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# 2



## INTRODUCTION TO SACRED SCRIPTURE

*Do you not know or have you not heard?  
The LORD is the eternal God,  
creator of the ends of the earth.  
He does not faint nor grow weary,  
and his knowledge is beyond scrutiny.  
He gives strength to the fainting;  
for the weak he makes vigor abound.  
Though young men faint and grow weary,  
and youths stagger and fall,  
They that hope in the LORD will renew their strength,  
they will soar as with eagles' wings;  
They will run and not grow weary,  
walk and not grow faint.*

—Isaiah 40:28-31



## **The Game of Life**

God is the source of our strength as we face the challenges of daily living.



## **The Bible Is the Inspired Word of God**

God is the author of the Bible. The Holy Spirit inspired the human authors of the sacred books.



## **How to Read the Bible**

The Scriptures must be read in light of the same Spirit by whom they were written and in communion with the whole Church.



## **How to Understand the Bible**

There are three spiritual senses of Scripture—allegorical, moral, and anagogical—that help us look to the deeper meaning of God's Word.



## **Biblical Translations**

The Bible was originally composed in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. St. Jerome translated it into Latin, from which many English editions have been drawn.



## **Modern Approaches for Studying Sacred Scripture**

Historical, source, form, and redaction criticism help us to read Sacred Scripture prayerfully and interpret it critically.

## The Game of Life

Baron de Coubertin, a key founder of the modern Olympic games, borrowed the words for the Olympic motto from Fr. Henri Martin Dideon, the headmaster of Arcueil College in Paris: *Citius, Altius, Fortius*, Latin for “Swifter, Higher, Stronger.” Fr. Dideon used the motto to describe the athletic achievements of the students at his school. Coubertin thought these same words would be appropriate to describe the world's greatest athletes. The Olympic creed also reads:

The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part, just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well.

The Olympic motto and creed are inspirational because they challenge us to be the best people, not just athletes, we can possibly be. Compare these words to the passage from the Book of Isaiah that opens this chapter. The source of our strength is the good God who will never let us down. He will always carry us through the tough times. The goals are similar: We participate in the journey of life, hoping to be all that God intends for us, the best people we can be.



## How to Locate and Read Bible References

A typical Bible reference looks like this: Jn 1:1–18. Follow these steps to locate and read the passage:

1. “Jn” is an abbreviated title of the book, in this case the Gospel of John. (Common abbreviations for the books of the Bible can be found in your own Bible or on page 266.)
2. The first number listed is the *chapter* number; the *verse* number follows the colon (:). In this example, we should look at chapter 1 of the Gospel of John, verses 1–18.
3. The hyphen (–) indicates several chapters or verses. Study these two examples:
  - Gn 1–2 (Genesis, chapters 1 through 2, inclusive)
  - Ex 32:1–5 (Exodus, chapter 32, verses 1 through 5, inclusive)
4. A semicolon (;) separates two distinct references; a comma (,) separates two verses in the same chapter. Study these two examples:
  - Lk 6:12–16; 7:18–23 (Luke, chapter 6, verses 12 through 16 and Luke, chapter 7, verses 18 through 23)
  - Is 9:1, 3, 8 (Isaiah, chapter 9, verses 1, 3, and 8)
5. Sometimes you’ll see something like this: Prv 6:6f. The “f.” means the following verse; “ff.” means an indeterminate number of subsequent verses. Thus, Prv 6:6f. means Proverbs, chapter 6, verses 6 and 7, while Prv 6:6ff. means Proverbs, chapter 6, verse 6 and several verses that follow.

Write in your journal the full citations for the following biblical passages. Follow the format of the examples given above.

- Ps 8:1–5, 9
- Pss 8; 50; 145



- Jl 1:1–2:5ff.; 2:28–3:17
- Is 40:12–41:4; 65:17f.
- 1 Cor 10:1–13; 12:1–13:13

## For Reflection

- What one area of your life best fits the Olympic creed? Explain.
- Reread Isaiah 40:28–31. When was a time when the Lord carried you to greater heights?

## The Bible Is the Inspired Word of God

The Bible is the written record of God's Revelation. God comes to us through this collection of writings. "Through all the words of Sacred Scripture, God speaks only one single Word, his one Utterance in whom he expresses himself completely" (CCC, 102). The Bible is a great source of strength to help us live "Swifter, Higher, and Stronger."

Because Sacred Scripture is the Word of God, the Church teaches that:

- God is the author of the Bible,
- the Holy Spirit inspired the writers of the sacred books, and
- the Sacred Scriptures teach the truth.

Furthermore, if the Bible is to mean something for our daily lives, we need the Holy Spirit to enlighten our minds to understand and apply his holy word to our lives.

After Jesus rose from the dead, he appeared to the disciples in Jerusalem. The Gospel of Luke reports that "he opened their minds to understand the scriptures" (Lk 24:45). The Bible is not a religion textbook that we study from as if we were learning world history, geography, or languages. It is a living

book. For it to remain so, we must call on Christ, through the Holy Spirit, to open our own minds to its Good News.

## What Is Inspiration?

We use the words "inspired" and "inspirational" in common speech. For example, you might have read a story about how a teenager overcame cancer. Her faith, courage, and the support of her family and friends *inspired* her through her battle. Or say a classmate gave a particularly good talk in his bid to run for class officer. You told him his talk was "inspirational," that is, it aroused confidence in you that he would be a great class representative.

When we say that God inspired the sacred writers of the Bible, we are using the term a bit more technically. Used in this sense, it means that God is the author of the Bible; he used the human authors as his instrument to convey Divine Revelation to us. Just as you use a ballpoint pen or a pencil to take class notes, so God used the human authors as instruments to commit to writing those truths that are necessary for our Salvation, and to do so without error.

Take this analogy another step: When you take notes in class, you are the author of the notes that end up in your notebook. The pen or the pencil is the instrument you use to get the notes down on paper. Each instrument has its own characteristics (for example, black ink for your pen or erasable lead for your pencil), but the notes that result from either the pen or the pencil will be the same. You are the author of them, even though the writing will look different depending on the instrument you used.

