

1 THE BIBLE AS A SOURCE OF WISDOM AND AUTHORITY IN DAILY LIFE

2

3 The word 'Bible means books. The word Canon mean 'set order' The Jewish Tanakh is
4 made up of the Torah (Books of Law) The Nevi'im – the prophets and the Ketuvim – the
5 wisdom writings. For Christians these books also form part of their collection. The Christian
6 Bible is a collection of sacred books bound together in 2 volumes known as The Old
7 Testament and the New Testament.

8 The Old Testament

9 Old Testament original language is Hebrew. Protestant Bibles have 39 OT books – the
10 same as the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh – although not in the same order) whilst Catholic and
11 Orthodox have 46. This is because t they include the 'Apocrypha' which protestants consider
12 deuterocanonical. – (a second list genuine sacred books). Some protestant Bibles also
13 contain the apocrypha but place them at the end of the Old Testament.

14 Old Testament was written and edited over many centuries. Parts of the Old Testament
15 would have formed Jesus' Scriptural usage. We know that Jesus was familiar with both the
16 Torah and the Neviuum – although parts of the wisdom writings had not been established as
17 canon by the Jewish community and may not have been familiar to Jesus.

18

19 The original language of the New Testament is Greek. This section of the Bible contains 27
20 books – all focusing in some way on Jesus. All Christian Bibles contain these 27 books.
21 They include the 4 Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, The Epistles (21 altogether - 14 written
22 by Paul) and Book of visions – known as Revelation. different Christian scholars' debate
23 about the meaning of this – so see it as eschatological – referring to the end times and others
24 see it as coded messages written to secretly pass the Christian message in a time of
25 persecution under Nero)

26

27 THE BIBLE STORY

28 For Christians the Bible , through many different books and genres, tell the story of God's
29 plan to save humanity from sin. This story is often called 'salvation history' and can be
30 summarised as follows.

31 God created the universe and everything in it ex nihilo. God creates human beings in his
32 image and likeness and gives them the duty of stewardship over creation.. Human beings are
33 the highpoint of creation – they can appreciate right from wrong and have a moral and
34 spiritual dimension.

35 Everything that God mad is good but sin enters into the world via Adam and Eves act of
36 disobedience against God. This 'original sin' is passed on from generation to generation.
37 Yet God always had a plan to save his people. Part if this salvific plan is experienced int eh

38 covenants God makes with Noah, Abraham and Moses. These covenants save the righteous
39 from destruction, establish ancestry through Abraham and liberate the Hebrews from slavery
40 in Egypt establishing them as a nation by the giving of a homeland.

41 Then a cycle seems to take route. The people are unfaithful to God, they lose their homeland
42 and are conquered by their enemies, they cry to God for help, God intervenes and leads them
43 to victory and back to the homeland again. Then repeat. (They Jewish people are conquered
44 by the Assyrians, then the Babylonians, the Greeks and the Romans.)

45 In addition to this history are examples of the laws the people must follow, their psalms and
46 prayers, the wisdom writings which offer reflection on the meaning and purpose of life.

47 THE NEW TESTAMENT

48 The New Testament takes up the story focusing on the life and ministry death and
49 resurrection of Jesus. The New Testament writers show that Jesus, who rises from the dead,
50 has conquered sin and death forever, thus completing the cycle. The books of Acts records
51 the life of the early church community, the coming of the holy spirit and the preaching of the
52 good news by Peter and the others and later Paul who writes prolifically to the Gentile
53 communities.

54

55 THE SET TEXTS.

56 You are required to refer to certain texts which have been given to you by your teacher.
57 However, this does not mean that you must stay solely on these. An examiner will be
58 impressed with knowledge gained beyond the specification so do not be afraid to include
59 other ideas.

60

61 'The Bible on the Meaning and purpose of life'

62

63 What is the meaning and purpose of life? This remains an essential question for those
64 seeking to live a life beyond the superficial. For Christians the answer could quite easily be
65 summed up by the old catechism statement- the meaning and purpose of life is to know, love
66 and serve God in this world and be happy with him forever in the next.' Let us examine this
67 statement further.

