

Discovering *the* Bible

LEADER'S GUIDE

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TO THE LEADER

Welcome to the video series, *Discovering the Bible*.

This *Leader's Guide* is intended to provide you further resources to lead a challenging group experience with the use of the video programs.

INTENDED USAGE

This is a series that can be used over again many times with different groups. It is intended to be a basic introduction that can be used effectively with those who have little or no background in the Bible, and a stimulating refresher for those who have loved the Bible for years but perhaps never had opportunity to look into where the Bible came from and how it came down to us.

The programs provide an excellent vehicle for outreach and sharing with others the treasures of Scripture.

FLEXIBILITY OF THE PROGRAM

We suggest that you use this video curriculum for a four or eight-week program.

If you use it for four weeks, you will want to show one program each session and include whatever introduction and follow-up discussion that time allows.

For an eight-week structure we suggest you show one video program on alternate weeks, and in between have a study-discussion session based on the outlines and questions provided in the separate booklet enclosed here, *Student Handouts and Worksheets*.

THE MATERIALS INCLUDED IN YOUR KIT

◇ **This Leader's Guide** should provide you all you need and more to prepare lively and interesting sessions. You will want to highlight the particular items that you find useful and want to share with your class.

◇ **Full-Color 32-Page Companion Publication** to *Discovering the Bible*—This printed supplement covers many of the points

made in the video programs. You may simply want to retain it for your personal use in preparing your sessions, or you may find it valuable to order quantities of this piece for group use. They can be utilized in the following ways:

- Give them out a couple of weeks before you begin the series to arouse interest and build anticipation. They can also be used as a promotional piece by giving them out to prospective attendees along with an invitation to attend your showings of the videos.
- Give them out to your class participants at the first session and use various items during your discussion time.
- Give them out at the end of the series as a reinforcement to help underscore many of the points in the series.

◇ **Student Handouts and Worksheets**—Use these as best fits your situation. You have permission to copy or you may order additional copies from us.

- You may want to give out the complete set at the beginning of the series and encourage your participants to work through them at their own pace.
- You may want to give out only the specific sheets related to the current program either the week before or the day of the showing.

◇ **Papyrus Sample**—Pass your sample around the class preferably in connection with Program 3—The New Testament. Point out how writing materials in the ancient days were scarce and expensive compared to the ready availability, abundance, and economy of paper for us today. Papyrus was a predecessor to paper. This was the kind of material most of the original New Testament documents would have been written on. Your sample is a genuine papyrus from a papyrus plant grown in the Nile River in Egypt and was made the same way they did in Biblical times.

◇ **Glimpses Samples**—You may wish to use these only for your own preparation. Or, you may want to make copies to hand out as a “take home” piece after individual sessions. You have our permission to make your own copies, or you may order quantities from us if that is more convenient.

SOME PRACTICAL TIPS

Here are some suggestions that we find will enhance your use of *Discovering the Bible*.

(1) Do some advance promotion at least two to three weeks prior to the first program. There are many people eager to find out about the Bible but don't know where to begin.

(2) Watch each program yourself first before showing to your group. There will be features you will want to highlight and questions you will want to raise.

(3) Before showing the program, indicate what you consider the key points to watch for and areas you will want to pick up later for discussion.

(4) Put everyone at ease. Emphasize that these programs are intended for those who have little or no knowledge of the Bible as well as those who have. Encourage the viewers to make notes with their questions and comments for discussion afterwards.

(5) Have a clear idea in your mind as to what will work best for your situation in terms of discussion after the showing.

For example, do you prefer to have questions and comments come from the group, thereby sending discussion down many possibly unanticipated pathways? Or, do you want to have the questions and topics pre-selected so that your time for discussion is clearly focused?

Obviously, it would be preferable to have time for both.

(6) Be prepared for the fact that people have many strange ideas about the Bible. These can range from those who think the Bible almost appeared magically or was dictated by God to those who think it has nothing to do with God but is a collection of ancient fables and myths. Don't let such conjectures take over the discussion. The video series presents factual and historical information that offers more than enough content to deal with.

NOTES ON THIS LEADER'S GUIDE

For each program in this “Discovering the Bible” video series, you will find a section containing the following items:

- ◇ **IN THIS PROGRAM:** a brief summary of the program’s contents.
- ◇ **FOR STARTERS:** ideas for beginning or introducing each program.
- ◇ **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AFTER VIEWING VIDEO:** questions with *suggested responses in italics*.
- ◇ **WRAPPING IT UP:** ideas for closing the class.
- ◇ **ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND FOR TEACHER:** supplemental material the teacher might find useful in elaborating the discussion or enhancing the introduction/conclusion of each session.
- ◇ **OPTIONAL BIBLE STUDY:** a Bible study corresponding to each video’s theme is included in the student handouts. The appropriate one to use for each program is noted in this guide. These may be developed into separate lessons or it may be distributed for individual study outside of class.
- ◇ **HANDOUTS:** may be duplicated for the class.

