, E) – Sometimes also labeled 3 Esdras. Mostly similar to the OT Book of Ezra.

**2 Esdras** (A) – Sometimes also labeled 4 Esdras. Messages of judgment to a wayward Israel combined with apocalyptic visions.

### Q. What is the Apocrypha?

A. The Apocrypha is a collection of additional books written by people of the Old Covenant, and used in the Christian Church.

*Book of Common Prayer p.853*

**Esther** [Additions] (A, R, E) – Various additions to the OT Book of Esther.

**Judith** (A, R, E) – About Judith, a woman who saves Israel from the Assyrians.

**1 Maccabees** (A, R, E) – History of the Maccabean Revolt c.175–134 BC.

**2 Maccabees** (A, R, E) – Covers a part of the same history, but in a more theological way.

**3 Maccabees** (E) – Unrelated to the Maccabean revolt. Story is about persecution of Jews in 3rd century BC.

**4 Maccabees** – Uses the story of the Maccabean revolt as the backdrop to talk about “reason” as “sovereign over the emotions”.

**Prayer of Manasseh** (A, E) – A penitential prayer. Used in the Prayer Book as Canticle 14.

**Psalm 151** (E) – A psalm said to be written by David after he “slew Goliath in single combat”

**Tobit** (A, R, E) – Story about Tobit who goes blind and whose son Tobias goes on a journey to Media. Along the way the Archangel Raphael assists him as he frees a woman Sarah from the demon Asmodeus and marries her. Raphael also gives Tobias a method to cure his Father, and so he returns home with Sarah and heals Tobit of his blindness.

**Wisdom of Solomon** (A, R, E) – A wisdom book similar to Proverbs.

Q. What is the New Testament?

A. The New Testament consists of books written by the people of the New Covenant, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to set forth the life and teachings of Jesus and to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom for all people.

*Book of Common Prayer p.853*

The New Testament is called “New” based on Jesus’ words that he established a “New Covenant” between God and us in his sacrifice on the Cross. (Luke 22:20) Compared to either the Old Testament or even the Apocrypha, the New Testament covers a much smaller amount of time: from the birth of Jesus though the era of the Apostles. The single possible outlier to this is Revelation, which some argue presents events in the far future near the return of Jesus.

Generally the New Testament is divided into five major sections: **Gospels**, Acts (History), Pauline Epistles, Catholic Epistles, and Revelation (Apocalypse).

The Gospels are the primary source in the Bible for our knowledge of the words and works of Jesus. Though they are history they are often placed in their own category due to this. Within the Gospel they are often also divided into the three **synoptic** Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke; and then the non-synoptic John. They are called synoptic because they have much of the same material, leading scholars to believe they are all related to a prior source, or set of sources, as well as each other, whereas John has more unique stories and sayings of Jesus.

The Gospel of Luke is actually part one of two, the second being the Book of Acts (“Acts of the **Apostles**”) which narrates the history of the early Church during the time of the Apostles with a special focus on Paul’s ministry.

The bulk of the New Testament is made up of letters written to various churches or the Church as a whole, with the majority of these letters written by one person: the **Apostle** Paul. Even though Scholars debate the authorship of some of these, they are still often put in the category of “Pauline Epistle” and were written to address specific issues in particular churches. Some were also written to individual church leaders (1&2 Timothy and Titus), and are called “Pastoral Epistles”.

The rest of the New Testament Epistles are called “catholic” or “general” because they were written to the entire Church instead of a particular community. Similarly, they were written to address varying issues of belief or discipline that arose in the first century Church.

Finally we have the Book of Revelation, the only New Testament book containing apocalyptic images which many Christians have interpreted as visions of the future.

#### Books of the New Testament:

##### Gospels

**Matthew** – “Synoptic” Gospel. Jesus is God’s chosen King, the Messiah.

**Mark** – “Synoptic” Gospel. Very similar, yet shorter, account to Matthew.

**Luke** – “Synoptic” Gospel. Written as two parts with the Book of Acts. Emphasis on the Gospel to the Gentiles.

**John** – Jesus is the eternal Son of God who saves the world.

##### History

**Acts** – Story of the early Church and the sequel to Luke.

##### Pauline Epistles

**Romans**

**1&2 Corinthians**

**Galatians**

**Ephesians**

**Philippians**

**Colossians**

**1&2 Thessalonians**

**1&2 Timothy**

**Titus**

**Philemon**

**Hebrews**

##### Catholic or General Epistles

**James**

**1&2 Peter**

**1, 2, 3 John**

**Jude**

##### Apocalyptic

**Revelation** – Vision of God’s victory over evil given to John, considered by tradition to be the same as John the Apostle. There are a variety of interpretations on Revelation.

## Part Three: How do we know what books belong?

### Theology of Canon

The **Biblical Canon** is the official list of books which belong in the Bible. Because the Old and New Testaments were both written over different periods and have different canons, they are separated below. The main point to remember is that the Canon is the result of the guidance of the Holy Spirit on the Church. Aspects of it can be messy, but the end result is a very consistent collection of books the Church has given us by the Spirit which we claim is divinely inspired. And this is the key. It's not that each book has an internal quality which we as individuals can easily discern, nor can we as individuals start creating a "canon within the canon". Instead, those authoritative books we consider to have divine inspiration are those which there "was never any doubt in the Church." (BCP 868, Article VI) And so we rely on the collected wisdom of the Church which has handed down particular books to us while acknowledging some continued dispute over the nature of some of them.

### Canon of the Old Testament

Within the Old Testament, the core of the Canon is the **Torah**, or Law: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These books were always considered authoritative by ancient Israel through the time of Jesus, and so also by the Church. The rest of the Old Testament, the Writings and the Prophets, were sometimes debated. By the time of Jesus things had begun to solidify but there were still disputes and there is evidence that the Pharisees and Sadducees held to differences in what books are considered authoritative, though scholars disagree as to what extent. Jesus himself quotes from many of the same books we have in our canon today. By the time of Jesus, and in the early Church, the great bulk of the canon was settled, and for these books the Church has always united. What is often called the Apocrypha comes from the disputed books, which we have seen differs even among Christians.

The debate over these became more intense during the Reformation which is why many Protestant and Catholic Bibles have differing numbers of Old Testament books. Protestants typically argue the Church should rely on the established Jewish canon which developed in Israel during the end of the Apostolic era. Several **Church Fathers** also held to this view and argued for only the same books as used by Jews. Catholics argue for a wider canon found in some other parts of the Jewish world at the time of Jesus, and also argue the Jewish canon was incorrect. There are also Church Fathers who support this view, who asserted that the Biblical canon should be found in the Church, as it was the Church that had the guidance of the Holy Spirit during the Apostolic age. In the end the doctrinal differences are minimal and Anglicanism tends to strike a middle ground of using the Apocrypha for "example of life and instruction of manners; but yet doth it not apply them to establish any doctrine." (BCP 868, Article VI)

### Canon of the New Testament

Unlike the Old Testament, the books of the New Testament canon are much more firmly established. Most of the books had been canonized at least by AD 170 with the entire canon becoming set during the 300's. Also unlike the Old Testament canon, the New Testament is the same across the majority of the Christian world: Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox. The primary factor in the Church's discernment over the New Testament canon was making judgments on which books can be read in the Churches, i.e. which books should be part of the liturgy. For the early Church it was worship that determined canon, and not the canon determining worship. Christians gathered to hear the Scriptures and to celebrate the **Sacrament** of the **Eucharist**. From this they derived which books should be allowed to be read in this context of the **liturgy**, and from these lists derived the councils and theologians who declared which books were canon.

