

SCRIPTURE – PART ONE
REVELATION, OVERVIEW OF SCRIPTURE & ITS DEVELOPMENT, OLD TESTAMENT

REASON & REVELATION: KNOWING GOD

We are by nature religious beings and *each of us has an empty place – a God-shaped hole* – that can never be filled by anything less than God. We are made to live in spiritual union with God, in whom we can find true happiness.

How do we discover the God who can fill this hole?

- **Natural gifts of observation & reason**
 - Natural realities, experiences of love – reason tells us something had to create such order and possibility
 - Experience voice directing us to act lovingly and generously instead of selfishly – reason tells us something greater than us is responsible for placing that voice within us
- When we listen to the message of creation and to the voice of conscience, every person can come to certainty about the existence of God. Can come to know the one true God from God's works – world and human person. That is why we teach salvation is possible for every person, even though who have never heard of Jesus Christ.
- Church makes frequent appeals to human reason in teaching about religious truths God has revealed.
- Reason can only take us so far in explaining great mysteries of life and religious truth. There are limits to human reason & reality of original sin can hamper our knowing God
- Ultimately have to trust that God has revealed to the Church what God wants us to know for our salvation.

REVELATION

- **God making Godself and God's divine plan known to the human race through words and deeds in history.**
- Communicated to us in Bible's stories of how God made Godself known to chosen people by acting throughout their history. Helps us understand the big picture of God's relationship with human race, as told in the Bible. This big picture is sometimes called **salvation history** because it shows how God has worked within the people and events of human history to restore our lost union with God.
- When these attempts met with failure, **God sent Jesus Christ into the world to be our saviour.** While remaining fully God, Jesus took on a human nature – thus he is both true God and true human. Jesus Christ is the fullest and most complete revelation of who God is.
- **The Holy Spirit inspired the biblical authors to write what God wanted us to know for our salvation.** The Spirit did not take over the biblical authors' humanity when they wrote. They were subject to human limitations, and they used their human creativity in their writing.
- We understand that the **Bible is without error in communicating what God wants us to know** for salvation without having to be historically and scientifically correct in every detail.
- **Church teaches everything we need to know about God; everything we need to know for our eternal union with God has been revealed in Christ.** Nothing else needs to be added

on or taken away – although we keep coming to new and deeper insights by reflecting on everything Jesus did and taught.

- God has provided by giving us two sources for coming to know Jesus Christ: **Apostolic Tradition and Sacred Scriptures**. Holy Spirit helped Apostles remember and understand all that Jesus did and taught. These truths about Jesus and his teaching are called the Apostolic Tradition, or sometimes the Tradition. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles handed on everything they knew about Jesus to the first Christians and to the generation of leaders who followed them. Bible, particularly the New Testament, are written portion of the Apostolic Tradition.
- **We speak of Tradition and Scriptures as two sources of revelation. They are closely connected and together form a single sacred deposit of truth under guidance of Holy Spirit. They can never be in conflict, and each one helps us to understand the other.**
- It is the responsibility of the church, through her teaching, her worship, and her ministries, to transmit to every new generation all that God has revealed.
- As the successors of the apostles, it is the particular and exclusive responsibility of the bishops in union with the pope – **who are also called the Magisterium** – to faithfully teach, interpret and preserve the Scriptures and Tradition for all believers until Christ returns in glory.

WHAT IS THE BIBLE

- Bible is **God’s word to us**, a valid **source book of God’s revelation**.
- **Sacred documents of bible mediate God’s presence to us**. Written Word of God is codification of the process of divine disclosure. Learn from Bible that from the beginning of time God desired to enter into a relationship with human beings. The Word of God helps us to understand ourselves, our place in the world, our destiny, and how we are to live our lives. It provides an ethical code and is a source of strength and nourishment.
- **Collection of 73 different books** that span course of human history from beginning of time to time of apostles. **Library of different kinds of writing or different literary forms** that were written and gathered over a period of time. The bible contains various literary genres, or forms, such as histories, stories, letters, songs, pronouncements and sayings. The cultures, perspectives, and writing talents of the authors are as varied as the books themselves.
- Word bible comes from Greek word for book – **biblos or in biblia**
- Divided into **two main parts: 46 books of Old Testament** which consists of ancient Hebrew Scriptures before the time of Christ, and the **New Testament which contains 27 early Christian writings**.
- The word **testament means agreement, covenant**. The Old Testament writings refer to several mutual agreements made by God with the Jewish people. Most particularly, it refers to the one entered into **by Moses on behalf of the people, from which we have the Ten Commandments**. With the advent of Jesus, with his life, death and resurrection, we have now entered into a new agreement, **a new covenant with God through Jesus**; hence, the New Testament. The record of this new covenant is found in the Christian Scriptures.
- In church document “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church” of 1994, Pontifical Biblical Commission insisted that, as important as it is to know what the Bible originally meant, **we must also be concerned about what it might mean in today’s world** – a world embroiled in economic injustice, war and discrimination. This means that, in our reading

of the Bible, we must be sensitive to issues of gender, race, ethnic origin, class and other political factors that make up the real world. These factors influence the way women and men perceive reality and fashion their inner and outer worlds.

