



**Breathed by God**  
The Bible and You



## Session One

# **INTRODUCING... THE BIBLE!**

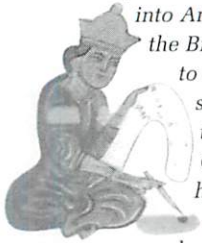
*How sweet are your words to my taste,  
Sweeter than honey to my mouth!  
Through your precepts I get understanding;  
Therefore I hate every false way.  
Your word is a lamp to my feet  
And a light to my path.  
I have sworn an oath and confirmed it,  
To observe your righteous ordinances.*

Psalm 119:103-106



### The Armenian Angle

After the Armenian alphabet was created in 404 A.D. by St. Mesrob Mashdotz, the first book translated into Armenian was the Bible. Thanks to one of his students – the monk Goriun – we have the story of how this was accomplished. Koriun wrote a small book called “The Life of Mashdotz” in which he lovingly and admiringly details this fascinating story.



## Introducing... The Bible!

Most people are more familiar with the Bible than they think they are. They've heard that “the love of money is the root of all evil,” which is something Saint Paul said. They know that Mary is a shining example of obedience and love. They can tell you what David did to Goliath, and they know that calling someone a “Judas” is the same as calling him a traitor.

### A Special Way of Seeing

Both Christians and non-Christians are familiar with these Bible bits, and probably many more. But for Christians, the Bible is not just a collection of sayings and stories, a good book to dip into now and then. For Christians, the Bible is the book of sacred writings of God's people, both the people of the Old Testament and the people of the New Testament. And since those people are our ancestors as well as our spiritual sisters and brothers today, the Bible is absolutely essential to understanding who we are and who God is.

Though we refer to the Bible as a book, it is not really one book but a collection of many, arranged and ordered over a period of hundreds of years. There are two main parts to this collection of books: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament has a very specific purpose, according to Christian teaching. It reveals how God carefully and thoroughly prepared the world for the coming of His Son to save humankind and all creation. The New Testament books contain several kinds of writings which all testify to the fact that Jesus Christ did come, as His Father promised, and that He has saved the world.

This specific way of seeing the Old and New Testaments is unique to Christians. No casual reader of the Bible who is not part of a church, and no member of any faith group other than Christianity, looks at the Bible in just this same way. It really is a special way of seeing.

### Translations

Since the original languages of Scripture are primarily Hebrew and Greek, when you read the Bible in English (or Armenian) you are reading a translation. You might have noticed that these vary slightly in vocabulary and style.

Some translations will render each word of the ancient text into as precise a word as possible of the new language. Translators call these “formal;” they will always sound different from modern English because they follow the patterns of the ancient language. They can be (though not always) a clearer word-for-word mirror of the original text and culture.

Other translations are more interested in putting whole thoughts into modern

expressions. These translations are functional and are generally smoother to read and easier to understand. Many of the newer translations try to honor both approaches. These will sound contemporary yet still reflect ancient Bible times. Here are a few examples from the famous 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm:

**King James Version (1611)** “formal”

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.

**Today's English Version (1976)** “functional”

The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need.  
He lets me rest in fields of green grass.

**New International Version (1984)** “formal-functional”

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures.

Any standard translation is okay if it gets you reading the Bible regularly!

## Main Sections of the Bible

The New Testament, for all Christians, contains 27 books. They can be looked at as four groups: 1) the four Gospels 2) the Acts of the Apostles 3) Epistles or Letters 4) The Revelation to John. We'll learn more about these in later sessions.

The Old Testament used in the Armenian Church, as well as in other Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, contains more books than those listed as Old Testament books in Protestant Bibles. How did this come about?

The original Old Testament Scripture was written largely in the Hebrew language. But the Jewish people were frequently dispersed, and sometimes those who had settled in an area far from their homeland forgot or lost their Hebrew language. Translations of the Bible into the languages of these dispersed people became essential if the faith was to be preserved.

The most important of these translations from Hebrew (into Greek) is the Septuagint. This name is from a Latin word meaning “seventy.” Jewish tradition tells us that over seventy Hebrew scholars worked separately on the translation, yet came up with the same wording.

The Septuagint was accepted by the Jewish religious authorities of the time (about 300 B.C.) as the official Bible of the Jewish people. It was also the Scriptures known to Jesus Christ and His disciples. However, in the first cen-

### Word Watch

**Septuagint** (lit. seventy): The Greek translation of the Old Testament completed circa 300 BC and the version used in the Orthodox and Catholic Churches.



**Deuterocanonical** (lit. second canon): Books and chapters recognized as Scripture on a secondary level by the Orthodox and Catholic Churches.

**Looking In**

*“And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”*



Read this passage from Deuteronomy 6. Underline the words you think are key and reflect on these questions:

Who is “I” and who is “you” in this passage? What does it mean to have words “upon your heart”? How would a person live if he or she were living according to this passage?

turies of our era, when Christianity became a distinct and separate religion, the Jews rejected this version.

