

St. Alice Bible Study: Lesson One

“Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.” (St. Jerome)

“Don’t study Scripture to become wise; study Scripture to overcome your greatest fault.”

(St. Thomas A Kempis.)

Intro:

- If we aren’t changed by study of Scripture, we are reading it incorrectly—it is impossible to not be recreated by our encounter with the Living Word of God.
- This class will be an overview of the entire story of the Old Testament, from Genesis to Jesus—an ambitious goal but possible if we are diligent.
- Our method of study will focus on the “Canonical Method” of interpretation. This is the way the Church Fathers read the Scriptures.
- **Suggested (but not required)** reading for further study: 1) Bible Basics for Catholics (\$5 from Lighthouse Catholic Media. Covers all the main points in this course) 2) Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: Genesis (~\$10—really good to answer questions about proper interpretation, science, history, etc.)

Catholic belief about the Bible:

1) The Bible is the Inspired and Inerrant word of God.

- Inspiration- God inspired the sacred authors to convey everything He wished them to write for our salvation, while at the same time not restricting their own freedom or skills as writers and editors to relate that revelation to us. Inspiration is NOT oral dictation from God (unless the author is relating a direct quote).
- Inerrant- The Bible is without error in “everything that the authors wished to assert.” This statement doesn’t limit the inerrancy to merely matters of “faith and morals” but other things as well. Don’t assume the Bible is incorrect in matters of history (*Note—this is not the same as “fundamentalism” or a blind acceptance of everything in the bible as “historical” in the modern sense. The Bible is primarily “Salvation History” which is from a particular perspective—namely God’s!)
- As *Dei Verbum* and the Catechism say:
In Sacred Scripture, God speaks to man in a human way. To interpret Scripture correctly, the reader must be attentive to what the human authors truly wanted to affirm and to what God wanted to reveal to us by their words. (cf. DV 12) In order to discover the sacred authors’ intention, the reader must take into account the conditions of their time and culture, the literary genres in use at that time, and the modes of feeling, speaking, and narrating then current. “For the fact is that truth is differently presented and expressed in the various types of historical writing, and in other forms of literary expression” (CCC 109-110)
- The Magisterium and Tradition are the infallible interpreters of the Scriptures. The Bible is a book of the Church, written by the Church—it was not codified in the form we have today until the late 4th Century!

2) Bible (*Biblia*) means “books”

- The Bible is a library containing many different styles or genres of literature. There is poetry, history, symbolic visions, philosophical wisdom texts, as well as biographies and “pre-history.”
- Therefore, to understand a text properly, we must know what type of literature it is so that we avoid obscuring the meaning.

Which Translation of the Bible is the Best?

-For this Class, I will be using the Revised Standard Version, 2nd Catholic Edition (RSV-2nd CE). This version is one of the closest possible translations to the original languages and has the benefit of being an acceptable translation to Protestants and Catholics alike. (Whatever Bible you have, be sure that it is a “Catholic Version” because there are 7 fewer books in Protestant Bibles.) It is important for the purpose of study that, if we can’t read the original languages, we get as close a translation as possible. The benefits can be illustrated by an example Dr. Bergsma calls the “Psalm 8 test”

- Open your bible to Psalm 8: 4-7. The Original Hebrew reads “What is man that you are mindful of him...the son of man that you care for him? You have made him little less than the angels...crowned him with glory...you have put all things under his feet.”
- If you have the New American Bible of a certain generation, or certain others such as the NRSV, you may read something like “what are humans that you are mindful...mere mortals that you care for them?” This was motivated by the movement for “gender neutral” language in the Bible. While being sensitive to the need to be inclusive, there are unfortunate consequences to such changes
- In the original Hebrew, there are 4 possible meanings: 1) Man (Adam) and his Son (Seth), 2) Man (humanity), and all of us, 3) Man (David) and his Son (Solomon), or 4) Man (Adam) and the Son of Man (Jesus Christ). With the more “modern” translation, we only have one option before us. The most unfortunate consequence is that one of the options eliminated (number 4) is a prophecy about Christ which is eliminated because of the translation!
- If you open to this passage and they translated it correctly (Man and the Son of Man), most likely they will be consistent throughout the rest of Scripture. This is the “psalm 8 test”.

