



Our
STORY

A Bible Refresher
for Catholics



AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY

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American Bible Society | Catholic Initiatives

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QUESTIONS FOR PART 1: THE OLD TESTAMENT

Old Testament Segment 1: The Pentateuch

These writings, also known as the Books of Moses, combine stories and laws to chronicle the formation of the nation of Israel.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Explore one of these readings before moving on to the next video segment.

→ **Adam and Eve.** Read chapters 2 and 3 of Genesis.

- What's the main message of this famous story for you?
- What part of these two chapters do you connect with the most?

→ **The Ten Commandments and the Law.** Read Deuteronomy 5:1—6:9. The Ten Commandments were first given to Moses at Mt. Sinai just after the Israelites' dramatic Exodus from Egypt. But about forty years later, as their wilderness wanderings neared an end, Moses reminded them of those commandments.

- How do you respond to the Ten Commandments? Do you find them rather easy to follow or difficult?

In Deuteronomy 6:4–9, Moses also mentioned one more command, which the Jewish people call the Great Commandment or the *Shema* (meaning "hear"). Still today, the Jewish people often place the words of the Shema on their door and touch it as a reminder before leaving the house every day.

- How fully are God's words woven into your life? How do you "hear" God as you go through your day?

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

→ **Your Reactions.** Based on what you've just read:

- What surprises you, pleases you, or interests you?
- What is being revealed about (1) God; (2) humans; (3) the relationship between God and humanity?
- What, if anything, has become a little bit clearer for you? What, if anything, challenges you?

WHEN YOU HAVE MORE TIME ...

→ **The Joseph Saga.** Read Genesis 37–45 (but, to keep the focus on Joseph, you can skip chapter 38). This extended story touches on many life experiences like using your gifts, being a dreamer, family feuds, betrayal, second chances, faith in God, and forgiveness. A great read when you get time.

→ **Moses and the Liberation of the Jews.** Read the first 15 chapters of Exodus. The Joseph story got the Israelites down to Egypt, where they later became slaves. Here's how they got out. You'll find details of Moses and the burning bush, the epic struggle with Pharaoh, the plagues, and the crossing of the Red Sea. Read it all for yourself. Take special note of the Passover, which prefigures the power of the blood of another perfect Lamb to come. And notice the very first thing the Jewish people did once they were free.

- How do you celebrate the amazing things God has done for you?

Old Testament Segment 2: The Historical Books

This section of the Bible chronicles the history of Israel after their Exodus from slavery, their wandering in the wilderness, and their eventual occupation of the Promised Land of Canaan.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Explore one of these readings before moving on to the next video segment.

→ **Jericho.** Read Joshua 6:1–25. Joshua, the successor to Moses, leads the Israelites toward the establishment of their own land and nation. The battle of Jericho is legendary.

- How many days did this battle go on? Do you see any connection between the length of the battle and the story of Creation, or even the sacramental life of the Church?
- Notice who leads the march. What do you think is the significance of this?

In verses 22–25 we find an unlikely hero—Rahab the prostitute. Rewind to chapter 2 to get her story, then page forward to the New Testament (Matthew 1:5) and see who later turns out to have her as an ancestor.

→ **David and Goliath.** Read chapter 17 of 1 Samuel. Study the subtle and symbolic messages in this famous event.

- Notice what David declines to use in battle ... and what he chooses to rely on.
- If Goliath is a symbol of the fear that prevents us from living as God intends, what would you say is your “Goliath”?
- As David picked five stones for his slingshot, what tools might you choose to rely on in overcoming your fears? (Pick five if you like!)

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

→ **Discerning a Calling.** Together, read 1 Samuel 3. As a boy, Samuel heard God's call to become a prophet, but he wasn't sure of it at first.

- How can a person in modern times discern the call of God?
- What has been your experience and understanding of a vocation or calling?
- What can get in the way of discerning a calling?