A few of the books in the Septuagint were not part of the original Hebrew Scripture. Yet the Christian Church of the first few centuries recognized them as part of the canon—this word means the group of books accepted by scholars and clergy as being part of the Bible. But many centuries later, the Protestant “reformers” decided to accept as part of the canon only those books which had been part of the original Hebrew Scriptures. So their Bibles do not contain these few books, and they refer to them as apocrypha, a name derived from a word that means “hidden.” A more properly descriptive name is deuterocanonical, which means “second canon.”

The Old Testament in the Bible of the Armenian Church contains 48 books, and we can look at them in four groups: 1) The Pentateuch, the first 5 books of the Bible, sometimes called the Books of the Law of Moses 2) Historical Books 3) Wisdom Books 4) Books of the Prophets and Prophecies.

**Many Kinds of Writing**

As a way of sampling the many kinds of writing found in the Old Testament, look at the books of Deuteronomy, Isaiah, First Samuel, Proverbs and Psalms. Find a short passage (about 10 to 20 words) of each of the following kinds of writing and copy it here:

1. Law
2. Prophecy
3. Historical description
4. Wise sayings
5. Poetry

**Finding Your Way Around in the Bible**

We know that some people can quote the Bible “chapter and verse.” Originally, the Bible wasn’t divided into chapters and verses. That work was done by later scholars, and makes it easier for us to find a passage. So if we see a reference to a Bible passage listed as, for example, *Isaiah 12:8*, we will do three things:

1. Look in the Bible's table of contents to find the page on which the Book of the Prophecy of Isaiah begins.
2. Turn to Isaiah, and find within it the large, boldface number for Chapter 12.
3. Within the chapter, follow the small verse numbers to verse 8.

We might see a reference like this: *1 John 1:5b*. This would mean that we are to look at the first Letter of Saint John (he wrote three) and that we should look into Chapter One to find the second half of verse 5 (indicated by the "b") and read that rather than the whole verse. If we saw "5a" we would look at the first half of verse 5. (In referring to half of the verse, we mean an obvious division in the verse, not necessarily exactly half the words in it. So, in *1 John 1:5b* we would read the words "...that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all."

For a bit of practice, find and copy these passages:

*2 Peter 3:7a*

*Proverbs 14:1a*

*Lamentations 3:3a*

*John 14:1a*

*Ezekiel 40:38b*

*Wisdom of Solomon 15:3b*

*Deuteronomy 22:1b*

*2 Chronicles 36:2b*

## Helpful Bible Reference Books

Most of us would have no trouble using a Bible dictionary or a Bible atlas because we are used to using dictionaries and atlases in other fields of study. But another helpful Biblical reference book may be less familiar to us:

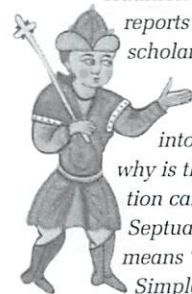
the Bible concordance


This is a book of words and names listed in alphabetical order, showing all the places where each one appears in the Bible. (Some concordances are very big books and quite

## Did You Know?

Tradition actually reports that 72 scholars translated the Jewish Scriptures into Greek. So why is their translation called the Septuagint (which means "seventy")? Simple. The

Roman numeral for seventy-two, LXXII, slowly became abbreviated to LXX. Never underestimate the power of laziness!





complete, while abridged ones show only the more significant words and names.) Suppose you have a Bible verse in mind, and are not sure where it appears in the Bible. To find out, you would take a key word from the verse and look it up in the concordance. The concordance will list a short part of each verse in which the word appears, and from that list you can find the reference you are looking for.

An example: “By you all the families of the earth will bless themselves” are God’s words to Abraham. If you wanted to find where they appear in the Old Testament, you would look up a key word in the concordance. The words “you” and “bless” are so common in the Bible that the list of references for each one might take a long time to go through. But the word “families” might have a somewhat shorter list, and going through it you would find that this passage is from *Genesis 12:3*.

Another way to use the concordance is to see what the whole Bible has to say about a certain person or subject. So to find out what the Bible says about families, you could use the concordance to get a whole list of references to that word in the various books of the Bible.

For a bit of practice, choose a word (a subject) or a Biblical name that interests you. Use the concordance to find some references, and be prepared to share with the class.

## Quick Quiz #1

- ① **The Old Testament of the Armenian Church (as well as other Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church) contains more books than those listed in Protestant Bibles.**

T    F

- ② **The New Testament is divided into 5 basic sections called the Pentateuch.**

T    F

- ③ **The Septuagint is**

- the Armenian translation of the Old Testament
- the Hebrew translation of the Old Testament
- the Greek translation of the Old Testament
- the original language of the Old Testament

- ④ **Which term better describes the additional Old Testament books in the Armenian**

Church Bible    apocrypha    deuterocanonical

- ⑤ to ⑩ **Old Testament or New Testament?**

- \_\_\_\_\_ epistles
- \_\_\_\_\_ gospels
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pentateuch
- \_\_\_\_\_ prophets
- \_\_\_\_\_ wisdom
- \_\_\_\_\_ revelation



