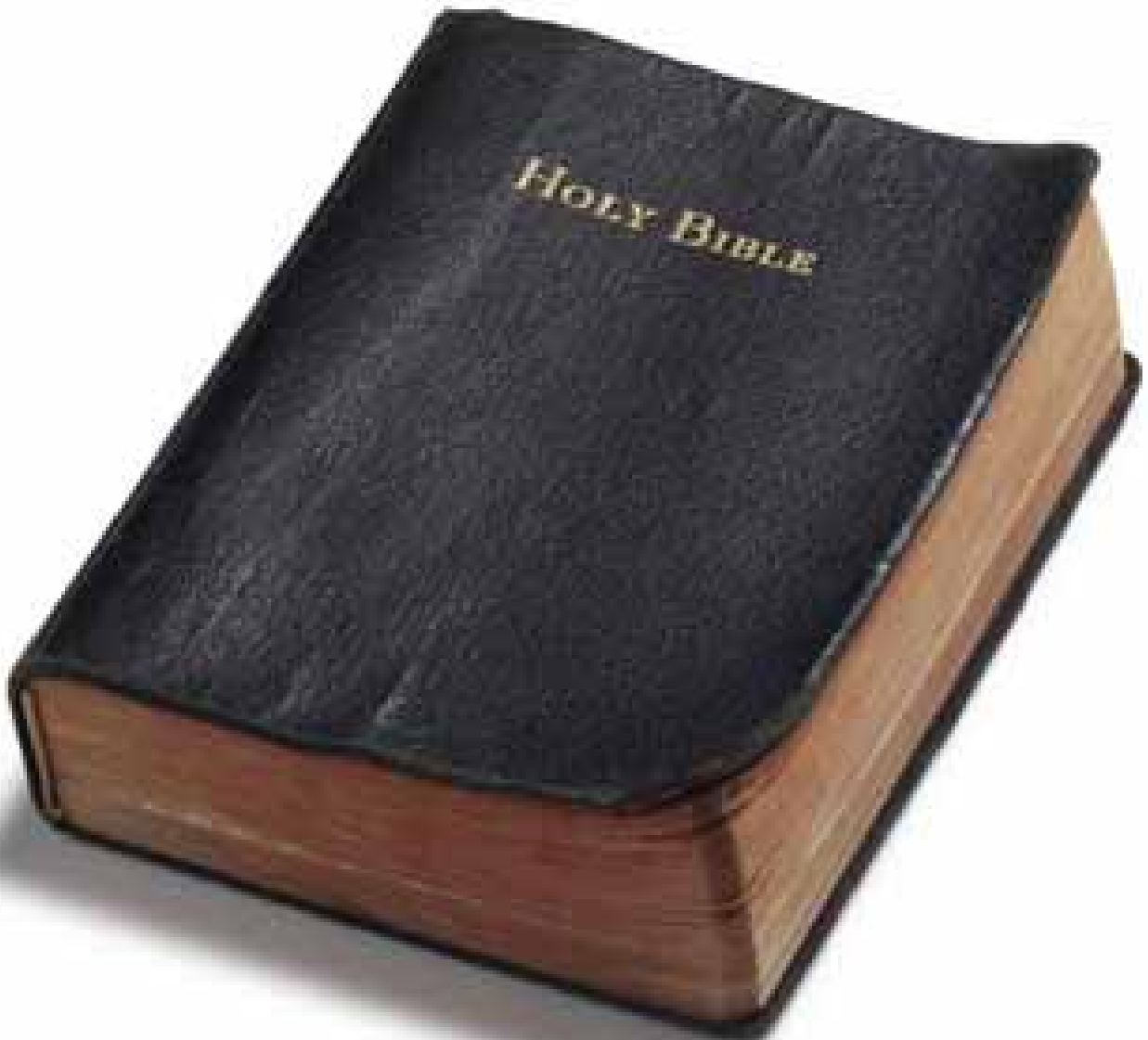


Bible 201

Session Three

January 26, 2011



10 Key Themes of the Bible (continued)

6. God calls us to be in partnership with other Christians.

Acts 1:1-2:21

Acts 2:37-47

The disciples are scattered and afraid.

The Holy Spirit brings them together and gives them a mission.

They are called to be witnesses to what they have seen and heard from Jesus.

Why is it important to be part of a congregation?

Because we have a hard time living the faith alone.

We inspire one another in worship, learn from one another in classes, and pray for one another when the chips are down.

7. God invites us to be part of the mission of love.

John 13:1-35

Romans 12:1-21

God has a mission to bless and save the world. Why? Because God loves us and all people (John 3:16).

We don't go up to God. God comes down to us.

God's love is meant for all people.

Love is not simply a feeling. It is how we act toward one another. In this regard, love is a choice. We can share it, whether or not we always like someone.

In what ways are you being called to share God's love?

8. God invites us to be part of the mission of justice.

Micah 6:1-8

Part of God's vision for the world is treating people fairly and rightly.

This is hard work because it often involves taking on the powers that be.

Check out Micah 2:2, 2:9, 3:5, 6:11. Who are the people getting "stepped on"?

People covet their neighbor's fields, they cheat widows out of their homes, they take bribes, etc.

Who are the people getting "stepped on" in our time?

Often the power and powerless can't seem to find justice.

Why do so many Christians today tend to make the “private” aspects of faith more important than the “public” ones?

