

Lesson 1 - Introducing the Bible

A. Introduction

Welcome to the Firm Foundation series. I'm glad you made it. Now, I don't know what your background is—whether you're one who believes in the existence of God or you may be an agnostic or even an atheist. No matter where you've been or what your past experience has been, this series is for you.

I suspect that if you're like most people, your understanding of the Bible is akin to someone watching Rocky II, and all you know about the movie is the scene where Rocky's manager, Mickey, has Rocky running around chasing a chicken, and Rocky says, "Hey yo, Mick, what do I got to chase a chicken for?" To which Mick responds, "First, because I said so. And second, is because chicken-chasing is how we used to train back in the old days. If you catch this thing, you can catch greased lightning."

Now if that's all you've seen of the Rocky series--you probably would have no idea that it's about a struggling boxer trying to make the big time, and he's working as a debt collector, when this famous boxer, Apollo Creed, visits Philadelphia and wants to set up an exhibition match between himself and a struggling boxer.

Now in Rocky 2, Rocky won the fight with Apollo Creed, and Apollo wants a rematch, so Rocky goes back into training.

But if all you ever saw from Rocky was a guy chasing a chicken around, you probably wouldn't know any of this. You'd have the wrong idea about the Rocky series, about a guy who's down on his luck who gets a chance to be a winner and the effect it has on his life.

Well that's how many approach the Bible. They know just a little bit from what they've read or heard from someone or from a high school teacher or college professor. They may've been told that God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah and He's a God of hate and violence. Or maybe they've read in the Bible-- the 6th commandment: "Thou Shalt Not Murder!" and they buy into what they've been told from this one verse and how it's been presented to them. From this one verse, they believe that God is against the use of guns, He's against capital punishment, and He's against going to war, yada, yada, yada...

Or they read that God is love in 1 John 4:16 and they think that it doesn't matter how you live your life, you're still going to make it into heaven, cause God is love. Right? Wrong! That problem with that is that it's an incomplete picture and understanding of God. If that is your understanding of God and the Bible, that's as incomplete and warped as saying that Rocky is about some guy chasing a chicken because maybe he is a chicken farmer.

Do you catch what I'm trying to say...you may just know bits and pieces of the Bible, but you don't know the entire story. You don't have the complete picture...you're just seeing a tiny portion of the Bible, but you fail to see the complete picture. Well that's what we're going to do here in this series. I want you to see the Bible as ONE story from Genesis to Revelation. It's ONE BOOK. It has a beginning and an ending.

In this series, we want to discover who God is, and even if you don't believe in God right now, that's ok.

As **St. Augustine** wrote "Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee."

God has made us for Himself and there's a restlessness or yearning deep inside all of us for something more, to know the One who created us.

The purpose of this series is NOT to try to brainwash you into believing anything.

All we're going to do each time we get together is see what the Bible says about God and the creation of the world and what is God's purpose for mankind. I'm not going to be giving a bunch of checklists, nor am I interested in "cookie-cutter" Christianity and trying to make you into a nice church-going person. My goal is that you might discover the Almighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth and the God who doesn't fit in our little boxes or in our preconceived notions.

And here's the thing—all too often, people read or study the Bible to get some of the Bible into their lives. I've been guilty of that. We all do that. We try to force Scripture to fit our experience. I've done it, we've all done it. Instead, what we want to do is let go fit us into His world which is vast and goes on for eternity, as we'll see in our next lesson.

I heard someone years ago say that most of us have only tasted dog food hamburgers and we think that's the greatest meal there is. We put bar-b-q sauce on our dog food hamburgers and they taste yummy, or at least we're satisfied with them. But then someone comes along and offers us a steak burger, made with 100% Angus beef and we look at them like they're from another planet. What do you mean--give up my dog food hamburger for a steak burger? How do I even know if I'm going to like it. That's why the Psalmist says, "Taste and see that the Lord is good, that His mercy endures forever." I'm asking you to suspend some of your judgment and to taste and see, and discover what God has for you as you begin this Firm Foundation Series together.

In this Foundation series, we're going to be spending a good bit of time in the Old Testament before we get to the NT.....and why is that? It's because **the OT is the foundation for the NT**. A building is impossible unless there is a foundation, and likewise the OT is essential if you are to understand the NT. As we will see in this series of studies, the OT and NT are essential to one another, and sad to say, most folks have ignored the OT as either irrelevant or hard to understand.