PROGRAM 1:

GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH THE BIBLE

IN THIS PROGRAM WE WILL

- Briefly look at the continuing influence of the Bible
- Note what the Bible actually is and why it is unique
- Learn how the Bible came to be written
- Discuss how the Bible is organized

FOR STARTERS:

Have the class work through HANDOUT 1 to show that the Bible continues to influence even our everyday language. In this series on *Discovering the Bible* we'll be exploring the origin, organization, and significance of the Bible, the book which continues to influence our language and culture over 2000 years after it was written.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AFTER VIEWING VIDEO:

1. What does the word Bible actually mean? How does the name of the book in some way reflect its origins? *[Means "book." The ancient Phoenician city of Byblos was a place for the shipment of parchment from which ancient books were made. The Bible itself has its origins in the ancient Middle East.]*

2. In what geographical area did the events of the Bible take place? Why is this region important geographically and historically? *[In ancient Middle East. Geographically, the Middle East is the junction of three major continents—Africa, Asia, and Europe. Historically, events of the Bible took place where civilization began—the area bounded by Egypt and Mesopotamia.]*

3. The Bible is often called a holy book. What makes its origins different from many other "holy" books? *[The Bible was written over a period of hundreds of years and rooted in history.]*

What does the nature of the origin of the Bible imply about the God of the Bible? *[God is concerned in working in the affairs of the world, people's lives, and their history. He is not removed from our earthly affairs.]*

How is the nature of the Bible different from a book of philosophy or systematic theology? *[Is rooted in history, in the actual lives of people, not simply in abstract ideas.]*

4. Examine the timeline on HANDOUT 3. What events of history were occurring while the Bible was being written? *[Examples—Stonehenge built in England; Hammurabi Law Code; Homer's epics; Olympic games begin; Kingdoms and cultures of Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Rome, etc.]*

5. Why can you say the Bible is more of a library than a single book? *[Is actually a collection of 66 books written over perhaps about a 1,500 year period.]*

6. The Bible is divided into two parts called the Old and New Testaments. What is a testament? *[A will or covenant.]*

Who are the parties to the Biblical testaments? *[God and His people.]*

7. Discuss how the Bible can be both simple enough for children and the common person and so complex that even the greatest scholar cannot fully comprehend it. Is this a contradiction, or can you explain the paradox?

8. What are some differences between our Bibles and the originals? *[Languages are different—originals were written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek; chapters and verses have been added to our Bible for easy reference.]*

9. How can the Bible be relevant today when it was written millennia ago in totally different geographical and cultural settings? *[Deals with eternal answers to issues and questions which transcend cultural and geographical differences. For example, what are we to think of ourselves? How are we to treat each other? How are we to handle guilt and fear? How does God reach down to people? How are we to find God? What's the meaning of life and the reason for the universe?]*

10. What differences do you think having the Bible as a written book would make as opposed to simply having a collection of oral traditions handed down through the ages? *[Written book would be more easily authenticated and would*

be available to more people. Written records cannot be as easily changed as can oral reports.]

WRAPPING IT UP:

Read and discuss “What Others Have Said About the Bible” in HANDOUT 2. Rather than discuss all the quotes at one session, two or three quotes might be discussed to conclude each of the four sessions in the series.

ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND FOR THE TEACHER:

In your discussion you might want to be familiar with the following:

Revelation—God reveals Himself to humankind in a general way through His creation and more specifically through the Scriptures. By God’s revelation in the Scriptures people can know God’s person, character, and will for His people.

Inspiration—Though Scripture was written by human authors (over 30 of them), Jews and Christians believe God so inspired the authors in their writing, that what was written is the authoritative Word of God.

Apocrypha—Books found in the Catholic Old Testament but not in the Hebrew Bible or most Protestant Bibles. These include the books of I & II Maccabees, Ecclesiasticus, Wisdom of Solomon, I & II Esdras, and Judith. In addition to the Catholic Apocrypha, the Eastern Orthodox Church includes the books of III & IV Maccabees. The Jewish people, many in the early church, as well as Reformation leaders, recognized these books as not on the same level as the inspired Scripture. They are not quoted from by Jesus or the apostles.

Gospel of Thomas—Frequently in the news of late, the Gospel of Thomas is a first century collection of Jesus’ sayings found at Nag Hammadi, Egypt. Some scholars have argued in favor of the accuracy and historicity of this work. However, this gospel was known in the early church and not accepted as scriptural. It contains many Gnostic ideas, ideas which have become increasingly popular in our modern culture and with the New Age movement.

The Bible has influenced many famous individuals. Very often a single portion of Scripture became a focus of the person's purpose and goals in life. Following are some famous people and the Scriptures that helped them make history. You might choose to use one or two of these examples each lesson, incorporating them into your introduction or wrap-up, if not in the lesson itself. Or, depending on your time available, you may prefer to use this section with program four.

Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658)—Puritan who became Lord Protector of England during the Puritan Revolution. Cromwell often felt inadequate in the positions he found himself, but throughout his career he relied on one verse of scriptural encouragement, "I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13). This was the verse which brought him through when his son was killed in battle, and this was the passage he wanted read to him on his deathbed.

George Fox (1622-1691)—Founder of the Quakers or the Society of Friends. When George Fox was looking for spiritual answers to many questions, he could not find them from the worldly and unspiritual clergy of his day. He came to realize that Christ was the "light of the world" (John 8:12; 9:5).

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)—French scientist and religious philosopher who laid the foundation for the modern theory of probabilities and advanced differential calculus. His *Pensees* are noted for their spiritual reflections and the beauty of their French language. November 23, 1654 Pascal lay in bed, unable to sleep, so he read Scripture. He found in Jeremiah 2:13, "My people have committed two evils, they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." In a dazzling mystical experience, Pascal totally gave his life to Jesus Christ. From that point on he put Christ first in his life, even above his mathematical and scientific studies.