68 Perhaps the clearest place to start is with the nature of humankind. In the Genesis creation story,
69 we read

70)

71 26 Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness,...."²⁷ So God
72 created mankind in his own image,
73 in the image of God he created them;
74 male and female he created them.

75 Much can be gleaned from this passage. Perhaps most significantly is the concept that
 76 humans are made 'imago dei'. The purpose of our life then is to reflect God's glory.
 77 Human beings are like God because they share God's likeness. Humans can appreciate
 78 right from wrong. They have a conscience. However, one must develop and educate the
 79 conscience and act in accordance with the laws of God. Our purpose is to come to know
 80 and love God in this world and reflect God's goodness

81 The passage continues:

82 ²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the
 83 earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every
 84 living creature that moves on the ground."

85 Clearly stated here is that the purpose of human life is to procreate. Life is sacred and holy.
 86 This is a theme that has clearly dominated Catholic Christian thinking and influenced ethical
 87 theories (e.g. Natural Law)

88 Since humanity is regarded as the highpoint of creation humans are given 'dominion over'
 89 the earth. Rather than being about power and control this is about stewardship. Humans
 90 must care for, protect, manage and nurture the world and everything in it. Our current
 91 situation is dire. The globe is crying out in distress. Rather than being consumers of creation
 92 we have a holy duty to complete the work of creation. There could not be a time where this
 93 message is so relevant, so needed, so crucial than today.

94

95 Ecclesiastes 9:5-9 reads

96 ⁵ For the living know that they will die,
 97 but the dead know nothing; ⁷ Go eat your food with gladness, and drink your
 98 wine with a joyful heart, for God has already approved what you do. ⁸ Always be clothed in
 99 white, and always anoint your head with oil. ⁹ Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all
 100 the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun—all your meaningless
 101 days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labour under the sun
 102

103 This forms part of the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. Reflecting on the meaning
 104 and purpose of life the writer points out that Life is finite – we will die. What we have for
 105 certain however is the present moment. It is human nature for us to grapple with the
 106 meaning and purpose of life but if we are not careful our search for meaning could led us into
 107 depression or despair. Whilst it is not unwise to question our purpose we must recognise that
 108 We will never really be sure what the full meaning and purpose of our life is. It is God, not
 109 humanity, that has full knowledge. We may get an insight into the ultimate purpose of
 110 existence, but we can never fully know. If we spend all our time worrying about what the
 111 point is we could easily miss the good things. Ironically, if we miss the good things we will
 112 never really come to understand the meaning and purpose of anything at all! t We need to

113 'seize the day' – life in the present moment with a spirit of gratitude for the gifts that God
114 has given us. We should 'enjoy' this life because it is God given.

115 When we turn our attention to passages in the New Testament we see that for Christians the
116 meaning and purpose in life does not lie in gaining material possessions, power, success or
117 prestige. There is no meaning in life other than God because God is life itself. Above all the
118 meaning of life is found through Jesus who is 'the way, the truth and the life.' Therefore, the
119 purpose of life is to know and love God in this world, to worship him and glorify him and
120 ultimately share in his resurrection.

121 PASSAGES THAT OFFER A GUIDE TO LIVING

122 For all Christians the Bible is the word of God. As a result, regardless of how one
123 understands the Bible as an inspired, inerrant and revealed book, it has authority and
124 therefore will offer a guide on how to live the Christian life.

125 The obvious answer to the question 'how is the Bible a guide to Christian living' is Jesus.
126 The true guide to Christian living is not the Bible but Jesus himself. Jesus does not offer a
127 list of instructions rather he sets an example by his teachings and through his actions. He
128 consistently and unequivocally demonstrates a preferential option for the poor, the sinner, the
129 outcast, the marginalised, the disadvantaged. He shuns power, money, material gain and
130 prestige. Christians too then must put at the forefront of their minds when facing any
131 situation 'What would Jesus do.' The Christian does as Jesus does.