God used the human authors of the books of the Bible as his instruments to reveal the truths of our Salvation. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, the human authors drew on their own background, education, skill and talent as writers, vocabulary, and so forth to write what God intended for people to know. God respected the freedom of the human writers, but in every case, the Holy Spirit guided the author in the truth. The end product is the inerrant Word of God:

The inspired books teach the truth. "Since therefore all that the inspired authors or sacred writers affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our Salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures" (*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, No. 11; CCC, 107).

## For Review

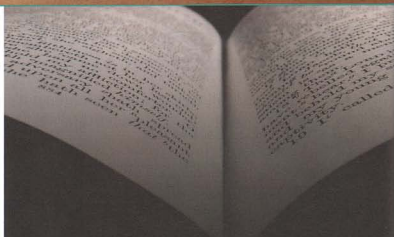
1. How is the Bible the inspired Word of God?
2. How is the Bible inspired?
3. Why should we accept the Bible as inerrant?

## For Reflection

- Write your own definition of *inspirational*.
- What is the most inspirational book you've ever read? Why?
- What kind of music inspires you? Explain.
- Who is the most inspirational person you know? What qualities does this person possess? How would you like to be like this person?

## How to Read the Bible

The purpose of interpreting the Bible is to discover what God wanted the biblical authors to reveal for the benefit of our Salvation. Because God speaks to us in a human way, when we read the Bible we must pay attention to what the human authors wished to say and to what God wanted to reveal through their words.



## EXPLAINING THE FAITH

*Isn't the Bible just a story about the past? Why do people today think it applies to them?*

It is true that Sacred Scripture contains stories, history, poetry, and many teachings about events in the past, but these events are part of Salvation History. The message it contains is timeless, just as Jesus Christ and the Salvation he won for us are timeless.

The Bible is the living Word of God. Although the content is rooted in specific historical events, the message of Sacred Scripture will never grow old. God continues to speak to us through his holy Word. The Church recognizes this in her liturgies, which always contain readings from Sacred Scripture. It is also important to focus our personal prayer on Scripture.

To discover the human authors' intentions requires diligence. It requires learning how the history of their time and culture influenced them. It also means studying their language and how they used it to express themselves. A major factor in getting at the authors' intention is to identify the literary form or genre of their writing. (See below for various types of literary forms.)

In addition, since Sacred Scripture is inspired, it "must be read and interpreted in the light of the same Spirit by whom it was written" (*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, 12 §3; CCC, 111). The Second Vatican Council taught three ways for

interpreting Scripture in accordance with the Holy Spirit who inspired it.

First, note the content and unity of the whole Scripture. Even though the various books may be different, Jesus Christ is the Word of God, the center and heart of Sacred Scripture. The Old Testament prefigures him and illuminates the New Testament. The entire Bible must be read in light of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. Similarly, because the Old Testament retains its own value as Divine Revelation, the New Testament must be read and understood in light of the Old Testament. As St. Augustine put it, “The New Testament lies hidden in the Old, and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New” (quoted in CCC, 129).

Second, “read the Scripture within ‘the living Tradition of the whole Church’” (CCC, 113). Recall that Sacred Scripture is one of two parts of a *single* Deposit of Faith. The other part is Sacred Tradition. God gave Sacred Scripture to the whole Church. Therefore, to interpret the Bible properly, we should read it within the living Tradition of the

Church. Christ left the authority to interpret Sacred Scripture with the Magisterium, which is the Pope and the bishops united with him. Just as the Holy Spirit enlightened Church leaders to recognize which ancient books were inspired, so he guides the Magisterium to help us understand the meaning of God’s Word and how to apply it to our daily lives. Without the help of the Magisterium our personal interpretations of Scripture may be wrong.

Third, pay attention to the “analogy of faith.” The analogy of faith is the unity “of the truths of the faith among themselves and within the whole plan of Revelation” (CCC, 114). Simply put, this means that truths revealed in Sacred Scripture cannot contradict each other. God’s revealed truths make sense, one with the other. Therefore, in explaining what the Bible means, it should be done in such a way that it is in harmony with all of God’s Revelation, including the teaching of the Magisterium.

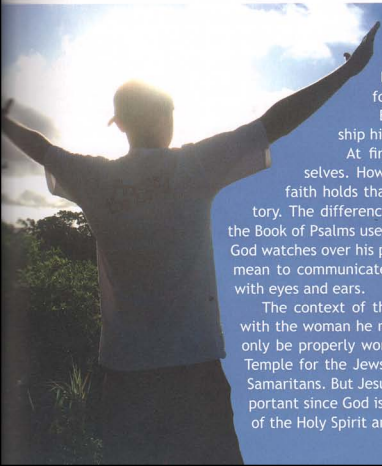
## AN ANALOGY OF FAITH

What is meant by “analogy of faith”? Consider the following example: Psalm 34:16 says, “The LORD has eyes for the just and ears for their cry.”

But John 4:24 says, “God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth.”

At first glance, these passages seem to contradict themselves. How can a spirit have eyes and ears? But the analogy of faith holds that Revelation in the Sacred Scripture is not contradictory. The difference is understood by recognizing how the passage from the Book of Psalms uses a *figure of speech*. The intent was to emphasize how God watches over his people and listens to their prayers for help. It does not mean to communicate that God is a physical being like humans, endowed with eyes and ears.

The context of the passage in John’s Gospel concerns Jesus’ dialogue with the woman he met at a well in Samaria. She believed that God could only be properly worshiped in a particular place, either in the Jerusalem Temple for the Jews, or in the Temple erected on Mount Gerizim for the Samaritans. But Jesus tells her that the physical place of worship is not important since God is a spirit. He can be worshiped anywhere with the help of the Holy Spirit and in truth.



### literal sense (of the biblical text)

"The literal sense is the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture and discovered by exegesis, following the rules of sound interpretation" (CCC, 116).



### literary genre

A type of writing that has a particular form, style, or content.

### exegesis

The process used by scholars to discover the meaning of the biblical text.