Lady Selina, Countess of Huntingdon (1707-1791)—Philanthropist; a noble lady of wealth and influence who supported the evangelical revival under John Wesley and George Whitefield. She used her money to build colleges and chapels and establish missions overseas. Living with the utmost frugality, the

Countess of Huntingdon invested her money in spiritual projects and died materially impoverished. Her support of the Gospel and her entire life was based upon the truth that “Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (I Corinthians 3:11).

Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910)—Russian author and religious philosopher; author of *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina*, and *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. Tolstoy sought to answer the question of why he had been sent into the world. In Matthew 6:33, “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you,” he found that true happiness cannot be found living for ourselves but only for God. Our lives are not our own, but His.

Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)—English author and literary critic whose *Dictionary of the English Language* won him fame. Often in financial straits himself, Johnson always shared what he had with others and even had several mendicants living in his house and sharing his table. In spite of his many talents and abilities, Dr. Johnson often felt depressed over the text, “Of him to whom much is given, much will be required” (Luke 12:48). For much of his life, Johnson feared he would never be able to do enough good in his life, but in his last years he came to realize that faith in Jesus Christ was sufficient for his soul.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881)—Russian novelist who wrote *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, and *Brothers Karamazov*. Dostoyevsky was arrested and sentenced to death for membership in a political circle. Just before his scheduled time of execution, his sentence was commuted to hard labor in Siberia. He was given a New Testament on the way to Siberia, and this became his solace and strength. He especially was moved by the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:12-32). His novels frequently have the theme of redemption for even the vilest sinners.

Charles Simeon (1759-1836)—Evangelical pastor of Holy Trinity Church, Cambridge for over fifty years, Simeon taught hundreds of young men who later became missionaries and Christian leaders. He also helped establish important evangelical societies such as the British and Foreign Bible Society and the Church Missionary Society. Throughout his life, from his

conversion to his dying words, Simeon sought to “comprehend the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge” (Ephesians 3:19).

William Wilberforce (1759-1833)—English politician who worked for the abolition of the slave trade (1807) and for the end of slavery itself, which was achieved in England shortly before his death in 1833. Wilberforce was consumed with a desire to free the slaves because he so deeply appreciated the freedom from sin’s bondage Christ had brought him. “God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13) was the humble plea of Wilberforce’s heart.

Lord Shaftsbury (1801-1885)—Victorian statesman who worked tirelessly to improve the conditions of the poor. As a member of the House of Commons and later House of Lords, as well as president of numerous reform societies, Shaftsbury was beloved and revered by the poor he sought to help. At his funeral, large groups of the poor gathered in the streets bearing banners with phrases from Shaftsbury’s favorite Scripture: “I was hungry and you gave Me meat; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came unto me... Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, my brethren, you have done it unto Me” (Matthew 25:35-40).

William M. Thackeray (1811-1863)—English novelist, author of *Vanity Fair*, *Henry Edmond*, *The Newcomes*, and *The Virginians*. Through troubles, times of intense poverty, and a beloved wife who went hopelessly insane, Thackeray relied on Psalm 37:23-25, “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with His hand. I have been young and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.” These verses Thackeray also made the source of comfort and solace of his ideal Colonel Newcome in *The Newcomes*.

Other authors similarly valued Psalm 37:23-25 as a noble encouragement to characters in their novels undergoing deep trials. Oliver Goldsmith’s *Vicar of Wakefield* and Jeanie Deans in Sir Walter Scott’s *The Heart of Midlothian* found solace in these words. The missionary-explorer David Livingston also relied on these encouraging words during his feverish last days.

William Gladstone (1809-1898)—British prime minister. Gladstone was converted to Christ at the age of ten, and ever after his Christianity was an integral part of his life. Psalm 17:8, “Keep me as the apple of Thine eye: hide me under the shadow of Thy wings,” was the verse and prayer that remained with Gladstone throughout his life.

OPTIONAL BIBLE STUDY:

HANDOUT 4: “What Does the Bible Say About Itself?” Select questions you wish to take up. Perhaps you would want to assign questions to individuals in advance for them to prepare a response. Or, you may have your group break up into sections and each take one question and then regather and report to the whole group.

PROGRAM 2:

THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES OR THE OLD TESTAMENT

IN THIS PROGRAM WE WILL

- Briefly look at the Hebrew Scriptures or Old Testament
- Summarize the main themes of the Old Testament
- Describe how the Old Testament is organized
- Assess the accuracy of our copies of the Hebrew Scriptures

FOR STARTERS:

The modern land of Israel is often called the “Land of the Book,” and the ancient Hebrew language has been revived within the modern Jewish state. The Hebrew Scriptures, the Christian Old Testament, continue to have a place in our modern world. In this program, we’ll be looking more closely at those Hebrew Scriptures.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AFTER VIEWING VIDEO:

1. What role do the Hebrew Scriptures play in Jewish religious life? *[They are valued almost as God’s love letter to His people; they are more than a set of laws or collection of stories. They provide a living memory and identity for the Jewish people. The Scriptures are greatly respected, and their reading is the most important part of the Jewish service.]*

2. How would our reading of the Bible differ if we read it as a love letter rather than as an ordinary book? *[We’d read it eagerly, noting every detail and shades of meaning, and we would read it repeatedly. Such reading would also increase our longing to be with the Author.]*

3. Who wrote the Hebrew Scriptures and when were they written? *[There were close to 30 writers of the Hebrew Scriptures who wrote during the millennium from about 1400 to 400 B.C. The writers ranged from political leaders to prisoners, kings to shepherds.]*

4. Discuss the contents of Hebrew Scriptures, completing and using HANDOUT 5. You may want to do this as a group exercise or individually.

