

Introducing the Bible

William Barclay

Discussion Guide

Introducing the Bible, by William Barclay (Abingdon Press, copyright © 1972), is intended to help people better understand the Bible and discover it as a source of life and hope in Jesus Christ. The book covers the original meanings of Scripture, how the Bible came into being, who wrote it, why it was written, and how to read and study the Bible. The author offers readers valuable insights and encouragement to read and enjoy the Bible and to learn the message it has for us today.

Permission is granted to reproduce this discussion guide.

Chapter 1

The Making of the Old Testament

This chapter explores how and why the first books of the Bible were built up and came into being.

1. What is meant by the “canon of Scripture”?
2. Why would no one in biblical times ever think of the Bible as one book?
3. List and discuss the Jewish sacred writings. Into what three sections were these writings divided and what “books” are contained in these sections?
4. Discuss the importance of the Law for the Jews.
5. How and why did the Law become authoritative as the Word of God or Scripture?
6. Discuss the different Hebrew words for God and how they were used by the Jews.
7. Discuss how the Prophets became part of the Word of God.
8. List the reasons the Jews took history so seriously.
9. What was the discovery that Jeremiah and Ezekiel made and why it was important?

10. What are some of the main themes/messages of the Prophetic books?
 11. Discuss how the Writings eventually became Scripture.
 12. What books were questioned and challenged before they were accepted, and why?
 13. Over how many years and over what period of time was the Old Testament written?
-

Chapter 2

The Making of the New Testament

This chapter examines the creation of the New Testament starting with the writings of Paul.

1. What insights about the New Testament did you receive from this chapter?
2. For what purpose were Paul's letters written?
3. Discuss why there was a delay in writing the Gospels down.
4. What changes took place that caused the Gospels to be written down?
5. In what way was Christianity a missionary religion when it began?
6. Discuss the importance of memorization in ancient times and how it affected the accuracy of the Gospel.
7. What was the primary purpose and use of the Gospels? Explain the difference between history and biography as we think of it today and the message the gospel writers wanted to portray through their accounts of Jesus.
8. List and discuss the five forms in which the Gospel stories are stereotyped.
9. List and discuss the three purposes of the book of Acts.
10. Discuss how and why the book of Revelation is different from other New Testament books.
11. What did Gnostics believe and how did they influence the New Testament?
12. Discuss how and why the writing of the New Testament came to an end.

Chapter 3

The Apocrypha

This chapter examines another group of books that some regard as part of the Bible.

1. What does the word *apocrypha* mean? To what three types of books was this term applied?
2. Discuss the differences between the Roman Catholics and Protestants regarding the Apocrypha.
3. List the different books and types of literature contained in the Apocrypha.
4. What do additions to the books of Esther and Daniel include?
5. What is known about the book The Wisdom of Solomon?
6. List and discuss the importance of the historical books.
7. Discuss what is known about the sources of the Apocrypha.
8. List and discuss arguments why the Apocrypha are not part of Scripture.
9. Discuss some of the history of the inclusion of the Apocrypha in the English Bible.
10. What was Coverdale's position on the Apocrypha?
11. What are your views on the importance of the Apocrypha?
12. How has this discussion helped you?

Chapter 4

How to Study the Bible

This chapter discusses attitudes and techniques for effective Bible study.

1. For what reasons do Christians study the Bible? List some goals or objectives.
2. What does it mean to read the Bible with reverence?
3. Why is it importance to begin Bible study with prayer?
4. What do you receive by studying the Bible within a Christian fellowship that you do not receive by studying on your own?
5. What does it mean to study the Bible honestly? Give an example.
6. What is lacking with a selective, one-sided approach to reading Scripture?
7. Discuss why Bible study is not just an intellectual exercise, but also leads to action.

8. Discuss the three reasons why the Authorized Version is considered an inadequate translation.
 9. How do you go about putting a biblical passage into its context and background? What questions need to be asked?
 10. Share how Bible study has improved your spiritual life.
 11. Give a summary of what to do and what not to do when interpreting Scripture.
 12. How has this discussion helped you be more effective in studying the Bible?
-

Chapter 5

The Inspired Book

This chapter explores what it means that the Bible is inspired.

1. What new insights did you receive from reading this chapter?
2. In what ways is the Bible unique?
3. What is different about studying the Bible than studying other books?
4. Discuss why there are differences in the biblical text.
5. How are the writers of the Bible the same? How are they different from each other?
6. What evidence is there against divine dictation?
7. Give some examples of how different opinions are expressed in the Bible.
8. How is the Bible a meeting place between God and humans?
9. Explain what it means to you that the Bible is inspired.
10. How has your view of the Bible changed by reading this book?
11. How does God speak to you when you read the Bible? Give an example.
12. List and discuss the four reasons the author finds that the Bible is the word of God.