- **There is only one God and that same God is revealed in both the Old and New Testaments.** There is a living connection between the Testaments. Together they tell the story of God's will to care for and save humankind – salvation history.

- **OLD TESTAMENT (HEBREW SCRIPTURES)**
 - ***The Pentateuch or Torah*** (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) These first five books are the core of the Old Testament. They tell the stories of creation, sin, and the origin of God's chosen people. About the origins of nations.
 - ***The Historical Books*** (Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I Samuel, II Samuel, I Kings, II Kings, I Chronicles, II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Tobit, Judith, Esther, I Maccabees, II Maccabees) These books tell how the Israelites settled in the Promised Land. They also tell the stories of their great – and no-so-great – kings.
 - ***The Wisdom Books*** (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Wisdom, Sirach) These are books of poetry and the collected wisdom of the Israelites.
 - ***The Prophets*** (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Baruch, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.) These books are collected speeches and biographies of the Israelite prophets and are about the constant call to be faithful to the covenant relationship during the years of settling and living in the Holy Land.

- **NEW TESTAMENT (CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES)**
 - ***The Gospels*** (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) These four books are the most important books for Christians since they convey the meaning of Christ Jesus' life and teaching as their central message.
 - ***The Acts of the Apostles*** This book is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke and tells the stories of how the early church was spread
 - ***The Epistles*** (Letters of St. Paul – Romans, I Corinthians, II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I Thessalonians, II Thessalonians, I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus, Philomen) (Other Letters – Hebrews, James, I Peter, II Peter, I John, II John, III John, Jude) These are 21 letters written by Paul and other early church leaders that give teachings and guidance to individuals and to first Christian churches.
 - ***The Book of Revelation*** This book records the visions of an early Christian named John

- Catholics recognize **7 books** in the Old Testament which are not included in the canon of most other Christian Traditions: Tobit, Judith, 1 & 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch. All Christians agree on the 27 books of the New Testament.

FORMATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

End product of 5 step process which took over 2000 years

- A long period of oral tradition and storytelling preceded the writing of the books of the Bible
- The books of the Bible are collections of writings that were written and gathered over a period of time.

- The Bible contains many different kinds of writing, all of which contribute to an understanding of an event or era.
- The Bible contains many literary genres or forms such as histories, stories, letters, songs, pronouncements, sayings.

1. EVENTS

- God revealed Godself to God's people through events which occurred in midst of community. Story of salvation history – how God has worked within people and events of human history – begins with Creation, moves through our ancestors in faith, Abraham & Sarah, and continued for about 2000 years through the events of the life of Jesus and the deeds of the first-century apostles and disciples.
- Through these revelatory events Hebrew people came to understand that the one and eternal God was present with them in their history.

2. ORAL TRADITION

- **No story about a biblical event is contemporary with the event.** All of the stories took shape over a period of time. Accounts of things **were passed on in the community by word of mouth**, sometimes for many generations. Those who were passing on the oral tradition were not trying to tell exactly what happened, but to tell the significance of the events for their own lives. Therefore, the accounts were moulded to meet community's needs, so that community would appreciate their importance. Those who told the stories were passing on the community's beliefs about God's role in the events that occurred.
 - **No claims that oral tradition is passing on exact quotations.** Passes on sense of what was understood through the event. Post-resurrection insights are placed on Jesus' lips in Gospels.
 - **Oral tradition does not pass on the social setting in which an event occurred.** That is why we sometimes read in different gospels that Jesus said similar words but not to the same audience or in the same setting. For example, in Matthew Jesus teaches Beatitudes from mountain while Luke has him on a plain. Matthew puts Jesus on mountain because he sees Jesus as new Moses and Moses was on mountain when he promulgated first Law. Setting is for theological not historical reasons.
 - **Oral tradition does not claim accuracy in historical chronology of events.** When they were collecting stories in the early church of Jesus' mighty acts, they didn't care what order these acts occurred.
 - **In oral tradition storytellers and listeners are contemporaries in same culture.** Many things presume to be known between them could be unknown to us.
 - Oral tradition produces stories that are layered with circles of details that grow up around their core.