To help you better understand how we got the Old Testament scriptures and their unified message, let's take a look at this video from the Bible Project—a Portland, Oregon based non-profit that utilizes short-form, fully animated videos to make the biblical story accessible to everyone, everywhere. They create videos, podcasts, and study guides that explore the Bible's unified story by focusing on its overarching themes. Their commitment is to help bring an understanding of the Bible in its historical context and communicating its wisdom for the modern world. Check out all they have to offer at: **thebibleproject.com**

Take a look at this short video from their series, “What is the Bible?”

The Bible Project does a great job of giving us an overview of both the Old Testament and the New Testament, or the Tanak and the New Testament. From time to time, I’ll be using other Bible Project videos on the various books of the Tanak or Old Testament, as we go through this Firm Foundation series. The Bible Project and this Firm Foundation series have the same goal: that you would see and understand the Bible as one book, one story from beginning to end.

All too often, when people hear the term Old Testament, they think that it means the Old Testament is outdated and no longer relevant for today, which is why we have the New Testament. Get it? And sad to say, many Christians today believe the Old Testament is no longer needed—that it’s irrelevant, and that couldn’t be further from the truth as you saw in the Bible Project video.

Also, as if you don’t have enough to confuse you, besides the Tanak which as stated is an acronym for the Torah which is the Law and refers to the 1st 5 books of the Bible, along with the Nevi’im which is the writings of the Prophets, and the Kethuvim which is the writings, you have the Old Testament in the broadest sense referred to as the Torah or the Tanakh. I have a slide here which gives you a breakdown of the books under each heading.

For our purposes in this study, we’ll refer to it as Torah which means TEACHING or INSTRUCTION, and it can refer to all the Jewish scriptures in the broadest sense. , and the less accurate but widely used term, Old Testament. We’ll use Old Testament and Torah interchangeably.

There are those who say that the Old Testament is no longer needed because it is the law, and the law was done away with and we are now in a period of grace which God ushered in thru Jesus Christ. But Jesus said in **Matthew 5:17-19 (NKJV)**

¹⁷ "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

¹⁸ For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

¹⁹ Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus did not do away with the Law –He fulfilled it and he said that whoever teaches that you can break any of the commandments shall be called “least” in the kingdom of heaven.

All of the Old Testament points to the coming of the Messiah, the Deliverer, the Savior of the world. The Old Testament tells us that we are infected with sin. It’s in our DNA. We are sinful, broken people, and throughout the Old Testament. We’ve been born with a sin nature. We’ll explore how this came to be in an upcoming lesson.

In the Old Testament or the Torah, God is showing His people, Israel, what they need to do to have a relationship with Him. He is also shaping them and preparing them for the coming of the Messiah. Without the Torah – God’s Law, we lose sight of how lost and broken we are as a

people. The Old Testament is like looking in a mirror and seeing all our blemishes and all the ugliness in our lives. The Old Testament prepares us for the New Testament—the Old Testament or the Torah prepares us to eagerly and wholeheartedly embrace the coming Messiah, the Savior of the world whom God would send to be the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

But, here's the thing--the apostles recognized the Old Testament as God's record of His involvement in the world and especially with His chosen people in preparation for the coming of the Savior. **The Old Testament or the Torah was the Bible of the early Church.** The apostles in the Book of Acts linked the acts of God in the Old Testament to the revelation of God Himself. The apostles used the Old Testament to authenticate the claims of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ. For them, the story of Christ began long before they met him at the Sea of Galilee or at the River Jordan where John was baptizing. The apostles taught the Old Testament and its history and the events which they had experienced as one story.

This method of teaching is clearly evident, beginning with Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost. Another classic example is the sermon of Stephen in which he gives an account of Old Testament history beginning with Abraham.

The Torah or the Old Testament Scriptures, which prepare the mind to see the need and purpose of Jesus, have been badly neglected by the Church. Multitudes have little if any understanding of the biblical reasons for His coming.

B. Our one purpose here is to STUDY THE BIBLE.

God is the focus of our study.

God wants us to know Him, which is why He gave us the Bible. As we meet together, we will learn:

- Who He is
- What He does
- What He is like—His personality
- What God expects of us: His purpose and plan for us and this world.
- We learn what ought to be our chief goal in life and how to live a life that is blessed by God.
- We learn how to live a life that is at peace with God, at peace with ourselves and with one another.

We talk of “fitting the Bible into our lives” or “making room in our day for the Bible,” as if the Bible is something that we can add on to or squeeze into our already full lives.

C. We will study the Bible chronologically.

The Bible is not just a book of doctrines or teachings about God, but is the story of history as seen from God's perspective.

