

# The Bible and You

powers and abilities, so that with Him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things that He wanted” (*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*). In this way, the divine origin and the human input are seamlessly entwined. Catholics also believe that the Holy Spirit continues to guide the Church in interpreting and handing on the truths contained within the Scriptures.

## How to Read the Bible

It’s a good idea to start with the New Testament. Begin with the Gospel of Luke and continue with Luke’s account of the early Christians in the Acts of the Apostles. It will give you an overview of the life of Jesus and his followers.

If you’re interested in the Old Testament, begin with the first two books of the Bible — Genesis and Exodus — that trace the early history of the Jewish people.

Before you start, read the introductory material at the beginning of each book. It will help to put what you read into a historical perspective and give you an overview of the audience, cultural setting, and literary form. A biblical commentary can also be helpful in understanding the background of the text.

Read each book as a whole. Don’t pull out individual phrases and try to attribute meaning to them. Instead, look at the deeper levels of meaning. For example, ask yourself what the Scripture says to you

personally. Ask yourself what message the writer was trying to convey. Ask yourself how you can respond to this message in your own life. Always examine Scripture in light of Catholic teachings.

Look for a Catholic scripture study group in your parish.

All spiritual growth comes from reading and reflection. By reading we learn what we did not know; by reflection we retain what we have learned.  
— St. Isidore



## How to Choose a Bible

Choose a Catholic Bible you can read and understand. The Bible was originally written in Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic — so when you buy a Bible, you’ll get a translation, and not all translations are the same.

Not all Bibles are the same, either: the books of Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach, and Baruch are included in Catholic Bibles but omitted in Protestant ones. If you plan to study the Bible, you may want to invest in one like the *Catholic Study Bible*, which has supplementary notes, maps, cross-references, and commentaries to help you better understand all of Scripture. *The New American Bible* also has helpful footnotes and background information. (This version will be familiar because it is the translation used during Mass.) Another good choice is the *Revised Standard Catholic Edition*, which is one of the most accurate translations of the Bible.

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.  
— 2 Tim. 3:16-17

## Grow in Your Understanding of Jesus

St. Jerome warned, “To be ignorant of the Scripture is to be ignorant of Christ.” If you want to grow in your faith of who Jesus is and what it means to follow Him as a Catholic, pick up your Bible! Open it up and begin to read, study, and pray.

## For More Information

*Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second Edition*, Nos. 100-141.

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## Our Sunday Visitor

200 Noll Plaza • Huntington, IN 46750  
1-800-348-2440 • Fax: 1-800-498-6709 • [www.osv.com](http://www.osv.com)

ISBN: 1-59276-168-2, Inventory Number: P-219

By Karl A. Schultz  
and Lorene Hanley Duquin

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Cover Images DesignPics

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To become adult Christians you must learn familiarity with the Scriptures.  
— St. John Chrysostom



If you're like most Catholics, you probably have a Bible somewhere in your home. Maybe it's an heirloom. Maybe it's a paperback that your children used in religious education classes. Maybe it's a Bible you received as a gift. Or maybe you bought one for yourself.

You probably want to read the Bible, but you're not sure how to begin. Some Catholics make the mistake of starting at the beginning, but get bored when they reach the book of Leviticus. Some open the Bible at random places for inspiration and end up confused. Some start with the Book of Revelation and get frightened by the powerful images. Some never get started at all because it seems so intimidating.

But it doesn't *have* to be that way. All you need is a little basic knowledge and some helpful tips. Once you get started reading the Bible, you will find you don't want to stop!

### Why Catholics Should Read the Bible

The Bible is the inspired word of God. It offers comfort, encouragement, and spiritual strength; it shows us how God interacts in the lives of people. Most of all, the Bible is the story of God's love for us.

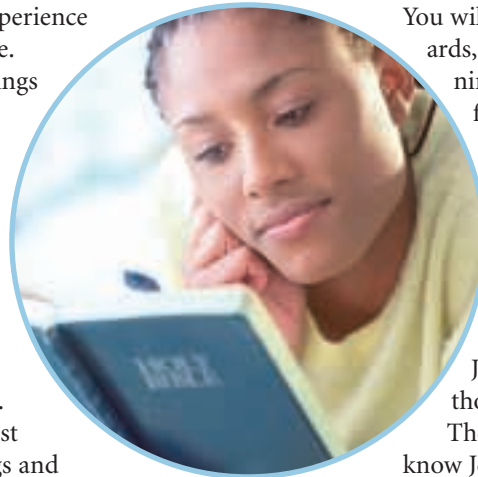
You probably have more experience with the Bible than you realize. There are four Scripture readings during Sunday Mass: an Old Testament reading (except during the Easter season when the reading is from the Acts of the Apostles), a responsorial Psalm (which is not always a psalm!), a reading from one of the New Testament letters or the Book of Revelation, and the Gospel.