3. WRITTEN TRADITION

- In time **various parts of oral tradition began to be written down** – oral tradition continued side by side. Over time various parts of oral tradition were written down, but always to serve a contemporary audience. And attempt to address the questions and needs of that audience.
- **Gave birth to variety of writing:** parables, miracle stories, legends, creeds, laws, poetry. Motive of writer was not to report all that had occurred but to pass on to contemporary

generation how God had acted through events in the past and to help them see how God was still acting in their own lives. For example the earliest writings of the New Testament are Paul's letters. Paul used the oral tradition about Jesus to help various communities integrate the facts of Jesus' resurrection and presence in their midst into their daily lives.

4. EDITED TRADITION

- **At various times in the course of events** that are at the core of both Old and New testaments, **inspired individuals, editors, went over the inherited oral and written traditions and arranged them into a connected narrative.** They wrote, ordered and edited accounts of all that had occurred. First five books of the Old Testament were edited a number of times: during the time of King David, after the Babylonian exile, to name two. Accounts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection were edited to produce gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke.
- In going over inherited tradition, if editors found stories that did not entirely agree with each other, they did not choose between them; rather they included them both
- Arrangement of books in Old and New Testaments is one more result of editing.

5. CANON

- **Not all accounts of revelatory events that passed through oral and written tradition are in the Bible.** Some texts did not pass the test of time – they were not experienced by community as truthfully representing their faith experiences and nourishing them spiritually. **Those texts which are in the bible are called canonical.** When we say a text is canonical we say
 - Contains revelation
 - Those who passed it on were inspired to hand on to us what God intended to communicate through them.
 - Books accepted by generations of believing community as faithfully passing on truth about their experiences and beliefs, and being spiritually nourishing: considered to be sacred texts
 - Canon established by movement of Spirit in whole community
- **While many gospels of Jesus Christ were written, only four were included in the canon** – Mary Magdalene, Peter, Thomas, Jude. etc.
- There are variations in the number of books considered sacred by Catholics, other Christian communities and the Jewish people.
- **Old and New Testament canons pronounced closed by voice of authority:** Old Testament canon at Council of Jamnia, first century, by those in authority in Jewish religion. Later Greek translation called Septuagint included books not in the original Old Testament. This Septuagint translation the one used by St. Jerome when he translated it into Latin – Vulgate translation. Seven books not included in the original Jewish translation are included here.
- **New Testament canon declared closed at Council of Trent 1545 – 1563.**

BIBLICAL AUTHORSHIP / REVELATION

- **In antiquity there was a different notion of authorship.** In many cases do not know who the biblical authors were. Many books were composed anonymously and subsequently attributed to important witnesses in the Hebrew faith and in early Christianity.

- When we claim God is the author of Bible do not mean God put pen to paper and wrote it. Nor when we use the word inspiration do we mean God dictated the text to the inspired author. **Those who wrote sections of Bible were inspired** – the writings by human authors faithfully contain what God wishes to communicate. God did not take possession of the imagination or thought of the author and dictate to this person who, in some kind of trance, recorded it for the community. When say author is inspired we mean that what they taught about God and our relationship with God was true – not that they had the God’s point of view. We do not claim that the author had knowledge on subjects not related to topic that no one else in their generation had.
- **Biblical inspiration:** believe God is ultimate author of the Bible because the Holy Spirit inspired the human authors in their writing.
- **Inspiration first of all a gift bestowed on the biblical community who first recognized God’s revelation in their lives and testified to this revelation.** Later this same gift compelled others to use that testimony in such a way that it could speak to a new time and different community. Still later, it was gift to those who wrote down the oral testimonies and memories of earlier believers so as to preserve the tradition. To say the bible is inspired is to recognize the long process of divine inspiration which affected the growth, development, and interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures. Because we say the bible is inspired we speak of truth and authority. Truth of bible is a living active truth in our very midst.
- **When we say the bible contains revelation we mean the bible teaches us about God, our relationship with God and about what God would have us do to build up the reign of God.** We mean what we need to know in order to cooperate with God’s saving grace is contained in Bible.

CONTEXT OF SACRED SCRIPTURE

- The bible needs to be placed in the social and historical context that gave rise to them
- It is important not to impose a modern interpretation on ancient texts that were written to people of another culture, place and time
- Biblical interpretation considers the original social and historical context, and relates the particular passage or issue to the whole body of the revelation of God.
- **Three important contexts to be considered**
 - **Literary form:** bible is library of books of different literary forms so must revise our frame of mind, our expectations as we move from one literary form to another. Myths, legend, parable, allegory, fiction, debate, prose, fiction, poetry, apocalyptic writing, songs & lamentations. Each of these forms is distinct and each can easily be misunderstood if it is mistaken for something other than what it is.
 - **The culture and beliefs of the time:** Culture and beliefs of those who lived at the time the book was written. Inspired writer will say something by way of application or elaboration that is not essential to the truth being taught but that makes it more understandable to the contemporary audience. Inspired author and original audience shared knowledge, presumptions, expressions and concerns that may not be part of our awareness, but may influence the meaning of the book or passage. May show cultural biases and presumptions that later generations know are inaccurate. Biblical author may apply eternal truth to a setting that is important to the original audience but not to us. Ex: one of Paul’s

key insights is that the way we treat every other person is the way we treat the risen Christ. He applies this insight to the social order of his day which included slavery. We misuse scripture if we say this shows God's social order includes slavery. We need to distinguish between the core universal truth that the author taught, and various presumptions and applications that the author has also included.