## Literary Forms

Part of the task of interpreting Scripture is to identify the kinds of writing or various literary forms so we can understand and interpret God's Word correctly. Imagine reading this headline in your local paper: "Padres Slaughter Tribe!" If this appeared on the front page of the newspaper, you could possibly conclude that some missionary priests went crazy and decided to eliminate some native people. But if you read the same headline on the sports page, you would probably conclude that the San Diego baseball team defeated the Cleveland Indians, and by a wide margin!

The context of the headline is crucial in this example. Additionally, editorial writing differs from news reporting. What appears in a horoscope differs from news analysis. Sending an e-mail to your girlfriend is not the same as writing a letter to your grandmother. Instant messaging a friend about an upcoming party differs from filling out your first job application.

Context is also vitally important in scriptural interpretation. Determining context in the Bible first involves identifying the **literary genre** being used by the author. A literary genre or form is a type of writing that has a particular style or content. The seventy-three books of the Bible contain many literary genres.

Catholics typically rely on the work of biblical scholars working under the Magisterium to understand the meaning of difficult biblical texts.

**Exegesis** is the process used by

scholars to discover the meaning of the biblical text. Some of the work they do in their studies will be described in the section "Modern Approaches for Studying Sacred Scripture" (pages 39–41). Identifying the literary genre helps anyone who reads the Bible to determine the literal meaning or **literal sense** of the biblical text. "The *literal sense* is the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture and discovered by exegesis, following the rules of sound interpretation" (CCC, 116).

There are several types of literary genres in the Bible. In some cases, entire books of the Bible consist of one literary form. For example, the First Book of Samuel is a *historical book*, Amos is *prophecy*, the Psalms are *poetry*, and most of the books attributed to St. Paul are *letters*. Even within these larger works, we find smaller literary forms like *genealogies*, *miracle stories*, *prayers*, and *parables*. Examples of these and other literary genres from the Old Testament and New Testament are listed below:

- **Allegory:** an extended comparison where many elements of a story stand for deeper realities like abstract ideas, moral qualities, or spiritual realities (see Proverbs 9:1–6).
- **Biography:** a written account of a person's life (see Jeremiah 26).
- **Creed:** a formal statement of religious belief (see Deuteronomy 26:5–10).
- **Etiology:** a story that gives the cause of something (see Genesis 32:22–32).



- *Fable*: a brief story with a moral; often uses animals that act and speak like human beings (see Judges 9:7–15).
- *History*: a chronological narrative or record of events, as in the life or development of a people, country, or institution (see 1 Kings 1–2).
- *Law*: a rule of conduct or standard of behavior established by proper authority, society, or custom (see Ex 20:1–17).
- *Prophecy*: an inspired utterance made by a prophet, which expresses God's will (see Amos 1–2).
- *Genealogy*: a record of one's ancestors (see Matthew 1:1–17).
- *Hyperbole*: a deliberately exaggerated saying to highlight the topic under discussion (see Matthew 18:8).
- *Miracle Story*: for example, a nature miracle is a report of a powerful sign performed by Jesus to show his mastery over the elements (see Luke 8:22–25).
- *Riddle*: a question or statement that teases the mind; it requires thought and application (see Matthew 11:11).

## EXPLAINING THE FAITH

*Who are fundamentalists? How do they read the Bible? What is the difference between a "literal" reading and a "literalist" reading of the Bible?*

Christians known as "fundamentalists" believe in the sole primacy of Scripture. They also allow for private interpretation of biblical texts and a literalist interpretation of Scripture. This view is not correct. Christian faith is not a "religion of the book." Rather it is a religion of the living Word of God. Catholics look to both Scripture and Tradition as having their common source in the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Further, only the Church's Magisterium can give an authentic interpretation of Scripture.

Fundamentalists read the Bible in a literalist sense. This means they ignore various literary forms and the cultural and historical factors of the period in which the biblical authors wrote.

There is a major difference between the "literal" sense of Scripture and a "literalist" approach. The literal interpretation takes into account what the author intended to convey. For example, "It's raining cats and dogs" means, in a literal sense, "It's raining hard." In contrast, a literalist interpretation takes the exact meaning of the words without considering any other factors. "It's raining cats and dogs" means cats and dogs are falling from the sky.

Note how a literal reading of the two creation accounts in Genesis (1:1–2:2 and 2:4–22) can explain apparent contradictions. A literalist interpreter would be at a loss to explain how God created humans last in the first creation account but first in the second account. Fundamentalists would conclude that God created the earth in seven twenty-four hour days, the equivalent of one of our weeks. This literalist, fundamentalist way of reading the Bible does not consider changes in language over the centuries, nor does it account for the cultural differences between our age and that of biblical times.

The Church holds that the Bible faithfully teaches the truth that God wishes to convey to us. The primary purpose of the Bible is to present the religious truths that God wishes to reveal through the events of Salvation History. In sum, under the guidance of the Magisterium, biblical scholars and individuals work to find the literal sense of the biblical words—what the author intended. Literalism fails to do this.

- **Parable:** a vivid story told to convey religious truth, usually with a surprise ending (see Matthew 13:33).
- **Pronouncement Story:** a passage whose purpose is to set up an important saying (see Mark 3:1–5).

## For Review

1. Read each of the following passages. Identify its likely literary genre: 1 Samuel 17:1–54; Leviticus 23:1–14; Acts 19:1–12; 1 Corinthians 15:1–8; Luke 12:49.
2. What is meant by the “analogy of faith”?
3. What is the *literal sense* of the biblical text?
4. Define and give an example of five literary forms found in Sacred Scripture.
5. What is the difference between a “literal” and a “literalist” reading of the Bible?

## For Reflection

Share an example from your experience (other than the Bible) where reading in context was crucial to your understanding of the material.