5. What are the Hebrew Scriptures about? [**Providence**—God created the world and continues to be involved in His creation and in the history of mankind; **People**—the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are God’s chosen people with a unique role in history; **Place**—land of Israel was promised to the Jewish people by God; **Promise**—God made a covenant with His people that He would be with them, guide them, and bless them if they would follow His ways; **Prophecy**—predictions about the future, including assurance that a Messiah would come, and prophetic warnings against injustice, idolatry, social evils, and departing from the ways of God.]

6. Why do the Jews have 24 books in their Bible and the Protestants have 39 books in the Old Testament? [*The books are actually the same, but the Protestants divide Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, and Ezra-Nehemiah into two sections each and count each of the “minor” prophets as separate books.*]

7. Many different materials were used to write on in ancient times. Read the following Scriptures and make a list of writing materials used:

Ezekiel 4:1

Exodus 24:12, 18; Joshua 8:32

II John 12

II Timothy 4:13

[Clay, stone, paper (made from the papyrus plant), and vellum or parchment (made from animal skins).]

8. Review HANDOUT 6 and discuss how archaeology illumines the historical faith of the Bible. What specific insights can archaeology give us about the Bible? [*pervasive influence of pagan idolatry; importance of cities as strong commercial and cultural centers; strong bureaucratic organization of various imperial governments; accuracy of Bible in portraying cultural, social, and political conditions of the period; wealth and artistic skill available to ruling classes in Biblical period.*]

9. The Old Testament is full of stories, such as the story of Joseph told in the video. What are some other famous Old Testament stories? How do these stories compare with the myths of other religions of the day? *[The Old Testament stories are accounts of historical events and show God's covenant relationship with His people. Myths are fables invented to instruct people about the gods. They are not rooted in time and place as are the historical narratives of the Old Testament.]*

10. If the Old Testament books were written over many centuries and by many authors, what are the steps by which the books came to be collected together? *[Oral transmission (Exodus 24:3-7); preservation of written law in the ark (Deuteronomy 31:26); reconsecration of people to the law at various stages in their history (II Kings 23:1-3; Nehemiah 8:1ff.); collection of books into categories of the law, the prophets, and the writings (Luke 24:44); the Jewish Council of Jamnia in 90 A.D. is thought to have reaffirmed the books in the final collection of Scripture.]*

11. How can we be assured that what has come down to us in our Bible accurately contains what the original scrolls contained? *[Jewish scribes who copied the scrolls worked under very strict regulations: no word was written from memory; each word was spoken aloud as written; before writing the sacred name of Yahweh, pen had to be wiped; scroll was discarded if errors were found; every word and letter was counted. Scribes recognized the seriousness and sacredness of their task.]*

12. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls is one of the most significant archaeological finds of modern times. How have the Dead Sea Scrolls affected our understanding of the Scriptures? *[Show amazing accuracy of the Old Testament manuscripts we had. Only minor differences between these earlier manuscripts and the later Old Testament manuscripts from 1,000 A.D.]*

13. Deuteronomy 6:4 is called the *Shema* by the Jews and is the great confession of Israel's monotheistic faith, recited morning and

evening by faithful Jews. The following verses in Deuteronomy 6:5-9 describe what the Jews' relationship to God and His word was to be. From these verses the Jews developed the custom of fastening portions of Scriptures to the doorpost of their homes and wearing little boxes containing the Law attached to their forehead and arm. More than ceremonies, however, these verses describe a Jewish perspective of the Law. What attitude do these verses reflect towards the Law and God's Word? *[The Jews believed their entire lives were to be guided and directed by the Law of God.]*

WRAPPING IT UP:

The Hebrew language and Scriptures are inseparable from the Jewish people, but their influence extends far beyond the Jewish people themselves. The English language includes the Hebrew words "amen," "hallelujah," and "jubilee," and Hebrew names continue to be used for persons and places, such as David, Jonathan, John, Miriam, Mary. The Hebrew Scriptures continue to edify and encourage. Many testify to the wisdom still found in Proverbs or the solace received from the Psalms. Next session we'll look at the Christian New Testament and notice its deep roots in the Hebrew Old Testament.

ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND FOR THE TEACHER:

A unique characteristic of the Hebrew Scriptures is their record of the covenants or agreements which God makes with humankind. No other religion has God involving Himself with such binding contracts with His people. Such covenants define the promises and obligations on both sides. Examples are:

Genesis 9:8-11—with Noah and his descendants

Genesis 12:1-3—with Abraham and his descendants

Exodus & Deuteronomy—with Moses and Israel at Sinai

Jeremiah 31:33-34; 32:38-40—a promised new covenant which will change the heart of the people to one of obedience.

Christians believe that Christ is the fulfillment of the new covenant promised in Jeremiah...hence the terms old and new covenants, or testaments. Hebrews 7-10.