-If you have a favorite Bible, you don’t have to get another one, just be aware that some of the insights of the class are related to the original languages and may not be as clear in other translations. Remember too that the New American Bible is the Bible we read from at Mass, so there is nothing “wrong” with it; the RSV is just more accurate.

Creation and Fall: Gen 1-3

Creation

~2 keys to understanding Sacred Scripture are contained within the first 2 chapters. These are the **Liturgical Orientation of Creation** and the **Nuptial orientation of Creation**. The Liturgical Orientation is contained in the first chapter, the Nuptial in the second. Let’s examine these chapters to see what structure they contain.

Genesis 1

-The days of creation reveal not scientific explanation for the creation of things, but rather the “why” of Creation. The book of Genesis as a whole is filled with many symbols which reveal a deeper meaning. If we read the first chapters “strictly literal” we will miss the author’s intention. Keep in mind that the first 5 books of the bible were, at the earliest, written down by Moses. They existed as oral tradition before that time. As

we will see, many of the questions raised by evolutionary theory are only problematic if we have a fundamentalist interpretation.

-The world is “formless and void”—a situation which God will correct in an orderly fashion.

-In the first three days, we have the realms of the universe created: Light/Dark, Sea/Sky, and Land/plants. In the second three days, the “rulers” of those realms are created: Sun/moon, Birds/fish, and animals/Man (Men and Women). These are parallel to each other, lining up perfectly. This shows that God is a God of order, reversing the “formless and void” nature of the Earth at the beginning. He creates form in the first 3 days, then “fills the void” in the second 3 days.

-The 7th day is significant for many reasons. It is the day God “rested” (when He needs no rest), a day he “blessed” and “made holy.” The number 7 (*sheva*) is also the same word for “covenant” or “oath”; to make a covenant is “to 7 oneself.” God, then, is making a covenant with creation, which involves our participation in God’s “Sabbath.”

a) Thomas Aquinas: “What is last in execution is first in intention.” (taken from Summa II-I, q.1, art 1) This principle means that since the Sabbath is created last, it is actually the most important thing God did. It is analogous to getting a book published. The last thing you do is put the finished manuscript in the mail, but before that you do many other things to prepare for it. Yet, all the things that came before that moment are directed towards putting the finished product in the mail.

b) When you combine this principle with the covenant notion of the Sabbath—all of creation is directed towards the Sabbath. In other words, the purpose of creation is the Worship of God! This is what we mean by the **Liturgical Orientation of Creation**—all creation was made to worship!

Genesis 2

-This “Second account” of creation can be seen as the same story from a different angle. Instead of the whole of creation, this account focuses specifically on humanity and “day 6.” It tries to address the question, “What is the purpose of men and women?” (As opposed to other creatures)

-God creates man (*ish*) from the ground (*adamah*) and woman (*issha*) from the rib of man. Much of the poetry is a play on words in the Hebrew:

- a) “You are dust and to dust you shall return” –play on Adam and *Adamah*-dust
- b) “She shall be called woman, for out of her man she was taken”—play on *ish* and *issha*

-God sees that the man is alone and says “it is *not* good.” God plans to give him a suitable Helpmate (*Etzer*) for him. This word *etzer* is usually attributed to God in the Scriptures, ie “saving help.” Eve then, is seen as one who will help Adam on the way to salvation.

-It has been said that Eve was not taken from the foot so she could be crushed, or the head so that she would dominate man, but rather next to his heart to have the first place in love, under his arm to be protected by him, and at his side to work with him.

