

Why We Need to Know Facts About the Bible by Joe Carter

“When you encounter a present-day view of Holy Scripture,” J. I. Packer wrote, “you encounter more than a view of Scripture.” As Packer adds,

What you meet is a total view of God and the world, that is, a total theology, which is both an ontology, declaring what there is, and an epistemology, stating how we know what there is. This is necessarily so, for a theology is a seamless robe, a circle within which everything links up with everything else through its common grounding in God. Every view of Scripture, in particular, proves on analysis to be bound up with an overall view of God and man.

Our view of Scripture—particularly how we view the Bible’s truthfulness and authority over our lives—profoundly affects our spiritual formation. For this reason, the primary thing we should know about the Bible is that, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

But our view of Scripture should also lead us to discover what the Bible is and how we came to receive it. Knowing facts about the Bible is not for the purpose of gathering material for a trivia contest, but for becoming intimately familiar with the book that will most shape our lives.

Here is a sampling of basic facts we should know:

It’s library of books — The Bible is a library of 66 books, written by 44 authors under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit over a period of about 1,500 years. The 39 books of the Old Testament were composed between 1400 and 400 B.C., the 27 books of the New Testament between AD 50 and AD 100.

The Bible is self-referencing — All the books of the Old Testament, with the exception of Esther, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon, are quoted or referenced in the New Testament. Jesus quoted or made references from Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Proverbs, 1 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Amos, Jonah, Micah, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Why it's called a "Bible" — The English word Bible is derived from the Koine Greek τὰ βιβλία (ta biblia—"the books"). While Christian use of the term can be traced to around AD 223, Chrysostom in his Homilies on Matthew (between AD 386 and 388) appears to be the first writer to use the Greek phrase ta biblia to describe both the Old and New Testaments together.

The meaning of Testament — The word "testament" means "covenant." The term "Old Testament" refers to the covenant that God entered into with Abraham and the people of Israel, and "New Testament" to the covenant God has entered into with believers through Christ.

Where chapters and verses came from — The practice of dividing the Bible into chapters began with Stephen Langton, an archbishop of Canterbury in the early 13th century. Robert Estienne, a 16th-century printer and classical scholar in Paris, was the first to print the Bible divided into standard numbered verses.

How we discovered the canon — "Canon" is a word that comes from Greek and Hebrew words that literally mean a measuring rod. So canonicity describes the standard that books had to meet to be recognized as Scripture. God's people merely discovered the canon—the authority of the books in the Bible is established by God. That a book is canonical is due to divine inspiration while how it is known to be canonical is due to a process of human recognition. The process of discovery, as Norman Geisler explains, included the following questions:

Was a book (1) written by a spokesperson for God, (2) who was confirmed by an act of God, (3) told the truth (4) in the power of God and (5) was accepted by the people of God? If a book clearly had the first mark canonicity was often assumed. Contemporaries of a prophet or apostle made the initial confirmation. Later church Fathers sorted out the profusion of religious literature to officially recognize what books were divinely inspired in the manner of which Paul speaks in 2 Timothy 3:16.

Source: http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-we-need-to-know-facts-about-the-bible?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=tgcblog#When:06:06:00Z