## Part Four: How did the Bible get to us?

### How scribes made copies

All books of the Bible were originally hand written and hand copied. Gutenberg wouldn't invent the printing press until AD 1440! Therefore after the original author wrote the **original autograph**, it was passed on to a person who was able to read and write and who would hand copy the original. This copy could then be passed on to another person who would make another copy, and so on. Sometimes these copies were mass produced by professional scribes all working together, and other times by individuals. Later they would also be copied in **monasteries** where monks would be responsible for producing many of the Bibles of the Medieval Era.

### Knowing what the original text said

As copies were made, copying errors would occur. Most examples include things such as copying the same line twice, or a simple misspelling. Sometimes words were skipped on accident or a line left out. Some **textual variants** were more intentional, such as harmonizing with parallel texts, or modifying grammar and spelling. Others occurred when over scrupulous scribes either worked from two **manuscripts** which had different variants, or had a manuscript with writing on the margins. Not wanting to accidentally omit anything they would often include everything to ensure the preserved the text.

One should not get the impression that scribes were on the whole bad at their jobs or introduced a wild amount of variations. In fact the Dead Sea Scrolls demonstrated that between around the time of Jesus and c. AD 1000 Jewish scribes had preserved the text amazingly well, with only a few minor variations in the entire book of Isaiah! Many variations in the New Testament are no more than saying "Jesus Christ" instead of "Jesus" or just swapping the words "Jesus" and "Christ" for one another. The only two major variations scholars believe are not original are the "longer ending of Mark", Mark 16:9-20, and the story of the woman caught in adultery, John 7:53–8:11.

Another reason there are so many variants is that there are an incredible amount of copies of at least parts of the New Testament, over five thousand, all made within around 200-300 years from the original. In comparison Homer's *Iliad* has under seven hundred within a 400 year span, and Caesar's *Gallic Wars* survives in about ten copies that date around 1000 years after the original. When we say there are thousands of variants what we mean is the same variant may appear in two thousand manuscripts, and it's often just the same minor typo repeated thousands of times. Few would say we can never know what Caesar really wrote in his *Wars*, even though it doesn't have close to the same evidence as the New Testament!

So how do we determine what the original said? The art and science of this is called **textual criticism**. Though this applies to both Old and New Testaments, Old Testament textual criticism has less variations and manuscripts to work through, and so we'll only talk about New Testament for the example. We have thousands of copies of New Testament manuscripts covering all books, with some manuscripts dating to the 2nd and 3rd centuries. Scholars use a combination of all these manuscripts to construct the original text. Scholars use such information as how many copies have one reading, how early those copies are, how widespread one reading is (all copies in a major city may have the same error, but not as likely in another city many miles away), how "hard" a reading is (how likely would the scribe be to chose "option A" over "option B?"), and other various factors. This is why it is more art than science, one can't rely on just a single criteria. But with the large amount of manuscripts scholars are able to reconstruct the original with an incredible degree of accuracy, and most all variants are irrelevant to our theology.

### **Some early witnesses to the New Testament text:**

P<sup>52</sup> = c. AD 100 – 150. Oldest copy of any part of the NT, it contains part of the Gospel of John.

P<sup>72</sup> = 3rd Century. Oldest copy of Jude, and 1&2 Peter.

P<sup>75</sup> = c. AD 175 – 225. Oldest copy of Luke, also contains John.

Ⲁ (Codex Sinaiticus) = 4th Century. Complete NT.

### A simple (made-up!) example of Textual Criticism using English:

*This is an overly simplified example but may help give you a basic idea of how scholars look at different manuscripts to attempt and put together the original.*

#### Original

Greetings to the saints in Sherman in the Name of our Lord! Even in Shreveport I've heard about your faith and love towards God and his saints. I do hope to visit you soon, and when I do bring a word from God for your edification. I also hear of your love for the poor and in this I rejoice! You will be blessed in Jesus with spiritual blessings as you minister in his name. Now may God bless you in faith and love as you await the return of his Christ to judge the world and reward you richly for your service. I shall see you soon in a few days.

#### Manuscript A

Greetings to the saints in **Dallas** in the Name of our Lord **Jesus**! Even in Shreveport I've heard about your faith and love towards God and his saints. I do hope to visit you [], and when I do bring a word from **the Lord** for your edification. I also hear of your love for the poor and in this I rejoice! You will be blessed in Jesus **Christ** with spiritual blessings as you minister in his name. Now may God bless you in faith and **hope** as you await the return of his Christ to judge the world and reward you richly for your service. I shall see you soon in a few days.

#### Manuscript B

Greetings to the saints in Sherman in the Name of our Lord! Even in Shreveport I've heard about your [] love towards God and his saints. I do hope to visit you soon, and when I do **visit you soon** bring a word from **the Lord** for your edification. I also hear of your love for the poor []! You will be blessed in **Christ** with spiritual blessings as you minister in his name. Now may God bless you in **hope** and love as you await the return of his Christ to judge the world and reward you [] for your service. I shall see you soon [].

#### Manuscript C

Greetings to the saints in **Dallas** in the Name of our Lord **Jesus Christ**! Even in **Louisiana** I've heard about your faith and love towards God and his saints. I do hope to visit you soon, and when I do **visit you soon** bring a word from God for your edification. I also hear of your **great** love for the poor and in this I rejoice **in your love**! You will be blessed in Jesus **his Christ** with spiritual blessings as you minister in his name. Now may God **richly** bless you in faith and love **and hope** as you await the return of his Christ to judge the world and reward you richly for your service. I shall see you soon in a few days.

#### Manuscript D

Greetings to the saints in Sherman in the Name of our Lord! Even in **Louisiana** I've heard about your faith [] towards God and his saints **in Dallas**. I do hope to visit you soon, and when I do bring a word from God for your edification. I also hear of your love for the poor and in this I rejoice **in your love**! You will be blessed in **our Lord Jesus Christ** with spiritual blessings as you minister in [] **the name of Jesus**. Now may God bless you [] as you await his return of [] to judge the world and **greatly** reward you richly for your service. I shall see [] in a few days.

#### Critical Text

Greetings to the saints in Sherman<sup>1</sup> in the Name of our Lord! Even in Shreveport<sup>2</sup> I've heard about your faith and love towards God and his saints. I do hope to visit you soon, and when I do<sup>3</sup> bring a word from God for your edification. I also hear of your love for the poor and in this I rejoice! You will be blessed in Jesus<sup>4</sup> with spiritual blessings as you minister in his name. Now may God bless you in faith and love<sup>5</sup> as you await the return of his Christ to judge the world and reward you richly for your service. I shall see you soon in a few days.

<sup>1</sup> A few mss say "Dallas", possibly considering the town as part of the Dallas area.

<sup>2</sup> A few mss say "Louisiana", possible to clarify the location.

<sup>3</sup> Some mss add "visit you soon", probably just a scribal error in repeating the previous phrase.

<sup>4</sup> Many mss add "Christ", likely an expansion of piety.

<sup>5</sup> Some mss add "hope", replacing either faith or love or adding it to the list.

## Guide to Modern Translations

If you walk into an average bookstore, particularly a Christian one, you may be surprised at how many Bibles there are! There are three reasons for this: language, additional resources, and textual criticism.

