

LESSON 4: Bible Library

AIM

To understand the Bible as God's word in human language, and to have a basic idea of its composition, as well as the different canons found in the Jewish, Catholic and Protestant communities (8.2.9, 8.3.8, 8.3.9, 8.3.10, 8.3.11)

OUTCOME



Learners have some awareness of the structure of the Bible.

TEACHER BACKGROUND

The word '*canon*' means rule or measure. When we talk about the canon of scripture, we are referring to the list of books which, in the Church's judgement are inspired by the Holy Spirit. (We also talk of *canonised* saints - those who measure up to the Church's norms of holiness.)



A *covenant* is a binding agreement between two people or parties that is sealed with a special ceremony.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 Divide the class into groups. Each group is given one of the four sections on the **worksheet, The Bible Library**, to read and study. Section 4 is for a more gifted group.  ⇒
 - 2 Invite questions for **clarification** from the groups.
 - 3 Groups **prepare** a 2-minute presentation of their section.
 - 4 Groups **present** their sections.
 - 5 All the learners **read the whole sheet** silently and individually.
 - 6 Learners are given the **worksheet, Bible Exploration**, to complete.  ⇒
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WHAT YOU NEED

- *  Copies of the worksheet, *The Bible Library* (1) ⇒
- * Bibles (6)
- *  Copies of the worksheet, *Bible Exploration* (6) ⇒

The Bible Library

I THE ORIGIN OF THE BIBLE

The word 'bible' comes from 'biblia', a Greek word meaning a collection of books. (We have, in Afrikaans, the word 'biblioteek', meaning library.) The Bible is a library of books, and just like any library, it contains different kinds of writing. We have, for example, fiction and non-fiction, legal and technical books, teaching books, history, inspirational books, stories, poems, songs and prayers. The books do not appear in the Bible in the order in which they were written. They were put together much later to tell the story of God's covenants with humankind.

This story had been passed on by word of mouth for many centuries as an *oral tradition*. Parts of the story were eventually written down. The books as we know them now were written over a period of 1000 years, from about 900 BC until 100 AD, or roughly from the time of Kings David and Solomon until 100 years after the death of Jesus Christ. The writers wrote in the language of the time, mostly in Hebrew, but some books were written in Greek and Aramaic.

2 THE JEWISH OR HEBREW BIBLE

What Christians call the Old Testament is a library in itself, consisting of three main sections. The first letters of the names of these three sections, Torah, Nebiim, and Kethubim, when put together, give us the Jew's own name for the Bible, the Tanak.

The Law (Torah), also called the Pentateuch in Greek, consists of the five books, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The Law contained in these books is said to have come from Moses and covers moral laws, for example the Ten Commandments, and laws for worship and special customs, such as circumcision, paying debts and many other things. These books are the foundation of the Jewish religion.

The Prophets (Nebiim) contain some history, but the real purpose of prophecy is to interpret the signs of the times in which the prophet lived. The biblical prophets all wrote about the way the people were living or forgetting to live out their covenant relationship with God. The books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings contain the messages of the Former Prophets, for example, Elijah, while the other books in this section, the Latter Prophets, are all named after a particular prophet. Among them are the major prophets - Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and 12 minor prophets.

The Writings (Kethubim) contain a variety of books, some history, stories, psalms and wisdom sayings such as Proverbs.

3 THE CANON OF THE BIBLE/...

3 THE CANON OF THE BIBLE

The Christian Bible is divided into two parts, or testaments. This word means ‘agreement’ and refers to the agreement or covenant God made with the people. The Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible or Tanak, contains the story of the covenant God made with the People of Israel through Moses, and is about the time before Jesus. The New Testament contains materials about the new covenant instituted by Jesus. The Old Testament writings were gathered together by the Jewish leaders. The New Testament writings were chosen by the leaders of the early Christian Church. These collections of books are known as the Canon of Scripture. All the books that were chosen were acknowledged to have been written with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that God dictated word for word what the writers were to say but that God influenced how the writers presented the story.

