



Lesson One

God's Word, The Bible

Evidence Points to the Bible

For generations, humankind has been searching for answers to deep questions.

Where do we come from?

What happens when we die?

Many answers have been promoted for these and other of life's abstract concepts. Some have sought answers in dreams while others believe science has the key.

Perhaps the most frustrating is when someone claims

to have the answers to life's great questions, but fails to provide the evidence. They use twisted logic to promote ideas that, at best, don't make sense, and at worst, can cause people significant harm.

What if someone told you there was a book that held the answers to the great mysteries of life? Would you read it? Of course you would! Many would line up to get a

glimpse of such a book. Scientists and historians would want to test the book to validate its authenticity.

Many people propose that the BIBLE is such a book. For millions of people throughout the world, the bible has provided satisfying answers to the great mysteries of life. What's more, the bible doesn't just provide answers; it gives guidance on morality, health and wellbeing, and practical advice for everyday living.

The bible does have its doubters though. Like any work of great influence, there are those who question the teachings of the bible, and others still who disagree with what the bible has to say.

Does the bible hold all the answers? The bible claims to be written 'words of truth'

(Ecclesiastes 12:10), any many of its claims have been substantiated. For instance, we know that the bible figure Abraham was born around 2166 BC, and lived in the Sumerian city of Ur. Many of the once-thought made up tales have been proven through archeological digs, including the city of Jericho discovered in 1868.



Dwellings in Jericho

Image credit to A. Sobkowski

Some claim the bible is out of date, but is that true? In fact, many of the stances the bible took on subjects such as women's rights and slavery were *ahead* of the times they were written. For example,

Old Testament laws found that if a man sold another as a slave, he was to be put to death (Exodus 21:16).

Whenever the Israelites conquered a land, they were allowed to employ the captives taken in their homes as 'bondservants', or people who worked in exchange for food and living space. Even though these people were not Israelites, the Law still protected their welfare (Exodus 21:20-27).

At the time, this sort of protection was unheard of. The prevailing laws of the time dictated that men could be taken as slaves and sold for proof of purchase. If a slave tried to rebel against this treatment, his ear would be cut off.

These examples prove that the bible was certainly more morally inclined than the era

it was written in. Yet that is not the only proof the bible has on its side. Generally, scientists have found that the bible agrees with modern discoveries, well before they were even thought of. The bible is not a science book, and never claims to be. Still, when it does talk about a scientific subject, the bible is always accurate. The bible stated that the heavens were created before the earth, which is true; the universe was created in the Big Bang, and millions of years later the earth formed from a debris cloud caught in the sun's gravitational field. The prevailing belief of the time was that the earth was formed out of a great flood, and that the people were created to bear the gods' workloads.

Another thing that stands the bible away from other books

claiming to have answers to life's great questions is the matter of *prophecy*.

Throughout its many pages, the bible makes some 2,500 prophecies, 2,000 of which have already come true.

These did not happen in a vague sense where you could sort of attribute the event to the words prescribed in the bible; no, these events occurred *exactly as the bible writers recorded they would*. The odds of this happening by chance are so numerically slim as to be negligible.

The bible even records events we're seeing today!

Discussion: read **2 Timothy 3:1-5** and discuss with your teacher the following points:

- How does the bible describe the attitudes of people in the Last Days?

- Are we seeing these attitudes today?

What does all of this evidence tell us about the bible? Can we trust this book to give us answers to life's greatest questions? If anything, this lesson has taught us so far that there is no other book like the bible. The bible can change your life. By studying it and learning the lessons imparted therein, we grasp answers to mysteries that have plagued mankind since the dawn of time.

Discussion: read **Hebrews 4:12** and discuss with your teacher the following points:

- What makes "the word of God is living and active"?
- How does the bible "discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart"?

The Divine Author



A careful examination of the evidence shows us that the bible can only have one source: a divine inspiration. The subject of the divine, what it is and how we can know it, has been around since man first walked on earth. There have been many texts throughout history trying to explain the divine in relatable terms. The bible is perhaps the best of them.

