

2 Timothy 3:14-17

Common English Bible

But you must continue with the things you have learned and found convincing. You know who taught you. Since childhood you have known the holy scriptures that help you to be wise in a way that leads to salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus. Every scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for showing mistakes, for correcting, and for training character, so that the person who belongs to God can be equipped to do everything that is good.

When I was in the high school drill team we had to make a half size poster about ourselves. On that poster, I put the words from Philippians 4:13 because I had memorized that scripture, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” I grew up in church going to Sunday School and youth group. I studied the Bible for inspiration looking for what I could find that helped me.

When I went to college, I signed up for a class called Biblical Studies because I had grown up in church. I had been in a Bible Study all four years of high school. This would be an easy A. I made a B, and I had to work hard for that B. There was more to the Bible than I realized. For the next two weeks we are going to be looking at the Bible. This week I’m going to talk about what the Bible is, how the Bible came to be and what it consists of. Next week our SMU Perkins Intern Chris will talk about what the Bible is not, but what it can be.

The word Bible comes from the Greek word *biblion* which means book or papyrus. Papyrus was a plant from which the earliest writing paper was made. The plural of *biblion* is *biblia* which means books. There are 66 books in the Bible written over 1100 years. The Bible begins with the history of the people of ancient Israel. It was an oral story that was then transcribed onto scrolls.

The Hebrew Scriptures is the Christian Old Testament and is made up of the *Tanak*. The T stands for Torah, sometimes called the law. The Torah are the first five books of the Bible, the foundation of Israel’s story. N stands for *Neviim*, the Hebrew word for prophet. These are the historical books that tell Israel’s story from the prophet’s point of view and the poetic books of the prophets themselves. The K in *Tanak* stands for *Ketuvim*, the Hebrew word for writings. This is a diverse collection of poetic books, stories, and wisdom books. The writers saw Israel’s story as a central part of what God was doing for all of humanity.¹ The Hebrew alphabet has no vowel letters, so in Hebrew it would be T+N+K but you pronounce it Tanak with ‘a’ vowels.

The Jewish people believe that through all of these literary works, God speaks to God’s people. The Hebrew Bible is this epic story of how God is working through these people to bring order and beauty out of the chaos of our world. It builds up to a hope for a new leader who would come renew all creation. Christians believe that this leader who would restore the world is Jesus. Jesus’ followers wrote new literary works about the story of Jesus called the Good News or the Gospel. They formed an account called Acts about the spread of the Jesus movement outside of Israel. Followers of Jesus wrote letters to different Jesus communities all around the world. They were continuing the epic story found in the Hebrew Bible of God speaking to God’s people.²

The Bible is a story of God’s relationship with humanity, with each one of us. It is a story of people messing up and again and again God loving them back into relationship. Of the 66 books in our Protestant Bible, 39 are in the Hebrew Scriptures and 27 are in the New Testament.

¹<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/what-is-bible/>

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There are three languages, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. The Bible has songs, poems, history, laws, jokes, and riddles.

A canon is an authoritative list for a given community so the canon of the Bible, the books that we find in the Bible now, are the ones that the faithful turned to most often for moral and religious instruction. We don't know an exact date for when the Hebrew Bible canon was decided, but Josephus who lived from the year 37 to the year 100 A.D., wrote about a canon used by Jews at the time. Josephus said the Jewish scripture was five books of the Torah, 13 books of the prophets, and four books of hymns.

By the year 100 A.D. people were asking what books should be in the New Testament. There was a canon of the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the letters of Paul, other letters, and the Revelation of John by the late 300s. Athanasius, a Bishop of Alexandria, wrote a letter in 367 A.D. with the earliest known complete list of the 27 books of the New Testament. Those books were formally set during the councils of Hippo in 393 A.D. and Carthage in 397 A.D. in North Africa.

When we think about Biblical translations, the first was the Septuagint. This was the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible for Jews living outside of Israel who didn't speak Hebrew. It is called the Septuagint because legend says seventy Jewish scholars worked to translate it in 300 to 200 B.C. Many early Christians used the Septuagint to find prophecies that they believed were fulfilled by Jesus because much of the early Christian church was Greek. In 382 A.D. Jerome, a leading biblical scholar of his day, was commissioned by the Pope to produce a Latin version of the Bible from the various translations that were being used at the time. This Latin version of the Bible was called the Vulgate because the Latin for common version is *editio vulgata*. The Vulgate was based on the Septuagint Greek version of the Old Testament, but about twenty years later Jerome decided to go back to the original Hebrew version of the Hebrew Bible and translate the entire Old Testament again. Now, the Old Testament, originally in Hebrew, and the New Testament, originally in Greek, were translated into Latin. The Vulgate was the Bible for 1000 years.

In 1415 John Wycliffe translated the Bible from Latin to English, but he was condemned by church authorities who said there would be bad interpretations of the Bible if it was in English. Then, we have the invention of the printing press in 1455. After Martin Luther put his 95 theses on the door of the church door on October 31, 1517, he translated the Bible into German from the original Hebrew and Greek. Then, we have William Tyndale. He was the first person to translate the entire Bible from the original Greek and Hebrew text into English. Unfortunately, he was burned alive in Belgium in 1536 for this horrible crime of treason because there was a prohibition against common language translations of the Bible.

This Bible stuff is fascinating and dangerous! Every English translation for the next 200 years borrowed from William Tyndale's work. Then, we have what many think of as THE Bible – the King James Version. In 1604 the Puritans convinced King James I that there needed to be an English Bible translation for the Church of England without Catholic influence. Unfortunately, the translators used faulty Greek and Hebrew manuscripts. The problem was which manuscript should they use?

Now there are so many translation choices. There is a spectrum of translations with word for word on one end, thought for thought in the middle, and paraphrase on the other end. The Interlinear Bible would be an example of the word for word, the New Revised Standard Version Bible would be an example of thought for thought, and the Message Bible is a paraphrase.

Our scripture from 2 Timothy tells us that the holy scriptures help us to be wise in a way that leads to salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus. 2 Timothy says every scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for showing mistakes, for correcting, and for training character, so that the person who belongs to God can be equipped to do everything that is good. The UCC had an ad campaign a few years ago called God is Still Speaking. They said: The Bible is like GPS. It is a brilliant guide, all-knowing, and occasionally wrong. We approach the Bible with caution and historical criticism. The Bible has much to teach us about how we live our lives and how we shouldn't.³

The messiness of human life is evident in the Bible. There are wars, physical violence, murder, betrayal, human failure and weakness. There are stories about lying to God, running away from God, ignoring God. There are stories about human love and human devotion. There are beautiful stories and ugly stories. There are stories about courage, shame, hope, and despair. The entire human experience can be found in the Bible, for good and for bad.

That's what makes the Bible so fascinating to me. As we read the words of Scripture we see ourselves mirrored in its pages. We see our own failures, our own weakness, our own hope and our own despair. We find comfort and challenge in the Bible. We read the Bible so we can grow in faith and be transformed into the image of Jesus. A relationship with Jesus is a conversation, a dialogue, a two-way thing. When we read the Bible, it is an opportunity for us to listen to God. Thanks be to God, Amen.

³ From the UCC God is Still Speaking 2.0 campaign. <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/297378381625218659/>