The Bible is ONE BOOK and you can't take bits and pieces of it--a few verses here and there and expect to comprehend God's divine revelation of Himself and His purpose for all mankind. You must see the Bible in its completeness as progressive revelation. We can't think that just reading little scraps of it can ever compensate for going deep and reading it consecutively as God intended. **The Bible was written with a definite beginning and a definite ending,** and in-

between, there are many things that take place which, when taught and understood in their historical sequence, form ONE cohesive, understandable STORY.

Now if someone were to teach the contents of any other book, they would naturally start at the beginning, and that's what we're going to do in this FOUNDATION SERIES. We're going to start at the beginning of the OT. God's story begins with the very first verse in Genesis.

In our study, we are going to walk through history, so to speak, seeing little by little what God reveals about His own character, about Satan, and about mankind.

When I say that we're going to study the Bible chronologically—I mean that we will study the Bible in the order in which major events took place. Notice on the chronological map eternity past and the creation, Adam, & Eve, Noah, and the Tower of Babel and Table of Nations. Then we'll move on to God's call to Abraham, His covenant with Abraham, Sodom and Gomorrah, Isaac, Esau and Jacob and his 12 sons as well as Israel's enslavement in Egypt, Moses and the Exodus, then the period of the Judges and the Kings. That is followed by the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah and the 70-yr of Babylonian captivity, followed by 400 yrs of silence, the birth of the Jesus, Yeshua, the Messiah and his disciples as well as the creation of the Church and the writings of the Apostles.

Studying the Bible this way is a little like stretching out a clothesline and then hanging clothes on it. We will be stretching out the Biblical timeline and placing selected events on that line. You may already know certain details of the Bible, but not yet have a clear understanding of where they fit into their proper position among the things already on the line.

We will concentrate on “setting up the clothesline”—that is, establishing the basic time line of Bible history; and we will be placing some key events on that line. But we will not have time to put EVERYTHING on the line.

We're going to begin our next lesson in Genesis, which is where God's story of history begins. **Genesis** is the foundational book of the Bible. (comparison to foundation for building a house).

If you miss out of these early teachings from Genesis, you will find it more difficult to understand later lessons.

D. We need to lay a firm foundation for understanding the Bible.

When storms hit, especially hurricanes, the walls of buildings may crack and crumble. The roof may end up buckling and falling into pieces. Floors may crash, one upon another. In a few moments, the house is reduced to rubble.

Subsequent investigations reveal that the builder had not followed the proper building specifications and plans. The depth of the concrete had been reduced, and not all of the steel reinforcements required for the foundation had been laid down. Thus, the foundation was inadequate for the height and weight of the building. The walls and floors lacked the necessary steel rods to hold and strengthen the building.

The builder had disregarded the instructions which had been given to him. He didn't build the building according to the building codes. He built the building his own way because it was easier, quicker and cheaper.

Just as a builder can carelessly ignore construction standards and specifications, we can ignore God's plan for building a strong foundation in our lives. He refuses to take short cuts and he builds carefully and patiently. He never uses inferior materials or methods.

In the construction of any building, the foundation is the first part of the structure to be prepared. Sadly, many Christians have never had a proper foundation laid in their lives because all they ever hear are sermons on doctrine or isolated texts plucked from all over the Bible and they never see God's chronological and historical framework which He has set down in the Bible starting in Genesis.

For this reason, it is very important that you attend every lesson. If you miss any lesson, just go to our website: foundationstudy.weebly.com where you can view all the lessons as well as download complete, detailed notes for each lesson.

We need to understand that the Bible deals with many different issues, questions and themes.

The Bible addresses the subject of SIN:

Sin in the Bible means to "miss the mark"—I liken it to taking a bow and arrow and trying to hit the bull's eye. That's your goal—hitting the bull's eye, hitting the mark. And for us, if we hit the "bull's eye" every time, that would be what we call "perfection." But the fact is that no matter how well-intentioned we are, no matter how hard we try, we aim at the bull's eye, and we "miss the mark." In most cases, we don't even hit the target—our arrow goes off into the woods, or hits a tree, or falls to the ground without even making it to the target.

So sin is "missing the mark"—and that's what we all do every day—we miss the mark. We miss the mark in relationships, in doing the right thing, in saying the right thing, and most of all, in our response to God. We do not respond to Him with total obedience or love or gratefulness. We miss the mark all day long!

1. There is a penalty for sin which we will look at as we go along in this study.
2. There is Salvation from the power of sin—again, we'll talk more about that in future lessons.
3. And there is a real battle going on between the Spirit of God and our flesh, and God wants to empower us so that we can have victory over the sinful desires of our flesh, the very things that are in opposition to God and His Kingdom.