**Language:** As English has changed so too Bibles have updated English reflecting the time of translation. In addition, even within the same era some translations differ for a variety of reasons. Often they differ in approaches to idioms and figures of speech which will be covered in Part Five. Some also differ in how much to “modernize” the text. For instance some may use “police” instead of “palace guard” in an attempt to bridge a historical gap as we no longer have “palace guards”. Or some may translate “denarii” into “money”, using the modern equivalent instead of as a historical term. Some differences have to do with reading level as well, translations geared for higher or lower levels. Sometimes the translation attempts to stick more strictly to the original words, regardless of how it may sound in English, while others attempt for good English, even if they have to rearrange or reward a more strict reading. The latter are often better for public reading and so tend to be more of a concern in liturgical churches such as ours. This is also called the difference between **formal equivalence** and **dynamic equivalence**. Formal, sometimes called “literal” is when the emphasis is placed on exact word for word meanings. Dynamic is when emphasis is placed on concepts with less concern for a direct translation of each word.

All translations are a combination of both formal and dynamic, but often each is intentionally more on one side of the scale than the other. Many may be tempted to think, then, that formal equivalence is “more accurate” but this is not true. A “literal” translation doesn't mean a “better” translation! Accuracy of a translation is the one that best communicates the meaning of the text being translated. Sometimes that may require being more dynamic or the English won't make a lot of sense.

### Translation Example for 1 John 1:1-2

#### Woodenly literal [“word for word translation”]

What was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen that with our eyes, which we have beheld, and our hands have handled concerning the word of life. And the life was manifested/reveled and we have seen and we have testified and we have announced to you life eternal which he was with the Father and was manifested/reveled to us.

#### New American Standard Bible (NASB) [More Formal]

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life~and the life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us~

#### New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) [Balanced/Formal]

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life~this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us~

#### New International Version (NIV) [Balanced/Dynamic]

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched~ this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.

#### New Living Translation (NLT) [More Dynamic]

We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us.

**Additional Resources:** Often the exact same translations only differ based on additional resources bound with the Bible. For instance some are “study bibles” that have more extensive footnotes, maps, and even articles. Sometimes these can be even more specific, focusing on one particular theme throughout the Bible. Some may come with additional prayer resources, or articles and commentary on the spiritual life.

**Textual Criticism:** Some bibles differ based on the underlying original text. As covered in the previous section, textual criticism means that sometimes some words and phrases are disputed as to which is original or how a translation should handle them. The more extreme example is the difference between the use of a **critical text** or the **majority text**. A critical text takes into account many factors in determining which variant is original. The majority text is called such because it asserts that whichever variant is found in the most manuscripts is the one likely to be original. Most all modern translations follow a critical text.

### So what do I buy?

Which Bible do you buy? There’s not a perfect translation nor a perfect Bible, but there are some things to consider. First, though a masterpiece of the English language, the King James Version (KJV) uses an older Greek text based somewhat on the **majority text**, which most scholars believe to be less than ideal. Though remember that it was top scholarship at the time. In addition, some of the language is archaic enough to cause problems in understanding. For instance Jesus says to “suffer little children” which used to mean “permit” or “allow” and not to cause pain! The New King James Version (NKJV) clarifies many of these words but uses the same underlying Hebrew and Greek text.

If you want a Bible based on the most recently found Hebrew and Greek, that follows the textual criticism examples above, there are many more options. Some, like the New American Standard Bible (NASB) are far on the formal equivalence spectrum but can sound stilted when read. Others like The Message (MSG) or a lesser extent The Living Bible (TLB) are so far on the dynamic end they are actually more paraphrases than translations. Note that The Living Bible is not the same as the New Living Translation (NLT) which is not a paraphrase but high on the dynamic end. Between these two are Bibles such as the [New] Revised Standard Version (RSV/NRSV), New International Version (NIV), the [New] Jerusalem Bible (JB/NJB), English Standard Version (ESV), and the Revised English Bible (REB). There are of course many more but these are some common options.

Many Bibles also don’t come with the Apocrypha. These include the NIV which is easy to read and popular among Evangelicals, and the ESV which is a revision of the NRSV for geared towards Evangelical concerns. Bibles that either do, or often do, contain the Apocrypha include the JB, NJB, RSV, NRSV, and any Catholic edition. Both the RSV and NRSV were efforts to create an **Ecumenical** Bible for all Christians. The RSV is older, has more traditional language, and traditional translations of the Old Testament by using the New Testament as a guide. Whereas the NRSV’s goal was to translate the Old Testament only in reference to itself, and to use more gender-neutral language. (“fishers of men” = “fishers of people”). The NRSV is also newer and so takes advantage of newer manuscripts for translation, or more accurate understandings of the culture in terms of word meaning. This doesn’t mean that “newer” is “better” either! Scholars continue to debate the merits of different translations, different translation philosophies, and different decisions over textual variants.

But for the basic Christian life any of the above mentioned translations are sufficient! It is important to have a general idea where your translation is coming from, and to check others from time to time. For general usage it’s also usually better to purchase a Bible in the middle of the formal and dynamic spectrum. The Message Bible is not helpful as a study Bible; and the New American Standard Bible may be harder to read and understand due to its more wooden translation. For a first Bible consider a RSV/NRSV if you want a separate Apocrypha, the JB or NJB if you want the Deuterocanonicals mixed in, the ESV (no Apocrypha for most) if you like the NRSV but a different translation philosophy, or the NIV if you want something more modern in language with an Evangelical background and are not concerned about including the Apocrypha.

# Part Five: How should we interpret the Bible?

## The Four Senses of Scripture

Before we begin interpreting we need to have what's called a **hermeneutic**. Hermeneutics is the technical term for interpreting the Bible and a **hermeneutic** is a particular method of interpreting. First and foremost the hermeneutic must be **exegetical**. **Exegesis** is deriving our interpretation out of the text as opposed to reading our own meanings into it, an error called **eisegesis**. A traditional and helpful hermeneutical framework is called the **four senses of Scripture**, but must be properly understood and used under exegetical principals.

During the early Middle Ages there developed a systematic concept that the Scriptures contain four "senses". This was based upon the varied ways the Church Fathers interpreted Scripture which medieval theologians fully categorized into four types: the **literal**, **allegorical**, **moral**, and **anagogical**. Each of these flows from the other, in other words one must start with the literal before moving on to the others.

The letter shows us what God and our fathers did;  
 The allegory shows us where our faith is hid;  
 The moral meaning gives us rules of daily life;  
 The anagogy shows us where we end our strife;  
 - *Nicholas of Lyra (c. 1270-1340)*

The **literal sense** is often misunderstood and for that reason makes some leery. However the literal reading has been from the time of the Church Fathers the foundation of all other interpretations; even if some placed more emphasis on allegory. Everybody "takes the Bible literally" to some extent. Few people would dismiss Jesus saying to "love your enemies" or John saying that "God is love" by arguing "you know, we shouldn't take the Bible literally!" The real danger is attempting to read the Bible like the character "Amelia Bedilia" from the old children's books who, when told "let's hit the road", literally hit the asphalt with a stick! We don't ignore the **genre** of the text or **idiomatic** expressions which is why some prefer to call this historical-grammatical interpretation. For instance, the literal meaning of "this costs an arm and a leg" is "this costs a whole lot". We look at the proper genre, grammar, and context within it's proper historical and cultural setting to hear was the writer of the text was intending to communicate. We discern if the text is presenting a mere description of an event or giving us an example or command to follow. These types of details will be covered later and this is the sense that takes the most specific work.

