



How the Bible Works and Why It Matters

Most Christians are encouraged to read Scripture, but very few are taught how it actually works. This foundational session changes that.

The Hidden Problem

The Feeling

Many sincere believers feel confused or overwhelmed when reading the Bible.

The Assumption

Over time, they assume the problem is personal—a lack of intelligence, discipline, or spirituality.

The Reality

In reality, the issue is simply training.

Understanding Scripture is not reserved for scholars, but it does require intention.

The Same Problem with Scripture

Modern Assumptions

Reading an ancient text with contemporary expectations

Familiar Words

Using words that sound familiar but carry different meanings

Wrong Framework

Assuming the Bible works like a modern book

Our Language

Approaching Scripture from our perspective instead of the Bible's

What the Bible Actually Is

The Bible is not a single book written at one time by one author. It is a **library of books**, written over centuries, by many authors, in different places, and for different audiences—yet unified by one overarching story of redemption.

The Bible is NOT a Lover Letter

- A love letter is written to one person
- The Bible was written to many audiences across history
- A love letter communicates emotion
- The Bible communicates truth, instruction, and correction
- The Bible requires interpretation, not casual reading

Written Across 1,500 Years



Patriarchal Era

Earliest traditions; Job possibly oldest



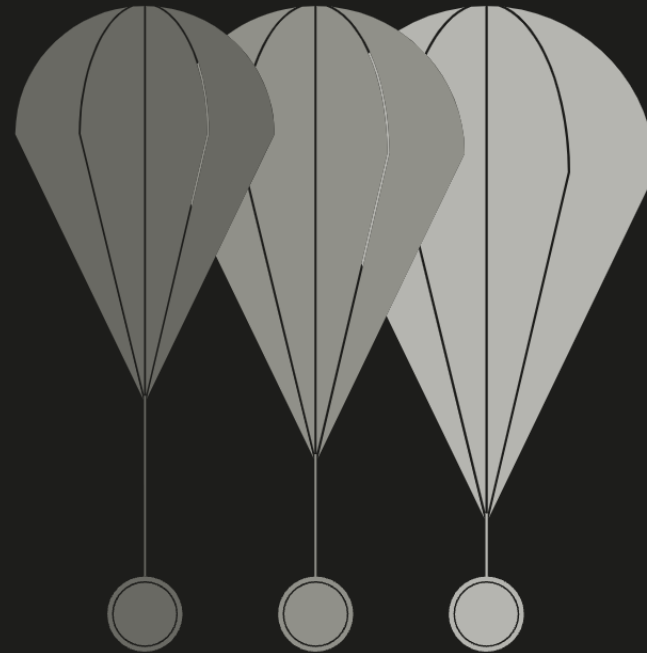
Mosaic Law

Law codified around 1400 BC



Revelation

Final book written AD 90–95



The earliest biblical material reflects the patriarchal period. Many scholars believe Job may be the oldest book, as it contains no reference to Mosaic Law or Israel's priesthood.

The final book, Revelation, was written around AD 90–95 during Roman persecution under Emperor Domitian.

The Structure of Scripture

66

Total Books

39 Old Testament, 27 New Testament

1,189

Total Chapters

929 Old Testament, 260 New
Testament

40

Human Authors

Kings, shepherds, fishermen,
prophets, and more

Understanding this structure helps us see the Bible as both diverse and unified. Different voices, one message. Different times, one story.

Not Written in Chronological Order

Although the Bible records historical events, the books are not arranged chronologically. The order is theological and literary, not historical.

Genesis

Records the earliest events but was written much later

The Prophets

Often speak into moments that appear earlier in the storyline

The Gospels

Written decades after the events they describe

The Letters

Written to address real church situations, not create systematic theology

The Human Authors of Scripture

God used approximately 40 different people to write Scripture—ordinary people from diverse backgrounds, not just religious elites.



