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The Word of God

2

FAITH FOCUS

How do the different types of writings in the Bible help communicate God's word to us?

FAITH VOCABULARY

Bible
inspiration
canon of
Sacred Scripture

oral tradition
literary genre
covenant

What expressions do you know that people use to get a point across?

You sometimes hear people say things that are not literally true; for example, "There must have been a million people at the game last night!" This expression is used to get the point across that there was a very large crowd at the game.

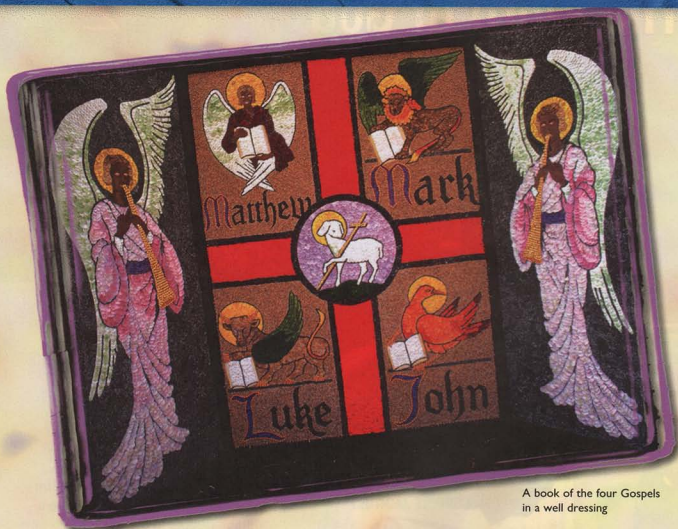
God first chose writers to write down his message to his people in words they knew and understood. These words were then translated into other languages.

Why is it important to understand there are many types of writing in the Bible?

"[W]e shall devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 6:4

God Speaks to Us



A book of the four Gospels
in a well dressing

The Inspired Word of God

The **Bible**, or Sacred Scripture, is the collection of all the writings God has inspired human authors to write in his name. This means that God is the author of the Bible. We use the phrase **inspiration of the Bible** to name this belief of God's people. We believe that all the writings that make up the Bible have been written down by human authors with the help of the Holy Spirit.

The Canon of Sacred Scripture

The list of books that the Catholic Church teaches to be the inspired written word of God is called the

canon of Sacred Scripture. There are forty-six books in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New Testament.

The Church teaches that God's message, or revelation, was first passed on to us by word of mouth. We call this **oral tradition**. Eventually this revelation was written down by God's people. The writing of the Old Testament began about a thousand years before the birth of Jesus Christ. The New Testament was completed about seventy years after the death-Resurrection of Jesus.

What are some stories that have been passed down in your family from earlier generations?

Jesus, the Center of the Bible

The Bible is one book. There is an unbreakable connection between the Old and the New Testaments. The Old Testament tells us about God's plan of saving love from creation up to the birth of Jesus. The four accounts of the Gospel are the heart, or center, of the Bible, because Jesus is their center. The writings of the New Testament pass on to us the Church's faith in who Jesus Christ is and in the meaning of his life, Passion, death, Resurrection, and glorious Ascension.

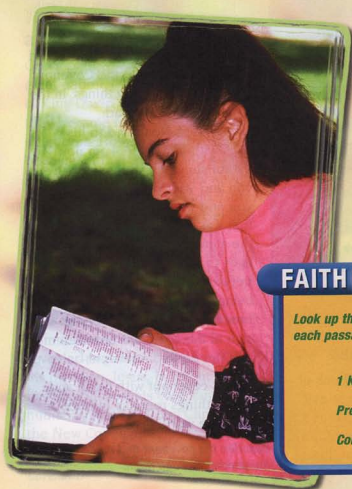
Describe the connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Literary Genre

The vast collection of books that make up the Bible include many different styles of writing, or **literary genre**. These include history (Kings, Chronicles, the Acts of the Apostles), letters (Paul's epistles), and collections of sayings (Proverbs), poetry, and other forms of literary expression.