WHEN YOU HAVE MORE TIME ...

→ **Deborah.** Read Judges 4 and 5 and meet the only woman to serve as a judge in Israel. Deborah was a sage, warrior, wife, poet, and maternal figure. Who does she remind you of in your own life?

→ **Samson.** You can read all about this strongman and his trials and triumphs in Judges 13:24—16:31. What virtues and messages do you see here?

→ **Ruth and Naomi.** The book of Ruth is named for a loyal foreigner who makes an oath to her mother-in-law Naomi and becomes the great-grandmother of David and ancestor of Jesus. Addressing human and divine relationships, the book is considered a classic among short stories. What do you take away from it?

→ **David the Sinner.** Read 2 Samuel 11:1—12:25 for the account of David's most sinful act. He was a successful king, mighty warrior, skilled musician, and friend of God—but here he messed up big time.

- What was the prophet Nathan's role in this story? Who has played a similar role in your life?
- What do you make of David's actions and attitudes after his conversation with Nathan?

Old Testament Segment 3: The Wisdom and Prophetic Books

The books in these sections of the Old Testament share a common purpose: instruction regarding how life is to be lived both in the midst of daily human experiences and in preparation of what might come.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Explore one of these readings before moving on to the next video segment.

→ **Psalms.** About half of these songs and hymns are attributed to David. Some are laments, which are cries of despair followed by expression of faith in God. Some are statements of insights, wisdom, and spiritual discoveries. The Psalms are often referred to as a school of prayer, giving us models to follow and helping us craft prayers of our own.

Read some of these psalms: 1, 15, 23, 27, 32, 46, 71.

- Which one(s) can you relate to most?
- If you were writing your own psalm, how would it start?

→ **Proverbs.** This collection of sayings emphasizes that the pursuit of wisdom should be a fundamental way of life. While they often seem addressed from a father to a son, they are universally seen as advice from God to us.

- Read Proverbs 3. What insight do you find about trust, wisdom, and relationships?
- Chapters 10–29 of Proverbs appear to be a random assortment of clever couplets. Open at random and read ten verses. What lines and phrases stick with you?

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

→ **A Time for Everything.** Together, read Ecclesiastes 3:1–8.

- What season are you in these days? How would you describe this time in your life right now? A time to tear down or a time to build, or what?

WHEN YOU HAVE MORE TIME ...

→ **The trials of Job.** Dig into the book of Job, all 42 chapters. Here you can read of the sufferings of a good person, lectures by friends who try to explain God's will, Job's laments, and God's response. Your own similar experiences will come to mind—times you have experienced hardship, offered answers to suffering friends, or received such answers.

→ **Wisdom Is a Woman.** Page through Proverbs 8 and 14, Sirach 24, Wisdom 7–9, and Baruch 3:9—4:4 and see how Wisdom is referred to.

- What thoughts do you have after reading these passages?

→ **Song of Songs.** These love lyrics, long attributed to Solomon, can make you blush. While the poetry speaks of human attraction, romance, and sexuality, it is also interpreted allegorically, as a description of God's intimate relationship with his people. Many Catholic mystics have written of their spiritual relationship with God in this way.

- What light does this poetry shine on your own romantic relationship? How does it describe your relationship with God?

QUESTIONS FOR PART 2: THE NEW TESTAMENT

New Testament Segment 1: The Gospels

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Explore one of these readings before moving on to the next video segment.

→ **Bread of Life Discourse.** Read John 6:28–62. This passage clearly reveals a core Catholic belief about Christ. Notice that those questioning Jesus point out that God provided their ancestors with manna from heaven after their great Exodus from slavery.

- What does Jesus say is the difference between those who ate the manna from God in the desert and those who eat this “new” bread from God?
- What confuses those who hear his response?
- In verses 56–58, what promises does Jesus make to those who “eat my flesh” and “drink my blood”? What do those statements mean to you today?

