



The Bible and the Word

FaithBuilder 4 | Lesson 28 | Word

Lesson Overview

1. Watch a Video

Watch *History of the Bible in Five Minutes* (4min 59sec) at bitly.com/HistoryBible

2. Read

History of the Bible came into being pp. 1-2

3. Discuss

What implications do New Church teachings have on how we care for and read the Word? p. 3

New Church Concept

New Church Canon

The books of the Word are all those which have the internal sense; books which do not have it are not the Word. The books of the Word in the Old testament are: The five Books of Moses; the Book of Joshua; the Book of Judges; the two Books of Samuel; the two Books of Kings; the Psalms of David; and the Prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. And in the New Testament they are: The four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John; and the Book of Revelation. *Arca Coelestia* 10325

Watch a video

Watch *History of the Bible in Five Minutes* (4min 59sec) online at bitly.com/HistoryBible. (Enter bitly link in the browser bar at the top of your screen.)

Choose questions for discussion.

1. When do scholars think Moses wrote the first 5 books of the Word? (1400 BC)
2. How many books do most Christians recognize as part of the Bible? (66; 39 Old Testament, 27 New Testament.)
3. What three criteria does the video suggest were used to decide which books should be in the Bible? (1. Historical accuracy, 2. Written by a great patriarch, 3. Not in conflict with other scripture.)
4. What impact did the invention of the printing press have on access to the Bible? (While the Bible was not the first book to be printed, it was among the earliest. Preparation took 5 years. The first printed Bibles were produced in the 1450s. Many could own and read the Bible after this.)
5. When was the Bible first published in English? (1535)

Read

The Jewish faith and different branches of Christianity have used a variety of criteria to decide which books should be part of the Bible. If we look at how the Bible came into being, it's not hard to see why.

Before books as we know them today were invented, the books of the Word were copied by hand on to separate scrolls made from animal skins (parchment or vellum) or papyrus (paper made from papyrus reeds). The Dead Sea Scrolls, found in caves above the Dead Sea, are one of the most significant scroll finds. Dated to between 3 BC to 1 AD, they give a picture of what the books of the Word were like at that time. (See samples of scrolls at <http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/>).

Bible scrolls were later collected and bound into books. The codex (as these early books were called) was in equal use with scrolls by 3rd century AD, and had replaced scrolls by the 6th century.

The Septuagint

In the third century BC the Jewish scriptures were translated into Greek (the language spoken at that time) because many Jews could not read Hebrew. This translation is called the Septuagint.*

Septuagint comes from the Greek word for 'seventy', which refers to a tradition that seventy-two rabbis translated it into Greek.

The First Christian Bible

When the Christian Bible was being assembled the Septuagint was used by both Jews and Jewish Christians. Christians adopted it as the Old Testament of the Christian Bible. However, around 100 AD Jewish rabbis revised their Scripture and established an official Judaic *canon* (collection of authoritative scriptures) which left out some of the Septuagint. Fifteen late Jewish books that were not in the Hebrew texts of the Jewish Scripture were omitted. Christians did not follow suit but continued using the full text of the Septuagint as the Old Testament.

Protestant Bibles

In the 1500s, Protestant leaders decided to organize the Old Testament according to the Jewish canon instead of the Septuagint. They moved the Old Testament books which were not in the Jewish canon into a separate section of the Bible called the *Apocrypha*. Protestant Bibles included the same material as the earlier Bible, but divided it into two sections— the Old Testament and the Apocrypha. Protestant Bibles included the Apocrypha until the mid 1800s, but it was eventually dropped.

Catholic and Orthodox Bibles

The Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches did not follow the Protestant changes. Today they base the Old Testament on the Septuagint, so Catholic Bibles have more Old Testament books. Catholic Old Testaments include *1st and 2nd Maccabees, Baruch, Tobit, Judith, The Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, Prayer of Azariah & Song of the Three Holy Children*, additions to Esther, and additions to Daniel. Orthodox Christian Old Testaments include these plus *1st Esdras, Psalm 151* and *3rd Maccabees*.

The Catholic and Protestant New Testament

The Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox New Testaments are identical. Both contain 27 books, however Eastern churches make some additions.