## How to Understand the Bible

The starting point for understanding Sacred Scripture is what the author intended by the words he wrote, the *literal sense*. But the Bible also has a *spiritual sense* that depends on the literal sense. The literal sense concerns the meaning of the words of Scripture; the spiritual sense refers not in the words themselves but by the “realities and events” that can be signified by them. It is the spiritual sense that

looks to the deeper meaning of various scriptural passages as part of God’s overall plan of Salvation. There are three spiritual senses of Scripture:

1. **The allegorical sense.** An allegory is a metaphor or “sustained comparison.” In an allegorical work of literature, for example, the story line conveys more than one level of meaning at the same time. Taken in total, an allegorical reading of Scripture looks at the entire Bible, especially the Old Testament, in light of its fulfillment in Christ. Therefore, when we study the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites, we see it prefiguring Christ’s victory over sin. We can also understand the waters of the Red Sea as a symbol for Christian Baptism, a sign of our freedom from sin in Jesus Christ. Or, the Paschal Lamb sacrificed for the feast of Passover is a clear foreshadowing of the Lamb of God—Jesus Christ—who gave up his life to win our Salvation.
2. **The moral sense.** God’s Word is intended to lead us to live a good life, to act justly on behalf of God and other people. Thus, the words of the prophets telling the Chosen People to obey God’s Commandments also apply to us. When reporting the punishments that resulted from the sins of the Chosen People, St. Paul wrote, “These things happened to them as an example, and they have been written down as a warning to us” (1 Cor 10:11).
3. **The anagogical sense.** Still another way to view God’s Word is to look at earthly events and other realities in the context of leading us to Heaven. Our final goal is to get to Heaven, and the Bible shows us the way. (The word *anagogical* comes from the Greek word for “leading”). For example, we can see the Church as a symbol of the heavenly Jerusalem. The Church, which is the Body of Christ, leads us to our eternal destiny.

In summary, there are four senses of Scripture:

# EXPLAINING THE FAITH

*Are historical and scientific truths and Biblical truth at odds?*

We must always remember that the Bible is not a science book or a history book. Its purpose is not to explain scientific facts from modern biology, chemistry, or astronomy, or historical facts that have to do with exact dates for events like the creation of the world. The Bible is a written record of Divine Revelation. God inspired its authors to reveal religious truths. As noted, the Bible contains many literary forms, including poetry, parables, prayers, and, of course, historical narratives. One of the main responsibilities of the Magisterium is to help identify the truths of the faith revealed in Sacred Scripture and explain how they relate to scientific and historical research. These truths reveal who we are in relation to God and the world he created. They tell us that we are material-spiritual beings made in God's image and likeness. And they reveal our destiny—eternal life of union with a loving, Triune God.

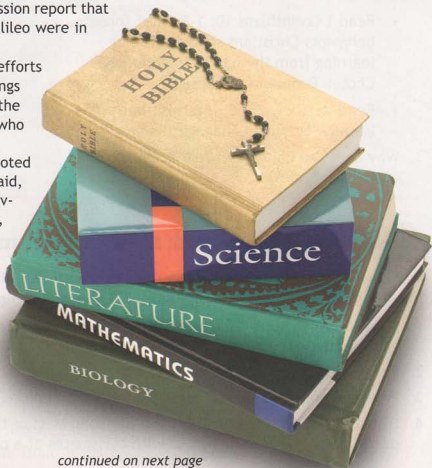
The Catholic Church welcomes the research of historians and scientists because “truth does not contradict truth.” For example, consider the work of historians who have examined the events depicted in Sacred Scripture to see if there is any record of them elsewhere. Nothing is more important than the existence of Jesus himself. Was there really such a person? Or was he just the invention of the early Christians? Historians, including non-believers, have looked into this question. And, drawing on records from Roman and Jewish historians, and judging the New Testament to be historically reliable, they have proven the following:

- Jesus of Nazareth did indeed exist.
- The Romans under the prefect Pontius Pilate crucified him.
- He established a Church that persists to this very day.

Believers have nothing to fear from open-minded historical research. This is why popes have opened up the Vatican archives to researchers. Pope John Paul II even appointed a commission of historians, scientists, and theologians to reexamine the famous case against Galileo Galilei (1564-1642). The result of the open search for truth was the commission report that said that the judges who condemned Galileo were in error.

Similarly, the Church appreciates the efforts of scientists who help explain the workings of the universe. Their research reveals the marvelous genius of our Creator God, who brought everything into existence.

Cardinal Baronius (1538-1607), quoted often by Galileo, put it well when he said, “The Bible teaches us how to go to Heaven, not how the heavens go.” Simply put, scientific research and Christian faith do not exclude each other. Consider the theory of evolution and the origins of human life. Nothing in this theory denies or is opposed to the existence of a loving, Divine Creator as depicted in Genesis, who brought everything into existence out of nothingness. Good science does not, and cannot, say that humans resulted from chance in a random universe. Good science cannot exclude the existence of God, who is the first cause of creation.



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1. The literal sense teaches history, for example, what the words say in a historical context.
2. The allegorical sense teaches what you should believe, that is, what the words mean in the larger context of Salvation History.
3. The moral sense teaches what you should do regarding how to live your life.
4. The anagogical sense teaches where you are going, building up the virtue of hope while leading us to Heaven.

## For Review

1. What are the three spiritual senses of Scripture? Give an example of each.
2. For the passages given below, briefly summarize the *literal sense* of the passage by answering the questions that follow:
  - Compare Genesis 1:1-2 and Matthew 3:16. What is the connection?
  - Read 1 Corinthians 10: 1-14. List three behaviors Christians should avoid by learning from the bad example of the Chosen People in the desert.
  - Read Matthew 7:1-5. Interpret both literally and in an anagogical sense.
3. Why does the Church not fear scientific or historical studies?

## EXPLAINING THE FAITH *continued*

Again, there is no conflict between the religious truths that Scripture reveals and the truths that science or history discover and report. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (159) says it well:

Though faith is above reason, there can never be any real discrepancy between faith and reason. Since the same God who reveals mysteries and infuses faith has bestowed the light of reason on the human mind, God cannot deny himself, nor can truth ever contradict truth (*Dei Filius* 4; DS 3017).

Consequently, methodical research in all branches of knowledge, provided it is carried out in a truly scientific manner and does not override moral laws, can never conflict with the faith, because the things of the world and the things of faith derive from the same God. The humble and persevering investigator of the secrets of nature is being led, as it were, by the hand of God in spite of himself, for it is God, the conservator of all things, who made them what they are (GS 36 §1).