→ **The Final Judgment.** Read Matthew 25:31–46. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus points out the way God intends us to live, what is necessary to achieve eternal life, and much more. But in this iconic passage Jesus shows how we will all be judged in the end.

- Are you surprised, pleased, or challenged by his words here?

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

→ **You and the Gospel.**

- What person, group, or process helped you most in becoming familiar with the gospel?
- What is one of your favorite parts of the story of Jesus? Why do you like it so much?

WHEN YOU HAVE MORE TIME ...

→ **The Sermon on the Mount.** Read chapters 5–7 of Matthew. Take your time as you review this classic passage containing many famous teachings of Christ. Only Matthew's Gospel captures all of these together in this way.

- Which of his teachings stand out to you? Which do you find most important right now in your own faith journey?

→ **Last Supper Discourse.** Read chapters 14–16 of John. Here are the final words of Jesus to the Apostles at the Last Supper before he is betrayed and crucified.

- What emotion(s) do you sense in Jesus's words?
- Jesus assures us of the Holy Spirit. What has your relationship to the Holy Spirit been like? How much of a role does it play in your spiritual life these days?
- In chapter 15 Jesus describes some basic traits of discipleship (especially in verses 7, 8, 10, 14). There is a difference between being a believer and being a disciple. Which would you say best describes you?

New Testament Segment 2: Acts of the Apostles

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Explore one of these readings before moving on to the next video segment.

→ **Pentecost.** Read Acts 2. Jesus had promised his disciples that he would send them the Holy Spirit, and he asked them to wait for it. In this chapter they receive what they were waiting for.

- How would you describe everything that happens here?
- Note the activities of the brand new Church in verses 42–47. Where do you see these activities in the Church today?

→ **Paul's Philippian Adventure.** Read Acts 16:11–40. On his second missionary journey, the apostle Paul, with his colleague Silas, visits the town of Philippi, where they make new friends ... and enemies.

- Of all the interesting characters in this story—Lydia, the slave girl, the jailer, etc.—which do you identify with? Why?

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

→ **Witness.**

- Jesus said his disciples would be his “witnesses” (Acts 1:8). Why do you think Jesus used this word?
- Historically, the apostles did bear witness to Jesus, and they extended his Church throughout the known world. What do you think Jesus expects of us today?

WHEN YOU HAVE MORE TIME ...

→ **Peter's Rooftop Vision.** Read chapter 10 of Acts. Peter is being called way past his comfort zone. He has to reexamine his beliefs and religious practices.

- When has the Spirit called you to move beyond your comfort zone or to reexamine your beliefs and religious practices?

- Clearly this was a big deal: God was opening up his salvation to a whole new group of people. What message in this passage might apply to us today?

→ **Paul Addresses the Philosophers.** Read Acts 17:15–34. In Athens, the local philosophers wanted to vet Paul’s message. How did the “Unknown God” shrine help Paul decide what to say?

- When he visited the synagogues, Paul often used Scripture to explain who Jesus was. Why didn’t he do that while speaking to the philosophers?
- What unique approaches might help you explain your belief in Jesus?

New Testament Segment 3: The Letters

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Explore one of these readings before moving on to the next video segment.

→ **The Duties of Christians.** Read Romans 12. Paul's letter to the Romans include four chapters (12–15) often referred to as "The Duties of Christians," in which he describes the expectations the first Church had for its members.

- Which verses from this chapter stand out for you, and why?
- Which parts do you find most affirming? Which are most challenging?

→ **Life in the Spirit.** Read Galatians 5:13–26. Here St. Paul describes the tensions of being human while seeking the Spirit-led life.

- How does Paul sum up "the whole Law" in verse 14?
- How do you react to that? Is it too easy or too difficult?
- We find in this passage the famous "fruit of the Spirit" that we study while preparing for Confirmation. Which of these qualities are clearly growing in you? Which do you wish were growing more?