- **The process of revelation:** scripture probes mystery – it reveals a 2000 year process of people reflecting on their experience and on the significance of their experience in the context of their relationship with God. As the years passed, their insights increased, Early insights, however, were not shown to be completely wrong. Those ideas that originally may have been understood to be the whole truth were later understood to be partial insights, steps on the road to a fuller understanding of the truth.
- When we consistently ask questions about context as part of process of understanding scripture, we act as contextualists. When we do not consider context, we act as fundamentalists.

BECOMING BIBLICALLY LITERATE

- **Spend time with the word** – read it daily, read Sunday readings before going to church, go to scripture when facing difficulty, read and pray with the scriptures, keep a journal of your insights and questions
- **Become bible smart:** study the bible glossary, indexes, maps and notes; read commentaries and see resources on scripture; take an introductory course in scripture or read books about scripture. Should be able to:
 - **Find a passage in the scriptures.** Suppose you want to find Jeremiah 35:5 – 6. The word that begins the reference is the name of the book of the bible. The number following the name of the book refers to the chapter. The numbers following the colon in the reference refer to the verses. The books of the bible are listed in the beginning pages of the bible. The table of contents will tell you on what page each book begins. Often the name of the book in a reference is abbreviated. You will also find a list of abbreviations near the beginning for every book in the bible. Look up the name of the book, find the page it begins on, turn to that page. At the top of that page you will see the name of the book. Next to the name is the chapter number. Ex: Jeremiai 35. This is similar to guide words in a dictionary. The numbers of the chapters will always appear in bold print in the body of the text. The verses are numbered within the text.
 - Be **familiar with names and general order** of the books of the bible
 - Know the **divisions of the bible** (Pentateuch, historical, wisdom and poetry books, prophetic books, gospels, acts of apostles, letters and revelation)
 - **Awareness of overall biblical narrative which we call salvation history.** This is generally divided into two parts: the stories of the Jewish people told in the Old Testament and the stories of Jesus' life and ministry and the early church told in the New Testament.
 - Be familiar with **major places, people and events** in the bible
 - Know the **chronology and meaning of the major events** in biblical history
 - **Know how to ask contextual questions:**
 - What is the literary genre of the book or passage

- What historical or cultural situation was the author of the book or passage addressing
 - How does the story fit with the rest of the bible's message or teaching
 - How does the church understand or interpret this book or passage
- **Break open the word with others:** use scripture as basis for sharing and discussion with your spouse or a friend or a small group (staff at school).

OLD TESTAMENT

- **Old Testament belonged first to God's chosen people, the Jews.** These are the texts that nourished Jesus' Judaism. These are the texts that Jesus preached and taught from. After Jesus was executed and raised from death, these were the books that his disciples searched and prayed over, in hopes of more deeply understanding the meaning of Jesus' message and mission. We believe that God arranged that the New Testament be hidden in the Old and the Old be made manifest in the New.
- **THE PENTATEUCH:** The Greek prefix penta means five and there are five books in this section. For Jews the laws of the Torah were not seen as oppressive or threatening. The Law is primarily God's gift of the people. Through the law, God's will and mind is revealed to the Israelites. The people gladly learn how to live the covenant relationship God has entered into with them
 - **Genesis:**
 - **We discover the very earliest memories in the Judeo-Christian era.** Genesis 1:1 – 11:26 contains stories so old they are subtitled **Primeval or Prehistory**, referring to that period predating written records. The tales told in these first Genesis chapters found their way by word of mouth from generation to generation for a very long time before being committed to writing. Genesis was written millions of years after the creation of the world took place and thousands of years after the human race appeared on the face of the earth. Genesis is not an eyewitness account of the events . In fact, Genesis was not the first book of the Bible to be written down – Exodus was the first and Genesis came later
 - **We don't know who the authors were although they contain much which attributable to Moses' influence.** We recognize **four distinct threads** woven into a single account. These four (Yahwist, Elohist, Priestly, Deuteronomic) probably reflect oral traditions as preserved in different geographic areas. Since final word on the Pentateuch's written version wasn't completed until the sixth century B.C., it was difficult to reconcile divergent accounts of a specific episode into one. As a result Genesis sets side by side two creation stories (Gn 1:1 – 2:4a and 2:4b – 3:24) and merges two flood epics, one which speaks of saving two of every species (Gn 6:19) and one which calls for rescuing seven pairs (Gn 7:2 – 3)
 - **We do not know the details of the first sin.** All we can conclude is that the sacred writers looked at the world in which they lived and, seeing evil in it, tried to express how it all came about and what its real meaning was. With the help of God they wrote the story in Genesis to teach that from the beginning the human race sinned, bringing upon itself the evil that prevails in this world. Careful study reveals that the **author(s) of the**

creation accounts is telling us some very important religious truths in a kind of dramatic story form:

- God is the creator of the world and all that is in it, including men and women. God made it out of nothing
 - God is good, loving and provident; what God made is good
 - Humankind was ungrateful to God
 - The human race sinned and introduced evil into the world
 - Despite our sinfulness there is still hope for us all because of the goodness and mercy of God
- At **Genesis 11:27**, it's as though the curtain has fallen on the prologue to the biblical drama and risen on Act One: the Age of the Patriarchs, an era which probably began in the 19th century B.C. A patriarch was a father figure for an extended family or clan which included a multitude of servants or slaves needed to tend large herds and flocks. The constant need to feed and water these animals made life nomadic. The first historical biblical figure we meet is the leader of one of these family units. His name is **Abram, later Abraham, and it is with him that the covenant relationship with God begins**. The remainder of the book of Genesis deals with the four generations of patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, Esau and Jacob (later called Israel) and the 12 sons of Jacob, progenitors of the tribes of Israel. The focus is on Jacob's favourite son, Joseph, through the latter part of this book. As Genesis ends, Joseph, together with his father, brothers and assorted relatives are living a life of ease and comfort in Egypt's Land of Goshan
- **Exodus**
 - **Between the last lines of Genesis and the opening of exodus four centuries disappear and the situation of Jacob's descendants is radically different**. Now called the Israelites because all are from the line of Israel (Jacob), these Hebrew people are considered a threat to Egypt's security and are virtually enslaved. In terms of its ongoing significance, the Book of exodus is one of the most important in the Hebrew scriptures.
 - **Here is where Moses comes into his own**. The exodus means departure and the Israelites are off to the desert. The high point of the book is Moses' meeting with God atop Mount Sinai. It is there that the fullness of the Covenant is proposed, a relationship between the Chosen People and their God freely entered into in love and mutual respect. Once the people ratify God's proposal, this Covenant with all its requirements becomes known as the Law which would govern Israel religiously, socially and often politically for over a thousand years.
 - **Leviticus: The Law:**
 - **The third volume examines the Law in some detail...** more detail, as a rule, than most readers are up to. As a result, Leviticus is rarely first choice for reading, but it does provide particulars necessary for a real understanding of this long-standing relationship between the people of God and their Lord.
 - **Numbers: Counting Heads**
 - The book of Numbers **takes its name from the two censuses**, one in chapter one and a second in chapter 26. This book carries on the story of

the Israelites' sojourn in the Sinai Desert and can be considered an extension of the tale begun in Exodus.

- **Deuteronomy: The second law**
 - Prefix deuterio means second, so here in the last book of the Pentateuch, we find a rehash of a lot of material already covered, but it's done in a much different manner. The Law is gone over once more, this time in a series of discourses given by Moses as he appeals to the people to live up to the Covenant. As the book ends, the Promised Land (Canaan) is in view, Moses' successor (Joshua) has been appointed, Moses delivers a farewell address (chapters 32 – 33) and exits biblical stage.
- **THE HISTORICAL BOOKS:**
 - **Joshua: Journey's End**
 - **Joshua is a prominent historical figure.** To him fall two heavy responsibilities: to get the Israelites into the Promised Land and conquer such obstacles as lay in his path; to divide the newly occupied land among the tribes. Joshua was a military man, exactly what was needed for these tasks.
 - **Judges: But no courts**
 - These are not magistrates but **charismatic elders**, often of a military nature, whose assignment is to get the Israelites out of one jam or another. Following the death of Joshua, there is no central authority over the tribes, no leader or governing body.
 - What remains is a loosely knit confederation of relatively weak tribal units constantly preyed upon by stronger neighbours.
 - **This cycle of being raided and invaded is God's way of getting their attention after major breaches of the Covenant**, which more often than not had something to do with idolatry, the worship of false gods. This, sin came and punishment followed. Having their backs to the wall frequently led to fervent repentance and prayers for relief. Help, according to this book, arrived in the form of a judge who took matters in hand and got everything into shape. Among the more prominent were Deborah, Samson and Samuel. Once the judge died or departed, the cycle began again.
 - **Ruth: An interlude**
 - Story of Ruth
 - **Samuel: One and Two**
 - Here we have **historical actual events but not presented as history book.** Have salvation history, story of God, the Israelites and their ongoing endeavour to live out their Covenant. To that end, biblical writers included those episodes which served their purpose, downgraded or eliminated those that didn't. Happening which were considered of major importance sometimes appear several times.
 - Historical books **cover span of history, beginning at about 1020 BC and ending about 142 BC**, nearly bumping up against the Christian era.
 - **The two books of Samuel were probably originally a single work** and may be seen as transition books, wrapping up a period of the judges and introducing the monarchy. Samuel himself plays a dual role, last of the judges and a prophet as well. Though not a leader of all the tribes in the