Just as our parents and teachers speak to us in many different ways, so do the writers of the Bible. They explain, warn, reprimand, comfort, praise, and so on. Each type of writing helps us, in its own way, understand what God is saying.

The Bible is the most widely read book in the world according to the American Bible Society. This group distributes more than 200 million Bibles annually. The main languages that the Bible was first written in are Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. To date at least one book of the Bible has been translated into more than 1,600 languages. This represents the languages of more than 97 percent of the world's population. The New Testament was first printed in English in 1526 and the first complete Bible was printed in English in 1535.



FAITH CONNECTION

Look up these passages in a Bible. Name the genre of each passage.

1 Kings 5:9-14 _____

Proverbs 10:1-6 _____

Colossians 1:1-6 _____

The Story of the Covenant

Why would God inspire the people of God to write down his message? God wants everyone to know who he is and how much he wants all people to be happy with him now and forever.

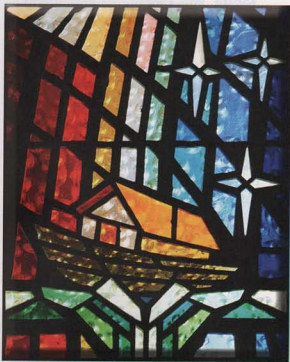
In the Bible God tells us about the **Covenant** he made with humankind. A synonym for the word *covenant* is *testament*. The Old and the New Testaments tell the story of that covenant and its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, the New and Everlasting Covenant who is the Savior of the world.

God's Covenant with humankind began at creation. God entered an agreement with humankind through Adam and Eve who had been created to live in happiness with him. God ordered Adam not to eat from "the tree of knowledge of good and bad" (Genesis 2:17). You know what happened. The serpent's temptation was too much, and the first humans chose not to keep their part of the agreement.

God did not allow his plan of creation to be destroyed. God promised to send a descendant from Eve who would one day conquer the tempter, the devil. God's plan of loving and merciful salvation began.

The Covenant with Noah

Chapters 3 through 11 of the Book of Genesis tell us about the great evil of sin and its effects on people and God's creation. We read about Cain and Abel, Noah and the great flood, and the tower of Babel.



Covenant with Noah

We learn that when sin so divided people, God renewed the Covenant with Noah and all living things. In the Book of Genesis we read:

God said to Noah and to his sons with him: "See, I am now establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you: . . . This is the sign that I am giving for all ages to come, of the covenant between me and you and every living creature with you: I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth." GENESIS 9:8-10, 12-13

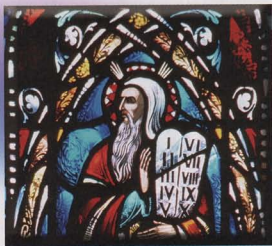
God's covenant with Noah and all living things remains in force as long as the world lasts.

Describe the covenant God made with humankind through Noah.

Abraham and Moses

God next formed a covenant with Abraham. God promised that Abraham would become the father of a great nation (see Genesis 12:1–12). As the story of the Covenant unfolds, we learn that the Israelites are Abraham and Sarah's descendants.

God would later choose Moses to lead the Israelites, or Hebrews, out of slavery in Egypt. Through Moses God would reveal his Law to them and enter a covenant with them. He would be their God, and they would be his people (see Deuteronomy 7:6–9, Jeremiah 11:4).



Moses carrying the tablets containing the Ten Commandments

The home of Abraham and Sarah was called Ur, which today would be located in southern Iraq. Archaeologists have discovered that people lived at the site of Ur from 5000 B.C. People stopped living there around 300 B.C. Remains of graves found there date from 3500 B.C. Ruins of a tower of an ancient temple still stand.