The Dead Sea Scrolls are often recognized as the most important archaeological find of the century. Before the scrolls were found, the Masoretic text from the ninth century A.D. was the earliest complete manuscript of the Old Testament available—but that was 1300 years after Malachi wrote. The Dead Sea Scrolls bring our knowledge much closer to the time of writing. Among the scrolls found was one complete copy of a scroll of Isaiah, 1000 years older than any Isaiah manuscript previously known. Yet, the text is almost exactly what we had possessed. 95% of the text was word for word identical. The 5% difference were obvious slips of the pen or variations in spelling. It is amazing that in the millennia of hand copying the text so few variations would arise.

For the New Testament, comparing the many ancient Biblical manuscripts reveals variations in the Bible text. For example, in the Lord's prayer in the New Testament, the oldest manuscripts omit the last part of Matt. 6:13. The oldest manuscripts also omit John 7:53-58 (the woman taken in adultery) and the last twelve verses of Mark's gospel. How can we explain such variations?

Obviously some of the variations were caused by hastily hand-written copies. Some kinds of mistakes were errors of hand and eye—a scribe skips a line or words because they have similar endings or he copies an explanatory note as part of the text. Some mistakes are errors of the mind—the scribe's mind wanders, and he writes down a familiar phrase not in the text. This is especially seen in the Gospels where he might write down a well-known phrase from another Gospel. Other variations are more deliberate—which probably is the case in John 7:53-8:11 and Mark 16: 9-20.

However, it is important to emphasize that there are relatively few variants in the Bible manuscripts. For example, it has been estimated that manuscript errors are in the ratio of 1/1000. In other words, for every thousand words copied correctly, there is one word containing a copying error. Sir Frederick Kenyon, formerly director of the British Museum, comments on these:

It is true (and it cannot be too emphatically stated) that none of the fundamental truths of Christianity rests on passages of which the genuineness is doubtful; but it still remains a matter of concern to us to know that our Bible, as

we have it today, represents as closely as may be the actual words used by the writers of the sacred books...

If there are variations in Bible manuscripts, how can we know which is the true reading? This involves the science of textual criticism. Textual critics compare different manuscripts to determine which versions are the oldest (dating is based on style of script, style of material, pottery and archaeological remains, and radio carbon methods). They also carefully study ancient translations of the Bible, especially the Latin and Syriac versions, because these translations might have been made from older manuscripts than we possess. They also examine the quotations from Scriptures in the writings of the early church fathers.

Here, however, they must consider the possibility that the writer is quoting from memory and might not be accurately giving the text as he has it. Sir Frederic Kenyon expresses well the confidence we can place in our Bible text today because of such textual criticism:

There are no common books, such as machinery turns out in hundreds every day in these later times. Each one of them was written by the personal labour and sanctified by the prayers of some Egyptian or Syrian Christian of the early days, some Greek or Latin monk of the Middle Ages, working in the writing-room of some great monastery of Eastern or Western Europe, some scribe in a professional scriptorium. Each has its own individuality, which must be sought out by modern scholars with patient toil and persevering study. And from comparison of all, from the weighing, and not counting merely of their testimony, slowly is being built up a purer and more accurate representation of the text of our sacred books than our fathers and our forefathers possessed, and we are brought nearer to the very words which Evangelist and Apostle wrote, more than eighteen hundred years ago.

OPTIONAL BIBLE STUDY:

See HANDOUT 7, "A Faith Rooted in History." You may want to begin by asking the group to mention quickly the first Old Testament stories they can remember. Why do they remember them? What meaning do they derive from them?

PROGRAM 3:

THE NEW TESTAMENT

IN THIS PROGRAM WE WILL

- Briefly look at the Christian New Testament
- Show the New Testament's relationship with the Old
- Describe how the New Testament is organized
- Depict the writing methods of the period
- Explain what is meant by canon and how the New Testament canon came about

FOR STARTERS:

Even the non-Christian recognizes that Jesus Christ is one of the most significant and influential people in all of human history. Our very system of numbering years with B.C. and A.D. (or B.C.E. and C.E.) makes Jesus the focal point of history. In today's program, we're going to look at the New Testament, the primary source for information about Jesus and the beginnings of Christianity.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AFTER VIEWING VIDEO:

1. In what ways are the Old and New Testaments connected?

[The New Testament is rooted in and linked to the Old Testament. Jesus and the earliest Christians were Jews steeped in the Hebrew Bible. They saw Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of a Messiah. Almost every New Testament book refers to or quotes from the Old Testament.]

2. What are some differences between the Old and the New Testaments?

<i>OLD TESTAMENT</i>	<i>NEW TESTAMENT</i>
<i>Written in Hebrew or Aramaic</i>	<i>Written in Greek</i>
<i>Written over a 1,000 year period</i>	<i>Written within 50 to 100 years</i>
<i>About 593,000 words</i>	<i>Much shorter than O.T. — about 180,000 words</i>
<i>Focuses on the people of Israel</i>	<i>Focuses on Jesus Christ</i>
<i>A covenant of promise</i>	<i>A covenant of fulfillment</i>
<i>Primary attention on Jewish nation</i>	<i>Includes the Gentile world more</i>

3. What (or who) is the focus of the New Testament? *[The person of Jesus Christ and the Church He established.]*

4. What are the main sections of the New Testament? *[Gospels—narrations about Jesus; Acts—history of the early church; Letters—to address early church needs, questions, and problems; Revelation—how God will consummate history and establish a new heaven and earth.]*

5. Why were the Gospels written, and why were there four? How can they possibly include the actual words of Jesus when they were written down years after His words were spoken? *[The Gospels were written to preserve reliable accounts of Jesus' life and words, especially for those who had never seen or known Jesus. In Luke 1:1 and John 20:30-31, two of the Gospel writers specifically explained why they were writing. The four Gospels reflect four different perspectives (see HANDOUT 8), much like four cameras giving four perspectives of the same sporting event. In a pre-technological society, people's memorization skills were more highly developed than ever, and the accuracy of such records would be much greater than if they were written today. Besides, Jesus' words were powerful and memorable (John 7:46).]*

6. Many of the books of the New Testament were originally letters written to address specific problems in the earliest churches. From the descriptions in HANDOUT 8, discuss how relevant such ancient documents might be in our modern society.