-Before the creation of Eve however, God brings all the animals to Adam so that he can recognize his uniqueness among the animal kingdom. Once Adam realizes his “original solitude” (see the *Theology of the Body* by John Paul II), God “casts a deep sleep” on Adam and creates Eve from his rib.

-Rabbinic interpretation: Adam would have fallen asleep on the 6th day and woke up on the 7th day to the vision of his bride—linking marriage with the Sabbath somehow.

-Typological interpretation: Just as Adam fell asleep and his bride was born from his side, so Christ, the new Adam, slept in death and from his pierced side the Church, His bride, was born!

-again, in the book of Revelation we see that Heaven is a wedding feast of the Lamb and the Bride—the Church. Worship and Marriage are mystically linked!

-If we remember the principle of Aquinas, Eve is the most important creature created since she is the last. This means all of creation is ordered to the feminine, or more precisely to marriage. This is the Bridal or Nuptial orientation of creation.

-With these two keys, we see God’s original plan for creation—all of creation is called to Worship and to Marriage (note—we will discuss how voluntary celibacy fits into this picture later). As we proceed ahead through scripture, you can predict problems whenever people depart from God’s original plan: namely, when they worship false gods or when they embrace a vision of sexuality different from one man, one woman marriage. We will see that just as marriage, sex, and worship are mystically united in God’s original plan, whenever people sin, marriage, sex, and worship are usually connected as well.

The Fall

“Inversion of Norms”—Everything that God established as normative is turned on its head.

Genesis 3

-The Serpent (*Nahash*) is obviously symbolic of Satan, however the Hebrew word *nahash* is flexible in meaning—could be anything from a worm to a dragon!

-in fact, in Revelation 12, the Dragon is referred to as “That ancient serpent.” It is, therefore, very possible that this “serpent” is not your garden-variety snake!

The Way Satan works:

1) The serpent begins by planting doubt: “did God really say...”

-This is the same in the New Testament. When Christ was baptized in the Jordan, God’s voice said, “This is my beloved Son...” Immediately afterwards, in the temptation in the desert, Satan says, “If you are God’s Son, change these stones to bread.”

2) Tells a lie which contains some truth: “you will not die...you will become like gods who know...”

a) Some people say that Satan wasn't lying because Adam and Eve didn't die physically. However, God said literally in the Hebrew that, on the day they ate the fruit, they would "die die," or "die the death." This phrase is obscure, but Tradition is clear that it refers to spiritual death. Satan merely says that they will not *die*. This is true partially, for Adam and Eve didn't die right away, but the supernatural life of grace that they experienced died at that moment, and by extension they also would experience death in the future.

b) The truth is that Adam and Eve did gain knowledge of good and evil, but it was not what they wanted to know, because they "learned the hard way" by committing evil and experiencing the punishment.

c) some scholars also see contained in this statement an implicit threat from the serpent directed towards Eve, namely "you won't die AS LONG AS you eat the fruit."

-After Eve eats the fruit, she gives it to her husband—some translations say that he was with her! This implies that Adam stood by watching the whole time, saying nothing. God put Adam in Eden to "till and guard" the garden. This episode then, is a failure of Adam to fulfill his duties. Eve is not off the hook however. Her role was to bring "saving help" (*etzer*) to Adam. Instead of life, she brings him death. We could say that Adam commits the first sin of *omission*, by doing nothing, whereas Eve commits the first sin of *commission*.

*as a side note, the New Testament (especially Romans 5) refers to The Fall as "the sin of Adam"—which Christ reversed by His sacrifice.

-As a result of their sin, Eve will experience labor-pains, Adam will have to work hard to produce fruit of the earth, the earth will produce thorns, and men and women will battle for dominance. They no longer have complete trust with each other, nature, and God—symbolized by the fact that they are now ashamed to be naked. All of creation has fallen with them—yet there is one ray of hope in Gen 3:15—the "seed of the woman" will crush the head of the serpent, undoing the curse. For this, we must wait for the coming of Christ.