Proving God exists is not a topic of this lesson, but we can certainly ascertain the relationship between such a God and the bible. In fact, if God is real, *the bible certainly does come from Him*. In fact, many consider the bible itself to be proof of God's existence. How could such a well-informed,

prophetic and moral book exist at all without divine interference? How can this book tell of things man simply could not have known in such great detail if not for Godly wisdom?

The bible was written over the span of thousands of years, with hundreds of writers to its name. The likes of Moses, King David, and the Apostle Paul are all known to have written portions of the bible. Which begs the question: if men wrote the bible, how can we claim it has a divine author?

While men might have put pen to paper - so to speak - to write the words of the bible, that does *not* make them the author. Let's look

at a modern example. If a person has an idea for a book, that book is their work. However, they might choose to hire someone to write the book out for them. This practice is known as *ghost writing*. The writer is just that, a writer. The *author* is the one who had the idea and, presumably, planned out the whole thing. The intellectual property that the book consists of belongs to the author, not the writer, which is why the author's name goes on the book, not the writer's.

Like our modern example, the likes of Moses, David, and Paul were ghost writers for a book that didn't belong to them. The divine author of the book makes Himself clear. Even the writers themselves acknowledged the divine inspiration for the bible as they wrote it!

1 Thessalonians 2:13 shows how the early assembly knew God was the author, not the men who wrote it.

Discussion: If the men who wrote down the bible records are considered ghost writers, who does the intellectual property of the bible belong to?

That may leave you wondering, how did God manage to get men to write this amazing collection of books? It's not like God called them up on cell phones, or sent them an email distributing all of the important facts of His plan?

In fact, God did something much more spectacular. God put His own thoughts into the minds of men. Remember, we're talking about a spirit creature, not a physical person. God is a

powerful entity, with the ability to do many things man cannot. Men can speak to each other with mouths and words. God used the power of His holy spirit to impart information directly into the minds of men (2 Peter 1:21).

God also used this power to allow man to discern *which* scriptures written throughout history belonged in the bible canon. Philippians 1:9-10 shows us that God used His spirit to grant heavenly wisdom to certain men. Those men were then able to 'distinguish good from evil'. This practice allowed them to know which scriptures were divinely inspired and which were the works of the men who wrote them. This practice protected the people from being taken advantage of through spurious scriptures.

Much of the early bible was written on papyrus or leather skins. This material was the only one available to man at the time. It is easily erodible, something that does not last long. So God put extra protection on His words. For thousands of years, men have carefully copied scripture *by hand* to preserve them. This practice would have been arduous and taken possibly the lifespan of the copyist. Yet they persevered.

We know that the ancient writings we have are accurate to the historical scripture by looking over our oldest surviving manuscripts. For the Old Testament, that includes the Dead Sea scrolls, which are dated to around the 3rd century BC. For the New Testament, that includes Papyrus 52, or P52, which dates to the 2nd century AD. Examination of these oldest

manuscripts show us that the bible has retained much of what was originally written, with little to no inaccuracies.