There is a difference between the Catholic and the Protestant canons. The Catholic canon contains some extra books which formed part of the Jewish canon in the Greek speaking world at the time of Jesus, but they were not included when the canon was finalised by the Jewish leaders after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. Many Protestant churches base their Old Testament on this revised Jewish canon. The extra books known as deuterocanonicals or apocrypha are mainly from the last centuries before the birth of Jesus. All Christians, however, use the same 27 books of the New Testament. They are the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the Letters and the Apocalypse, or book of Revelation.

4 THE BIBLICAL WRITERS

For the whole of the Bible there were many different writers, most of them Hebrews or Jews. Some are known and some unknown. They wrote in different places, at different times and from different points of view. This can be seen clearly in the gospels which all tell the story of Jesus but from a slightly different point of view. Scripture scholars believe that there were 4 main groups of writers, or traditions, in the Old Testament.

The Yahwist tradition (indicated by the letter J) dates from about 950BC. God is called Yahweh, which means "I AM", and God is shown to be a very human God, always ready to bless and forgive.

The Elohist tradition (E) calls God “Elohim” and dates from about 750 BC. The prophets are very important in this tradition. God is a shadowy person and much is written about sin, morality and our duty towards God and one’s neighbour.

The Deuteronomist tradition (D) is found mainly in the Book of Deuteronomy. It dates back to the 7th century and deals mainly with the Law of Moses.

The Priestly tradition (P) dates back to the 6th century and stresses the importance of worship, ritual and tradition.

An example of these traditions can be found in the two different creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2. Which of the two creation stories do you think could be from the Yahwistic tradition?

Bible Exploration



PART I

Conduct a mini-tour through the Bible library:

- 1 Visit the two main sections. Which is the longest?
- 2 Where would you find the Book of Psalms? Between and
- 3 How do you know whether a passage is a poem or psalm?
- 4 Which gospel comes last?
- 5 Find the story of Jonah and the whale. Give the book, chapter and verses
- 6 Why is the book of Numbers called by that name?
- 7 Why are the books of the Law called by that name? (Read the main headings of the sections in Exodus 20 - 31 to find some clues.)
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- 8 Find the book of Proverbs and skim through to find a proverb that you find interesting.
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PART II

True/False – tick the correct answer.

	True	False
1. The Old Testament was written before the birth of Jesus Christ.
2. God dictated the Bible.
3. All Christians use exactly the same Bible.
4. There are 3 writers in the Old Testament.
5. There are 4 gospels in the canon of the New Testament.
6. The Yahwistic tradition describes God in very human terms.
7. Most of the Bible was written in English.
8. The Bible contains some poems and stories.
9. The biblical canon is a weapon used by Moses against the Egyptians.
10. The oral tradition means that stories were passed on verbally.
11. Elijah was a prophet.
12. Wisdom sayings are part of the Law.
13. Jesus dictated the gospels.
14. The Bible was written over a period of 1000 years.
15. The New Testament is the same for all Christians.
16. The word Yahweh means "I AM".
17. The deuterocanonical books are in the Protestant Bible.
18. Prophets are there mainly to foretell the future.
19. The biblical books are put together in the order in which they were written.
20. The Bible is a collection of different kinds of books.

LESSON 5: The World of Jesus

AIM

To share some knowledge of the different religious and political groups in Palestine (8.4.10, 8.4.11)

OUTCOME

Learners have some knowledge of the world in which Jesus lived.

TEACHER BACKGROUND

The story of Samuel, built on the story of the feeding of the five thousand [Matthew 14:13-21] is used as a teaching story incorporating information about the religious traditions and background of the Jewish people and the political setting at the time of Jesus and the early Church. A very brief overview follows.

Palestine at the time was a mixture of people, languages and cultures. Governed by Rome the Greek language and culture were strong even amongst Jews. Many non-Jews known as Gentiles also lived there. The Jews awaited a **Messiah** but believed that he would be a political as well as spiritual leader as King David had been. Some Jews, belonging to the party of the **Zealots** wanted to overthrow the Roman rule by force.

