

What is the Bible?

The Bible can actually be thought of as a library containing 73 books.

Think of the word 'bibliography'.

It is divided into two sections. The first part is known as the 'Old Testament', and was written before the time of Jesus. The second part is known as the 'New Testament', and was written about Jesus, His teachings, and how to live according to them.

The Old Testament – 46 Books in total – contains 21 historical books. These trace the story of God's Chosen People, the Israelites (see eye chart!!!) beginning with the Creation Story in the Book of Genesis.

There are 7 Wisdom books – books of prayer, books of praise offered in the form of poetry, and proverbs, which is a collection of divinely inspired ways to guide our lives towards God.

There are 18 prophetic books – books of prophecy – which guide the Chosen People – and us – and they show us what happens when we follow God, but also what will happen when we do not follow God.

There is a common thread that runs through these 73 books – all of them point us towards a saviour and to the salvation promised to us by God the Father in Genesis, when Adam and Eve chose to disobey God, and so were sent out of the Garden of Eden. All through the Old Testament, we are pointed towards Jesus, we are given clues and predictions on how we will be able to identify the Saviour when He comes. This is why we can say that Christ is concealed in the Old Testament.

In the New Testament, we see numerous times – some scholars say over 300 times - when prophecies given in the Old Testament are fulfilled by Jesus in the New Testament. This is why we say Christ is revealed in the New Testament.

The New Testament contains 5 historical books – the 4 Gospels plus the 'Acts of the Apostles', which is the story of the earliest days of the Church, and of how the Apostles lived out the mission given to them by Jesus – to love God, love others and to make disciples (sound familiar?) This is our mission – given to us in Matthew's Gospel, 28: 19.

We also find 21 letters from various writers: St Paul, St Peter, St James, St John. These are lessons on how to live according to what Jesus taught us.

Finally, there is the Book of Revelation, which is a book of prophecy written by St John the Apostle. So many people claim to be able to predict the end of the world based on how they interpret the Book of Revelation. So far, they have all been wrong...

Revelation is simply a promise by Jesus that He will come again, and that He will lead anyone found worthy to eternal life in a New Jerusalem, a new place of peace.

Why do we read the Bible?

We need wisdom, we need guidance, we need hope, we need to feed our faith, we need to find ways to love, to be charitable. To do all these things, we need to know ourselves, and we come to truly know ourselves by building a relationship with God, through prayer, and by absorbing the lessons of Scripture.

When do we read the Bible?

Some people suggest that Catholics don't read the Bible. However...

At Mass, during a three year cycle, we read three readings plus a psalm every week, so some 600 readings which cover all major events and themes from the Bible.

If we attend daily mass over a two year cycle, we cover nearly 90% of the Bible.

Our prayers at mass are based on Scripture. Some are direct quotations from Scripture.

Catholics do more than just read the Bible. We hear it, we are taught from it, we pray from it. Often, we make it part of our daily lives – lectio divina is a great example of this.

Who is revealed to us in the Bible?

Jesus – Who is concealed in the Old Testament – hints and clues are given, and prophecies are made is revealed to us in the New Testament – over 300 predictions can be shown to be true.

Humanity – when we look at society with our ‘Bible’ glasses on, we can see what happens when we chose to follow God, and we can also see what happens when we choose to ignore God.

Ourselves – we see ourselves in Scripture. We learn about ourselves. We begin to recognize what we need to change.

Should we take the Bible ‘Literally’, that is ‘word for word’?

In a word, No. The Bible is not a history textbook or a science textbook. It is a guide to living a moral life, to living a life which seeks to imitate Jesus Christ.

The books of the Bible are written in several styles. Also, different literary techniques are used to get points across.

If we attempt to read the Bible as a textbook, looking for verifiable scientific fact, we will be disappointed. If we read the Bible as a guide to history or science, we will be able to find patterns and evidence from outside biblical writings which will back up the historical or scientific ideas which the Bible touches on.

If we are confused by a particular passage, we should not rely on our own interpretation. Instead, we should seek out good guidance from trusted Catholic sources: an informed Catholic, a priest, verified Catholic books with an ‘imprimatur’. All good Catholic knowledge and teaching is based on what has been provided for us through the Magisterium, the teaching arm of the Church.