7. How can we be certain the New Testament documents we have are historically reliable copies of the original manuscripts? *[The number of New Testament manuscripts and their antiquity is much greater than the manuscripts for any other ancient document. New Testament manuscripts have been found which were copied merely decades after the original text was written. There is very little variation in these manuscripts, and such variations are minor and do not touch on the major doctrines of the faith.]*

8. How did the books which now comprise the New Testament come to be accepted as the canon, or rule and standard, for the Christian community? *[Shortly after the various books were written, the churches recognized their Scriptural authority—Peter calls Paul’s writings part of Scripture in II Peter 3:14-16. When deviant teachers, such as the Gnostic Marcion about 140 A.D., denied the authority of many of these writings, church leaders were forced to consider and confirm what Christian writings were true and authoritative. The Christians of the early centuries frequently quoted from New Testament books, along with the Old Testament, to refute error. In the fourth century, Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria, Egypt, wrote a letter to his people listing the books which a consensus of the churches had established as accepted and authoritative. Further and final reaffirmation came at the Council of Carthage in 397 A.D.]*

9. What were the standards for including a book as part of the canon? *[Some criteria which helped establish the authority of a book for the New Testament were:*

1) Was the book written by an apostle or someone closely associated with an apostle?

2) Is the book orthodox, following the teachings of the apostles handed down in the churches?

3) Was it used in the earliest churches?

4) Was it endorsed by the early church fathers and a succession of believers?

EE Bruce: “The New Testament books did not become authoritative for the church because they were formally included in a canonical literature; on the contrary, the church included them in her canon because she already regarded them as divinely inspired.”]

10. We’ve seen that both the Old and New Testaments are deeply rooted in history—ancient history. How can books so rooted in the past have continued relevance for our modern world? *[Because God moved among His people to accomplish His purposes and continues to work in the modern world as*

well (Hebrews 13:8). We find we face the same problems and challenges believers have faced in the Biblical era and every era.]

WRAPPING IT UP:

Part of the Bible's amazing story is its preservation over the centuries. There are more manuscripts surviving of the New Testament, for example, than manuscripts surviving from the works of ten major classical authors combined (including Caesar, Livy, Plato, Tacitus, Suetonius, and Aristophanes!). Before his death in 1778 Voltaire said that within 100 years Christianity would be swept from existence and pass into history, yet the circulation of the Bible continues to increase, the teachings and influence of the New Testament endure and expand.

ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND FOR THE TEACHER:

Ancient books were on scrolls, rolled up sheets of connected papyrus or sheets of parchment or vellum that were made from animal skins. The Christians were the first to extensively use codices or books rather than scrolls. A codex was basically a book with sheets of paper or parchment folded and sewn together. By the third century A.D., 84% of all Christian manuscripts were in book form; only 6% of non-Christian manuscripts were codices. By the 4th century, 97% of the Christian and 65% of the non-Christian manuscripts were codices. The Christians apparently found this form more convenient for easy reference and Bible study.

Archaeology continues to provide evidence touching on the New Testament. The following are some relevant New Testament finds:

Pontius Pilate—in 1961 a stone was found during the excavations at the theater in Caesarea recording the erection of a building dedicated to Emperor Tiberius by Pontius Pilate.

Capernaum—the first century synagogue where Jesus taught has been uncovered as well as the ruins of an ancient church many believe was built over the site of Peter's family home.

Sepphoris—though not mentioned in the Bible, this trade center has become a major archaeological site. Located near Nazareth, the town shows the amount of Greek culture which was present in Galilee.

Caiaphas—in 1990, the tomb of the Jewish high priest in the days of Jesus was found in Jerusalem.

Dead Sea Scrolls—aside from the importance of the Old Testament scrolls found, the non-Biblical scrolls have become important in providing background to the New Testament period.

One of the great archaeologists of the New Testament period was Sir William Ramsay. Trained in the German historical school, he was convinced that many of the New Testament books were written much later than traditionally believed. The book of Acts, for example, he thought was written in the middle of the second century A.D.—that is, until he researched the archaeology and geography of the places Acts describes. The more he studied Acts in its historical setting, the more he was impressed with the accuracy and precision of the book, and the more convinced he became that the book had to have been written in the first century to so accurately reflect the conditions of that period.

One of the most fascinating stories in the history of Bible manuscripts and the New Testament is the discovery made by Constantine Tischendorf. In 1844, the German scholar was touring the East in search of old manuscripts, that is, documents written by hand. In the library of the monastery of St. Catherine at Mt. Sinai he noticed a basket filled with pages of an old manuscript. Tischendorf was shocked! This was the oldest Greek writing this seasoned scholar had ever seen, and the pages were from the Greek Old Testament. Tischendorf asked the librarian about them. To his horror he learned the pages had been placed in the trash basket for kindling fires, and two basket loads of such papers had already been burned! Though the monks admitted there were more pages of the manuscript, Tischendorf's enthusiasm made them wary, and they would not show him any more. They did allow Tischendorf to take 43 pages with him, however, and Tischendorf urged the monks to use something else for their fires!