The **Sanhedrin** led by the High Priest was the Jewish council and had a religious and political role. Its members included elders - a lay aristocracy, **Sadducees** - who were of the priestly class, **scribes** - doctors and students of the Law, and **Pharisees**, who were the group who lived strictly by the letter of the law. The Pharisees and Sadducees, were the main religious groups in Jerusalem. They held some different religious opinions, because the Sadducees refused to accept any revelation outside of the Torah, or five books of Moses. The Pharisees, for instance, believed in resurrection, life after death, angels and demons, while the Sadducees rejected these ideas. Scribes were concerned with studying, interpreting and teaching the scriptures. They also worked in the village synagogues as the priests were only found in the temple in Jerusalem where they were concerned with the offering of sacrifices.

Over the centuries because of the wars and the exile of the people many Jews came to be living in other countries. This was known as the **Diaspora**. These were the people visited by Paul on his missionary journeys. Jews at home and abroad refused to worship the statues of Roman emperors that were considered gods and were often in trouble. After they lost the war of 66-70AD against **Rome**, Jerusalem was partly destroyed.

The **early Church** spread first within Palestine to the Jews, then to Gentiles and then to Jews and Gentiles outside Palestine. In the 1st century AD **Jews and Christians** were living side by side in Rome at a turbulent time for the Roman Empire. There was much internal chaos and at times there was trouble too between the Jews and Christians. The current emperor had to maintain order. The emperor Nero was a paranoid tyrant. In 64AD Rome was burnt down - apparently by himself - but he blamed the Christians and used that as an excuse to persecute them.



WHAT YOU NEED

- * Copies of the worksheet (1) ⇨
- * Map of the Mediterranean lands (3)
- * Worksheet (4) ⇨
- * Bibles with maps (5)

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 Have the learners **read through the story** of Samuel. Guide them to focus on the following three aspects: family life in a fishing village, the religious situation, and the political situation. 📖 ⇨
 - 2 In groups have them **discuss one** of the above three aspects, drawing comparisons with our world of today.
 - 3 Using a map, if available, provide input as appropriate about **the religious and political world** of the time from the TEACHER BACKGROUND or other sources.
 - 4 Referring to the story of Samuel, and to other sources, ask the learners to **write a sentence** of explanation for each of the *italicised* words in the story. The words are *scribe, Torah, scroll, Aramaic, synagogue, preacher, Passover, Zealot, Pharisee, catacombs*. 📖 ⇨
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ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

- 5 Invite the learners to **review the maps** of Palestine of the time and of the missionary journeys of Paul if they are contained in the Bibles at their disposal.
- 6 Make a list of questions about **the historical aspects** of the story and have a class quiz, e.g. what is a synagogue? a scribe?
- 7 Invite the learners to choose a **Biblical character** of the time and make up their own story about this person.

Samuel's Gift

A STORY OF THE TIME OF JESUS

As the son of the village synagogue's only *scribe*, Samuel took his work and his studies seriously. He knew he could follow in his father's footsteps but hoped that he might even be able to go to the Temple in Jerusalem where the great teachers sat daily discussing and debating the *Torah* and the other sacred writings. Samuel had secretly taught his sister Judith to read the *scrolls*, as girls weren't usually given that privilege. So on hot summer evenings or cold winter nights they talked of the history of their own people, exiled and oppressed so often.

But they were interested in the lives of others too. At home they spoke *Aramaic*, the local language of the people. In the *synagogue* they learned some Hebrew, and his father had introduced him to Greek - the world language of culture and trade. They also liked to find out more about the Roman soldiers and their sports and hobbies. Young Samuel learned much about life beyond the village from the caravans and traders passing by. So when his friend Judas said, "Come on, let's go and hear this new *preacher*, a man called Jesus," Samuel asked his mother for some bread and fish and the boys ran off, Judith tagging along behind.