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

→ **Love is ...** Read 1 Corinthians 13 together, out loud.

- Which of these qualities of love are you most fond of?
- What quality of love do you wish you could demonstrate more often?
- Which quality of love do you wish others would show you these days?
- Would you care to add to St. Paul's description of love

WHEN YOU HAVE MORE TIME ...

→ **The Power of the Tongue.** Read James 3. Here is one of the few New Testament passages that addresses the damage we can cause by what we say.

- What do you make of the way James describes the power of the tongue?

- What has been your most recent experience of this? Were you the speaker or the hearer?

→ **Guidance for Living:** Read the First Letter of Peter. Take a quick drive through 1 Peter to see what our first Pope wrote about key life issues.

What did he say about ...

- Hardship (1:1–9)?
- Obedience (1:13–16)?
- Citizenship (2:11–17)?
- Spouses (3:1–7)?
- Conduct (3:8–12)?

QUESTIONS FOR PART 3: THE CATHOLIC APPROACH TO THE BIBLE

Catholic Approach Segment 1: The Mass and Its Biblical Background

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Explore one of these readings before moving on to the next video segment.

→ **Christ the Passover Lamb.** Read Exodus 12:1–28. Every year, the Jewish people remember the Passover Lamb during the Feast of Passover. Now carefully read what Jesus said to the Apostles as they were actually celebrating the Passover in Luke 22:7–20.

- As you think about the Passover Lamb and about Jesus, the sacrificial Lamb we celebrate in the Mass, what similarities do you see?

→ **Eucharistic Prayer.** Read 1 Corinthians 11:23–26.

- It's notable that we find this in one of Paul's epistles. Where do you think St Paul heard these words?
- Where do you hear these words? What do they mean to you when you hear them?

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

→ **Biblical Phrases in the Mass.** First, brainstorm phrases from the Mass that come directly from the Bible.

Then hand out **Resource B, "Biblical Phrases in the Mass"** and go over them.

- Any surprises? What's a takeaway for you? What stands out?

WHEN YOU HAVE MORE TIME ...

→ **Scripture in the Synagogue.** Read Luke 4:14–22a. This story takes place in a synagogue in Nazareth. There were typically seven readings from the Hebrew Scriptures (our Old Testament) at each synagogue service. The last person to read (in this case, Jesus) was invited to comment on the meaning of the passage.

This is the root of the Liturgy of the Word that makes up the first half of the Mass.

- Jesus chose a passage from Isaiah 61. Go to Isaiah 61 and read the entire chapter. Why do you think Jesus stopped his reading when he did?

→ **Lord's Prayer.** Read Matthew 6:9–13. We recite this prayer in every Mass, every day, everywhere. What do you think Jesus was trying to teach his disciples when he taught them—us—to pray in this manner?

Catholic Approach Segment 2: Basic Catholic Principles that Guide Bible Study

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Explore one of these sections before moving on to the next video segment.

→ **Literal and Spiritual Interpretation.** The Catechism of the Catholic Church identifies a principle of biblical understanding that often distinguishes the Catholic approach from other Christian traditions.

“According to an ancient tradition, one can distinguish between two senses of Scripture: the literal and the spiritual.” (CCC #115)

Find each of the following passages in the Gospel of Matthew and see which should be interpreted in the literal sense and which in the spiritual sense. (Some can have both literal and spiritual meaning.) In each case, see if you can capture the truth Jesus is conveying.

- Matthew 5:29–30
- Matthew 7:3–5
- Matthew 19:13–21
- Matthew 19:22–24

Do the same with these two from the Gospel of John.

- John 3:1–3
- John 6:52–66

→ **The Power of Scripture.** The Catholic Church venerates the Bible as it does the Eucharist because of the spiritual nourishment and direction they provide.

The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures as she venerated the Body of the Lord: both nourish and govern the whole Christian life. (CCC #141)

... Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ. (CCC #133)

Read Hebrews 4:12–16.