To understand the **allegorical sense** we have to understand what it was like to be a 1st century Christian. Like the literal sense this one also often has a bad reputation; in this case for being overly subjective leading to fringe ideas. However until the end of the second century at earliest there wasn't a complete New Testament circulating. In addition many early Christians were Jewish and so already had a collection of sacred books that would later be called the Old Testament. How do you preach the Christian Faith with only the Old Testament and perhaps a few New Testament books? As we covered in the section on the Old Testament, Jesus himself said those Scriptures testified of him and so the early Church followed Jesus' lead and found the Christian Faith in the earlier Scriptures. Another way of thinking about this sense is by calling it the theological sense: what is the theological purpose in this text? What we mean by allegorical is simply asking what the passage says about Jesus and our Faith. It's grounded in the literal, focused on Jesus, and only read in the context of the organic Tradition of the Church.

The Four Senses			
Literal	Allegorical	Moral	Anagogical
What is the grammatical and historical meaning?	What does it say about Jesus and/or the Christian Faith?	What does it say about Christian living?	What does it say about God's plan for creation?

The **moral sense** is exactly as it sounds. After taking a look at the context and grammar, and after figuring out what the text is saying about Jesus in particular or theology more generally, we ask what that means for living the Christian life. Another term for this would be the application of the text. In this we need to be careful to distinguish between the text being **descriptive** or **prescriptive**, which we'll cover later. It may be the moral sense is not directly evident, as the text is neither giving and command nor a norm. Sometimes, in fact, the text may be giving an implied negative example!

The **anagogical sense** is all about Christian Hope. After looking into the moral sense there will often be a strong sense of how demanding a Christian life truly is. Or perhaps in reading the text we're faced with the full sense of the pervasiveness of evil and sin in the world. To read the text analogically is to see in it God's future plan to redeem his creation and to see, behind even the stories of evil, the hand of God moving his creation towards the final end of the New Jerusalem where there will be no more pain or grief. One should not read the Bible being more depressed than before, but hopeful in seeing God's plan unfold!

### Putting it together:

#### Example A:

- Literal:** Noah and his family were saved from the flood on the Ark.  
**Allegorical:** Jesus Christ saves us as on a Ark through Baptism. (cf 1 Peter 3:20-22!)  
**Moral:** Our salvation in Baptism gives us the obligation to live a life of virtue.  
**Anagogical:** Eventually we will be saved from future judgment as those who were saved on the Ark.

#### Example B:

- Literal:** The Jerusalem Temple was where God dwelt with the Israelites  
**Allegorical:** Jesus fulfills this in the Incarnation, his body IS the Temple (John 2:19-21)  
**Moral:** We are Temples of the Spirit and should live as such. (1 Corinthians 6:19)  
**Anagogical:** The Jerusalem Temple points to the time when we will dwell with God eternally in the renewed Heaven and Earth (Rev 21:22)

## Reading the Grammatical and Narrative Context

*What is the text actually saying?*

Look carefully at the words and phrases used. Ask yourself: what may be the key words here and why? Why might the author have chosen these over others? How else are the words and phrases used in the same book? By the same writer in other books? By other writers in the Bible? Look for repetition. If a word, phrase, or even person or location is used frequently ask yourself why. Is it to draw out emphasis? Is it to show a pattern to follow or avoid?

Use Scripture to help you interpret Scripture, for though it is a collection of books from different authors over a great period of time, it's still a cohesive collection inspired by the same one Spirit.

Another important thing to look for is not just what is being said, but what is not being said. What expected words or responses from persons are missing and why? Does a story change when another person tells it? Is someone in the narrative lying or wrong? Is there more than one perspective and how do they cohere?

Read carefully to see the various parts of the narrative. What people and places are mentioned? How are those important? What relationships are being referenced or assumed? Do those people or places appear elsewhere? What's the atmosphere being produced? Joy? Foreboding? Despair? Hope? What may be going through the mind of either the writers or the people mentioned in the text?

### **Looking into the original languages:**

As you study the passage you may find that different translations appear to have very different readings. Sometimes this is due to textual variants as discussed earlier. Sometimes it's due to figures of speech (see the next box). But in a few cases it's because scholars are not sure what the word actually means in the original language. It may be what's called a **hapex legomena** or a word that only appears once! Or it could have various shades of meaning or be a debated translation. In these cases, and if you're adept at languages, you can check into a Hebrew or Greek Lexicon. The quality ones will take into account how the word was used outside of the Bible in other writings of the same period. This often helps explain the text in question. In addition you can do a word study on how the word developed. But be careful of committing an etymological fallacy! This is when a word is defined solely based on the origin or root of the word as opposed to how it was actually used. For instance, in English the word "butterfly" cannot be defined based on breaking it into the words "butter" and "fly". One example is the Greek *ekklesia* (Church). Its root is two words, one for "out of" and another for "call". But though it derives as "called out ones", the word *ekklesia* was used in ancient Greece for the governmental assembly of a city state. When the New Testament uses that word it exists in a prior linguistic and cultural context, not on its own.

Also avoid what is called "illegitimate totality transfer" by assuming the same word must always have the exact same meaning no matter where it appears. For instance, in English the word "cool" has a vastly different meaning in "That's a cool car" and "It's really cool outside". One word in Scripture for this is "saved". It can mean anything from "salvation from final judgment" to "being healed from a physical ailment" and various things in between depending on context. It doesn't mean all of those things all of the time, so you must determine which definitions of the word the author is using.

Even in the English translations you must be careful to understand how the author is using the word in that context. Words do have standard meanings but sometimes there may be a different nuance, or a metaphorical usage, or something idiomatic. You can recognize possible places of this by checking how different translations handle the same passage.

What about idioms, figures of speech, and metaphors? Language is not a computer programming code and most of the Bible is not a legal text. Therefore like any language it contains various figures of speech. Recognize this by checking different translations to see if they are translating a passage differently which may clue you in. Also ask yourself what makes the most sense in context if you suspect an idiom in the text. Perhaps more importantly is to steer a course between two errors. Don't be afraid to see something as a metaphor, particularly in poetry like the Psalms. On the other hand, watch out for quickly calling something a metaphor merely because you don't like the implications or don't personally think it makes sense. Also remember that metaphor still has meaning behind it. It still references something real that is analogous to the metaphor. For instance one might say Jesus' talk of hell is metaphorical, but one must still answer the question then, "a metaphor for what?" If not literal darkness and fire, then whatever the literal reality behind the metaphor is it's still as uncomfortable as if it were darkness and fire. Nor can metaphor mean the exact opposite. "Snow" isn't used as a metaphor for "fire" without being incredibly confusing. Metaphors should also make sense within the culture of the time. For instance, "resurrection" means to return from the dead. There is no "metaphorical" meaning in the cultural context of ancient Judaism and Greco-Roman culture to mean something else. Therefore the real meaning is Jesus truly rose from the dead.

**Idioms and Figures of Speech:**

Here is an example of how idioms both are translated and interpreted. Take the Spanish phrase "cuesta un ojo de la cara". There are three different, yet correct, ways to translate into English.

- A) Word for word – "Cost an eye from the face"
- B) Dynamic equivalence – "Cost an arm and a leg"
- C) Paraphrase (interpreted meaning) – "Costs a whole lot of money!"

Which is correct? All of them! Yet each one loses something in translation. The word for word may be confusing to English speakers and loses clarity, the dynamic loses the cultural context, and the paraphrase loses the literary force that idioms and figures of speech convey.