In 1853 Tischendorf returned to the monastery, but the monks would not show him the remainder of the manuscript. Six years later, Tischendorf again returned to the Sinai monastery, this time

under the patronage of the Russian Tsar Alexander II. On this visit, a monk took Tischendorf to his room and pulled down a cloth-wrapped manuscript which had been stored with some cups and dishes on a shelf above the door. Tischendorf immediately recognized the pages as the remainder of the book whose pages he had rescued from the trash pile. He suggested the monastery present the manuscript to the tsar of Russia as protector of the Orthodox church, which they agreed to do. When the communists took over the Russian government, they had little use for such a Christian manuscript, so in 1933, the Soviet Union sold the manuscript to the British Museum for £100,000.

The manuscript became known as the *Codex Sinaiticus* (book from the Sinai), and it is one of the most important early manuscripts of the Bible. Dating from about the middle of the fourth century, Sinaiticus is one of the earliest complete manuscripts of the New Testament we have. Some have even speculated this might be one of the fifty Bibles the Emperor Constantine commissioned Eusebius to prepare after he had made Christianity a legal religion in the Roman Empire.

The manuscripts we have older than Sinaiticus contain only portions of the New Testament. Many of the earliest church manuscripts were destroyed during the times of persecution against the early Christians. In these early manuscripts, writing was continuous—there were no spaces between words and usually none between sentences. Punctuation marks were rarely used before the eighth century. There also were no chapter or verse divisions. With every manuscript having to be copied by hand, it was easy for mistakes and variations to be made. As time went on, and manuscripts were recopied, these mistakes could be compounded. Understandably, then, the earlier manuscripts closer to the time of the original writing probably have fewer mistakes, and Tischendorf's discovery of the fourth century *Codex Sinaiticus* was of enormous help for scholars to check the accuracy of our New Testament writings.

OPTIONAL BIBLE STUDY:

See HANDOUT 9, “New Testament Quotes About Jesus From The Old Testament.” You probably will not have time to cover all of them, so go through either the Old Testament column or New Testament column and look up the references and select the ones you consider will be of most interest to you or your group. Discuss the particular subject that each pair treats. Consider how much the connection must have meant to the early church.

PROGRAM 4:

SURVIVAL, SPREAD, INFLUENCE

IN THIS PROGRAM WE WILL

- Note the Bible's influence in the development of western civilization and culture
- Show how the Bible survived through repeated persecution
- Describe how Bible translation accompanied the spread of Christianity
- Give examples of how the Bible has transformed individual lives

FOR STARTERS:

In our earlier sessions together, we've seen that one of the things that makes the Bible unique among the world's religious books is that it is thoroughly set within history and contains the story of God's working in history. Yet, the Bible is not some antique book with no current relevance. It continues to reach beyond its original geographical and historical setting to bring its message to varying cultures and peoples around the globe. In this our last program, we will be seeing how the Bible survived the centuries and continues to affect the lives of individuals.

DISCUSSION QUESTION AFTER VIEWING VIDEO:

1. What obstacles to survival has the Bible faced over the centuries?
[Political persecution, illiteracy, language and cultural barriers.]
2. Who preserved the Scriptures throughout the Middle Ages, and how did this affect the common people? *[The monks and monasteries. The Biblical manuscripts preserved in the monasteries had little effect on the common people since few could read them.]*
3. If the majority of the people could not read in the Middle Ages, how did they learn the Bible? *[Oral teachings, sculpture, pilgrimages to the Holy Land, church music, church architecture, stained glass windows with Biblical themes, plays and dramas in the church, mystery plays.]*
4. During the Middle Ages corruption infected the Church, and superstition often distorted the Gospel. Scriptures were mixed with tradition. What was the movement that most centered on

recovering the Bible for the daily lives of the people? *[Protestant Reformation.]*

5. What two important things did the fourteenth century English priest John Wycliffe do to place the Bible in the hands of the common people? *[He and his followers translated the entire Bible into English the first time; He trained preachers to bring the Bible to the common people.]*

6. The German monk Martin Luther found no relief for his guilt in religious ceremonies. How did Luther finally find peace for his soul? *[In reading the Bible he learned that forgiveness was a gift of God received by faith in Jesus Christ. He believed his conscience should be bound by the Word of God, not the traditions or dictates of human rulers, not even the pope himself.]*

7. What was the prayer and hope of Englishman William Tyndale, and how was it fulfilled? *[William Tyndale wanted even the common plowboy to be able to read the Bible in his native language, so he dedicated his life to translating the Bible into English. Persecuted for this illegal activity, Tyndale was executed in 1536. With his dying breath he prayed God would open the King of England's eyes. The next year King Henry VIII authorized the use of the Bible in English among the people. That English Bible was mostly Tyndale's work.]*

8. What invention revolutionized the spread of the Bible? *[The printing press.]*

What are some specific ways the printing press affected the Bible's influence? *[Increased the availability of personal copies of Scripture and correspondingly increased literacy; minimized copy variations in Scripture.]*

9. The Bible is a book not just with intellectual answers but which transforms people's lives, producing a "new creation" (II Corinthians 5:17). Study HANDOUT 7 and determine what key truths from the Bible particularly affected and changed the lives of the people listed.