Shepherds

Like Moses and David



Kings

Like Solomon



Prophets

Like Isaiah and Jeremiah



Fishermen

Like Peter and John



A Physician

Luke, the careful historian

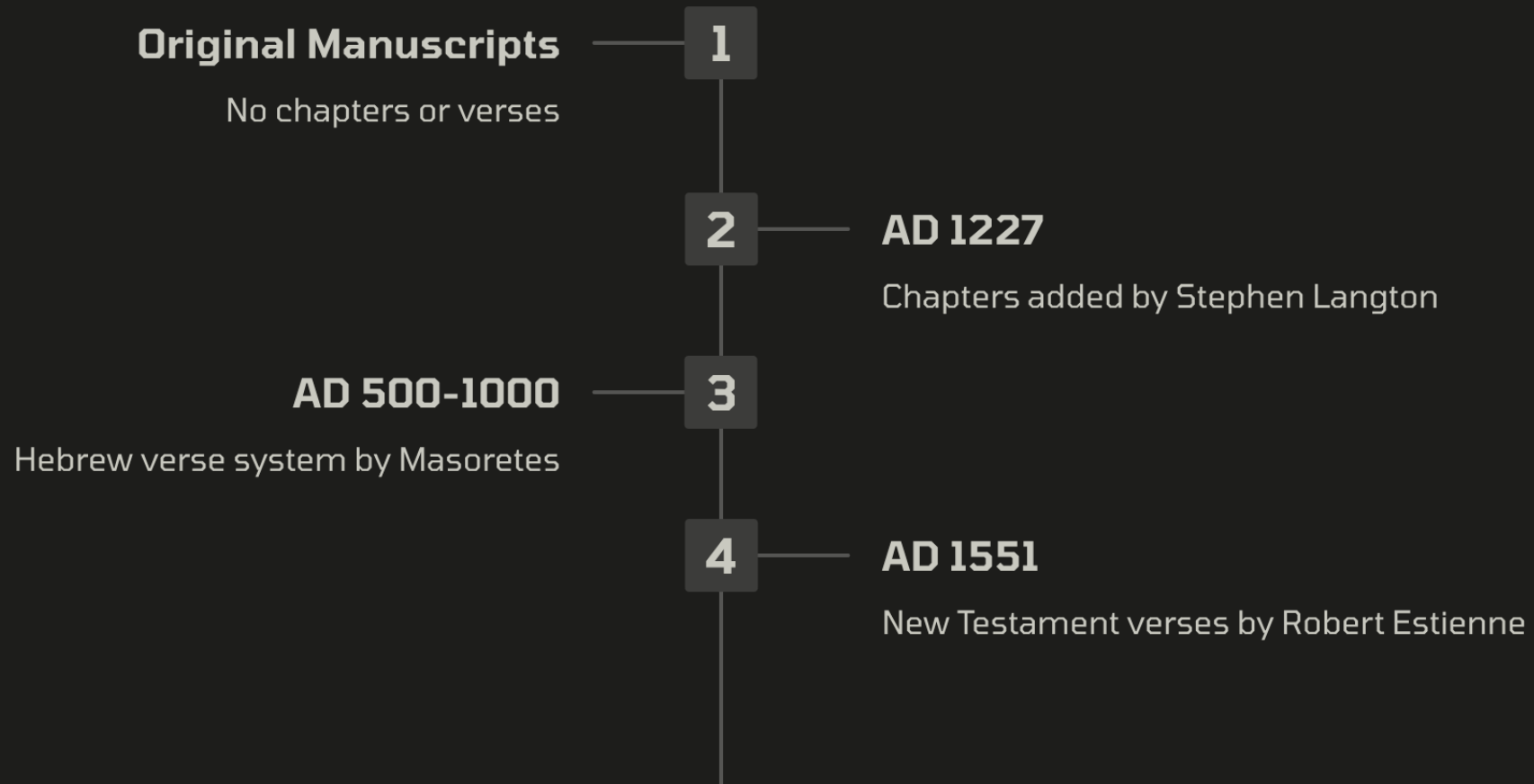


A Tax Collector

Matthew, transformed by grace

Chapters and Verses: A Later Addition

The Bible was originally written **without chapter or verse numbers**. It was continuous text meant to be read aloud and understood in context.