E. A look at the Bible:

Now open your Bible. Let's take a look at the many things the Bible contains:

It has a

- Table of Contents,
 - a. **The Torah, Tenak, or Old Testament.** The OT is an account of a nation, Israel.

- b. **The Torah is the Law or the 1st 5 books of the Bible; which is followed by Nevi'im, the writings of the Prophets, followed by the Kethuvim, the writings. And we saw this illustrated in the Bible Project video.**
- c. New Testament—The NT is an account of a Man (the Son of man), as well as the account of the start of the church on the day of Pentecost and the writings of the Apostles.
- d. Chapters, verse numbers—The Bible wasn't written with chapters and verses. That's a relatively recent development. Later, in 1445, Mordecai Nathan, a Jew, divided the Hebrew Old Testament into chapters. He and a later scholar by the name of Athias are credited with the further breakdown of the Old Testament into verses.

In 1551, the New Testament was similarly subdivided into verses. This work was accomplished by the famous English printer, Robert Stephens—of all things, while riding on horseback from Switzerland to France! Ever since that time, the Bible has followed his chapter-and-verse system. The downside of chapters and verses is that it keeps us from reading the Bible as one book, one story. Also chapters and verses breaks up the train of thought so often and keeps us from understanding the writer's complete thought in context.

- e. The Bible is God's Word
- f. The Bible is the most important and unique book in the whole world because it is the **Word of God**.

The Bible is available today in several modern English translations. I've put a slide up to show you some of the most popular translations—and if all you have is the King James Version, then I strongly encourage you to get yourself a modern English translation. You can pick one up at Amazon or Barnes and Noble for a few dollars, and that includes shipping. You want to have a Bible that you can understand and today, there are so many great modern English translations and they all say the same thing--There is the NIV, and one of my favorite translations--the New King James Version. There's also the New American Standard Bible, The New Century Version, God's Word translation, The English Standard Version which is growing in popularity. I also use The New Century Version. There's also the Message Bible which is a paraphrase, and not what you would consider a study Bible, but still it's very popular and easy to read and understand. So get yourself a modern translation like one of these that I've shown here—and they read like the morning newspaper, easy to read and much easier to understand.

However, one word of caution: Don't bother reading the New World Translation, put out by the Jehovah's Witnesses. If you have been given a copy of it, the best thing you can do with it is burn it. It's NOT a reliable translation and they have mistranslated so many important verses to promote their false doctrine. So stay away from the New World Translation.

2 Timothy 3:16 (NLT)

¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.

- **God does not change.**

- There is absolute unity in the Bible from beginning to end, because God is its one author.

In one sense, we should treat the Bible as we treat any other book. When we download a book on our iPad, Smart phone, tablet or Kindle, we would never think of reading just a paragraph, taking some ten minutes, reading a little at night and then reading a little in the morning. No interest could be maintained in the book or story by doing it in that manner. We must come to the Bible in a common sense fashion, believing that every book is about something and read and re-read until you find out what that something is.

However, for our study over the next 60 lessons or so, we will only cover highlights and the most important events which reveal foundational issues that will help to show us God's purpose and plan for mankind from Genesis to the life of Christ.

F. The Bible is God's message to the world which He gave through the Jewish people.

- God communicates with man.**
- God is supreme and sovereign.** (show slide on God's sovereignty). The sovereignty of God means that He has total control over all things, past, present and future. When we say that God is sovereign, we mean that He doesn't need to confer with anyone else. He also doesn't need the help or assistance of anyone else. He is in complete control and self-sufficient. He is all-powerful. His supremacy means that He is ultimate in rank, power, authority, importance, and glory. There is no one who can compete with Him. He is the highest authority. Period.
- Map of world, Mideast and Israel.** Notice the red arrow pointing to this tiny piece of land. That's Israel there in green. It's a tiny sliver of land surrounded by all these other countries which are enemies of Israel. And there are many including the U.N. which wants to divide this tiny piece of land up even more. There are many in these surrounding nations of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and others that don't even believe Israel should exist or possess this tiny sliver of land. But as we'll see, God gave this land to the Jews, and they are His people. If you don't know that or have a hard time with that, hang in there and it will all make sense as we go thru this Firm Foundation series.

God used one group of people through whom he expressed His message to and for the whole world. You might say that Israel was like God's megaphone, broadcasting his message to the entire world.