- To what extent does this express the Church’s view about Scripture and Christ?

Read Psalm 119:105–109 as another example.

- Why do you think the Church quotes verse 105—“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”—in the Catechism (#141)?

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

→ **Two Stories of Creation.** A basic Catholic principle is that the Bible teaches us what we need to know, but not all there is to know. Have some fun by comparing the sequence of events and different details in these two stories.

Read the first creation story in Genesis 1:1—2:3.

Then continue reading the second story in Genesis 2:4–25.

- You can make two columns—left column for the First Story of Creation and right column for the Second Story of Creation. Assign a couple of people to each story and then compare lists. (OR sketch the process of Creation as it is unfolds in each story.)
- The point here is that the biblical authors of both of these stories are trying to convey the same truth. What is it?

WHEN YOU HAVE MORE TIME ...

→ **Prefigurement.** This principle refers to instances in the Old Testament that point to Christ in the New Testament. Here are some examples you can explore for yourself:

- Read Genesis 22:1–18. A faithful father is about to sacrifice his beloved son.
- Read 1 Peter 3:18–22. St. Peter says that Noah’s ark prefigures what?
- Read Matthew 12:38–40. According to Jesus, what did Jonah’s time in the whale’s belly prefigure?

→ **The Catholic View of Scripture.** Read **Resource C, “The Catholic View of Scripture.”** Highlight what surprises, pleases, or challenges you.

Catholic Approach Segment 3: The Bible as the Source of Catholic Doctrine

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Explore one of these sections before moving on to the next video segment.

→ **Jesus Establishes the Church.** Read Matthew 16:13–19. This is the classic passage where Jesus commissions Peter as the leader of the Church.

- What stands out most for you?
- How does this affirm or challenge you?
- If you have any annotations or footnotes related to this passage in your Bible, take some time to study them.

→ **Doctrine of the Trinity.** The word “Trinity” does not appear in the Old or the New Testament yet it is a core Christian doctrine. See for yourself.

- Read Genesis 1:1–3 and verse 26. The presence of Wind has always been seen as the Holy Spirit. Note also the pronoun used in Genesis 1:26.
- Want to see it again? Read about the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. See verse 7.
- Now read John 1:1–3a. Who is this “Word” in the Gospel of John that was with God from the beginning? Here is a clue: read John 1:14.
- Jesus himself spells it out in John 16:4–15.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Since this segment concludes Part 3 of this program, discuss how you find yourself finishing this statement:

- As a result of these videos and readings, my understanding/attitude/interest in the Bible has ...

WHEN YOU HAVE MORE TIME ...

→ **The Biblical Roots of the Sacraments.** The following passages illustrate how the Catholic sacramental life is grounded in Scripture.

Baptism	Mathew 3:13–17; 1 Peter 3:20–21
Confirmation	Acts 2:4; Acts 19:3–6
Eucharist	Matthew 26:26–29; Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 11:23–27
Penance	John 20:21–23; Matthew 16:19
Anointing of the Sick	James 5:14–15
Holy Orders (Ordination)	Acts 6:3–6; Acts 13:2–3
Marriage	Matthew 19:10–11; Ephesians 5:31–32

→ **Biblical Roots of Our Creed.** Here is the Nicene Creed established by the Church at the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. and accepted as the definitive expression of faith at the Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D.

I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made.

For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

See if you can identify where each point can be found in the Bible. (You can always go online if you get stuck.)

RESOURCE A: BIBLE OVERVIEW

The Old Testament (46 books)

THE PENTATEUCH

Known as the Torah or five Books of Moses. Describing events from the very beginning to about 1200 BC

Genesis

- **Theme/story:** Beginnings ... of the universe, humanity, and God's chosen people.
- **Key characters:** Adam and Eve; Noah; Abram (Abraham) and Sarah; Isaac and Rebekah; Hagar and son Ishmael; Jacob and brother Esau; Joseph and his eleven brothers.
- **Don't miss:** God's promise in 15:1–6; God's plan in 50:20.