During the homily, the priest explains the Scripture readings and offers insights on how to apply the message to your life. So, if you go to Mass every day for three years, you will hear readings from almost the entire Bible. Additionally, if you also begin to study the Scriptures or add Scripture reading to your daily prayer life, your understanding of the Bible will deepen.

Pope John Paul II assured us, "Learning to read Sacred Scripture is fundamental for the believer: it is the first step of a ladder, which continues with meditation and thus, with real prayer. Prayer based on biblical reading is the principal way of Christian spirituality. Those who can dedicate the necessary time and commitment to it, gather abundant fruits."

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

— Mt. 4:4



### What is the Bible?

The word *bible* comes from the Greek word *ta biblia*, meaning "the books." These books contain stories, poems, history, songs, letters, proverbs, prophecies, parables, miracles, and advice on how to live your life. You will discover saints and sinners, heroes and cowards, the powerful and the weak, the clever, the cunning, the silly, and the stupid. Some stories are filled with adventure, intrigue, and romance. Others tell sad tales of jealousy, betrayal, and revenge.

Sometimes, Scripture is encouraging, as in St. Paul's assurance that we all play important roles as members of the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12). Sometimes, Scripture is challenging, as in the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus tells us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:43-48).

The more you read the Bible, the better you will know Jesus, and through Jesus, you will come to know God the Father. You will begin to understand the workings of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God out of the abundance of his love speaks to his people as friends and lives among them, so that he may invite and take them into fellowship with himself.

— Constitution on Divine Revelation, 2



### How to Pray Using the Bible

Praying with the Bible is different than reading or studying the Bible. The official Catholic model for praying with the Bible is known as *lectio divina*, a Latin term meaning "divine reading." It is composed of five stages:

- **Reading** (*Lectio*): Read slowly and reflectively, aloud if it will not disturb others. Read until you come upon a word, phrase, image, or verse that speaks to you.
- **Meditation** (*Meditatio*): Think about your chosen passage of Scripture and allow the Holy Spirit to show you how to apply it to your life.
- **Prayer** (*Oratio*): Share with God the emotions, thoughts, and experiences evoked by the passage.
- **Contemplation** (*Contemplatio*): Sit quietly with God, just as you would with a loved one. Listen to the movement of the Spirit.
- **Action** (*Operatio*): It is not enough to hear God's word; we must act upon it in our own lives.

### Who Wrote the Bible?

Catholics believe that the Holy Spirit inspired the biblical writers. But inspiration is a very mysterious process. It's not as if God dictated and the authors wrote what they heard. Instead, God instilled in human beings divine insights, which they described in their own words using images from their own culture to help their readers understand the message.

God inspired kings, teachers, poets, prophets, fishermen, and ordinary people, "who made use of their

### Bible Trivia

- The longest verse is Esther 8:9.
- The shortest verse is John 11:35.
- The shortest chapter is Psalm 117.
- The longest chapter is Psalm 119.
- The longest book of the Bible is Psalms.
- The shortest book is the Third Letter of John.
- The Bible is the best selling book of all time.



### Old Testament

- Genesis
- Exodus
- Leviticus
- Numbers
- Deuteronomy
- Joshua
- Judges
- Ruth
- 1 Samuel
- 2 Samuel
- 1 Kings
- 2 Kings
- 1 Chronicles
- 2 Chronicles
- Ezra
- Nehemiah
- Tobit
- Judith
- Esther
- 1 Maccabees
- 2 Maccabees
- Job
- Psalms
- Proverbs
- Ecclesiastes
- Song of Songs
- Wisdom
- Sirach
- Isaiah
- Jeremiah
- Lamentations
- Baruch
- Ezekiel
- Daniel
- Hosea
- Joel
- Amos
- Obadiah
- Jonah
- Micah
- Nahum
- Habakkuk
- Zephaniah
- Haggai
- Zechariah
- Malachi

The Bible is a collection of books. The 46 books of the Old Testament contain the story of the Hebrew people. The 27 books of the New Testament contain accounts of Jesus and the early Church.

### New Testament

- Matthew
- Mark
- Luke
- John
- Acts
- Romans
- 1 Corinthians
- 2 Corinthians
- Galatians
- Ephesians
- Philippians
- Colossians
- 1 Thessalonians
- 2 Thessalonians
- 1 Timothy
- 2 Timothy
- Titus
- Philemon
- Hebrews
- James
- 1 Peter
- 2 Peter
- 1 John
- 2 John
- 3 John
- Jude
- Revelation

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