

Reading the Bible as a Catholic

And Making Sense of It

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To Go Deeper.....

- Knowledge of Scripture = Knowledge of Jesus
- Session One:
 - How do *Catholics* read and interpret the Bible?
 - Is this similar to or different from other Bible readers?
 - What's in the Bible?
 - How did the Old and New Testaments take the form they now have?
- Next Week > Session Two:
 - What is the best English translation for me?
 - How is Scripture used during Mass?
 - Your Questions/Comments - handout card
- Fall - Gospel of Matthew in 6 sessions (handout & Timeline)

Old Testament

Who, What, When, Where?

God's covenant relationship with God's people

- Two Central Events in Israel's memory and history:
 - Exodus from Egypt & settlement in the Land (c. 13th cent. BCE)
 - Exile in Babylon: loss & return to Land (6th cent. BCE)
- “God (YHWH) with us” acting in history
- A “testament” or “covenant” (before any writing)
 - a commitment, a relationship, a bond
 - Noah (Genesis 6)
 - Abraham (Genesis 15 & 17)
 - Moses and all of Israel (Exodus 19 & 34) [c. 1250 b.c.e.]
 - “I will be your God and you will be my people”
- Jeremiah could speak of a “new covenant” in heart [late 600s BCE]

From Tradition to “Scripture”

❖ Oral traditions about covenant experience with God preserved in written form.

- Prayers, Poetry, Songs
- Legends and folk tales
- Stories of Origins
- Genealogies
- Law Codes
- Court histories
- Prophetic oracles
- Wisdom sayings

