

Session One – INTRODUCTION



Still Life with Bible by Vincent Van Gogh

Facilitators: Welcome participants to your small group and ask them to introduce themselves.

- Explain your role as facilitator.
- Watch the video presentation.
- Review the “Ten Commandments of Small-Group Discussion” and “Staying Focused.”
- Discuss the questions for Session One.

Introduction Talk Notes

I. Welcome

A. About *Unlocking the Mystery of the Bible*

B. Catholics and the Bible

1. “In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets his children with great love and speaks with them.”¹
2. Two keys: knowing God’s heart and knowing his ways
3. The Church “exhorts” us to read the Bible (CCC 133)

II. The Problem ...

A. The problem of the “heap”: Catholicism can seem “big”

1. Four “pillars,” or parts, of the *Catechism* help to organize the “heap”
 - a. The Creed

¹ DV 21.

- b. Sacraments and Liturgy
 - c. Life in Christ
 - d. Prayer
 - 2. The Creed (story) comes first
 - B. The Bible is not a book but a library
 - C. Other difficulties
- III. ... And the Plan
 - A. Our need for a story
 - B. The key to reading the Bible: discovering the story
 - C. Making the complex simple
 - 1. Sorting the “pile”: twelve periods
 - 2. Keeping it simple: fourteen narrative books
 - 3. Making it memorable: *The Bible Timeline Chart*

T • A • K • E • A • W • A • Y • S

1. The Bible tells a love story of God reaching out to you.
2. Get a Bible. Get away. Get together with God.

Discussion Questions

1. The Church tells us, “In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets his children with great love and speaks with them.”² Have you experienced this? In the video presentation, Jeff mentioned common difficulties people have when they start to read the Bible. What has been your experience with Scripture?
2. Many Catholics today feel as though they have received a “heap of Catholicism,” a random pile of separate Bible stories and facts about the Church’s teachings. What solution to this problem do the four “pillars” of the *Catechism* offer?
3. Why is it important to get the “big picture” of salvation history before reading or studying the Bible?

² DV 21.

4. The “narrative books” section of *The Bible Timeline Chart* gives you the names of fourteen books of the Bible that tell the story of salvation history from beginning to end. They are arranged across the top of the chart immediately below the period names, so you can see the historical time periods they describe. List the narrative books here.

5. Fifty-nine “supplemental books” make up the rest of the Bible. These books are not designated “supplemental” because they are less important than the narrative books, but in this study, we will set them aside to focus on the “big picture.” Once you have learned the chronological story told in these narrative books, you will be better equipped to read the remaining books of the Bible in their historical context.

Look at the top of the purple Royal Kingdom period on your Chart. The books of 1 Samuel 9–31, 2 Samuel, and 1 Kings 1–11 tell the story of this time period, during which God established a kingdom under David and Solomon. What are the “supplemental books” for this time period? (You can find these listed in the Royal Kingdom period on your *Bible Timeline Chart*.)

6. God’s formation of his family through covenants with various people is central to the story of the Bible. These covenants are listed in the Chart in a section called “God’s Family Plan.” You will learn more about these later, but notice the type of family group name with each (“One Holy Couple,” for example). What do you notice about the change in this family group as you move from left to right across the Chart?

7. Key people and events in salvation history are arranged in chronological order along the center of the *Timeline Chart*. This section is divided into three horizontal bands representing different aspects of the Middle East. The central area represents the land of Canaan, where most of the events in the story take place. When the action moves out of Canaan—to the northern countries like Babylon, for example, or to the south and Egypt—the events appear above or below the center area. Look at your Chart: What examples of geographic movement do you see?

8. Check out the events in secular history that are arranged across the bottom of the Chart. Find one you are familiar with. What is going on in the development of God’s plan during this period?

Overview of Salvation History

The stories in the Old and New Testaments are not disconnected, random events in the history of a people. Rather, each story presents a crucial part of God’s plan. By the end of this study, you will see the “narrative thread” that runs throughout Scripture and continues in your life today.

The Bible Timeline Chart groups the stories into twelve consecutive historical periods that are color-coded to help you remember them. Look at each period on *The Bible Timeline* Chart while someone reads the story in outline form as follows:

In the **EARLY WORLD**, God created the heavens and earth and tested Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This period is represented by the color turquoise, which is the color of the earth as seen from space.

In the time of the **PATRIARCHS**, God called Abraham and promised his children land, a royal kingdom, and worldwide blessing. The color burgundy helps us remember the blood covenant God made with him.

In **EGYPT AND EXODUS**, God freed his people from slavery so they could worship him. Red reminds us of the crossing of the Red Sea.

God taught Israel to trust him through forty years of **DESERT WANDERINGS**. What better way to remember those miles of sand than by the color tan?

In **CONQUEST AND JUDGES**, God led Israel triumphantly in the Promised Land, which is represented by green for the lush hills of Canaan.

In Canaan, God established Israel as a **ROYAL KINGDOM** under David and promised him an eternal throne. The color purple represents the royal throne.

Israel soon split into rival kingdoms and fell into idolatry. Black represents the darkness of this **DIVIDED KINGDOM**.

God punished both kingdoms with **EXILE**. Baby blue recalls the people of Judah “singing the blues” in Babylon.

The brighter days of **RETURN** are shown by yellow. God brought the exiles home to make a fresh start.

Years later, the Maccabees stood up against the threats of hellenization in the **MACCABEAN REVOLT**. The color orange calls to mind the oil lamps lit in the purified Temple.

Gold represents the first New Testament period—**MESSIANIC FULFILLMENT**—when at last God sent his only Son, the Messiah, to fulfill his promises. Remember this period’s color by the gold brought by the Magi at Jesus’ birth.

Finally, the **CHURCH** carries on God’s work in the world. Its color is white, for the spotless bride of Christ.

Closing Prayer

God’s plan unfolded through history and gives us the “story” for our lives. Let us pray in the name of Jesus:

R: Speak to us as we read your Word!

Home Preparation: Looking Ahead

Every story has a beginning, middle, and end. The story of salvation history begins at the dawn of time. In the **EARLY WORLD** period, you will learn how the world began, what went terribly wrong, and how God promised to provide a solution.

Use your Chart to fill in the following information:

Period name: **EARLY WORLD** Approximate dates: _____

Period color: _____ Color meaning: _____

List four key people from Jesus’ genealogy:

1) _____ 3) _____

2) _____ 4) _____

List five key events:

1) _____ 4) _____

2) _____ 5) _____

3) _____

Name one concurrent event in secular history: _____

The story of the **EARLY WORLD** is found in Genesis 1–11. You probably know these stories already, although you may not know how they are connected. We will explain that in the next session. In the meantime, read one or more of them ahead of time, in preparation.

- EARLY WORLD:**
- Genesis 1–3 Creation, Adam and Eve, the Fall
 - Genesis 4 Cain and Abel
 - Genesis 6, 9 Noah and the Flood
 - Genesis 11:1-9 The Tower of Babel

Understanding The Bible Timeline Chart

- Take a few moments to familiarize yourself with the parts of the Chart by reading the “Key to Understanding *The Bible Timeline Chart*” on the inside front cover of your Chart, and following along with *The Bible Timeline Chart* video in *Unlocking the Mystery of the Bible* video series.
- Review the twelve historic periods by filling in their names and the meanings of their associated colors in the chart below.

Period Name	Color	Color Meaning
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		
11.		
12.		

- Find the Contents page in your Bible. Using your *Bible Timeline Chart* or *Bookmark* as a reference, highlight the fourteen narrative books. If you are not accustomed to finding books in your Bible, take time to locate each narrative book before you continue.