sense that Moses was, he nevertheless commands respect of most tribal leaders, and it is to Samuel that they voice their desire for a king. Samuel reminds them they already have a king, God, and that they live in a covenantal relationship with that monarch under the Law.

- **What Israelites want is leader to fend off neighbours who have been disturbing the peace throughout the two centuries of the Judges.**

Samuel warns them they'll live to regret their request, but he nevertheless anoints **Saul as Israel's first king**, a reign that starts well, and ends badly, resulting in Samuel going to Bethlehem to anoint the youngest of Jesse's sons as Saul's successor. And so one of Israel's greatest kings comes to the throne – **David – who will be revered through Jewish history as the king of the golden age**. The remainder of the books of Samuel recount David's career.

- **Kings: One and Two**

- These books are **the immediate successors to the books of Samuel**. Some older bibles list all four volumes as First, Second, Third, Fourth Kings. History continues as the books open with David's farewell address and death and continue with the anointing of one of his many sons, Solomon, as the next king.
- Solomon known for wisdom and wealth. **He raises Israel to its period of greatest prominence in Mediterranean world**. He does extensive building at great cost to his subjects, who pay for it through crippling taxes and conscripted labour. Upon Solomon's death, a delegation approaches the new king, Rehoboam, begging relief.
- Rehoboam, upon consultation with his advisors, takes what is probably the worst advice given in entire Bible, telling the people that, if they think they it tough under his father, they haven't seen anything yet. Ten tribes secede and establish a kingdom of their own in the north. Hereafter, there will remain two nations: Israel and Judah.
- **The remainder of the Books of Kings documents the times of two nations and their ultimate downfall**. Israel is conquered by Assyria in 721BC, and most of its citizenry is relocated to other parts of the vast Assyrian Empire, never to return as tribal units, thus becoming known as the ten lost tribes. Judah lasts about a century and a half longer, only to fall into the hands of a later superpower, Babylonia, and most Judeans are marched into exile for some 80 years, ending the monarchy

- **Chronicles: One more time**

- The Books essentially recap most of what is in Kings. They originate from a source which also gives the next two books – Ezra & Nehemiah. The chronicler condenses the tale, adds a little more theology and includes the end of the Exile narrative.

- **Ezra and Nehemiah**

- **Post exile period of Jewish history**. In Ezra and Nehemiah we learn about the return of the Judean exiles from Babylon and the rebuilding of their homeland. By this time, all tribal identities except that of Judah have been blurred or lost and the descendants of Israel come to be known by the name of that one tribe, Jews.

- **Tobit, Judith, Esther: A novel approach**

- At this point is another interlude; three relatively short historical novels. Each is intriguing in own way. If are interested in historical can be skipped
 - **First and Second Maccabees: The hammer strikes**
 - Biblical writers have let something like three centuries slip by without comment and now direct our attention to a time not long before Jesus, **the second century BC**. In these books, the Jews are confronted with an attempt to undermine or eliminate their culture, replacing it with the Greek traditions so popular in the Mediterranean world of that time. Even the beloved Temple is desecrated.
 - These books report the attempts of Judas Maccabaeus (means hammer) and his brothers to regain religions and political freedom. Their success culminates in the glorious rededication of the Temple in a Feast of Light, celebrated today an Hanukkah.
- **THE PROPHETIC BOOKS:**
 - **The prophetic books constantly call Israel to be faithful to the covenant with God.** There are warnings of what will happen if Israel is unfaithful, but they are the loving warnings of a parent who is concerned about children who do not understand the implications of their actions. Also, the prophets announce God’s compassion and mercy for Israel, even in its failures to be faithful.
 - **Divided into major prophets and minor prophets.** The **major prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel** – are listed first. They are major not because their messages are more important, but simply because they are longer. **Hosea through Malachi, 12 minor prophets**, shorter in length, follow one by one.
 - The prophets in the two groups above are also **known as the writing prophets**. Scripture teems with prophets from whom we have not one written word: Elijah, Elisha, Nathan and so on.
 - **The main role of the prophets was not to predict the future but “to speak for” God on the issues of the day.** Hence prophets should be seen against a backdrop of the times and places in which they lived and worked. It is important, for instance, to read Jeremiah in relation to the events preceding the Exile as describes in 2 Kings 25 and 2 Chronicles 36. Every prophet was a product of his time. His primary message to God’s people dealt with the current situation and that alone, so when interpreting the prophetic books for our benefit, we should first learn what the initial intent of that message was: what problems of his time was a particular prophet addressing?
- **THE WISDOM BOOKS OR THE WRITINGS**
 - The Wisdom Books or the Writings come from a type of literature common in the Near Eastern world in the centuries just before and after Jesus’ time. In them, **Wisdom is often capitalized and personified and therefore spoken of as a living being (referred to as feminine).** Some of these books are Wisdom Literature: **Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Sirach, Book of Wisdom** (probably the final contribution to the Old Testament canon, written about **100 BC in Alexandria, Egypt**)
 - Each approaches the topic from a different angle.
 - **Job** ponders the mystery of why the good suffer
 - **Proverbs** compiles short axioms as norms for moral conduct
 - **Ecclesiastes**, Qoheleth mourns the vanity of everything that is not God, concluding that only God lasts; everything else in transient.

