12 - Overview of the Bible

I. Bible reading is for Catholics.

A. The Church encourages Catholics to make reading the Bible part of their daily prayer lives. Reading these inspired words, people grow deeper in their relationship with God and come to understand their place in the community God has called them to in himself.

B. Prayer is the beginning and the end. Reading the Bible is not like reading a novel or a history book. It should begin with a prayer asking the Holy Spirit to open our hearts and minds to the Word of God. Scripture reading should end with a prayer that this Word will bear fruit in our lives, helping us to become holier and more faithful people.

C. Get the whole story! When selecting a Bible, look for a Catholic edition. A Catholic edition will include the Church's complete list of sacred books along with introductions and notes for understanding the text. A Catholic edition will have an imprimatur notice on the back of the title page. An imprimatur indicates that the book is free of errors in Catholic doctrine.

II. The Bible isn't a book. It's a library.

A. The Bible is a collection of 73 books written over the course of many centuries.

B. The books include royal history, prophecy, poetry, challenging letters to struggling new faith communities, and believers' accounts of the preaching and passion of Jesus.

1. Knowing the genre of the book you are reading will help you understand the literary tools the author is using

2. and the meaning the author is trying to convey.

III. Know what the Bible is – and what it isn't.

A. The Bible is the story of God's relationship with the people he has called to himself.

B. It is not intended to be read as a history text, a science book, or a political manifesto. In the Bible, God teaches us the truths that we need for the sake of our salvation.

IV. The Old relates to the New.

A. The Old Testament and the New Testament shed light on each other. While we read the Old Testament in light of the death and resurrection of Jesus, it has its own value as well.

B. Together, these testaments help us to understand God's plan for human beings.

C. Reading isn't enough. If Scripture remains just words on a page, our work is not done. We need to meditate on the message and put it into action in our lives. Only then can the word be "living and effective."(Hebrews 4:12)

V. The Old Testament

A. The Pentateuch (law): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

1. Exodus lays the foundation

2. In Jesus’ time these were the only accepted inspired books for all Jewish groups

B. Historical Books: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah

1. Not history as we think of it, but more like family history

2. They show the development of Israel from a loose grouping of 12 tribes to a kingdom under a king, then the downfall of the kingdom

3. At one point they split into a northern and a southern kingdom

C Biblical Novellas: Tobit, Judith, Esther, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees

D Wisdom Books: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Wisdom, Sirach

E. Prophetic Books: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Baruch, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

1. Divided by length into major and minor prophets

2. NOT ABOUT TELLING THE FUTURE but about speaking for God, usually to correct

3. For several hundred years it was a paid position

F Protestants reject seven books: 1 and 2 Maccabees, Tobit, Judith, Sirach, Wisdom and Baruch

1. In addition, the Books of Daniel and Esther are slightly longer in Bibles used by members of the Roman Catholic, Eastern Catholic and Orthodox Churches

2. usually designated as deuterocanonical (other canon)

3. Rational includes the idea that they were not part of the Jewish canon

VI The New Testament

A. The Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts of the Apostles

1. Three of them are very similar – synoptics - Matthew, Mark, Luke

2. Acts of the Apostles is a continuation of Luke’s Gospel and tells of the early Christian Church

3. Most scholars believe that Mark was written first, and that Matthew and Luke used mark and some other materials to compose their accounts

4. Not intended as an autobiography, but rather an account for future generations

B. New Testament Letters (epistles):

1. Written to specific churches or people: Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews

2. The Catholic Letters – written for the entire church: James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, Revelation