## Reading the Literary Context

*What type of passage is this and how does it fit?*

An important aspect of interpretation that when forgotten can cause problems is not paying attention to the literary context, and in particular the **genre**. Genre is essentially the type of book. Some books are intended to communicate a story, some are poetry to evoke emotions, some are detailed history. The truths in the *Chronicles of Narnia* fantasy books are told via story in a different way than C. S. Lewis' more philosophical writings. Both can contain equally true statements told in different ways. Poetry is not less true than history, but may use statements that if found in a history book would be wrong. One might say, "my heart was weighed down with thoughts of scaling the looming mountain, larger than anything I could imagine" in a letter. Yet if the same phrase was found in a history or science book we would probably point out that "hearts" cannot increase their weight by thought and that the person could of course imagine a larger mountain. But such observations would be an inaccurate assessment in the context of a letter or poetry. Also remember that these categories are not absolute for an entire book. Some books of the Bible may contain several types of genre, and the following is not intended as an exhaustive list of each type or subtype.

**Law** is specific regulation. This is primarily found in large parts of the Torah, which although means "Law" also contains narrative. Law text is written to be specific for the particular circumstances addressed.

**Narrative** is story, usually in the context of history. Most of the Bible is written in narrative with a combination of personal stories, genealogies, and historical overviews. When interpreting narrative and history you should learn to make the distinction between descriptive and prescriptive passages. Descriptive is when the Bible is merely describing what was said or an event, sometimes without comment on God's view. For instance the Bible records people lying, or committing adultery, or murder. It's not endorsing an action merely because it records an action. Other things are prescriptive in that they prescribe certain behaviors or specifically condemn others. In these cases what was said or done is intended to be taken as a norm or rule for the Church in some way.

**Poetry** is found mostly in the Psalms. Due to its nature, poetry has a unique "style" that marks it as different from prose. It may use longer forms of words, archaic meanings for some words, high use of metaphor, and has a more flexible word order. Therefore expect many figures of speech, metaphors, symbolic meanings, and non-technical statements. Poetry uses language to evoke the emotions to bring about certain concepts or make points about the nature of God and the human experience. Scholars tend to classify psalms into three types. Psalms of orientation which are mostly hymns and praise, psalms of reorientation which generally contain thanksgiving or declarations of about God, and psalms of lament which cry to God for help. Poetry also usually contains various types of parallelism which when found may help in understanding the entire meaning. A few final warnings when interpreting poetry: avoid an overly literal reading, remember to engage your emotions, and don't interpret its symbolism outside of its cultural and historical context.

### **Common Parallelism:**

- 1- Synonymous - repetition of thought (2 Sam 22:5, Ps 2:4)
- 2- Antithetical - contrasting (2 Sam 22:28, Ps 1:6)
- 3- Synthetic - explanatory or supplemental (Ps 95:3)
  - a. Progressive - second line chronologically or logically follows the first (2 Sam 22:4)
  - b. Specifying - second line will specify how a general statement is realized (2 Sam 22:48)
  - c. Complementary (2 Sam 22:22)
- 4- Chiasm (Unique to Hebrew, but still found in Greek NT even though rare)
  - b. Parallelism of corresponding words or lines, such as A B B' A'
  - c. In most cases it is the center of the Chiasm that receives emphasis
  - d. May be unclear, so be careful basing your entire exegesis on it

**Prophecy** is direct revelation from God to a person, many times in the form of highly symbolized visions called **apocalyptic** literature. The idea behind apocalyptic is that the prophet or seer receives visions that are full of a series complex images which communicate either some aspect about the nature of reality or the future and sometimes both. The level of each of those is something theologians have frequently debated. When a prophet receives something about God's future judgment it's often **conditional prophecy**. These are easy to recognize because they'll often say something like "if my people don't repent then...". When one of these doesn't happen it's not that the prophecy failed, but that the condition was or wasn't met. Another important part of prophecy to remember is sometimes it's **telescopic**, like looking at a mountain range through a telescope. Sometimes two mountains look close together but are in reality very far apart as you get closer. A prime example of this is **messianic prophecy** about Jesus. Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus' first and second coming often run together, making it appear both his first coming and the future judgment were to happen at the same time. Moving forward we see that both were two separate events separated by now about two thousand years. A final note about prophecy is not all of it is about the future. Often that prophet's calling and vision was about Israel's need to repent from sin rather than suffer any form of punishment.

### Reading the Historical Context

*What else was happening at the time?*

This places the text within history. Find out what other events were happening, particularly in terms of politics and wars. How might these major events be effecting the writer? What about the geography? What does the physical setting have to do with what's being communicated?

### Reading the Cultural Context

*How might the people of the time understood this?*

A culture is the totality of the way of life for a group of people that form the "lenses" that they use to interact with the world around them. We too have our own assumptions, values, and ideas that effect the way we read the Bible and our modern western cultural lens is no better than theirs of the time. Each culture has strengths and weaknesses, and we must acknowledge our own limitations in interpreting the Bible. This is a major reason it's important to be catholic in our interpretation, to look at the Bible from different perspectives across different cultures and time periods. This also means the writers of the Bible were themselves embedded in their own cultures, and part of interpreting the Bible is to interpret it through the cultural lens of the writer. The Holy Spirit was still there inspiring the text for the purpose of revelation, but did that through the writer's own concepts, language, and personality.

"The original author may not have been aware of the implication of his own historic and cultural bonds, but the Holy Spirit certainly was. His object was revelation, not an attempt to hide truth or to confuse the seeker of truth"  
-McQuilkin, *Limits of Cultural Interpretation*, JETS 21/2 p.115

This isn't about finding where the writer was wrong, it's about understanding what was being communicated. For instance, in the world of ancient Israel the "sea" was a common symbol/metaphor for chaos and often associated with a giant sea serpent in the surrounding nations. (see also Isa 27:1) So when Job is taken to task by God and asked about the Leviathan it's most likely a common, maybe even apocalyptic, method of asking Job if he can tame the very powers of chaos like God. In the same manner, the book of Revelation says that in the New Heaven and Earth there will no longer be any "sea". (Rev. 21:1) Why? Because there will no longer be chaos that destroys the world or God's people. We use our culture to understand our personal bias we may be reading into the text, and we use the culture of the Bible to illuminate the truth being communicated in the text.

## Reading the Theological Context

*What is the overriding theological idea and how does it fit with the rest of theology?*

Considering the theological context has two main aspects. First, consider how the passage fits into the theology of the Bible as a whole. The theology of one passage must be integrated into the theology of all other passages, though each passage may present different viewpoints. It's similar to looking at a mountain from one angle, then moving to see it from another. The Bible as a whole gives the entire picture, but each passage may only be giving a small section of one side. Second, remember that revelation in the Bible is progressive. Not all the Bible writers or characters at any given time had all the revelation that we have available at the completion of the canon.

## Reading the Ecclesial Context

*How has the Church before me read this?*

We read the Bible with the Church and her confession of Faith, not against it. To do this we must make a distinction between "Tradition" and "traditions". The "traditions" of the Church are the little things which are mostly inconsequential such as carpet color, to larger issues such as the date of Easter, or even those things which are disciplines but not doctrines. Tradition is the living mind of the Church that has been guided by the

Holy Spirit. Acknowledging Tradition is nothing more than acknowledging the Spirit has always been at work in the Church, and that we ourselves must rely on community in our Bible reading so as not to succumb to our personal biases being read into the text. If we all have "lenses" by which we read the Bible then with Tradition we're exchanging our individual lenses for the lenses of the Church. Tradition is not infallible, but it is authoritative in the same way a map is an authoritative guide, even if you find an inaccuracy here and there.

Q. How do we understand the meaning of the Bible?

A. We understand the meaning of the Bible by the help of the Holy Spirit, who guides the Church in the true interpretation of the Scriptures.