The Collection of Jewish Writings

❖ Eventually collected as Israel's Scriptures

➤ Torah T

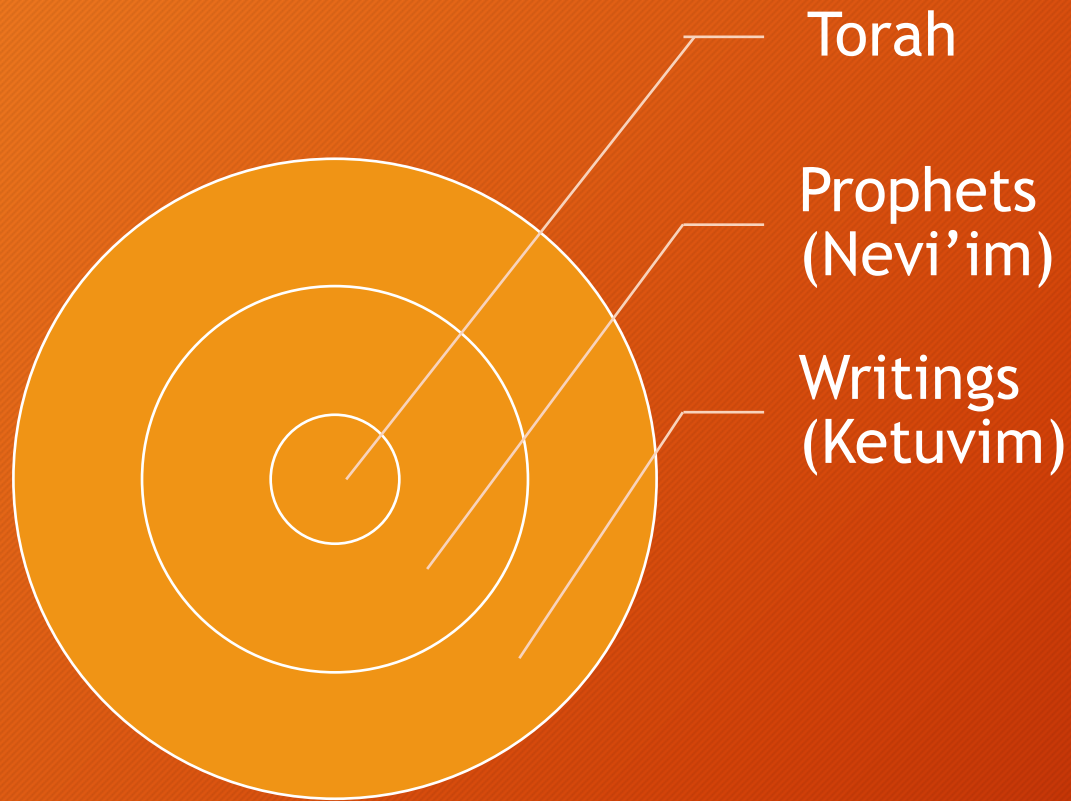
➤ Prophets (Nevi'im) N

➤ Writings (Ketuvim) K

➤ TaNaK

➤ Began to come together in late 6th century BCE, after Exile in Babylon

TaNak



- Torah
 - Genesis through Deuteronomy (1st five books)
- Prophets
 - Former: Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings
 - Latter prophets:
 - Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel
 - The Twelve: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
- Writings
 - Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, 1-2 Chronicles

The Septuagint (LXX)

❖ Translated into Greek in the Jewish Diaspora

- c. 250 BCE in Alexandria, Egypt
- Additional writings not previously in Hebrew
 - Tobit, Judith, additions to Esther, 1-2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus (Sirach), Baruch, additions to Daniel, others
- These ARE included in RC & Orthodox Bibles
- NOT included in Protestant Bibles; often in “Apocrypha” section

❖ A different arrangement

- Pentateuch (Torah)
- Historical Books
- Psalms & Wisdom
- Prophets

Christians use the Jewish Scriptures

- The Greek Septuagint (LXX) was the Scripture used by early Christians across the Mediterranean world.
- When the NT writers quote Scripture they are usually quoting the Greek text.
- All NT writings were in Greek.

New Testament

Who, What, When, Where?

What is the New Testament?

- Jesus of Nazareth (born no later than 4 BCE; died c. 30 CE)
 - preached covenant faithfulness
 - “attested ... by God with deeds of power” (Peter in Acts 2:22)
 - “a new covenant in my blood”
- Put to death by Roman authorities at behest of Jewish leaders
 - Crucifixion
- Experienced as alive in spite of death by followers
 - Resurrection
- Proclaimed as the new bond between Israel’s God and people

How did the New Testament come into being?

- Jesus did not produce any writings
- First followers proclaimed their belief - expecting imminent end
- 2nd generation begins to write
 - Letters
 - Gospels & Acts
 - Apocalypse (Revelation)
- Later generations collect these writings as their own *Scriptures*
- As now arranged, they tell the story of Jesus and his first followers
 - And reflect on the significance of Jesus.

27 Books

❖ Narratives:

- 4 Gospels according to -
 - Matthew
 - Mark
 - Luke
 - John
- Acts of the Apostles

❖ Letter/Narrative Combination:

- Apocalypse of John (Revelation)

❖ Letters:

- 13 attributed to Paul
 - To: Romans, I & II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon
- Hebrews
- “Catholic” Epistles:
 - James, I & II Peter, I, II, II John, Jude

Historical Understanding

- Paul's letters are the earliest NT writings
 - Written in the 50's - early 60's
- 1st Thessalonians, Galatians, Philippians, Philemon, 1st & 2nd Corinthians, and Romans considered authentically from Paul
 - Other letters attributed to Paul with more or less certainty
- Letters attributed to others later in the 1st Century
- Last 1/3 of the 1st Century - Gospels put the Christian message into the form of a "life" (*bios*) of Jesus.
 - Acts = narrative of early Christian community.
- Also late in 1st Century - *Revelation* > apocalyptic view.

Why these books?

- Placed on a level with the Jewish Scriptures
 - Preserved & revered by the 2nd century
- Considered to be of “apostolic” origin
- Produced for; known & used by important & influential communities.
- Conformed to the “rule of faith”
 - i.e. most consistent with what most Christians believed & understood.

