

Bible Sunday

Today we call Bible Sunday, a day in the year when we especially give thought to, and reflect on the importance and meaning to what we call "The Bible".

But, what is the Bible?

It is the most influential book in the history of mankind, and is a translation of the Scriptures, which we call the Old and New Testaments. For us, it usually comes in the form of a book, though for many today it may be online or some other digital form (*I have it on my "Kindle"*) But, if we were able to ask the early Christians what was the Bible they would give a very different answer to us. For the early Christians growing up in the 1st century the Bible as we know it simply did not exist!

Scriptures **did** exist in the form of Scrolls which were regularly read publically and the prophet Nehemiah tells us, they were always read ... with interpretation. The Word of God was never restricted to what was written on the page. The Word of God included "the interpretation". Also, in the New Testament Book of Acts, chapter 8 verse 31 Luke reminds us of the Ethiopian eunuch asking Philip to "*guide him*" with the interpretation of the Book Isaiah.

So if, in those early days, people only had the Scrolls (*i.e. the first five Books of Moses*) and the Prophets to read when did "The Bible", as we know it, emerge.

The Jewish collection of books that we call the Old Testament, was not fixed until well into the second century C.E. And consists of:- 5 Books of Torah, 13 Books of Prophets and 4 collections of Psalms (*those are Psalms of Praise, Wisdom, Thanksgiving and Lament*). (22 books all told).

The Books that make up "The New Testament", as we know it, were argued about for years and some sort of consensus was not reached until the end of the fourth century. But it was not until the late 16th Century, following further deliberation, that they eventually became the "New Testament Canon". It may seem strange to us who have been so used to reading the New Testament that early Christians did not grow up with what we now simply take for granted. Even the thought that we did not know the gospels of Matthew and Luke, for example, might make a huge difference to the way in which we approach Christmas!

Matthew wrote about the genealogy of Jesus. A genealogy that proves Jesus was indeed the Son of David. Giving proof of His royalty and of His God-given authority, and in his Gospel he stresses that Jesus is the Christ as foretold, and demonstrates how Jesus fulfils all the prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Jesus knew, and used the Scriptures in his teaching. He acknowledged that the Old Testament speaks about himself, and he interpreted what it said concerning himself to the disciples. He encouraged them to study the Scriptures so they would understand the significance of his life.

Throughout the Book of Acts, we see how the preaching of the disciples showed how Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament, and in this morning's reading from the Gospel of Matthew Jesus himself tells us that even though "*Heaven and earth will pass away his words will not pass away*". To know Christ, we need to know his word, and in the words of Martin Luther it is by reading our Bibles with rigorous interpretation of Scripture that we find him.

The Bible is not just another book of words the author of the letter to the Hebrews tells us it is "*Indeed the Word of God*" and "*is living and active, sharper than a two-edged sword*". So, on this Bible Sunday let us give thanks for God's Word living and breathing through us.
June