Why This Matters

Chapter and verse numbers help us find Scripture quickly, but they can trick us into reading the Bible in pieces instead of as a message. Chapters were not inspired. Verses were never meant to stand alone.

Meaning lives in passages, not isolated verses.

Written Across Three Continents



Culture deeply shaped how truth was communicated. The Bible's roots are not Western. It emerged from African, Middle Eastern, and eventually European contexts.

This matters because modern individualism often distorts biblical meaning originally expressed in communal, honor-shame cultures.

Written in Three Languages



Hebrew

Primary language of the Old Testament. Concrete and action-oriented, focused on lived experience.



Aramaic

Common language of the Persian Empire. Likely spoken by Jesus daily. Found in parts of Daniel, Ezra, and Jeremiah.



Koine Greek

The "common" Greek used for trade. The entire New Testament was written in this everyday language.

Scripture was written for everyday people, not scholars.

IMPORTANT CLARIFICATION

What Happened at the Council of Nicaea?

The **Council of Nicaea in AD 325** did not decide which books belonged in the Bible. That's a common misconception.

It addressed the nature of Christ, the false teaching of Arianism, and affirmed Jesus' full divinity.

By the time of Nicaea, the Gospels were already widely accepted, Paul's letters were in circulation, and churches were using the same core texts.

The Truth About Canon

Books were recognized as Scripture because they already functioned as Scripture among God's people. Later councils affirmed what was already recognized.

How Books Were Recognized as Scripture

The process of recognizing Scripture is called **canonization**. Canon means "measuring rod" or "standard." Books were recognized based on clear criteria.

Old Testament

- Written by a recognized prophet or leader
- Consistent with previously revealed Scripture
- Accepted and used by the people of Israel
- Affirmed by Jesus and the apostles

New Testament

- Written by an apostle or close associate
- Consistent with the teaching of Jesus
- Widely used by early churches
- Recognized as authoritative, not merely helpful



Jesus and the Scriptures

"And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."

—Luke 24:27 (NIV)

This takes place after the resurrection. The disciples knew the Scriptures, but they didn't understand them. Jesus didn't criticize them for reading—He explained meaning.

What Luke 24:27 Teaches Us

Scripture is a Unified Story

Jesus treats Moses and the Prophets as connected parts of one narrative

Meaning Requires Explanation

Even those who knew Scripture well needed guidance to understand

Sincere Reading Isn't Enough

Even devoted believers can misunderstand without proper interpretation

Understanding Is Possible

Jesus expected them to comprehend once the meaning was explained

Scripture's Purpose

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

—2 Timothy 3:16–17 (NIV)

Paul reminds Timothy that Scripture is not just inspired—it's **functional**. God intended His Word to be understood and applied, shaping both belief and behavior.

It's meant to equip, not confuse.

What the Bible Is Not

Not Random Quotes

It's not a collection of inspirational sayings to pick from randomly

Not a Secret Code

It's not a mystical puzzle only experts can unlock

Not a Self-Help Manual

It's not a modern guide focused primarily on personal success



What the Bible Actually Is

A Historical Document

Rooted in real events, real people, and real places across centuries

A Theological Message

Revealing God's character, His purposes, and His plan for humanity

A Unified Story

One overarching narrative of redemption from Genesis to Revelation

A Book Requiring Interpretation

Demanding thoughtful engagement with context, culture, and meaning

THE REAL PROBLEM

Why People Struggle with Scripture

"My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge."

—Hosea 4:6 (NIV)

In context, God confronts Israel's leaders. The issue isn't access to Scripture but failure to understand and teach it properly.

Ignorance is not neutral. Leaders are responsible for clarity, and misunderstanding has real consequences.

The same struggle exists today—people read without context, without guidance, without understanding how meaning works.

The Pattern for Understanding



"They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read."

—Nehemiah 8:8 (NIV)

Notice the pattern: Scripture is read, meaning is explained, understanding is achieved. Reading alone was never enough.

