



Session Objective

Many of the basic questions youth (and, for that matter, Christians of all ages) ask about the origins of the Bible—How did we get our Bible? Who wrote the Bible?—can be answered concretely. Other questions in that vein—How do we know whether everything in the Bible really happened? Are all the stories in the Bible real?—have answers that are more nuanced. In this session, we'll answer some of these questions and think critically about other questions, with the aim of arriving at a higher level of understanding and appreciation of the book we know as our Bible.

Faith Statement

We believe and confess the canonical Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles of both Testaments to be the true Word of God, and to have sufficient authority of themselves, not of humanity. For God spoke to the fathers and mothers, prophets, apostles, and still speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures.

—*The Second Helvetic Confession* (5.001)



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- Where did the Bible come from?
- How did we get our Bible?
- Who wrote the Bible?
- How do we know whether everything in the Bible really happened?
- Are all the stories in the Bible real?



Explore

Read Deuteronomy 6:20–25 and explore these questions:

- According to the passage, why are the people meant to obey God's law? Lead the group in examining Deuteronomy 5:6–7, 12–15, which gives the same reason for two of the Ten Commandments.
- What is the role of *remembering* in obedience to God's law? What are the people to remember?
- As Christians, we can remember things that occurred for centuries following the time of the Exodus from Egypt. What are some of the important events and acts of God that we can add to God's deliverance of God's people from slavery in Egypt?
- What is the role of the Bible in helping us remember? What is the role of biblical "memory" in helping us live lives of faith?

- As we've discussed, this passage gives a concrete reason for obeying God's law: Because God delivered our ancestors from slavery, we are called to obey God. But the Bible is more than law. Looking at the Bible as a whole, what is the proper role of the Bible in informing your daily life?
- What is the appropriate motivation for you to live a Christian life? Is it because of what God has done for you, or is there another reason?



Express

Use the following questions to help the young people express what they've learned.

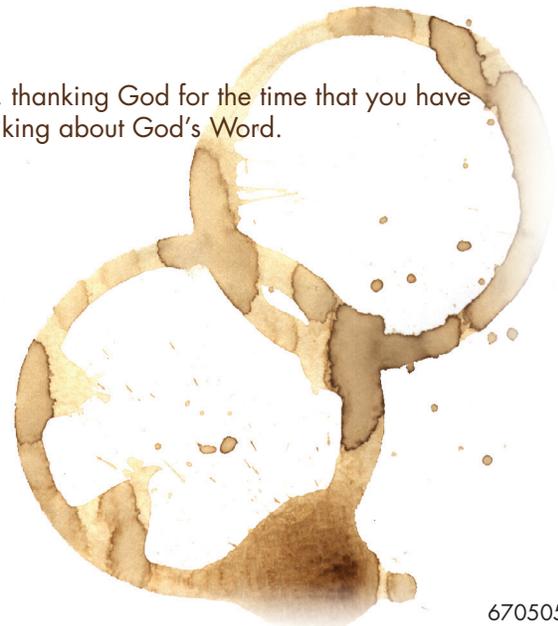
- How would you respond if someone asked you, "Where did the Bible come from?"
- Why does it matter (or not matter) for us to know where the Bible came from?

Consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the Bible passage.



Exit

Close in prayer, thanking God for the time that you have had together talking about God's Word.





Why Do We Need So Many Versions of the Bible?



Session Objective

KJV, RSV, NAB, NIV, NRSV, TNIV . . . the list of Bible translations—and acronyms—goes on and on. Do we *need* all these versions of the Bible? This session examines what we mean and don't mean when we speak of a *translation* of the Bible and then delves into some of the issues of translation that underlie the creation of every new Bible translation.

Faith Statement

The Scriptures, given under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are nevertheless the words of human beings, conditioned by the language, thought forms, and literary fashions of the places and times at which they were written. They reflect views of life, history, and the cosmos which were then current. The church, therefore, has an obligation to approach the Scriptures with literary and historical understanding. As God has spoken the divine word in diverse cultural situations, the church is confident that God will continue to speak through the Scriptures in a changing world and in every form of human culture.

—*The Confession of 1967*
(9.29) inclusive language version



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- Why are there so many different versions (translations) of the Bible?
- Why do we need so many versions of the Bible?
- Which version do you use the most?
- Which versions do your parents, grandparents, or caregivers use?
- Which version does your congregation use in worship?



Explore

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17 in the NRSV, TNIV, and NIV and explore these questions:

- Which of these differences in translation are important for the meaning of the passage, and which are not? Why?
- If you had been the translator, would you have made any word or phrase decisions differently? Why?
- The two newest translations, NRSV and TNIV, substitute "gender-neutral" language—"everyone who belongs to God" and "all God's people," respectively—for the more literal translation, "man of God" (NIV). Why might the translators have made this decision?

