



A word on the Word

A monthly series on the Bible by Carrie Boren, Missioner for Evangelism

Intro to the Bible — book by book

Even though I have been out of school for some time, when each new academic year begins, I feel within me the stirring of a renewed desire to learn. I yearn to join all those eager students and return to the classroom after a summer of sun.

One way or another, all learning, at any age, points to our profound human need to grasp truth. History, science, mathematics, literature, philosophy, art, sociology, psychology — all quests for knowledge beg for answers to life's questions: Who am I? Who are we? How does the universe hold together? Who, what, how did it all begin? What do I do with all of this information, and does it matter? Is there a higher standard by which we should live, and, if so, how shall I live? What will bring purpose in my life? Why must humans suffer? What happens after this life on earth? What does it mean to be human? How do we know God exists?

As Christians, we believe that God has made known the answers to these questions through nature and history — and, most of all, through His Word revealed in the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, the Eucharist, the Church, and the Bible. Although we cannot perfectly comprehend answers to these life questions because of our human frailty, we can encounter Truth and begin the journey. Faith for the Christian is never a leap in the darkness of wishful thinking. Faith is a step into reality, which God has shown to us.

Come and join the journey

This past year through “A word on the Word” monthly articles, we have looked at various topics regarding reality proclaimed in the Holy Scriptures. In the months ahead as young people around us return to the classroom, I invite you to join me as we enter afresh into the story of God and humanity by going through the Bible book by book. Holy Scriptures reveal God's truth. Under the Holy Spirit's inspiration, people of the Old and New Covenant have proclaimed God at work in human history. The Catechism in the *Book of Common Prayer* reads, “We call them (Holy Scriptures) the Word of God because God inspired their human authors and because God still speaks to us through the Bible.” As we explore and grasp Truth in God's story, He will speak to us, and we will dive deeper into reality and find answers to life's questions. We will form a Christian world-view that will enrich not only our lives but those of others.

Facts, figures, and an overview before we begin

- The Bible consists of 66 different books written by different authors. The Apocrypha adds another seven books.

- The Bible has two parts: The Old Testament and the New Testament.
- The Old Testament consists of the Hebrew Scriptures, or *Tanakh*. “Testament” in this sense means “an agreement.” The Old Testament begins with creation and chronicles God's dealings with His people before Jesus. This includes His call of the Jewish people beginning with Abraham in 1800 B.C., the giving of the Law, writings of history, and God's prophetic promises to one day send a Messiah, a Savior.
- The New Testament starts with the birth of Jesus, the promised Messiah, and the spread of the Good News about Him. It includes Jesus' life and teaching, the Church's beginnings, letters to Jesus' new followers, and a description of Christ's return.
- Old and New Testament writers reflect a diversity of style and perspective.
- The Bible was composed over a span of several centuries.
- Authors of the Bible's books originally wrote in three languages. Thirty-six books of the Old Testament and most of the Apocrypha were in Hebrew; parts of Daniel, Ezra, and Jeremiah were in Aramaic (a cognate language of Hebrew); and all 27 books of the New Testament were in Greek.
- In the fourth century AD, church fathers began the official formation of the biblical canon (books they recognized as inspired by God from their inception — see my column in the June edition of *Esprit*) even though they had used an unofficial canon of scripture in their daily liturgy for many years. The Church completed the New Testament Canon at the Council of Trent in 1546. The Jewish people had finalized the Hebrew Canon in the first century AD.

As we explore the Bible book by book, the most important point to recognize is that Holy Scriptures depict one unified story of God's powerful desire and plan to save humanity. He created us to be in perfect communion with Himself and each other. From Genesis to Revelation, many authors from different periods in history tell the same story that from the beginning God had a plan to save us from our sin. This is not a myth but THE story of God acting in and through human history. The center point of the story is that God sent His son Jesus Christ to provide a way for us to reunite with the Father. All history up to the incarnation was in preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ and all history afterward was and is the spreading and establishing of His Kingdom.

There are many ways to analyze salvation history found in Holy Scriptures. Biblical scholar Scott Hahn suggests a framework we will use as we enter into the Story. He breaks the story found in the Bible into seven covenants. In the Ancient Near East, a covenant was more than a mere contract. It provided a framework of trust, responsibilities, and benefits that connected two parties: from individuals all the way to

nations and kingdoms. It was a binding agreement that defined the relationship between them — a bond of sacred kinship. The entire Bible contains a series of God's eternal, unbreakable covenants with His people throughout history. It illumines our knowledge and understanding of God and ourselves.

First covenant — God with the universe and the human race; the covenant from which all others spring.

Second covenant — God with Noah and his household after the flood; God reaches out to save His people after they had sinned.

Third covenant — God with Abraham and his whole tribe. God chooses a people through which He longs to show the world Himself.

Fourth covenant — God with the whole nation of Israel through Moses; God gives the law as His standard towards which humanity is to strive.

Fifth covenant — God with all nations through Kings David and Solomon; it points to the King, Jesus Christ, who will come from the line of David and rule for eternity.

Sixth covenant — New Covenant with ALL Humanity through Jesus Christ; the establishment of the Church as the people of God to share the Good News of Christ with the world.

Seventh covenant — At the end of time God will establish a seventh covenant with humanity for all eternity.