In the great crowd that followed Jesus along the shore of the Sea of Galilee that long day, they recognised many local villagers but also some of the scribes and elders, Romans and slaves. They were soon caught up in the message and the personality of the preacher. "Blessed are the poor,... those who hunger,..... Forgive your enemies. Do not judge. "These were pretty controversial statements. Were they the family values they had been taught? They were hardly conscious of time and suddenly, it seemed, the sun was dropping low in the sky and people were beginning to feel hungry. People started muttering, "Who has some food?" "Does anyone have something to eat?" Without thinking twice he raised his hand and as Jesus looked at him and raised his hand in blessing Samuel passed his loaves and fishes out to those around him, who in turn passed the food on to others. Having eaten the crowd slowly dispersed.

Over the next months, although Samuel was afraid to discuss it with his father, he thought long and hard about what he heard and experienced. From time to time snippets of news reached them, about Jesus, about a rebellion here or a riot there over paying taxes to Rome and to the temple too.

At the *Passover* the family as usual traveled in convoy to Jerusalem, for protection against robbers on the road. King Herod's temple was becoming more beautiful every year but some parts, like the outer court where traders sold animals for the various sacrifices, were quite intimidating to these country people. A particular commotion there really sent them scurrying and in the next few days it seemed as if the atmosphere in Jerusalem was quite electric. Roman soldiers were on high alert. There were strange

currents, people muttering, whispering, gathering in groups, shouting in the streets and once from a distance it seemed to Samuel as if there was some kind of procession going on, which scattered quickly when there was a most horrific storm.

The journey home as usual was subdued and life settled again into its simple everyday family routine. The men fished, the women fetched water, the children played and the older ones learned their family trade. As a student scribe Samuel's time was taken up, reading and copying scrolls, studying and translating the passages that were read in the synagogue.

All the while he pondered on the words he had heard. "Blessed are you who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall have their fill." Should he join the **Zealots** and their liberation army and free his people from Roman oppression? Not being of the priestly class, should he become a great teacher or preacher at least?

Gradually more and more was being heard about this new group of believers, but yet he remained unsure. The famous **Pharisee**, Saul, passed by the village on his way to Damascus where it was told he was going to stamp out these dangerous beliefs. Not long after that Judith dragged him out to the market place where he could hardly believe his eyes when he recognised Saul now preaching boldly in the name of Jesus. Full of fire he told his story. He had been blind but the Lord had spoken to him and called him. Then Samuel knew. The Lord had spoken to him too, long ago, with his eyes, when he asked him to share the few loaves and fish that were all he had.

Samuel joined Paul, becoming a trusted companion, interpreter and scribe. Quietly in the background he followed Paul throughout the Greek world, where the Jews had been scattered, and finally to Rome, the centre of the world. It was there that the emperor Nero, in his paranoid fear of anyone who might usurp his power, persecuted the Christians. In the dark secret passages and chambers of the **catacombs** Christians worshipped and studied. Although they were aware of the danger the community was devastated when Peter and then Paul died for the cause. But their faith was strong and in the streets of Rome the simple secret symbol of a fish, drawn in the sand when passing word became a real source of strength. Samuel smiled gently. His favourite symbol.

He had not gone back during the Jewish-Roman war when Jerusalem had been almost completely destroyed but some years later he went home to Bethsaida to visit his mother, still living in the little family home. Going up on to the roof he found his treasure jar still tucked between stones. Excitedly he opened the jar and carefully unwound the scroll, his eyes searching for the fading words, "Today I shared my fish with a thousand people. Praise be to God" (TR 2000)

LESSON 6: Bible Wisdom

AIM

To help the learners become familiar with the wisdom literature of Old and New Testament so that it may serve them as a guide for life (11.3.10, 11.3.11)