- The Bible has been passed down to us intact and with extreme accuracy--** Now let me add that I personally believe in the inerrancy of the Bible. I settled this years ago as a college student. I would continually encounter other students trying to tell me that the Bible was just written by man and was full of errors. So I prayed about it, and one day as I was reading in **Revelation 3:15-16** where Jesus says to the church at Laodicea:
¹⁵ **I know what you have done, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you**

were cold or hot.

¹⁶ But since you are lukewarm and not hot or cold, I'm going to spit you out of my mouth.

Right then and there, the Lord spoke to me that He was an all-or-nothing God. He didn't do things that were incomplete or half-way, and this applied to the Bible. It wasn't partly true, or partly accurate. It was either completely and fully and accurately the Word of God, or it was a lie and not trustworthy. I chose to believe right then and there that God who is Almighty and All-powerful can easily make the ONE book that is all about Him—the One Book that is His Story, completely accurate and trustworthy from start to finish. And that settled it for me. But if you are not settled and still think that the Bible may just be written by man and full of inaccuracies, that's ok. Just hang in there with me and I believe that in time, God will show you and make this a non-issue. I'm not going to try to prove anything to you...I'll leave that up to God and His Spirit as we go through these lessons week by week.

- e. **The Bible is an accurate historical record.** Again, we could go into archaeological findings which reveal the historical accuracy of the Bible, but you can do that on your own.
- f. **All the ancient manuscripts that have been found are extremely close in content,** differing only in minute details which mostly amount to stylistic differences, and do not affect the meaning.

True Story:

In 1947, about 15 miles from Jerusalem, a shepherd boy threw a rock into a cave, and heard the sound of pottery breaking and went inside the cave to investigate. To his amazement, he saw pottery urns holding ancient scrolls. He reported his finding, and when scholars investigated, they found hundreds of scrolls. These "Dead Sea Scrolls" had been hidden in area caves by a religious sect sometime during the first century before Christ.

At the time of this discovery, translators were using manuscripts which had been copied in about 900 AD. When scholars compared the Dead Sea Scrolls with the manuscripts which they had been using, there was no significant difference in text! Though separated by 1000 yrs., these ancient manuscripts said the same thing. God knows how to preserve his word.

In the Illustrated Bible Dictionary, it gives us more insight regarding the Old Testament texts:

"It is important to recall the attitude of the Jews toward their Scriptures. It can best be summed up in the statement by Josephus, a Jewish historian from the 1st century, 'We have given practical proof of our reverence for our own Scriptures. For, although such

long ages have now passed, no one has ventured either to add, or to remove, or to alter a syllable; and it is an instinct with every Jew...to regard them as the decrees of God..."

G. How did we get the Bible in our language?

For many centuries, only a few people were able to have copies of the Bible. In the time of Christ, the scribes kept the scrolls (rolls of parchment or leather on which text was written in ink) in the temple.

Many of the New Testament books were originally written as letters which were circulated from one church to another.

The original texts of the Bible were written in one of three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek.

Down through the ages, God enabled men to translate the Bible into different languages. Many copies of the ancient Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts are still in existence. Translators have been able to study these as they translate the Bible. Today, we have the Bible available in a number of Modern English translations, but they all say the same thing. Just a few minutes ago, I showed you several of the new Modern English translations available today.

The Bible has been translated into more languages than any other book.

The Bible is an accurate historical record.

Archaeological discoveries in recent years have revealed many pieces of ancient information that agree in minute detail with the Bible.

In the book, **Archaeology and Bible History**, Joseph Free wrote that "...numerous passages of the Bible which long puzzled the commentators have readily yielded up their meaning when new light from archaeological discoveries has been focused on them...archaeology has confirmed countless passages from the Bible.

The Bible has withstood the test of time.

H. God does NOT change. He's the same God in the Old Testament or Torah as in the New Testament.

Psalm 119:89 (NLT)

Your eternal word, O LORD, stands firm in heaven.

- The Bible answers the most important questions of life.
- The Bible is God's voice speaking to us. The Bible tells us what God thinks of us and what He sees as our greatest need.
- God wants you and me to know what is in the Bible and why he wrote it.

The Bible is God's personal message to each of us; it is the most important message we will ever be given.

A lot of other things call for our attention including:

- Our work
- Our home
- Recreation
- Studies
- Shopping

The Bible is unique because it alone has God's message for our lives today. The Bible alone tells us what God thinks of us and what He sees as our greatest need.

***Next Lesson 2: God Alone.** We'll look at the God of eternity. The God who created our galaxy which is one of many galaxies...We'll look at God who has no beginning and no end.*