- **Sirach** scoops up the wisdom of past centuries and encapsulates it
- **Book of Wisdom** is lyrical in its hope for immortality, the most forceful statement on belief in an afterlife found anywhere in the old Testament (Wis 3 – 5)
- **The Song of Songs and the Psalms** are strictly speaking not Wisdom literature. The first is an epic love poem, celebrating ideal love between woman and man, which is also seen as an allegory describing the love between God and Israel
- **The Psalms are a collection (actually 5 collections) of song lyrics.** Many psalms were used in the Temple worship, and the Psalter as it exists today is rather like a modern hymnal preserved with only the lyrics, the melodic line is missing. The 150 psalms of the bible ere composed over 500 years and are of a variety of types: praise, thanksgiving, lamentation, odes to kings and so on.

COVENANT

- **Idea of covenant pervades all of scripture.** Scripture tells us of God’s covenant with Moses, Noah and Abraham. Most important covenant of all is the covenant of love made through Jesus Christ. The Bible tells story of God’s love and saving actions. We have traditionally referred to the two main sections as the Old Testament and the New Testament because the word testament means covenant. Central theme of bible is God has entered into relationship of covenant love with us. God can never stop loving us because it is God’s nature to love. The word covenant appear 289 times in the Bible. From Genesis to Revelation, the idea of covenant is the golden thread weaving in and out of the Bible’s many books.
- **What is a covenant:** Technically, a covenant (Hebrew berit) refers to an agreement made between two parties under oath to perform or refrain from certain acts. In addition, a covenant specifies both the promises and threats connected with the fulfillment or violation of its obligations. Covenants cover political as well as religious dimensions of communal life. They define social institutions as well as religious practice.. Covenants were an agreement binding on both parties - either individuals or whole communities.
 - Covenants were **usually ritualized and sealed with a ceremony** in which the covenant was recited. Exodus 24:7.
 - **The covenant and its conditions were read and agreed upon in a ritual ceremony.** Then there was a covenant celebration. In the Sinai covenant, it is sealed in a ceremonial meal. Exodus 24: 9 - 11.
 - **Most covenants have conditions attached.** In Covenant of Sinai, the response of the people is to be found in the code of the covenant – the Ten Words, Ten Commandments. The Ten Words are an instruction from the Lord on how to respond to the Lord. They teach this people how to be a free people.
- **Covenants are** open-ended contracts that are mutual, never-ending commitments of persons to each other in love. In religious context, a covenant is a solemn agreement between God and a human being or beings. It involves mutual promises. The covenant is a love bond between God and us. A love event – the covenant- precedes the law event – the Ten Commandments. These two are essentially connected. Morality is always a response to God’s saving love.
 - **God is first identified by past saving actions.** Powerful sign of God’s saving love for humanity is found in story of Exodus, through which God saved the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt and led them to freedom in the promised land. By the time the Hebrews arrived at Sinai they had experienced God’s ten mighty acts – the plagues – that led to their deliverance from Egypt. They had received manna and

quail, food for the journey. At Sinai, God told them – see how much I love you? Exodus 19: 4 – 5 Moses led God’s people from Egypt through the desert to the land God promised. The Exodus story shows us that God has a preferential love for those at the margins of society. We learn that God chooses to set us free from slavery of every kind. Testifies to a God who suffers with the oppressed, leads them to freedom, and calls them to be a holy people. The covenant that Moses made on Sinai on behalf of the Israelites is found in Exodus 19:3 – 5. In this covenant between God and the Israelites God promised to make the Israelites a chosen people.