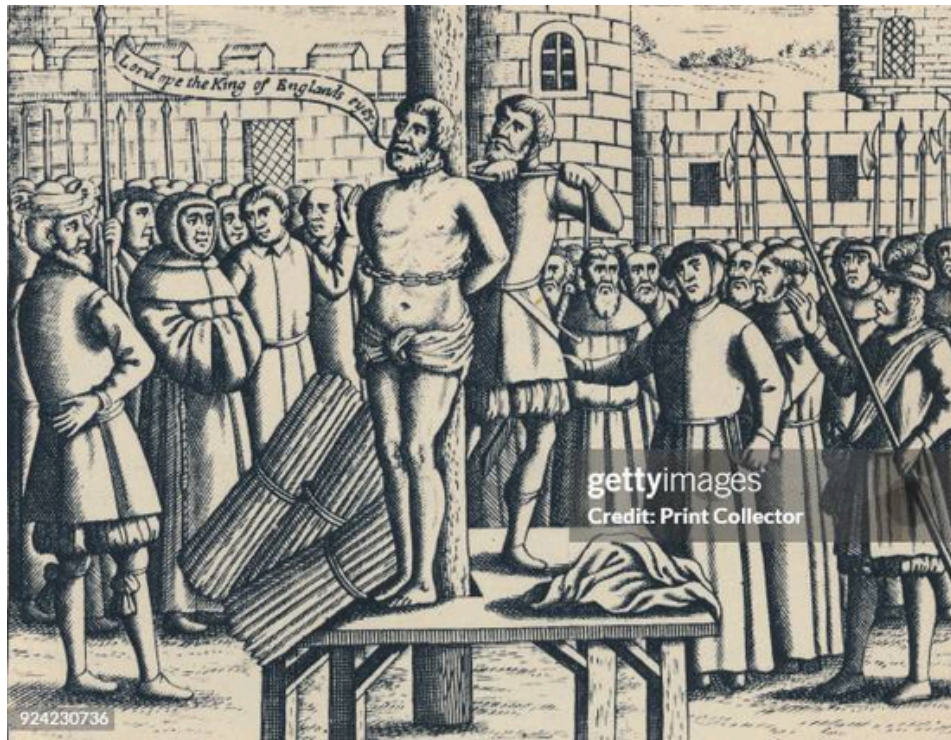
That is not to say that the bible hasn't been altered throughout the years. Whether through well-meaning scribes or by accident, there have been spurious scriptures recorded in the bible. Historians today work tirelessly to catalog these errors and remove them from doctrine. Yet even so, most of what the bible records today is true to the oldest manuscripts we possess, proving that God has shown favor to preserve His word for all of mankind.

Discussion: How do certain errors get into the bible? Does that mean we cannot trust the bible?

The bible has proven to be a

book, not just for one group as originally thought, but for everybody. Today, the bible has been translated into almost 800 languages, with portions of scripture being translated to over 1,700 languages. The advice and knowledge given within its many pages proves the bible to not be limited to one area or culture. Everybody can use the advice written in the bible to improve their lives.

Over the years, there have been efforts to destroy or hide the bible. In the past, religious leaders forbade the translation of the bible into the common tongue. Yet many have risked their lives to translate bibles so that everyone could read them. Many were put to death for their efforts.



The burning of William Tyndale
From John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*.

Discussion: Read **Acts 10:34-35** and discuss the following:

- Why did people risk their lives to translate the bible?

Discussion: Why would church leaders try to hide the bible from parishioners?

A Brief History of the Bible



It is only natural after learning about the amazing truth of the bible to want to know more about where it comes from. We know the bible was written by men, but authored by God. We know that most of the bible figures existed and lived around what today we call Israel, Jordan, and Iraq. Although it would be impossible in this study to cover the entirety of bible history, we can discuss the basics of where this incredible book comes from.

The bible was copied and compiled by many people, most of whom are unknown. The original manuscripts were written and copied on papyrus and leather, sometime in the paleo-Hebrew era (1200BC). No

original manuscripts have survived. Likely, the stories were passed by oral tradition long before man learned the art of writing and reading. No one knows for sure how far back the tradition dates. While we don't have any surviving manuscripts from this time period, it is known that the original canon of the scripture, the Torah, was copied with great care to keep the original work in tact.

The Old Testament is divided into three liturgical canons; the first being the Torah (or Pentateuch, meaning "the five books") - the first five books of the Old Testament, the Nevi'im or the Prophets, and the Ketuvim or the Writings - including Psalms .

Proverbs, as well as other important biblical tales. These three collections were known as the Masoretic Tradition. In the 2nd Century BC, added texts came together with these three to form the 'official' Roman canon of the Septuagint.

The New Testament was written in Koine Greek by the Apostles shortly after the beginning of the Common Era, marked by the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. These scripts were copied by untrained copyists with great care, with many copies - particularly of Paul's letters - being distributed at one time. Around the time of the death of Paul in 68 AD, during the reign of King Nero in Rome, his letters had been widely sent around the empire in various local languages.