## Share God's Word: Make a Bookmark for Christ

Matthew's Gospel ends with Jesus commanding his disciples to share the Gospel with all people (Mt 28:18-20). Here is an activity to help you to take up that charge:

1. Locate your favorite Scripture passage, one you wish to share with others. For ideas for good verses, search the Internet under the topic "famous Bible quotes."
2. Then create your own bookmarks. Insert appropriate clip art and the verse(s) you selected.
3. Print on card-stock paper, perhaps of different colors. Cut out the bookmarks.
4. Distribute to parishioners after the weekend Mass or to grade school students at the local parish school, or pass them out with classmates at a public place like the local mall.



## For Reflection

- Name an allegory with a moral message outside of the Bible that has had an influence on your life. Tell why this is so.
- In the past, what approach have you taken to reading the Bible?

## Biblical Translations

Most of the Old Testament was composed in Hebrew. The Hebrew language has origins as an ancient Canaanite language adopted by the Israelites when they entered the Promised Land. Hebrew was the living language of the Israelites until the end of the Babylonian Exile. Aramaic, the common language spoken in Babylon and the whole Middle East, then became the spoken language of the Jewish people. Small sections of the Old Testament were written in Aramaic. Jesus spoke Aramaic. By the first century AD, Hebrew disappeared as the ordinary spoken language, but it remained the sacred and literary language. Seven Old Testament books were also written in Greek.

The entire New Testament was written in Greek. *Koine*, or “common,” Greek had become the spoken language in the Roman Empire of the first century AD. Later, the common spoken language of the Roman Empire changed from Greek to Latin. In



390, St. Jerome completed the Latin translation of the Old and New Testaments. This translation, known as the **Vulgate**, became the Church's official translation of the Bible from the original languages.

Today, only scholars and other linguists are able to read and understand the Bible in its original languages.

### **Vulgate**

St. Jerome's fifth-century Latin translation of the Bible into the common language of the people of his day.

### Dead Sea Scrolls

Discovered in 1947 in caves near the Dead Sea, these manuscripts belonged to the Jewish Essene sect, which lived in a monastery at Qumran. The scrolls contain Essene religious documents, commentaries on certain Hebrew Scriptures, and ancient Old Testament manuscripts. They have proved very valuable to scholars in studying the Old Testament and for learning about some Jewish practices at the time of Jesus.

### Church Father

A traditional title given to theologians of the first eight centuries whose teachings made a lasting mark on the Church.

Your Bible is an English translation. If you include translations of individual books of the Bible, there have been almost five hundred new translations or revisions of older English versions of the Bible. None of the translators worked from the original biblical books because none of these exist. What translators use are meticulous copies of copies of the Bible. Some important biblical manuscripts have been discovered in the past two hundred years. For example, the **Dead Sea Scrolls** (discovered in Israel in the late 1940s) produced some Old Testament books that predate the birth of Christ. This was an important discovery because until the Dead Sea Scrolls were unearthed there were few Old Testament manuscripts preserved that were composed from earlier than 950 AD. In contrast, there are manuscript copies of virtually the entire New Testament books that date before 300 AD.

Some of the more important English translations of the Bible under both Protestant sponsorship and Catholic sponsorship are listed below.

### Protestant Translations of the Bible

For centuries Protestants have been using the popular King James Version (1611). Other Protestant translations include the following, all of which are available in editions approved for Catholic reading:

- *New Revised Standard Version* (1989). Using a good sense of English and sound modern

scholarship, this is the most important modern revision of the King James Bible.

- *Revised English Bible* (1992). The British equivalent of the New Revised Standard Version.
- *New International Version* (1973–1978). A conservative translation by scholars from thirty-four different denominations. Many excellent study versions of this Bible are available.

### Catholic Translations of the Bible

Until the twentieth century, Catholics relied heavily on the *Douay-Rheims Version* (1582–1609) and its revision done by Bishop Challoner (1749–1763). The *Douay-Rheims Bible* was a translation of the Latin Vulgate. In 1943, Pope Pius XII encouraged the translation of the Bible from the original languages. Two very popular and important English translations by Catholic scholars include:

- *New American Bible* (1952–1970; 1987). The Church uses this translation for the readings at liturgies in the United States. It is solid, faithful to the original text, readable, and scholarly. It is the translation cited in this text.
- *New Jerusalem Bible* (1985). The *New Jerusalem Bible* borrowed heavily from the French Bible, *La Sainte Bible*, which in turn is an important and scholarly translation from the original languages. It contains many helpful introductions and notes to guide the reader.

# DEFENDER OF FAITH: ST. JEROME (342–420)

**S**t. Jerome, the translator of the Bible from its original languages into Latin, is also an important **Church Father**.

Jerome was born in northeast Italy. He went to Rome as a young man to study Latin and Greek literature and had an early devotion to some non-Christian scholars. This education in the classics inspired him to lifelong study. At the age of eighteen, Jerome was baptized. After further travels and study, he entered a strict monastic community near his home at Aquileia. There he mastered the difficult language of Hebrew. Later, in Antioch, Jerome had a vision that criticized him for his devotion to secular learning, for being “a follower of Cicero and not of Christ.”

Ordained a priest in Antioch, Jerome then traveled in 380 to Constantinople and studied under the Church Father Gregory of Nazianzus. He eventually made it back to Rome to serve as Pope Damasus' secretary. Jerome had an explosive temper, often using his sharp pen to write fierce letters to his opponents. However, the Pope saw beneath

Jerome's sometimes-prickly personality. He discovered in him a man of unique holiness, learning, and integrity. As a result, the Pope commissioned him to translate the Bible into Latin, a task that eventually took Jerome to Bethlehem. There he founded a monastery for men and several convents for the women who studied Scripture under him.

Laboring relentlessly in a cave, Jerome, with the help of his disciples, completed his

translation and commentary of the Bible into Latin, a task that took twenty-three years. Known as the Latin Vulgate translation (382–405), it became the authorized Bible used in the Catholic Church from that time on.