The Promise of a New Covenant

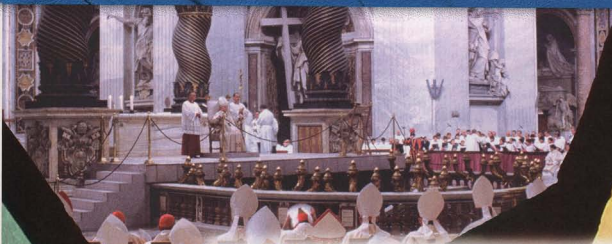
God's people eventually became a great nation. Under the leadership of King David and King Solomon, they became respected by their neighbors. However, perhaps because of their power and wealth, future kings and the people soon forgot their promises to God. God sent prophets, such as Ezekiel and Jeremiah, Amos and Hosea, to remind them of their covenant and to promise a new covenant (see Exodus 19–20).

We believe that all these events point to Jesus Christ. God has revealed himself fully by sending his own Son, Jesus, in whom he has established his covenant with humanity forever. Jesus Christ is the New Covenant.

Why do we say Jesus is the New Covenant?



Jesus, the New and Everlasting Covenant



Sacred Tradition

Part of the difficulty in understanding the Bible is the very fact that God chose human authors who used human words to tell us about himself. They wrote in their own languages truths that we might otherwise never know. So, if we know something about the writings and their language, we can better grasp the meaning of God's word.

Fortunately we belong to the Church whose understanding of these inspired writings can be relied upon. The Church is guided today by the same Holy Spirit that inspired the original writers of the Old Testament and the New Testament. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the teaching office of the Church has the responsibility of

authentically interpreting the word of God. The pope and the bishops in communion with him are the center of this teaching office.

The passing on of our faith in Christ by the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit is called Sacred Tradition. The Church passes on its faith not just in the writings of the Bible but also in her prayer and in all of the many ways that the Church lives in faithfulness to the Lord. Through Scripture and Tradition God's revelation is passed on to us. Together they make up one source, or deposit of faith. From this source we continually draw our faith and are nourished at the banquet table of God's love.

FAITH CONNECTION

Work with a partner. Brainstorm as many ways as you can that the Catholic Church shows the world she is faithful to God's message.

OUR CHURCH MAKES A DIFFERENCE



because we have just heard God speak to us. God's word has shared with us the deepest truth about life. God has spoken to us about how we can truly live in peace and happiness.

Praying the Scriptures

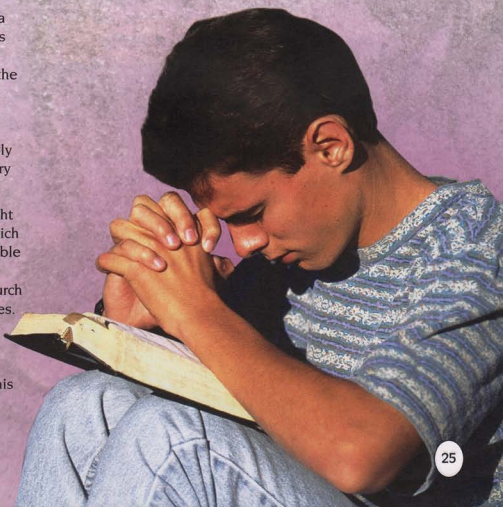
When we gather with the members of the Church to worship or when we read the Bible alone, God is always there for us. Faith in this truth is the reason we set time aside each day for reading the Bible. The evidence for this is that the Bible continues to be the most widely read book in the world.

How does your parish community show reverence for the word of God proclaimed at Mass? How can you make Scripture a more important part of your daily life?

The Table of God's Word

Sacred Scripture has always had a central place in Christian life. This is one of the reasons that the Catholic Church always includes the proclamation of Scripture as part of the liturgy, the official, public prayer of the Church. When the Church gathers for prayer, the Holy Spirit is present within us in a very powerful way.

Saint Augustine of Hippo taught that there are two tables from which we are fed at every Mass—the Table of the Word and the Table of the Eucharist. We believe that the Church draws its life from these two tables. This is why, at the end of the reading, we always say either “Thanks be to God” or “Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.” We say this



WHAT DIFFERENCE

Does Faith Make in My Life?