132 However, Jesus calls his followers not only to outward observance of the law but to an
133 interior holy attitude. In the sermon on the mount Jesus says, 'I have not come to abolish the
134 law but to fulfil it.' Following on from the beatitudes Jesus changes the old law with a set of
135 statements 'You have heard it said... But now I tell you' Adultery starts with lust and
136 therefore lust itself is adulterous. Unrighteous anger must be avoided since this attitude leads
137 to violence or murder. Forgiveness of enemies is praised over revenge and retaliation. Here
138 Jesus deals with the cause of things that break our relationships with God and others rather
139 than just the symptoms. Developing these attitudes is the keystone to living the Christian
140 life. Christians are called to be merciful and not to judge (Lk6) and since the meaning and
141 purpose of life does not include focusing on the material Christians should trust that God will
142 provide in all situations: 'Do not worry about what you are going to wear;

143 Old Testament passages too offer guidance. The wisdom writings of Ecclesiastes 12 state to
144 'keep God's commandments' for God knows and sees all and will judge every person. The
145 Psalms advise the young person to 'live according to God's word' and that the word of God
146 is the ultimate source of guidance: 'thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my
147 path.' Temptations can be avoided by learning the laws of God and meditating on his words.
148 All answers are found in God's word.

149

150 THE BIBLE AS A SOURCE OF COMFORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT

151 The Bible is a source of comfort and encouragement to believers. As St Paul writes, the
 152 scriptures have been written so that 'by the encouragement of the scriptures we may have
 153 hope.' Human nature is essentially constant. The people of the Bible experienced similar
 154 struggles, difficulties, fears that we face today; temptation, sin, bereavement, poverty,
 155 suffering and death. These concerns are timeless. To these timeless concerns the Bible
 156 offers timeless comfort and support.

157

158 TEMPTATIONS: Every human experiences temptation. It is not sinful to be tempted. Even
 159 Jesus was tempted. When faced with temptation we can look to Jesus for strength. If we fall
 160 into temptation then we can trust that an all loving, merciful God who died for our sins is
 161 willing to accept us back. The Bible showcases plenty of sinful people from King David to St
 162 Peter and Paul. It is not that we fall that matters but that we are ready to accept our human
 163 nature and allow Christ to redeem us.

164 BEREAVEMENT and DEATH. Losing someone we love to death is traumatic and
 165 disorientating. It can leave us with a sense of profound isolation, sadness and emptiness.
 166 However, for Christians death is not the end. Grief is an essential part of the process for the
 167 human spirit to come to terms with a bereavement. Jesus himself experienced this and wept
 168 at the tomb of his friend Lazarus. Since the essential part of Christian belief is in
 169 Resurrection the comfort lies in the knowledge that death is not the end. Whether we
 170 ourselves are facing death or are dealing with the loss of someone we can trust that we too
 171 will share Christ's resurrection. As St Paul said, 'If Christ had not been raised our faith
 172 would be in vain.' And also 'Death where is your victory? Death where is your sting.' We
 173 have nothing to fear from death

174 POVERTY. Jesus unequivocally has a preferential option for the poor. For those who live in
 175 absolute or relative poverty this could provide comfort. God suffers the plight of the poor
 176 and is concerned about them. The rich on the other hand have greater difficulty in coming to
 177 know and love God. 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich
 178 man to enter heaven.' Parables such as the rich man and Lazarus serve not only as a warning
 179 but as an exhortation to act now in favour of the poor.

180 SUFFERING: It is easy to look at the suffering in the world and conclude that there must be
 181 no God – or certainly no omnipotent, omnibenevolent God. For Christians however, this
 182 conclusion fails to understand the nature and purpose of suffering. Every human will
 183 experience some form of suffering – whether as a result of our own actions or those of others.
 184 What determines the Christian character is the choice to turn suffering into something
 185 positive. Much good can come out of suffering. A change of heart, perspective, repentance
 186 for example or a greater compassion and empathy for others who have shared a similar
 187 journey.. A clearer appreciation of the blessings bestowed on us a greater understanding of
 188 our need to grow in certain areas. Jesus never explained suffering, but he certainly set us an
 189 example. He entered into it with humility.

HALF TERM

190 TASKS

191 1. With reference to the passages you have studied (plus any additional passages for
192 breath) explain how

193 a) The Bible is a guide to life

194 b) The bible is a source of comfort and encouragement

195 c) The Bible offers answers to the meaning and purpose of life.

196

197

198