In his later years, Jerome also wrote against various heresies. He corresponded regularly with St. Augustine. As an old man worn down with a number of infirmities, he died peacefully. He is recognized as one of the Church's greatest minds and defenders of the faith. St. Augustine said of him, “What Jerome is ignorant of, no man has ever known.”



Read more about the life of St. Jerome. See, for example, [www.americancatholic.org/Messenger/Sep1997/feature2.asp](http://www.americancatholic.org/Messenger/Sep1997/feature2.asp). Report on something you learned about Jerome's life or write a commentary on one of his writings.

Faithful Disciple

יהושע  
יהושוע  
ישוע

Figure 1: Three ways of writing Jesus' name in biblical Hebrew

Ιησους Χριστος

Figure 2: "Jesus Christ" in Greek

## For Review

1. In what languages was the Bible written?
2. Name two important English translations of the Bible.
3. Identify St. Jerome.

## For Reflection

Note how the following versions of the Bible translate Psalm 23. Then explain which translation you prefer and why.

- *New American Bible*: [www.usccb.org/nab/bible](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible)
- *New Revised Standard Version*: [www.devotions.net/bible/00bible.htm](http://www.devotions.net/bible/00bible.htm)
- *Douay-Rheims*: [www.intratext.com/X/ENG0011.htm](http://www.intratext.com/X/ENG0011.htm)
- *King James Version*: [www.bartleby.com/108](http://www.bartleby.com/108)

## EXPLAINING THE FAITH

*How important is the Bible for Catholics?*

Sacred Scripture is an integral part of the Catholic Church. The Bible has a central role to play in Catholic prayer life. For example, Scripture readings are integral to every Mass and all the other sacraments. Scripture is also at the heart of the **Liturgy of the Hours**, or Divine Office, which is the public prayer of the Church that praises God and sanctifies the day. The Psalms are featured in a special way in the Liturgy of the Hours, which consists of Morning and Evening Prayer, Daytime Prayer, and Night Prayer. As official representatives of the Church, priests pray the Divine Office each day, but all Catholics are encouraged to pray the Liturgy of the Hours as a way to join in the daily prayer of the Church.

Especially since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the Church encourages us to use the Bible in personal prayer. Today, many parishes foster Scripture study and prayer groups as a way to grow in holiness. St. Jerome knew the importance of the Bible when he said, "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ." The Church has taken this saying much to heart, teaching in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

The Church "forcefully and specifically exhorts all the Christian faithful . . . to learn 'the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ,' by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures." (CCC, 133)





## Modern Approaches for Studying Sacred Scripture

Sacred Scripture contains God's Revelation. When we read it prayerfully, we can grow closer to God and to each other. But how should you read it? Are you to take everything you read as the absolute, literal truth? How are you to understand what you read?

As we have seen, not everyone agrees on answers to these questions. Fundamentalists, for example, take a literalist approach, believing in the exact meaning of the words without taking into consideration other factors. Others treat the Bible as good albeit fictional literature that is meant to inspire us to live good lives.

In contrast to these positions, the Catholic Church teaches us to read Sacred Scripture prayerfully and to interpret it critically. The Bible is the inspired Word of God. It requires careful reading so that we can understand the literary forms, symbolism, and cultural realities that influenced it. The Magisterium, with the help of biblical scholars, authentically interprets the Word of God. The scholars use techniques of biblical criticism to study the Bible. Don't think of the term *criticism* in a negative way. Rather, it means looking carefully at the biblical texts in their historical and literary contexts. Historical, source, form, and redaction criticism involve scholarly detective work. Their purpose is

simply to help us interpret what God wanted to communicate through the original Bible writers.

### Historical Criticism

*Historical criticism* tries to determine the historical context of the biblical text. Historical criticism uses dating techniques, archaeology, and historical research to accomplish this task.

Consider an example of how archaeology assists historical criticism. Archaeology is the branch of science that studies prehistoric or historic people and their cultures. It does so by looking at artifacts, monuments, inscriptions, and the like. Biblical archaeology was popularized with the now-classic film *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. In that movie, the hero, Indiana Jones, unearths the Ark of the Covenant. The events in the film are fictional, but they raise questions like these: Was there an Ark of the Covenant? And if so, what did it look like? And

### Liturgy of the Hours

The prayer of the Church; it is also known as the Divine Office. The Liturgy of the Hours utilizes the Scriptures, particularly the Psalms, for specific times of the day from early morning to later evening.



where is it today? Historical criticism helps to answer these types of questions.

For example, historical research reveals that the Ark of the Covenant was a wooden chest, built by the Chosen People after Moses received the Ten Commandments. Exodus 25:10–22 describes its design. Exodus 37:1–9 describes its construction. Its biblical measurements were in cubits (a cubit was the average length of a forearm). It would have measured approximately four feet by two-and-a-half feet. The original tablets of the Ten Commandments—and nothing else—were placed in the Ark. The Ark traveled with the Israelites in the desert. King David brought it to Jerusalem around 1000 BC. Around 930 BC, it was in the Holy of Holies in the Temple built by King Solomon. The High Priest visited it once a year, on the sacred feast of Yom Kippur.

The last time the Ark is mentioned in the Old Testament is when the Babylonians demolished the Jerusalem Temple in 586 BC. When the Temple was rebuilt around seventy years later, there was no mention of the Ark. The scholarly consensus is that the Babylonians destroyed the Ark, melting it down for its gold. There are other theories as to what happened to it, but all these theories are speculative.

## Source Criticism

*Source criticism* is like literary detective work that helps discover where the biblical authors got their material. For example, scholars believe that the history in the Book of Kings came from court records that royal scribes wrote down. Source criticism has also noted that the author of Luke's Gospel used three main sources when he wrote his Gospel. These sources were the Gospel of Mark, a collection of writings also used for Matthew's Gospel, and a list of materials that only Luke had.