The GPS Illustration

A GPS is incredibly accurate, but only if you understand how to use it. If you turn it on and start driving without entering a destination, the problem isn't the GPS.

- In the same way, **the Bible is not broken**. Many people simply open it without understanding how interpretation works.

KEY CONCEPT

What Is Hermeneutics?

Hermeneutics is the science and art of interpretation. It answers the question: "How do we determine meaning?"

What did the author intend?

Understanding the writer's purpose and message in their historical moment

How would the original audience have understood this?

Considering the culture, language, and context of the first readers

What rules guide interpretation?

Applying consistent principles to extract accurate meaning

Three Approaches to Scripture

Exegesis

Drawing meaning OUT of the text. Letting Scripture speak for itself, respecting context, asking what the author intended.

Eisegesis

Reading meaning INTO the text. Starting with our opinion, forcing the Bible to support it, ignoring context.

Guessegesis

Making something up. Not knowing what a passage means but feeling pressure to say something spiritual-sounding.

Examples in Action

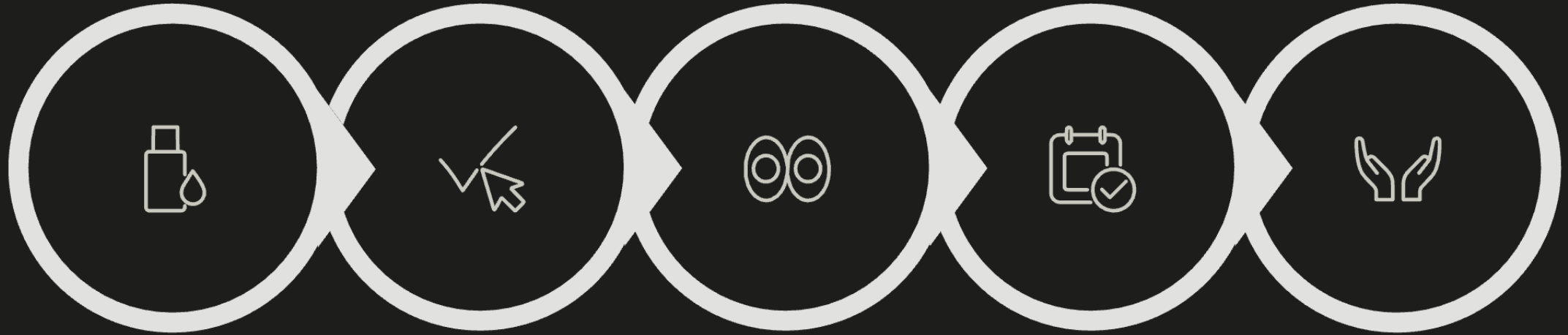
Exegesis: Philippians 4:13

Reading it in context reveals Paul is discussing contentment in suffering, not unlimited success. We apply it faithfully to situations of hardship and dependence on God's strength.

Eisegesis: Jeremiah 29:11

Ignoring the exile context and applying it as a personal promise of immediate prosperity. We force our desires onto a text meant for a specific people in captivity.

The Framework for This Conference



Foundation

Selection

Observation

Interpretation

Application

This is the roadmap we'll follow together. Each session builds on the last, moving from understanding what Scripture is to skillfully applying it in daily life.

The Model: Ezra's Approach

"For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel."

—Ezra 7:10 (NIV)

Notice the order:

1. Ezra **studied** Scripture carefully
2. He **obeyed** what he learned
3. He **taught** others with clarity


Understanding was not accidental. It was intentional, and it preceded both application and instruction.



Why This Foundation Matters

Understanding how the Bible came to us builds confidence, not confusion. When we grasp its history, structure, cultural context, and recognition as Scripture, we stop treating it casually and begin handling it carefully.

This foundation prepares us to learn how to read the Bible well, not just how to quote it.

 KEY TAKEAWAY

You Don't Need More Bible Verses You need a better way to read them.

The Bible is understandable, but it is not casual. God chose to reveal Himself through history, language, and literature—which means He expects us to approach His Word thoughtfully.

This foundation sets the stage for everything that follows.