- **The Sinai Covenant would be demonstrated by keeping the Ten Commandments.** In doing so, Israel effectively replied to God – we love you too. God not only created the covenant, but also gave the commandments to show how to live the covenant. The Commandments do not constitute the covenant but flow from it. First God offered the covenant, because God loves us then the commandments are kept by the people because they love God. The Ten Commandments are the people’s joyful response to God’s overflowing love, expressed in the invitation to enter close relationship with God. Even the Commandments should be seen as gifts of God’s love as God has lovingly shown how the Chosen People can show their love in return.
- The Covenant between God and the Chosen People is like an adoption agreement in which God agrees to love, feed and care for and protect the Chosen People. Jeremiah 31:33 “I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”
- Two written stone tablets were stored in the Ark of the Covenant Exodus 25:21 and read periodically
- **In the saving event of Jesus Christ**, this theme of slavery and freedom is enlarged beyond physical slavery. Jesus reveals that God’s love frees us from all that enslaves us on a spiritual level
- Christians understand that the story of God’s deliverance of the people reaches its deepest meaning in the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection, which frees us from the slavery of sin. **Jesus’ death and resurrection seals our relationship with God and we respond as children of God by living the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes**
- The **Exodus and Easter stories tell us of God’s passion to redeem us** from whatever enslaves us, and to restore life to whatever deals with death. These stories are about freedom and they involve us being set free for commitment to God’s people. We understand what the freedom of belonging to God requires.
- **Covenant calls us to grow out of the narrowness of excessive self-preoccupation and, instead, to commit oneself to a community.** Covenant is a call to love others as God loves us. Freedom and responsibility are inextricably woven together and they constitute the very fabric of our covenant with God. We are called to be an Easter people.

THE MEANING OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

The Ten Commandments **propose ten statements (words) of liberty** from attitudes and behaviours that undermine love. The Decalogue liberates us for the acquisition of attitudes that enhance love. The Ten commandments are liberating values as well as loving directives for our moral lives. The **first three commandments** flow logically from the first part of the covenant and focus mainly on God. The **remaining seven** are the requirements for maintaining the second part of the covenant, and the focus here is on the formation of a community that rightly be called a holy nation. Exodus 19:6

BIBLICAL WOMEN

- **The bible is a collection of books written by men** The stories evolved out of oral tradition, and decisions about what became the canon, the accepted word of God, were made by men in ages and cultures many centuries removed from our own. Those men could not have escaped the influence of their own culture any more than we can escape the influence of ours today. The hermeneutics, or interpretation of the scriptures, has until recently been the purview of men. Understandably, the stories that we have heard have placed men and their relationships with God at the center of our religious understanding.
- In the **last half of the last century, theologians began to look at scripture through the lens of women's experience.** They began to search for clues to new insights about relationships between men and women and God. What they discovered were the stories of women ignored, forgotten, or understood only from a male perspective. When they changed lenses, they learned that God's intention for humanity did not place women in a role secondary to that of men, and that Jesus modeled a way of being that respected and affirmed women and that treated women and men as equals
- **Ways we can ensure that students are introduced to biblical women as well as biblical men:**
 - Find a list of biblical women and include in examples, readings, discipleship witnesses
 - Have bible passages that can be used which introduce the voices of biblical women
 - Tell the stories of biblical women
 - Rachel, Leah, Sarah, Rebekah, Miriam, Ruth, Naomi, Tamar, Susanna, Deborah, Delilah, Eve, Hagar, Hannah, Huldah, Judith
 - Elizabeth, Mary, mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Mary & Martha, Euodia and Syntyche, woman of Samaria, woman with a hemorrhage, women accused of adultery and prostitution, the bent woman, the Canaanite woman, woman or women who anointed Jesus, Tabitha, Lydia, Prisca or Priscilla, Lois and Eunice, Jairus' daughter,
- See **Biblical Women Exploring Their Stories with Girls.** Janet Claussen. Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 2002

TEACHING THE OLD TESTAMENT

- ✚ Old Testament is full of fascinating stories which have morals and lessons. Tell the stories: Adam & Eve, Joseph and coat of many colours, Samson & Delilah, Ruth & Naomi, Noah's ark, Daniel and the lion's den, David and Goliath....
- ✚ Explain the fantastic – remember we don't interpret the bible literally. For very young, stress the moral or lesson and don't overstress our doubts that some of the details may not have happened exactly as written. As they get older and begin to question validity of details, explain that we believe the stories are enough that God wanted us to remember them pass them along and learn from them. These stories tell us something about God and how God wants us to live.
- ✚ Give them a sense of time and place – make a time line from 2000 BC to present day. Mark on the line when Jesus was born, when their grandparents were born and when they were born. As you discuss stories from the Old Testament, fill in when they were to have occurred. Post maps – one of biblical times and one of current day Middle East.