## Form Criticism

*Form criticism* involves studying small units of biblical text to attempt to determine how each book

took shape in the period of oral tradition before the actual writing of the biblical books. Second, form criticism identifies the literary genre or form. Form criticism is important for proper interpretation because each type of literature has its own way of presenting the truth.

Consider the parable of the Good Samaritan (see Luke 10:25–37). Form critics tell us that this was a story that Jesus told. Because the literary form is parable, we know that Jesus was not speaking of an actual, *historical* person. Rather, Jesus used a story to make the point to be compassionate and loving to all people, including enemies. Jesus' lesson was so important that the early Christian preachers repeated his parable in the early years of the Christian Tradition. Eventually, Luke drew from this Tradition and included it in his version of the Good News.



## Redaction Criticism

Think of a redactor as an editor. *Redaction criticism* zeros in on how the various editors put together their sources and arranged them the way they did. Redaction criticism tries to determine what theological insight a given biblical author had that influenced him in his organization of the material.

For example, consider the genealogy of Jesus. When the Evangelist Luke recorded Jesus' family tree, he traced it to Adam. Adam is the common ancestor of *all* people. This helps us to know that Luke's Gospel was written for Gentile Christians. Gentiles were non-Jews. Luke wanted to emphasize that Jesus is the Savior for all people.

The author of Matthew's Gospel, on the other hand, shows how Jesus descended from Abraham, the father of Judaism. Writing for a predominantly Jewish-Christian community, Matthew wanted to show that Jesus Christ fulfilled the prophecies made to the Chosen People, starting with the father of the faith, Abraham.

There are other types of biblical criticism, like sociological studies, but the four discussed here are among the most important. Chapter 3 takes a closer look at how the Bible came into existence. We will also study the official list of sacred books (the canon of the Bible) and discuss some of the tools you can use to read God's Word with more appreciation.

## For Review

1. List three types of biblical criticism. Explain what each tries to do.
2. Identify the Ark of the Covenant. What is most likely to have happened to it?
3. What is the point of the parable of the Good Samaritan?

## For Reflection

What is one book, story, person, or event of the Bible that you would like to investigate to find out more details about it? Which form of biblical criticism would help you most in your search?

## Main Ideas

- Sacred Scripture is the written record of God's Revelation (pp. 27–28).
- The Holy Spirit guided human authors to write the truths of Salvation (pp. 27–28).
- The Bible is inerrant (pp. 27–28).
- Sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted in light of the Holy Spirit (pp. 28–29).
- There are three ways for interpreting the Sacred Scripture in accordance with the Holy Spirit. They involve (1) noting the content and unity of the whole Scripture; (2) reading the Scripture within the context of the living Tradition of the Church; (3) paying attention to the analogy of faith (pp. 28–29).
- Identifying the literary genres of Scripture helps in interpreting God's Word (p. 30).
- There are several literary genres in the Bible, including history, prophecy, letters, and many others (pp. 30–32).
- There are three spiritual senses of Scripture that help us to understand its meaning: the allegorical sense, the moral sense, and the anagogical sense (pp. 32–34).
- There are several translations of the Bible, only some of which are approved for Catholics (pp. 35–36).
- St. Jerome translated the Bible from its original languages to Latin (the Vulgate) (p. 37).
- The Church teaches Catholics to read the Scripture prayerfully and to interpret it critically under the wisdom of the Magisterium (p. 39).
- Historical criticism, source criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism are four ways to interpret the original biblical source (pp. 39–41).

## Terms, People, Places

Write your answers to the following questions.

1. Name and define one literary genre from the Old Testament and one from the New

Testament. Give an example of each that is not named in this chapter.

2. How are source criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism examples of Scripture exegesis?
3. How does St. Jerome meet the definition of *Church Father*?
4. What is the English translation of *Lectio Divina*?
5. What is meant by a literal sense of the biblical text? What is the difference between a *literal* reading of Scripture and a *literalist* reading of Scripture?
6. How did the discovery of the *Dead Sea Scrolls* aid biblical scholarship?
7. What is another term for the *Liturgy of the Hours*?
8. Where did St. Jerome undertake the task of translating the Latin Vulgate?

## Primary Source Quotations

### *God Can Utter Nothing That Is Untrue*

It is a lamentable fact that there are many . . . whose chief purpose in all this is too often to find mistakes in the sacred writings and so to shake and weaken their authority. Some of these writers display not only extreme hostility, but the greatest unfairness; in their eyes a profane book or ancient document is accepted without hesitation, whilst the Scripture, if they only find in it a suspicion of error, is set down with the slightest possible discussion as quite untrustworthy. It is true, no doubt, that copyists have made mistakes in the text of the Bible; this question, when it arises, should be carefully considered on its merits, and the fact not too easily admitted, but only in those passages where the proof is clear. It may also happen that the sense of a passage remains ambiguous, and in this case good hermeneutical methods will greatly



assist in clearing up the obscurity. But it is absolutely wrong and forbidden, either to narrow inspiration to certain parts only of Holy Scripture, or to admit that the sacred writer has erred. For the system of those who, in order to rid themselves of these difficulties, do not hesitate to concede that divine inspiration regards the things of faith and morals, and nothing beyond, because (as they wrongly think) in a question of the truth or falsehood of a passage, we should consider not so much what God has said as the reason and purpose which He had in mind in saying it—this system cannot be tolerated. For all the books which the Church receives as sacred and canonical, are written wholly and entirely, with all their parts, at the dictation of the Holy Ghost; and so far is it from being possible that any error can co-exist with inspiration, that inspiration not only is essentially incompatible with error, but excludes and rejects it as absolutely and necessarily as it is impossible that God Himself, the supreme Truth, can utter that which is not true.