*Book of Common Prayer p.853-4*

### **Interpretive Exercises:**

1. Look up Genesis 2:16-17 and 3:1-3. What does God say? What did the serpent say God said? What did Eve say God said? What are the implications for the changes?
2. How does genre effect how you interpret Proverbs 26:4-5? How are both statements equally true?
3. One of the more famous verses in Scripture is John 3:16. This verse, however, was part of a conversation between Jesus and a Pharisee Nicodemus. Look up where else Nicodemus appears (John 7:50, 19:39) How does that enlighten your understanding of that passage?
4. In Acts 1:8 the disciples were told to go into various places, what were those places? What was the historical context of those places in relation to Israel? How does this enlighten your understanding of what Jesus is commanding? You'll probably need to do a little research here.
5. The Gospel of John contains several distinct miracle stories that the Gospel seems to center around, whereas Luke has more stories that involve non-Jews. What do these editing choices tell us about the intended purpose of the writers?
6. How does Paul being in prison effect your reading Philippians 4:4?

## Part Six: The Bible in the Christian Life

### Studying the Bible

The important part of Bible study is actually reading the Bible! First pray to God that the Spirit will guide you in understanding. The Spirit inspired text should be read with Spirit illuminated understanding. Also read entire books and don't always start in the middle somewhere. Ideally it's good to read the entire Bible from start to finish at least once, but you can also start by reading one of the Gospels, and then perhaps one of the Prophets.

It's important to read different translations as well. There are at least two reasons for this. First, it'll help you see things you didn't see before because the exact wording will be less familiar. Second, often differing translations bring out differing aspects of the language and culture which can help you in interpretation.

Consider reading an entire book in one sitting. Some books, particularly the New Testament letters, were not written to be piecemealed over time. Reading all of a letter at once helps bring out the context that may be missed with too many breaks in between readings. For the narrative portions it may even be helpful to use your imagination and play out the events in your mind.

One popular and helpful method of Bible study is called **Methodical Bible Study**, and is built around a three step process of **observation**, **interpretation**, and **application**. This is intended to give a structure to reading and interpreting the text so as not to miss anything important and work through any issues. During the observation phase you should carefully read the passage and surrounding context. Take notes about what you see, words and ideas that seem important, and questions you have. This is essentially a data gathering step only, and you shouldn't rush to interpretation. Only once you think you've gathered enough data then can you move on to interpreting the passage using the guidelines previously covered. Read the passage again, try to answer the questions you may have had during the observation stage, and take into account any other information found in other resources. Work through the context of the passage to discover what the text is saying

### **Methodical Bible Study:**

#### Observation

What do I see in the passage? Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?

What questions do I have?

What are the contexts of the passage?

#### Interpretation

How do the contexts effect this passage?

What do the words mean?

What is the point of the passage?

#### Application

How does what God is saying here apply to my life?

### **Distinctly Christian Bible Study:**

Though both Christians and non-Christians can read the same book, and even become Bible scholars, as Christians we shouldn't read the Bible as any other Book but do so in a distinctly Christian manner by:

1. Acknowledging the authority of the Bible
2. Viewing the Bible as divine revelation from God (not merely containing some revelation)
3. Reading the Bible as both a human and divine product
4. Reading the Bible as a unity, reflecting the nature of Scriptural inspiration as a harmony
5. Reading the Bible with the Holy Spirit within the community of faith both past and present
6. Interpreting the Bible within the "Rule of Faith" (the confession of the apostolic faith)
7. Treating the Bible reverently and prayerfully

and also consider what the four senses of the passage may be. Finally, only once it's been interpreted move into discerning what the modern and personal application may be. Don't rush to this. The goal is to know what God is saying through the Scriptures: to understand first and then to apply it to your life. We will cover application more below.

You will also need to consult other sources during your study, particularly when the passage seems confusing or you have questions that can't be easily answered. The following are some common resources.

**Bible Atlas.** Gives maps of areas related to the Bible. Often they are more than just political maps and may include climate, people movements, trade routes, battles, rainfall, and a myriad of other useful maps and charts.

**Bible Dictionary/Encyclopedia.** Shorter or longer articles on people, places, concepts, and words found in the Bible. Great for getting broad overviews of topics or to find out more about the historical context of people, politics, and geography. Some can be even more specialized, such as cultural dictionaries which are great for doing research on cultural backgrounds.

**Commentaries.** Books by Bible scholars and theologians on the particular books of the Bible. There are a wide variety of types ranging from those focused on the grammar and structure to ones more on application or devotion. These are one of the more essential resources to consider, particularly for any questions about passages or if any translation differences are noticed. Some may include a host of other information about cultural and historical backgrounds.

**Concordance.** An index of all or most of the words in a particular translation. Can be particularly helpful if they allow one to see all the places the same Greek or Hebrew appears though it may be translated by different English words. In general, however, these in book form are likely obsolete due to the various computer and online bibles with search functions.

**Lexicon.** A dictionary, typically of the Hebrew or Greek. Often they include definitions derived using sources outside the Bible and so are very helpful in discovering the full range of a word meaning. Some theological dictionaries will contain short articles on the theological usage of a word throughout the Bible.

### Applying the Bible

As the old adage goes: we read the Bible for transformation and not just information. The Bible is full of interesting stories and always leads to new questions and mysteries. At the same time, the purpose of God's revelation isn't to just satisfy our curiosity but to lead us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and love our neighbor as ourself. Fellowship with God and holiness of life, and so failure to apply the Bible is a failure at reading the Bible because it stops short of the ultimate purpose. There are, of course, plenty of times where the application won't be immediately obvious, or the application seems mostly in terms of doctrine and belief, but even that effects how we view the God, each other, and the world. Application must also wait until the end! Only after observing the text, gathering information, and interpreting the text by discovering what it means can you then move to apply it. The best way to approach application is by asking yourself: "Knowing that this is true, how will I live my life differently?"

#### **Descriptive vs. Prescriptive:**

One of the first pitfalls in application is the failure to discern the difference between something being **descriptive** and **prescriptive**. Much of the Bible is descriptive in that it describes events through story that taken as a whole teach us something about God or ourselves. There is not a direct application in these cases, but instead the application is derived from the principals displayed in the narrative.

Taking narrative descriptions as normative commands can lead to a host of issues. Prescriptive passages are actual commands to God's people. Though even here be sure to apply these commands in the context of previous interpretation such that the way it applies may differ to us then at the time. This is just to say that some commands were event specific or otherwise bounded by other factors. A simple example of this would be the Old Testament sacrifices, which are commanded for ancient Israel but under Christ are no longer allowed. The command to use changed based on the circumstances of Christ's sacrifice which fulfilled the ones in ancient Israel.

## Praying the Bible

In addition approaching the Bible as a text to be studied, it is also a text to be prayed. It is God's words to us, his Church, and the Church throughout the ages has testified that reading the Bible is not just an intellectual but also a spiritual encounter with the living God. Here are three good traditional ways of doing so:

**Reading the Bible during Prayer:** Our Prayer Book's Daily Office is used together with a **lectionary** which sets out readings for the year. The importance of this is to have time to just read the Bible. Sometimes in dissecting a thing we can kill it, and sometimes in study we can be so focused on pulling the passage apart we forget to see Scripture as a way to encounter God and learn from him. Reading the Bible during our prayer time helps keep some of our encounter with the Bible as a time of just reading and listening to God in the text.

**Just Reading the Bible:** It's also helpful to set aside times of the day to just read the Bible even outside of the Office. Some Bibles are "readers editions" that are helpful here because they are formatted for easier reading.