10. To what would you attribute the Bible's "staying power" over so many centuries and cultures, against repeated opposition? Why do you think the Bible has had such power to transform the lives of individuals and cultures?

11. The Bible is foundational to western civilization and has influenced art, music, law, economics, science, educational theories, social reform, and institutions. Make a list of ways the Bible has influenced western culture. *[The list is endless, but some possibilities are: **Art**—Biblical works by Michelangelo and Rembrandt; **Music**—Handel's Messiah; Bach's music, written for the Glory of God; **Law**—10 commandments is root of modern law, equality of all before the law based on equality of Christians in Christ; **Economics**—just wages, no usury, workman worthy of his wages; **Science**—the universe is created by God and is structured and orderly and we can learn the laws by which it is governed; **Education**—everyone should be literate to read the Bible, earliest colleges in America were established to train ministers and promote Christian knowledge.]*

WRAPPING IT UP:

In our first session we looked at several quotes by famous people on the Bible's influence and importance. [Alternatively, you might want to mention some of the famous individuals whose lives were particularly affected by specific Scriptures, found in "Background to Teacher" in Program 1.] If you were asked to write such a statement about your own experience with the Bible, what would you say?

ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND FOR THE TEACHER:

The Bible has been translated into more languages than any other book—a testimony to its universal message. In fact, it is thought that the first book to be translated into another language was the Hebrew Old Testament, translated into Greek in Alexandria, Egypt in the second century B.C. As Christianity spread, there was the need to present the Gospel in the many different languages of the people. In the fourth century Jerome

translated the Scriptures into Latin, the common language of the Romans. His translation, called the Vulgate, was used throughout the Middle Ages.

In the third century, Armenia became the first officially Christian nation. Bishop Mesrop created an Armenian alphabet so the Bible could be translated into the language of his people.

As Christianity spread to the borders of the Roman empire, translations were made into the languages of the barbarian tribes. Often the translator would first have to develop an alphabet for people who did not have a written language, much as translators do today among remote tribes. Throughout history Christianity has repeatedly encouraged the development of literacy among people who previously had no written language.

The earliest items written in any Germanic language are the fragments we have of the Bible translated by Ulfilas in the fourth century. Ulfilas organized the Gothic church and was its spiritual head for forty years. At this time the Goths had no written language, so Ulfilas devised an alphabet so he could begin to translate the Bible for them.

Perhaps the most famous alphabet developed by Christian missionaries was the Cyrillic alphabet, developed by two brothers, Cyril and Methodius, who were missionaries to the Slavic people in the ninth century. The Slavs did not have an alphabet, so Cyril invented an alphabet especially for them. He mostly used Greek letters, but he also used some Armenian and Hebrew letters, as well as some letters he made up for particular Slavic sounds. The Cyrillic alphabet is still used in Russia, Bulgaria, Serbia, and among other Slavic peoples.

Mary Jones' passionate desire for a Bible and the establishment of the British and Foreign Bible Society was an outgrowth of the worldwide Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century. It arose contemporaneously and as a servant of the many missionary societies. The London Missionary Society was established in 1795, the Church Missionary Society in 1799, and the Methodist Missionary Society in 1813. The Second Great Awakening in America similarly led to the establishment of numerous societies to aid in spreading the Gospel, including the American Bible

Society (1816), American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (1810), American Tract Society (1826), and the American Home Missionary Society (1826).

Interestingly enough, in 1804, the same year the British and Foreign Bible Society was established, Lord Stanhope perfected a stereotyping process which increased the economy, accuracy and quick availability of the printed material. Cambridge Press first gained access to this printing process and became a major printer of Bibles.

Mary Jones would be astounded if she could see how Bible Societies have proliferated and reached out to the world. The United Bible Societies report that in 1990 their distribution of Scripture (including everything from complete Bibles to portions for new readers, or selections) came to almost 640 million units. At least part of the Bible has been translated now in over 2000 languages. What is so impressive about this figure is that prior to 1800 there were only 66 language translations. In other words, 95% of the translations have been done in less than the last ten percent of the church's time on earth.

OPTIONAL BIBLE STUDY:

See HANDOUT 11, "The Bible Answers Eternal Questions" This handout picks up on a theme developed in the first program, namely the timeless themes and basic questions that the Bible deals with. Here is opportunity for reflection and practical application of the Bible for individual lives. Again, you will want to select the most pertinent question for your situation.

A LITTLE ABOUT US

These programs were prepared and are presented by Christian History Institute, based in Worcester, Pennsylvania.

We are a non-profit, independent Christian organization. We do not seek to advance any particular denominational agenda but attempt to serve the entire Body of Christ.

The series was written and produced by Dr. Ken Curtis who serves as President of Christian History Institute. Dr. Curtis is an ordained minister, founding editor-publisher of *Christian History Magazine*, and President of Gateway Films/Vision Video.

The video presenter for the series is Russell Boulter, a respected stage and screen actor based in London, England. He became a committed Christian while in drama school, and the Bible is an important part of his daily life.

This *Leader's Guide* was prepared by Dr. Diana Lynn Severance. Diana writes often for Christian History Institute and is feature writer for *Glimpses*. She is a historian who lives in Houston, Texas. She teaches in the public schools and, with her husband Gordon, leads church history seminars around the United States.

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