Because it’s much easier for us to engage in acts of charity than acts of justice.

So we focus on acts of personal piety.

Because we are consumers at heart, we often turn religion into a spiritual self-improvement project.

As such, our efforts are a long way from being part of God’s plan to bless and save the world.

9. God sends us out to make disciples.

Matthew 4:12-22

Luke 14:25-33

Matthew 28:16-20

We are called to be disciples of Jesus.

Jesus sends us out to make more disciples, and to witness to the love of Jesus in the process.

What does it mean for us to “Go, make disciples...” today?

We can testify to what we have seen and heard in Jesus...without beating people over the head with it.

Our job is not to convert or convince...our job is simply to form relationships and allow to God’s welcome to be evident through all that we say and do.

10. We look forward in hope to the day when God will make a new heaven and a new earth.

Isaiah 11:1-9

1 Corinthians 15:50-58

Revelation 21-22

The Bible paints a number of pictures of the world to come.

Creation will be restored, peace will prevail, all God’s people will be gathered around the throne.

Many of these pictures are simply extensions of the best this world has to offer.

The reality of heaven is beyond our knowing.

What is your vision of heaven?

How does hope for a new world help you live in the here and now?

Who Decided Which Books Belong in the Bible?

The books in the Bible form an authoritative collection or *canon* (“rule” or “standard”)

In forming a canon, we are recognizing that some writings bear faithful witness to God while others do not.

The Bible itself mentions several texts that did not make it into the canon

Numbers 21:14 – “Book of the wars of the Lord”

Joshua 10:13 – “Book of Jashar”

I Kings 11:41 – “Deeds of Israel’s kings”

Protestants have 39 books in the OT

Catholics have 46.

Eastern Orthodox have 49 or 50.

The order of books in the Bible varies from one tradition to another. The last book in the Hebrew Bible is 2 Chronicles, which ends with King Cyrus of Persia announcing that he would build a new temple and inviting all Jews to go back home to Palestine. In contrast, Christians placed the prophetic books last, so that the OT ends with the promise that Elijah the prophet would appear before the day of the Lord arrived (Malachi 4:5-6)

The text of the Hebrew Old Testament was not fixed until approx. A.D. 90 in Jamnia.

The Greek translation of the Old Testament—known as the Septuagint—was more fluid and included extra books. These extra books—Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, The Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach—account for difference between the Catholic Bible and the Protestant Bible.

In the 16th century, Martin Luther placed these extra books in an “apocrypha,” which means “hidden.” Luther granted that these books were useful to read, but denied that they could establish true teaching. He was especially troubled because the medieval church tied the idea of purgatory to 2 Maccabees 12:43-45.

The first Christians proclaimed Jesus’ death and resurrection and passed on his teachings by word of mouth. Occasionally, people like Paul sent pastoral letters to congregations.

As time passed and some of the apostles started dying, there was a move to preserve the apostles’ teaching. Gospels were written, and also the book of Acts.

Some of the criteria used to determine which books would be included in the sacred canon:

1. Rooted in the *apostolic tradition* (written or connected with an apostle: Matthew)
2. Known for their *catholicity* (universality). In other words, they had relevance for a wider audience than originally intended.
3. They were considered *orthodox*, or consistent with the teachings of the apostles

They were *used in sacred liturgy*

The church in Europe and North Africa reached agreement about the books of the New Testament in the fourth century. The four Gospels, Acts, the letters of Paul, Hebrew, 1 John, and 1 Peter were firmly accepted. Some uncertainties persisted about James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. By A.D. 367, the bishop of Alexandria in Egypt could say that all of these writings were accepted as authoritative for the church.

The debate about the boundaries of the New Testament erupted during the Reformation. Martin Luther declared that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus were the heart of the scriptures. In Luther’s thinking, books like Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation did not proclaim Christ clearly enough. But since they’d long been used by the church, he included them in his German translation and put them in the back of the book.

How Does the Bible Have Authority?

When we confess that the Bible is the Word of God, we refer to the Bible's unique capacity to speak God's word of judgment and grace to us. This word can bring life and salvation to individuals and communities.

The Bible is also information: it shows us what the essential content of the Christian faith was and still properly is.

The Bible's authority is derived from the authority of God to whom it witnesses. For those who do not confess that the Bible's God is their Lord, the Bible is just one book among many.

People will see that the Bible has authority only when they see that it "works" for them—that it speaks to their daily needs and contributes to their well-being as individuals and to the building up of their communities.

Bible passages do not have authority for our faith and life in isolation from one another. Individual texts must be interpreted in light of other biblical texts. We will never get to a point where we can say: "Now I've got it all straight."

Not every Bible passage has equal value for our faith and lives. In fact, sometimes we speak of a "canon within a canon" to refer to those parts of scripture that are especially helpful.

The Bible does not have answers to all of our questions. The biblical writers were unaware of many of today's issues.

Further Reading

Choose one or two of the following books to read.

Check out enterthebible.org before you begin reading the book.

Ephesians
Micah
Romans
1 Samuel
2 Samuel

If you have time, check out www.kencollins.com.

- 1. Read about the different translations of the Bible. Go to "The Bible." Click on "Translations of the Bible into English."**
- 2. Go to "The Bible." Click on "How to Select a Bible ~ And Read It."**

If you don't have a computer, these handouts are available at church.