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17 in the NRSV, using the following alternate beginning of verse 16 found in the NRSV footnote:

"Every scripture inspired by God is also useful for teaching . . ."

Ask: How does this alternate reading change the meaning of the verse? Discuss the implications of this difference.



Express

Use the following questions to help the young people express what they've learned:

- How do the differences in various translations of the Bible affect your faith and theology?
- How does the presence of different words across different Bible translations affect your view of the need (or lack of need) for different and updated translations?
- Is there value in using more than one Bible translation in study, teaching, worship, and private devotions? Why or why not?

Consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the Bible passage.



Exit

Close in prayer, thanking God for the time that you have had together talking about God's Word.





Session Objective

Youth have many questions about how we read the Bible: Do we take the Bible literally? If so, all of it or some parts of it? What parts and why? What has been proven in the Bible? Could the whole Bible have been a fictional novel that was just misinterpreted? These are questions of interpretation, and Christians give as many answers as there are denominations and traditions. Presbyterians and other Reformed Christians use some fairly specific interpretive guidelines, and this session explores and practices them.

Faith Statement

But we hold that interpretation of the Scripture to be orthodox and genuine which is gleaned from the Scriptures themselves (from the nature of the language in which they were written, likewise according to the circumstances in which they were set down, and expounded in the light of like and unlike passages and of many and clearer passages) and which agree with the rule of faith and love, and contributes much to the glory of God and humanity's salvation.
—The Second Helvetic Confession (5.010)



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- Is it possible to read the Bible without adding your personal interpretation? Why or why not?
- What things in our lives contribute to our interpretation of the Bible?
- What does it mean to “take the Bible literally”?



Explore

Read Psalm 19:7-10 and explore these questions:

- What, if anything, does this passage say about how we are meant to interpret God's Word?
- Verse 9b proclaims, “The ordinances of the LORD are true.” Does this mean, for example, that we have no choice but to accept the creation account in Genesis 1 as literally true? Or does the word “ordinances” narrow the definition of what is true?
- Is there any room in this passage for a nonliteral interpretation of God's Word? Why or why not?
- What frame of mind does the psalmist seem to think we should be in when we study God's Word? What difference does it make?
- Can the “Reformed Principles of Biblical Interpretation” (Web Resource 3b) be used to study this passage? If so, which principles? If not, why not?



Express

Use the following questions to help the young people express what they've learned.

- How has our conversation today affected how you will interpret the Bible in the future?
- How would you respond if someone asked, “Do you take the Bible literally? Why or why not?”
- Consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the Bible passage.

Note: A Leader's Guide activity (Express, Option A) is suitable for a coffeehouse setting.



Exit

Close in prayer, thanking God for the time that you have had together talking about God's Word.





Session Objective

In the previous session, we dealt with the general issue of biblical interpretation: Do we or don't we take the Bible literally? This session examines a more specific interpretive question: Is the God of the Old Testament somehow different from the God of Jesus Christ? Along the way, we'll tackle the relationship between the Old and New Testaments.

Faith Statement

The New Testament is the recorded testimony of apostles to the coming of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, and the sending of the Holy Spirit to the Church. The Old Testament bears witness to God's faithfulness in God's covenant with Israel and points the way to the fulfillment of God's purpose in Christ. The Old Testament is indispensable to understanding the New, and is not itself fully understood without the New.

—The Confession of 1967 (9.28)



Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- What words would you use to describe God in the Old Testament?
- What words would you use to describe God in the New Testament?
- Why does God in the Old Testament seem different from God—especially in the person of Jesus Christ—in the New Testament?
- Why does God seem cruel, vengeful, and unpredictable in the Old Testament, but loving and gracious in the New Testament?
- Did God change?



Express

Use the following questions to help the young people express what they've learned.

- What new insights or surprises struck you during the course of this session or over the past few sessions?
- How has your view of God changed, if at all?
- How would you respond if someone asked you, "Why does God seem to be cruel, vengeful, and unpredictable in the Old Testament, but loving and gracious in the New Testament?"

Consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the Bible passage.



Explore

Read John 1:1-5 and explore these questions:

- What does John mean by "the Word"? Who does "he" refer to? (*Jesus Christ, in both cases.*) Do you normally think of Jesus Christ as being "with God" at creation and having a part in creation? Why or why not?
- Consider Genesis 1:1-5 in light of John 1:1-5. What mention is there in Genesis 1:1-5, if any, of Jesus Christ? Of "the Word"?
- What, if any, is the connection between the light that God speaks into being in Genesis 1:3 and the light that "shines in the darkness" in John 1:5?



Exit

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