These major languages continued to copy their own transcripts of these letters. It wasn't until hundreds of years later, during the Council of Rome in 382 that these translations came together to form the New Testament canon, written in Latin. Later, between 385 and 405 CE, the Latin Vulgate was created as official church canon. During the Council of Trent in 1545–1563, the Catholic church reaffirmed the Vulgate as canon, while Protestants reduced the use of Old Testament Scriptures from the Septuagint - 51 scriptures in total, to the Masoretic tradition of 39.

Should we follow the Catholic or Protestant bible? The creation of Potestantism has divided Christians for centuries. Generally speaking, however, the

Masoretic tradition is preferred. Why? While the oldest manuscripts of the Septuagint are older than the oldest Masoretic text, the tradition of Hebrew scripture written in Hebrew far outdates the Septuagint, which was written in Greek. Scholars consider the Masoretic text to be more accurate. The introduction of the Dead Sea scrolls in the 1940s validates the Hebrew tradition.

In the 4th century, the Latin Vulgate bible was carefully constructed by scribe Jerome of Stridon under Pope Damascus I. There are many ancient translations of the bible into the common vernacular, but the most historically important translations include the following:

- The Wycliff bible written in 1382 in Middle English
 - The Tyndale Bible written in 1526 in Early Modern English
 - The Geneva Bible written in 1560 in Early Modern English
- and
- The King James Version written in 1611 in Early Modern English, which is still used to this day.

Today, the bible is widely translated into many languages globally. In English alone there are roughly 900 translations of the bible.

Which translations should we use? Bible students will often use many different translations to complete their studies. The most common ones are the New King James Version, the English Standard Version, and the New International Version.

How to Study the Bible



Now that we know more about the bible, perhaps you are ready to begin studying the bible. This can seem like quite the daunting task! After all, the bible is 66 books collected into one thick volume. Just to read it from one cover to the other can take well over a year. Where do you even begin?

First, it's important to know *how* to read the bible. The bible isn't one book, it's many. Most have different names, but some are continuations, almost like sequels of others. A bible verse will usually be identified by its name first, such as Psalms or John. For the books with sequels, those are called First or Second Book Name. For example,

1 Corinthians vs 2
Corinthians, denoted as numbers. Then, the verse will list the chapter number followed by the verse number. An example would be

Psalm 8:9

Here, Psalm is the book of Psalms, 8 means chapter 8, and verse 9 is the 9th verse in that chapter. This scripture reads:

"Oh Yahweh, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"

This probably helps you understand what you're looking at when reading bible verses as referenced, but maybe it doesn't help

you to know where to begin. Here are some important tips for beginning a bible study:

1. Begin with prayer

The bible isn't just a good book, it's *God's* book. As the divine author, there is no one better to help you understand the texts you will be reading. Begin a bible study by praying to God to lend you His heavenly wisdom, as He has done for countless before you.

2. Choose a topic that speaks to you.

The bible covers a wide array of topics. If you find the idea of reading the bible cover-to-cover to be daunting, perhaps pick a topic and start there. At NCMA we offer plenty of resources to help uncover bible truths related to a variety of topics.

3. Get to know the bible's characters

Throughout the bible you'll find stories of various characters overcoming struggles that range from personal to grand. Pick one of these characters and read their story.

4. Start at the beginning

Some of the most important bible accounts take place in the first books of both testaments. In the Old Testament we go through Genesis, which tells us the story of how God created the earth. In the New Testament the gospels walk us alongside the life of Jesus of Nazareth, one of the most important bible figures of all time. Begin your bible study by picking either Testament and reading through the first books.

5. Study with a teacher

You don't need to take an official college course to study the bible. However, you might still find it helpful to work through your studies with a teacher. At NCMA, we have trained ministers in our Ambassador program who can help you study the bible.

And lastly...Don't get discouraged!

Nobody ever said studying the bible would be easy. Any volume of such importance and divine inspiration is bound to be a challenging read! Yet you will be impressed with how much better your life gets when you apply the teachings found in the bible.

To learn the bible is a lifelong undertaking. You might read from cover to cover more than once, and still find you have more to learn. Yet this is not something that need be so frustrating. You are not alone. Millions of people study the bible to learn its beautiful message.

From here on in this course, we will begin to learn about the topics the bible covers, lies that are spread about the bible, and its important message for your future!