Listening

Listening is crucial to communication. You may believe that communication is mostly talking, but talking is only half of it. Listening is the other half. If you do not listen to what is being said, there is no communication. Sometimes when someone speaks to you, your mind will begin to think its own thoughts—to think about what you want to say. You may not even hear the other person speaking.

Communication Skills

God wants to communicate with you. The Bible is the inspired word of God. When you read or listen to the Bible being read to you, you need to remember it is God's own word you are hearing.

You may believe that it is easy to communicate. You may think that if you just speak words clearly, you will be heard and understood. But to really communicate you need to develop certain skills.

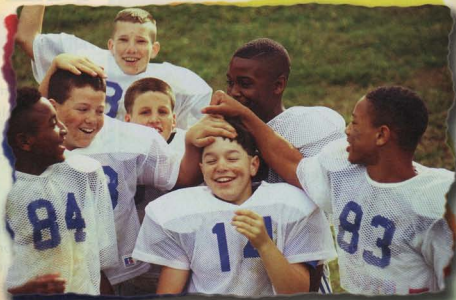


Clarification

Clarification helps you understand what the other person is really saying. This skill is needed to understand what is really being said. For example, in the Old and the New Testaments, the writers used letters, poems, histories, and other different ways to make God's message very clear. Clarifying the type of writing you are reading is very important to understanding God's message. The same is true in your communication with family members, friends, and others.

Actions

Would it surprise you to know that experts say that only about 7 percent of communication has to do with words? Most of your communication, 93 percent, has to do with your actions—your facial expressions and tone of voice. For example, you might tell someone, "I like you; you're my friend," but your mean and hurtful actions might be communicating different messages. Remember that you show your love for God and others in both words and actions.



Faith Decision

- Form a group of three that includes a speaker, a listener, and an observer. The speaker begins a conversation. The listener listens attentively and responds. The observer sits or stands behind the speaker and the listener and observes, saying nothing.
- When the conversation is finished, the observer shares what he or she perceived by answering these questions: How well did the one student really listen as the other one spoke? How clear was the exchange back and forth? What actions (tone, facial expressions, and so on) helped to make their message understood?
- If time permits, have the members of the triad switch roles.

This week I will try to communicate better with God by



PRAY and REVIEW

Praying the Scriptures

The Church has the tradition of praying the Scriptures. This practice is known as lectio divina, or divine reading. We use this form of praying to come to know God better, to listen to him speak in our hearts, and to love and serve him more.

Take the time to pray the Scriptures. Use these simple steps:

1. Choose a quiet place. Quiet your mind and relax. Remember God is with you.
2. Pray to the Holy Spirit. Ask the Spirit who dwells within you to open your mind and heart to God.
3. Open your Bible. Choose a Gospel reading. Picture yourself with Jesus.
4. Prayerfully read the Scripture. Listen attentively. God is speaking.
5. Stop often and have a conversation with Jesus. Ask him questions. Talk with him about what is going on in your life.
6. Thank Jesus for listening. Tell him you look forward to your next conversation with him.

FAITH VOCABULARY

Write a sentence that uses each of these terms correctly.

- | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Bible | 2. inspiration |
| 3. canon of Sacred Scripture | 4. oral tradition |
| 5. literary genre | 6. covenant |

MAIN IDEAS

Choose either (a) or (b) from each set of items. Write a brief paragraph to answer each of your choices.

1. (a) Explain why we say the Bible is God's own word to us.
(b) Describe the role of the human writers of the Bible.
2. (a) Describe the story of God's covenant with humankind.
(b) Compare Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. Include the concept *deposit of faith* in your response.

CRITICAL THINKING

Using what you have learned in this chapter, explain this statement:

"The Bible is no mere book, but a living creature, with a power that conquers all."

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

FAMILY DISCUSSION

How is family life a covenant between family members?

For more ideas on ways your family can live your faith, visit the "Faith First for Families" page at www.FaithFirst.com. Click on the Teen Center and read this week's interactive story.