**Praying through the Psalms:** Another benefit of the Daily Office, and a tradition that derives from the earliest days of the Church, is the continued reading, chanting, or singing of the Psalms. Some early monastic communities would go through all the Psalms in one week or even one day! The Psalms are the divinely inspired song book for us and so are a vital part of the spiritual life and worship of the Church.

### **Lectio Divina**

The final method is more intentional. It's a medieval spiritual practice called **Lectio Divina** which is Latin for "Sacred Reading". Lectio Divina has four parts: **lectio**, **meditatio**, **oratio**, and **contemplatio**; or read, meditate, pray, and contemplate. These are not necessarily in "order", and the entire experience with the text can run through all four in different ways.

**Lectio:** Is taking time to just read the text. Read it slowly and intently. Don't worry about answering specific questions but instead absorb what the text says.

**Meditatio:** Meditate on the text. Focus on words or phrases that stand out for any reason. Go over one part multiple times and let specific parts sink in. Wrestle with meaning and look intently at parts that seem confusing.

**Oratio:** Pray the text back to God. A journal can be helpful here as you can even write a prayer based on what the Scripture says. Turn the Scripture into a conversation with God.

**Contemplatio:** Silent contemplation in God's presence with God's Revelation. Let the truths learned from the Scriptures sink in and the Holy Spirit work in you to ingrain the text into your heart, soul, and mind.

## Part Seven: List of Terms

**39 Articles:** An early document from the English Reformation containing 39 statements that helped define the direction of the English Church. These Articles also appear in American Prayer Books with some modification. In our 1979 Book of Common Prayer they can be found in the section labeled *Historical Documents*.

**Abraham:** According to the Book of Genesis in the Bible, Abraham was given revelation from God and entered into a Covenant with God for him and his progeny. His son was Isaac who had a son Jacob who was also known as Israel and from him came the nation of Israel, God's Covenant People.

**Allegorical Interpretation:** One of the Four Senses of Scripture. Asks the question: What does this say about God, Jesus, or the Christian Faith?

**Anagogical Interpretation:** One of the Four Senses of Scripture. Asks the question: What does this say about God's plan for redemption?

**Anglican:** Comes from the word used of German tribes who invaded Britain long ago, the Angles. It came to be used to describe in the British Isles and things from it, thus "Anglican Church". It's used broadly to refer to the distinct practices and ideas derived from the Church of England. Episcopalians are Anglicans and our theological tradition is Anglicanism.

**Anglican Communion:** A worldwide communion/network/connection of various national Churches which trace their origins to the Church of England. Mostly come from places that were at one time part of the British Empire. The center of the Communion is the "See of Canterbury" (A "See" is a center of administration for a Bishop) and the Archbishop of Canterbury in England.

**Apocalyptic:** A type of Biblical writing that uses vivid images and complex symbols to communicate God's will or about the future.

**Apocrypha:** Means "hidden" and used of some books in the Old Testament that are not accepted by Protestants but are by Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox. Anglicans often take either a Protestant or Roman position or a middle ground position, seeing them as of secondary authority. In Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Bibles these books are counted as just part of the Old Testament.

**Apostles:** The twelve disciples of Jesus whom he sent into the world to proclaim his Gospel and build his Church. Of the original twelve Judas betrayed Jesus and was replaced by Matthias. Paul is also considered an Apostle even though not one of the twelve.

**Bible:** The sacred text of the Christian Faith which contains all things necessary for salvation. It's divided into either two parts: Old and New Testaments, or three including the Apocrypha. Bible comes from the word "book" in Greek.

**Biblical Canon:** Canon means "rule" or "standard". The Biblical Canon is the official list of books which make up the Bible.

**Book of Common Prayer:** In Anglicanism, the book that is central to our worship. It developed out of the English Reformation and combined aspects from earlier liturgies and translated them from Latin into English for the entire English Church. Since then there have been several versions in England, and the American Church has our own history of adapting the English version from 1662. The American Books have been revised in 1789 (first American Book), 1892, 1928, and 1979.

**Catholic:** Means “universal”. Though the Roman Catholic Church is Catholic, we also claim to be part of the Catholic Church just not Roman. We keep Catholic order of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons and much of the tradition in terms of Sacraments and worship. Often in Anglicanism “Catholic” describes those who place greater emphasis on these aspects of the Faith.

**Church:** At the time of Jesus, “Church” was the word used for the governing body of the city-state. In the Christian sense the Church is the New Covenant people instituted by Jesus to carry his message to the world, descended from his Apostles, administering his Sacraments, and making disciples of Jesus.

**Church Fathers:** A specific group of early Church leaders and theologians whose teachings and writings formed the basis for many of the beliefs and practices in the early Church.

**Clergy:** Another word for ordained ministers. In the Episcopal Church and Anglican Communion they are Bishops (overseers in historic succession of the Apostles), Priests (elders who care for the various needs of a particular church), and Deacons (servants who serve the Church in a variety of capacities).

**Covenant:** In the Biblical sense a sacred agreement made between God and a group of people. Ancient Israel was in Covenant with God (Old Covenant), and Jesus instituted a New Covenant by his death of which all Baptized Christians are made members.

**Critical Text:** Text of the Bible that uses all the available ancient manuscripts to put together the most likely reading of the originals.

**Deism:** A non-Christian religious belief that God is uninvolved in the world.

**Descriptive:** In terms of Bible study, passages that merely describe an event but are not commands to go and do likewise. There is still something to learn from the passage but it’s not a direct command to imitate the action or event.

**Deuterocanonicals:** Another name for the Apocrypha. This terms is used more in Catholic contexts to denote the books are still part of the Biblical Canon.

**Doctrinal Inspiration:** The idea that the inspiration of the Bible only, or primarily, touches on issues of religious doctrine and belief but not on things such as history.

**Dynamic Equivalence:** Method of translating the Bible that focuses on using similar ideas and concepts, placing greater emphasis on general understanding rather than the original words themselves.

**Eastern Orthodox:** Christians who trace their origins to the Eastern part of the Christian world after East and West divided in 1054.

**Ecumenical:** Used to describe Christians across Church boundaries getting together for some common purpose.

**Eisegesis:** When, instead of properly interpreting a passage by exegesis, we read an outside meaning into it.

**English Reformation:** The historical origin for what we call “Anglican”. This was the event that lead to the English Church becoming divided from the Church in Rome which had been the center of the Western Christian world in the Medieval Era.

**Episcopal:** The Anglican Church in the United States, as connected to the Anglican Communion. The Episcopal Church is the Church of England that arrives in the American Colonies before the Revolution. After the Revolution it was eventually renamed The Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States of American, mostly to avoid the English connotations of the name “Anglican”. The word Episcopal comes from the Greek word used of Bishops because the Episcopal Church is governed by Bishops.

**Eucharist**: Also known as the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, the Mass, or the Divine Liturgy. This is the Christian Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood in the forms of Bread and Wine. It is the principle act of worship on Sundays.

**Exegesis**: Deriving meaning out of a text of Scripture instead of reading our own meaning into it.

**Exodus**: The historical event when God brought ancient Israel out of slavery in Egypt as recorded in the Biblical Book of Exodus.

**Formal Equivalence**: Method of translating the Bible which places greater emphasis on using an equivalent word for each individual word in the original text. Sometimes known as "word for word" translation.

**Four Senses of Scripture**: A concept of how to understand the Bible that derives from the early Church and codified by the Medieval Church. It includes the literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical senses.

