

MAKING SENSE OF THE BIBLE

What the Bible is not:

- *Not a basic instruction book for what to do before you die
- *Not a Magic 8 Ball
- *Not a book of carefully laid-out doctrine and theology
- *Not a science or history book
- *Not a book of promises from God

What the Bible is:

- *The story of God's intervention and interaction with humanity that begins around 2550 BC to 1800BC and focuses on a man named Abraham and his descendants who became known as the Israelites/Hebrews/Jews
- *An *interpreted* history of a country named Israel, its people, kings, prophets, poets, and law-makers and how God shaped this people to be his people
- *The story of God's salvation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the beginnings of the early Christian church

Quick Review of the Old Testament (known as the Hebrew Bible to Jews)

- *3 Parts: The Torah or Law, the Prophets, and the Writings
- *Genesis 1 – 11—Primeval history
- *Genesis 12 on—the story of God calling a people to be in unique relationship
- *Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Joshua—God's gracious deliverance of the Israelites from slavery into the Promised Land under leadership of Moses, the giving of the 10 Commandments and Levitical laws and establishing a covenant after creating the 12 Tribes of Israel.
- Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles—story of the chosen peoples' struggles to be faithful in the midst of pagans. When all is well, they forget God. Kingdom of Israel splits into 2 kingdoms (Israel in the North and Judea in the South) and both are destroyed by enemies, Assyrians who conquered the North in 722 BC and Babylonians who destroyed the Judea and the Temple in 590 BC.

From Genesis on the story is one of covenant making and covenant breaking—God calls prophets to speak for Him.

The Writings—Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes—capture the heart and soul of the Jewish people.

Who wrote the Old Testament?

*Many writers from many sources who tried faithfully to tell both Israel's story and the story of the God who chose them to be his people—a story of faithlessness and God hiding his face and eventually restoring the people and bringing them back from exile with the promise of a new king.

*Writers wrote, not to just tell their history, but to interpret that history in light of the needs of those to whom they wrote.

How did Jesus look at and read the Bible?

*His bible was a collection of scrolls, as many as 24, and he would cite or allude to at least 23 of the 39 Protestant Old Testament books.

*He would have been part of the rabbinical tradition in which scripture is read and then expounded upon by the rabbis at the synagogue.

*Jesus refers most often to the Psalms, Isaiah, and Deuteronomy.

*Jesus routinely challenged the prevailing interpretations of scripture and calls his hearers to move beyond the letter of the law. (Mark 2:27 concerning the Sabbath)

What Jesus did not do:

*He never set out a doctrine of the Bible.

*Never defined which books were in and which were out.

*He did not offer any clear dogma.

*He favored those passages that portray God's mercy.

What Jesus did do with the Bible:

*He used what scholars call an "interpretive lens" or defining principle by which he read the of his Bible—"What is the most important commandment?" (Matthew 22) and he gave us 2 answers—"Love God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. . . .and love your neighbor as yourself."

Quick Review of the New Testament

*The early Christians and the early church read the Old Testament in light of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection and they say Jesus on nearly every "page."

Example: the idea of the lamb of God in the OT—when seen through the lens of Jesus' death on the cross, he became the lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.

*The Jews read the OT stories and prophecies very differently from the way Christians do.

Four Parts of the New Testament

*Four Gospels—Jesus reveals the heart and character of God

*Acts of the Apostles—stories of the disciples and followers who continued the ministry of Jesus.

*Letters from the Apostles—taught, challenged, built up and encouraged the new faith communities.

*Revelation—written 30 years after the death of Peter and Paul, it's a message to believers who were struggling to remain faithful.

Central theme of Jesus' preaching and teaching:

*The Kingdom of God (appears 82 times in the first three Gospels).

*Jesus announced the good news that God is still king and invited his hearers to repent.

*He tells what the kingdom of God looks like and how one lives after confessing God as one's king.

*He is the physical embodiment of God the king.

*The message of the kingdom: love God and love neighbor.