The Word for the New Church

Unlike the Catholic and Protestant canons, for which people decided what was holy and to be included in the Bible, the canon for New Church is defined in the Writings. This more limited list of books is given in *Arcana Coelestia* 10325 (see p. 1). The Writings explain that these books are part of the Word because they have an *internal sense*. We can grasp some of this internal meaning through correspondences. The Gospels themselves affirm the New Church canon by quoting from nearly all books of the New Church canon but not books from outside of it. Books of the Bible that are not part of the Word are useful for the New Church. They give important historical and cultural information. In their epistles, the Apostles tell of the beginnings of the Christian church and confirm the central teachings of the Lord. Swedenborg states they are good books for the church because they “maintain the doctrine of charity and its faith as strongly as ever did the Lord Himself in the Gospels and in Revelation.”

New Church Concept

The Word

The Gospels contain the words of the Lord Himself, all of which have concealed in them a spiritual sense, through which immediate communication with heaven is granted, while the writings of the Apostles contain no such sense, although they are nevertheless useful books for the church. *Apocalypse Explained* 815.2

The Word in the internal sense contains innumerable things which exceed human comprehension. It also contains things...which are manifest only to angels, and are understood by them. The internal sense of the Word contains arcana of heaven, which relate to the Lord and His kingdom in the heavens and on earth. Those arcana do not appear in the sense of the letter. Many things in the writings of the prophets appear to be unconnected, which yet in the internal sense cohere without a break in a beautiful series. Not a single word...in its original language, can be taken from the sense of the letter of the Word, without an interruption in the internal sense; and therefore, by the Divine Providence of the Lord, the Word is preserved so entire as to every point.

The internal sense is itself the genuine doctrine of the church. They who understand the Word according to the internal sense, know the true doctrine itself of the church, because the internal sense contains it. The Word is the doctrine of love to the Lord, and of charity towards the neighbor. *White Horse* 11

Discuss

Choose questions for discussion.

1. What are the implications of having criteria for books that are to be included in the Word? (i.e. that the books of the Word have a continuous internal meaning)
2. How does knowing there is value (spiritual, historical or cultural) in all books of the Bible influence the way you read and think about them?
3. Why are certain books included in the Word, while others are not?
4. Which is more important? Historical authenticity of books of the Word or the spiritual meaning they provide in their current form?
5. How would you explain the fact that the New Church canon omits many books of the New Testament to a Christian friend? Which books of the New Testament might be most important to him/her?
6. Should New Church people read books of the Bible that are not part of the Word? Why or why not?
7. We have the Bible today because many have been good stewards of the text. What responsibility does the New Church have for preserving the Bible?
8. A group of New Church scholars are working on producing a faithful New Church translation of the Old and New Testaments. It is called the “Kempton Project”. This version is available online at kemptonproject.org. What are the benefits of a project like this?
9. Given what the New Church teaches about correspondences, in what ways might a New Church translation of the Old and New Testaments be different from other translations?
10. Which translation of the Bible do you like to read, and why?
11. Which is more important—reading the Bible accurately or doing what it teaches? Which is more crucial to salvation?
12. Might there be additional books that should be included in the Word that we do not yet know about? (See *White Horse* 11, p. 2)
13. Are the Writings part of the Word?

THE MASORITES*

The Writings mention a group of Jewish scholars who carefully numbered the verses, the words, and the letters of every book in the Old Testament. They calculated the middle word of each book and also the middle letter. They made many similar detailed notes and observations to make it impossible for any future copyist to introduce any change whatsoever without being detected. Finally, since the Hebrew texts did not include vowels, they invented a system of markings to indicate how the words were to be vocalized, thus establishing their proper meaning (which otherwise might be interpreted variously). (The vowel system was developed especially by six generations of the ben Asher family in Tiberias between approximately 780-930 AD). The Masoretic schools did their work from approximately 700-1000 AD. There were schools in Tiberias, Jerusalem and in Babylon. The different Masoretic schools produced a number of texts (with little variation). The Masoretic text of Ben Ashur became the standard text in the West.

* Adapted from notes by Rev. Grant H. Odhner