OUTCOME

Learners are familiar with wisdom literature in the Bible.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 **Gifts of the Spirit:** Isaiah, an Old Testament prophet gives us a picture of how holiness works [11:1-2]. Traditionally we list the seven gifts of the Spirit as: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and wonder and awe. Note that wisdom is placed first in the list. It is a very important gift - but what is it?
- 2 **Two Women and a Child** [1Kings 3:16-28]: Read or tell the story as an example of wisdom in action. Ask the learners to discuss Solomon's situation. How did he demonstrate wisdom? Note the results of his wisdom: life was preserved and justice was done.
- 3 **Wisdom:** How then can we define wisdom? Knowledge is one thing, but knowledge alone does not help us to make decisions in difficult circumstances. Invite the learners to share occasions when they have been in such circumstances. What we need is wisdom which enables us to apply our knowledge to actual situations so that the decisions we take lead to true happiness and success.
- 4 **Solomon asks for wisdom:** Wisdom is a precious gift which we should ask for. Read or tell the story of Solomon who chose wisdom above all other possible gifts [1Kings 3:5-15].
- 5 **Old Testament Wisdom Literature:** Wisdom literature was a form of literature used by the different nations in the Near East. Israelite wisdom was the product of the scribes and was written down from about the time of King David. The Bible offers us much that will help us grow if we apply it. Its wisdom literature gives advice, inspires, encourages, and reprimands. It contains were wise sayings and instructions to the young about good behaviour. Some of the books we can consult are Proverbs, Wisdom, Job, Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth), Ecclesiasticus (Sirach). Let the learners identify these by looking at the content page of the Bible.
- 6 **Proverbs:** As an example, concentrate on the Book of Proverbs, in particular the section [10:1-2:16] which contains the Proverbs of Solomon. Have the learners browse through this section. They choose a saying that is particularly meaningful for them to share with the class.
- 7 The **Sermon on the Mount** found in Matthew chapter 5-7 contains the Golden Rule: Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. It also has many other wise sayings of Jesus gathered together into one sermon.



WHAT YOU NEED

- * Bibles (2)(4)(5)(6)(10)
- * Small strips of paper with references to passages from the Sermon on the Mount (8)
- * Materials for posters (9)
- * *The Slave Girl* from *Song of the Bird* (Anthony de Mello) (11) ⇨
- * 🎵 *Seek Ye First* or *Show Me Your Ways* (12)

- 8 Hand out strips of paper on which are written **Scripture references** to parts of the Sermon on the Mount. Choose the references yourself. In small groups have the learners discuss the meaning of their passages. Finally ask them to find modern-day examples of the various sayings in their own lives or the lives of others to which these sayings can be applied.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

- 9 Learners make **posters** of the proverbs they chose in ACTIVITY 6.
- 10 **Ten Virgins** [Matthew 25:1-13]: This story illustrates the wisdom of being prepared.
- 11 **The Slave Girl**: This is a story from the East found in *The Song of the Bird* by Anthony de Mello. The hakim had the wisdom to discern the ailment that afflicted the girl, whereas the king was blinded by his own personal interest. ⇨
- 12 **Sing**: *Seek Ye First* or *Show Me Your Ways*.

MATERIALS

THE SLAVE GIRL

A Moslem King fell passionately in love with a slave girl and had her transferred from the slave quarters to the palace. He planned to marry her and make her his favourite wife but, mysteriously, the girl fell seriously ill on the very day she entered the palace. She grew steadily worse. Every known remedy was given her, to no avail. She hovered between life and death.

In despair the King made an offer of half his kingdom to anyone who would cure her. But who would attempt to cure an illness that had baffled the best physicians of the realm?

Finally a hakim appeared who asked to be allowed to see the girl alone. After he had spoken with her for an hour he appeared before the throne of the King who anxiously awaited his verdict.

“Your Majesty,” said the hakim. “I do indeed have an infallible cure for the girl. And so sure am I of its effectiveness that were it not to work, I should willingly offer myself to be beheaded. The medicine I propose, however, will prove to be an extremely painful one—not for the girl, but for you.”

“Mention the medicine,” shouted the King. “And it shall be given her, no matter the cost.”

The hakim looked at the King with compassion and said, “The girl is in love with one of your servants. Give her permission to marry him and she will be instantly cured.”

Poor King! He wanted the girl too much to let her go. He loved her too much to let her die.