—Pope Leo XIII  
(*Providentissimus Deus*)

### *St. Jerome's Belief in the Inerrancy of Scripture*

Jerome further shows that the immunity of Scripture from error or deception is necessarily bound up with its Divine inspiration and supreme authority. He says he had learnt this in the most celebrated schools, whether of East or West, and that it was taught him as the doctrine of the Fathers, and generally received. Thus when, at the instance of Pope Damasus, he had begun correcting the Latin text of the New Testament, and certain “manikins” had vehemently attacked him for “making corrections in the Gospels in

face of the authority of the Fathers and of general opinion,” Jerome briefly replied that he was not so utterly stupid nor so grossly uneducated as to imagine that the Lord’s words needed any correction or were not divinely inspired. Similarly, when explaining Ezechiel’s first vision as portraying the *Four Gospels*, he remarks: That the entire body and the back were full of eyes will be plain to anybody who realizes that there is nought in the Gospels which does not shine and illumine the world by its splendor, so that even things that seem trifling and unimportant shine with the majesty of the Holy Spirit.

—Pope Benedict XV  
(*Spiritus Paraclitus*)

St. Jerome wrote that “Ignorance of Scripture means ignorance of Christ.” How does this statement apply to the entire Bible—Old Testament and New Testament?

## Ongoing Assignments

As you cover the material in this chapter, choose and complete at least three of these assignments.

1. Report on the history of the Bible’s translation into English. Use this website for reference: [www.biblesociety.ca/about\\_bible/english\\_bible/index.html](http://www.biblesociety.ca/about_bible/english_bible/index.html).
2. Report on the Dead Sea Scrolls. Here are some websites to start your research:
  - Library of Congress: [www.ibiblio.org/expo/deadsea.scrolls.exhibit/intro.html](http://www.ibiblio.org/expo/deadsea.scrolls.exhibit/intro.html)
  - West Semitic Research Project: [www.usc.edu/dept/LAS/wsrp/educational\\_site/dead\\_sea\\_scroll](http://www.usc.edu/dept/LAS/wsrp/educational_site/dead_sea_scroll)
  - Old Testament Gateway: [www.otgateway.com/deadseascrolls.htm](http://www.otgateway.com/deadseascrolls.htm)
3. Report on seven names for God found in the Old Testament. Present your findings

on poster board, duplicating the Hebrew lettering and English translation. Check this website for more information:

- The Names of God: [www.Ldolphin.org/Names.html](http://www.Ldolphin.org/Names.html).
4. Prepare a PowerPoint presentation on two or more archaeological sites in Israel. The following links can get you started on your research:
    - The Foundation for Biblical Archaeology: [www.tfba.org/finds.php](http://www.tfba.org/finds.php)
    - Archaeology and the Bible: [www.christiananswers.net/archaeology](http://www.christiananswers.net/archaeology)
    - The Jewish History Research Center: <http://jewishhistory.huji.ac.il/links/Archaeology.htm>
    - Old Testament Gateway: [www.otgateway.com/archaeology.htm](http://www.otgateway.com/archaeology.htm)
  5. Locate some of your favorite Scripture passages. Create a parchment-like, elegant, illustrated manuscript of your biblical passage. Do it this way:
    - Use heavy-bond paper.
    - Transcribe the verse in ink in your best handwriting or use an appropriate computer font.
    - Find an appropriate illustration that visually captures the spirit of your passage.
  6. Report on the Galileo Affair. See [www.catholiceducation.org/articles/history/world/wh0005.html](http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/history/world/wh0005.html).
  7. Copy the Lord's Prayer in a language other than English, perhaps one you are studying. Use Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:9–13). You can find various foreign language Bibles at this website:
    - Internet Christian Library: [www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/christian-books.html#bibles](http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/christian-books.html#bibles)

8. Individually or with a partner construct a model of the Ark of the Covenant.

9. Read both of these articles. Report on at least three new insights you gained from your reading:

- Elizabeth McNamer, "The Bible from Square One": [www.americancatholic.org/Newsletters/SFS/an0194.asp](http://www.americancatholic.org/Newsletters/SFS/an0194.asp)
- Sandra Schneiders, I.H.M., "Interpreting the Bible: The Right and the Responsibility": [www.americancatholic.org/Newsletters/SFS/an0997.asp](http://www.americancatholic.org/Newsletters/SFS/an0997.asp)



## Prayer

Yet another time-honored way to pray the Sacred Scriptures, and to meet the living God, is the devotional reading of the Bible. For centuries Catholics have practiced a method of prayer derived from the Benedictine tradition known as *Lectio Divina*, that is, "sacred reading." The purpose of the sacred reading of God's Word is not necessarily to cover a lot of territory or to use study aids or take notes. Its purpose is simply to *meet* God through his written word and allow the Holy Spirit to lead us into an even deeper union with him. Therefore, it is best to take a short passage, read it slowly and attentively, and let your imagination, emotions, memory, desires, and thoughts engage the written text.

Pray with the Bible using *Lectio Divina*. Select your Scripture readings from the Mass readings for the day (see [www.usccb.org/nab/index.shtml](http://www.usccb.org/nab/index.shtml)). Then follow these steps:

1. *Reading (lectio)*. Select a short Bible passage. Read it slowly. Pay attention to each word. If a word or phrase catches your attention, read it to yourself several times.
2. *Thinking (meditatio)*. Savor the passage. Read it again. Reflect on it. This time feel any emotions that may surface. Picture the images that arise from your imagination.

Pay attention to any thoughts or memories the passage might call forth from you.

3. *Pray (oratio)*. Reflect on what the Lord might be saying to you in this passage. Talk to him as you would to a friend. Ask him to show you how to respond to his Word. How can you connect this passage to your daily life? How does it relate to the people you encounter every day? Might there be a special message in this Scripture selection just for *you*? Pay attention to any insights the Holy Spirit might send you.
  4. *Contemplation (contemplatio)*. Sit in the presence of the Lord. Imagine him looking on you with great love in his heart. Rest quietly in his presence. There is no need to think here, just enjoy your time with him as two friends would who quietly sit on a park bench gazing together at a sunset.
  5. *Resolution*. Take an insight that you gained from your “sacred reading” and resolve to apply it to your life. Perhaps it is simply a matter of saying a simple prayer of thanks. Perhaps it is to be more patient with someone in your life. Let the word the Holy Spirit spoke to you come alive in your life.
- *Reflection*: Which passage spoke most deeply to your heart? Why?
  - *Resolution*: Try the form of praying for at least ten minutes for the next two weeks.