Scripture in the Liturgy

- Vatican II: “Easy access ... should be provided for all” (*Dei Verbum*)
- Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (#51): “The treasures of the bible are to be opened up more lavishly so that a richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God’s word.”
- Three Year Cycle for Sundays; Two Year Cycle for Weekdays
 - Four readings for Sundays (OT, Psalm, Letters/other, gospel)
 - Three readings for weekdays (OT or Letter/other, Psalm, Gospel)
- Sundays:
 - Continuous Gospel Reading: Matthew (A); Mark (B); Luke (C); John - Lent, Easter, Part of B
 - Old Testament (selected for relation to gospel)
 - New Testament - continuous reading of letters, Acts, Revelation

English Translations (Versions)

- **New American Bible - Revised (NABRE) 2011 [1970; 2001]**
 - Official American Catholic translation - used in Liturgy
 - Balances *literal* and *thought-for-thought* translation
- **New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) 1989 -> classic RSV**
 - Used by most biblical scholars
 - Good *literal* translation; sensitive to inclusive language
- **New International Version (NIV) 2011 [1984]**
 - Attempts to balance *literal* and *thought-for-thought*
 - Revision aimed at “gender accuracy”

English Translations (Versions)

- **New Jerusalem Bible (NJB)** 1985/90 revision of 1966 JB
 - Poetic translation of a French translation from *Ecole Biblique*
 - Extensive footnotes
- **New King James Version (NKJV)** 1982 based on 1611 KJV
 - Refines / modernizes Elizabethan English
 - Retains traditional structure and terminology
- **New Living Translation** 2007 revision of Living Bible paraphrase
 - Now based on translations from original languages
 - Explanatory translations
- **Contemporary English Version** 1995
 - Modern, colloquial American English
 - Aimed at broad audience, especially young people
- **The Message** 1993-2002 - very idiomatic, unconventional, “dynamic”

Catholic Interpretation of the Bible

- **Scripture** = part of a living, dynamic experience of God's self-revelation
- **Revelation** = God's gift of God's own SELF in the experience of people
 - More than a collection of propositions
- **TRUTH** of God's presence rather than truths about God
- God's living **WORD** more than a collection of words

Catholic Interpretation of the Bible

- Scriptures are foundational and authoritative
 - YET the community (Israel & Christianity) preceded & produced Scriptures
- NOT the other way around (= fundamentalism)
- Scripture and living Tradition support both continuity AND dynamic development of faith.

Catholic Interpretation of the Bible

- Early interpreters comfortable with allegory and metaphor in the Bible (rabbis, Origen, Augustine, etc.)
 - Especially when a biblical statement did not connect with experience.
- Middle Ages, notion of **Four Senses of Scripture** was embraced:
 - Literal (what the text says)
 - Allegorical (symbolic, deeper meaning - what should I believe?)
 - Moral (How should I behave?)
 - Anagogical (Where is my eternal destination?)
- E.g. Jerusalem = place, church, soul, heaven
- *Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, moralia quid agas, quo tendas anagogia*

Catholic Interpretation of the Bible

- 19th Century: reactions to Enlightenment doubts & to questions posed by science (e.g., evolution) led to literalist tendencies
- Pius XII - *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (September 30, 1943)
 - Catholic biblical scholars could embrace modern methods
 - Study “literary forms” used by biblical authors
 - Harmonize interpretation with secular sciences
- Vatican II - *Dei Verbum* (1965) - opened Catholics to a new awareness of Scripture
 - Encouraged reading & promoted modern methods.

Catholic Interpretation of the Bible

- Pontifical Biblical Commission further encouraged use of modern critical methods
 - 1964 - PBC Instruction concerning the Historical Truth of the Gospels
 - 1993 - PBC The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church
- Thus, “literal sense” of Scripture = what biblical authors intended and conveyed to their audiences by the texts that they wrote.
- Thus, biblical study uses tools of history, linguistics, archaeology, literary criticism, sociology, and more to interpret the Bible.
- Our faith is informed by our use of these, but also guides it.

Methods for reading and understanding

- Historical-critical methods: explore sources, genres, redactional/editorial or compositional practices
 - historical situations that help explain the texts.
 - also social scientific approaches & study of many manuscript variations.
- Literary methods: examine narrative, rhetorical, & linguistic features of texts
 - E.g. characterization, plot, rhetorical devices & structures.
- Theological methods: interpretation (hermeneutics) and the meaning of the text for contemporary readers.