**Genre**: The type of writing something it which helps determine how to interpret it. Examples include poetry, history, wisdom/proverb, and apocalyptic.

**God**: God is Triune (Holy Trinity), three Divine Persons and one Divine Essence. The word "God" can be used in the Christian Faith in three ways: as a shorthand for God the Father, or as a reference to the Divine Essence and thus either the entire Triune God or sometimes one of the Divine Persons such as "Jesus is God".

**God the Father**: The "First Person" of the Triune God, the one most heard from in the Old Testament.

**God's Image**: Can refer to two things. Most often it's a reference to human beings because we have been made in God's Image, to represent him as stewards over the rest of creation. In a greater sense it also refers to Jesus who is the perfect Image of God in that he fully reflects who God is.

**Gospels**: The four beginning books of the New Testament that record the words and works of Jesus: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

**Hapex Legomena**: A word that only appears once and so is notoriously hard to translate.

**Hermeneutic**: A method or philosophy for interpreting the Bible.

**Holy Scriptures**: Another term for the Bible, scriptures are writings.

**Holy Spirit**: The "Third Person" of the Triune God. Often associated with fire, a dove, and empowerment for ministry.

**Idiom**: A figure of speech or expression that means something more than the literal words. For example "this costs an arm and a leg" is an idiom for "this is very expensive".

**Impissima Verba**: The very words. Particularly with the Gospels the idea that they record the exact words of Jesus.

**Impissima Vox**: The very voice. Particularly with the Gospels the idea that they record the "voice" of Jesus, the exact ideas and concepts, but not necessarily the exact words he used.

**Inspiration**: In terms of the Bible this means the Bible is God-breathed and so in some sense is of divine origin though human authors.

**Israel**: The name for God's Covenant people as recorded in the Old Testament that God saved out of slavery in Egypt. Physical descendants of Abraham. In later history Israel split into two kingdoms with the North keeping the name Israel and the South becoming Judah.

**Jesus Christ**: The "Second Person" of the Triune God, God the Son, who became a human (Incarnation) in the person of Jesus and is the Christ, or anointed one of God. Jesus is the center of the Christian Faith and to be a Christian is to be his disciple. Jesus Christ died on the cross for human sin, rose again three days later, ascended into Heaven, and promises to return again to judge the world and complete the work of salvation for all creation.

**Judah:** The name for the Southern Kingdom after Israel became divided. The Latinized version was Judea and that was what the region was known as during the time of Jesus. Those who lived in the area as descendants of the older Kingdoms of Israel in Judah were called Judeans, and eventually Jews. Jesus was born a Jew into a Jewish family and all the Apostles were Jews as well.

**Lectio Divina:** A method of reading the Bible that developed in the Christian Church in the monasteries. It's intended as a meditative and spiritual exercise to connect with God and God's message found in the text. It has four stages: reading, meditating, praying, and contemplating.

**Lectioary:** A list of passages in the Bible intended to be read in worship either during the Eucharist or the Daily Office (Daily Prayer). This was the earliest means by which most Christians encountered the Bible.

**Literal Interpretation:** One of the Four Senses of Scripture. Asks the question: what do the words mean in this text? What is the text actually saying?

**Liturgy:** The term for the traditional method of Christian worship that derived from earlier Jewish practices of set prayers and formal worship. Often has a high level of symbolic actions. The various written versions are liturgies.

**Lutheran:** Christians who trace themselves to the monk Martin Luther who led the Protestant Reformation in Germany.

**Majority Text:** A original language text of the Bible collected from various other manuscripts, based on an idea that errors in the text are more likely to be in fewer manuscripts and thus the more accurate text is taken from what is in the majority of them.

**Manuscripts:** Hand written copies of parts of the Bible.

**Messiah:** Hebrew for "Anointed One" which is also "Christos" in Greek. In the Old Testament it was the term most often used of the Kings of Israel in the family line of King David. Jesus is the promised "Son of David" and heir to the throne who also fulfills many other prophecies about the future Messiah.

**Methodical Bible Study:** A type of Bible study intended to aid in exegesis by being systematic in approach. It involves three stages: Observation to gather data, Interpretation to determine what it means, and Application to apply it to the Christian life.

**Miracle:** When God acts directly in his world and creation.

**Monastery:** The facility that houses Monks, Christians who've taken a special calling to pray, work, and study. Many of our Biblical manuscripts were preserved by being copies on Monasteries.

**Moral:** One of the Four Senses of Scripture. Asks the question: what does this text say about how I should live a Christian life?

**Natural Revelation:** Or called General Revelation. Revelation from God that is derived from creation or general human experience. Theologians debate the exact role and nature of this type of revelation.

**New Testament:** The Books of the Bible that begin with the life of Jesus and concern the Church as God's New Covenant people.

**Old Testament:** The Books of the Bible that begin with creation and cover the history and prophets of ancient Israel.

**Original Autograph:** Term used for the original manuscript of a Bible book before any copies were made.

**Patriarchs:** Starting with Abraham, the early tribal leaders of the people of Israel from which all Israelites are descended: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel).

**Plenary Inspiration:** The idea that the entire Bible is inspired, and not just pieces of it.

**Prescriptive:** In terms of Bible study, passages that include more direct commands and examples to follow, as opposed to passages that merely describe events.

**Private Revelation:** When God gives some revelation to an individual that isn't binding on the whole Church, often in a dream or vision. Theologians debate the reality and merits of this type of revelation today.

**Prophecy:** General term for the declarations of the Prophets often to ancient Israel. Some prophecies were conditional, in that they would only come true if the people didn't repent. Another term often used is Messianic Prophecy when it's fulfillment is found primarily or solely in Jesus.

**Protestant:** Christians who trace their origins to churches that broke away from the Bishop of Rome during the Protestant Reformation. In Anglican contexts they often place greater emphasis on preaching and the Bible.

**Reason:** In the context of interpretation reason is merely using human reason sanctified by the Spirit to help us understand the meaning of the Bible.

**Revelation:** When God shows himself in some form to his creation, either about his nature or his will and desire for us.

**Roman Catholic:** Christians who trace themselves to the Western Church after the split in 1054 and who also are in unity with the Bishop of Rome, also called the Pope.

**Sacrament:** A visible sign of invisible grace. Physical objects and actions that are God given means of his grace, blessing, and power entering into our lives.

**Special Revelation:** As opposed to Natural Revelation this is when God specifically reveals himself to his people as a whole, often by prophets. The Bible is an example of special revelation, with Jesus being the primary special revelation.

**Synoptic Gospels:** Term for the Gospels Matthew, Mark, and Luke due to their strong similarities with each other.

**Telescopic:** When prophecy is given that sounds simultaneous but, like a telescope viewing a mountain range, the closer we get the more we realize how far away each part is from the other.

**Textual Variant:** Any variation in the manuscript copies of the Bible. This is often no more than a definite article "the" or sometimes even just spelling differences.

**Theology:** Term used for the study of God and the Christian Faith. Literally comes from the Greek words for "God" and "word", so means words about God or the study of God. Often used to refer to any study of any aspect of the Christian Faith, such as a "Theology of the Church" or "Theology of suffering".

**Torah:** Hebrew term for the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. Torah means "law" and these books are considered the foundational revelation given to the people of ancient Israel.

**Tradition:** In the context of interpretation tradition is listening to how the Spirit has guided the Church in the past to help us understand the Bible in the present.

**Verbal Inspiration:** The idea that God inspired the very words used in the Bible. Often used to contrast doctrinal inspiration, and thus to argue that all concepts in the Bible are inspired, including historical events.