Exodus

- **Theme/story:** Plagues; Passover; Parting of the Red Sea; Law given at Mt. Sinai; instructions for Tabernacle.
- **Key characters:** Moses; his siblings Aaron and Miriam; Pharaoh.
- **Don't miss:** The burning bush in chapters 3–4; the Ten Commandments in 20:1–17.

Leviticus

- **Theme/story:** God's holiness; priestly codes of ritual and conduct.
- **Don't miss:** The sacrificial system described in chapters 1–7 provides some great insight into the sacrifice of Jesus.

Numbers

- **Theme/story:** Wandering in the desert; trusting the Lord's guidance.
- **Key characters:** Moses; Joshua and Caleb; the prophet Balaam.
- **Don't miss:** The scouts' fateful decision in chapter 13; the talking donkey in 22.

Deuteronomy

- **Theme/story:** God's love; Moses gives final blessing, dies overlooking Promised Land.
- **Don't miss:** The devout home described in chapter 6.

THE HISTORICAL BOOKS

Describing events from about 1200 to 200 BC. Israel ruled by Joshua, judges, kings, foreign nations, and briefly the Maccabees

Joshua

- **Theme/story:** Joshua courageously leads the people into Canaan and they settle there.
- **Don't miss:** The battle for Jericho in chapter 6; Joshua's challenge to the nation in 24.

Judges

- **Theme/story:** Chaos reigns when people trust themselves more than God; but we find some examples of leaders with powerful faith.
- **Key characters:** Deborah and Barak; Gideon; Samson and Delilah.
- **Don't miss:** Deborah's example of leadership in chapters 4–5; Gideon's clever strategy in 7; the grim epilogue in 21:25.

Ruth

- **Theme/story:** Uncommon love and loyalty that rebuilds two lives.
- **Key characters:** Ruth; Naomi; Boaz.
- **Don't miss:** The lyrical commitment of 1:16–17.

1 Samuel

- **Theme/story:** Bridging from the chaotic rule of Judges to the first kings of Israel.
- **Key characters:** The prophet/judge Samuel; King Saul; the young hero David.
- **Don't miss:** The Cinderella story of David's anointing in chapter 16; the David and Goliath story in 17.

2 Samuel

- **Theme/story:** The reign of King David.
- **Key characters:** David; Bathsheba; prophet Nathan; rebellious prince Absalom.
- **Don't miss:** The painful account of David's sin and repentance in chapters 11–12.

1 Kings

- **Theme/story:** The reign of King Solomon and the division of the kingdom.
- **Key characters:** Solomon; King Ahab and Queen Jezebel; the prophet Elijah.
- **Don't miss:** The dedication of the Temple in chapter 8; Elijah's showdown with false prophets and his recovery in 18–19.

2 Kings

- **Theme/story:** The Divided Kingdom; the defeat of Israel and Judah.
- **Key characters:** The prophet Elisha; King Hezekiah; boy kings Joash and Josiah.
- **Don't miss:** Elisha's miracle of deliverance in 6:8–23 (and its themes of blindness and seeing).

1 Chronicles

- **Theme/story:** The reign of David, along with genealogies and other official lists.
- **Don't miss:** The exploits of David's Special Forces unit in chapter 11.

2 Chronicles

- **Theme/story:** Honoring God brings success, as seen in the ups and downs of the southern kingdom of Judah.
- **Key characters:** Solomon; Asa; Jehoshaphat; Hezekiah.
- **Don't miss:** God's promise to Solomon in 7:11–18.

Ezra

- **Theme/story:** After their captivity in Babylon, several groups of Jews return to their homeland and rebuild their society and system of worship.
- **Key characters:** The priest/scribe Ezra; prophets Haggai and Zechariah.
- **Don't miss:** The combination of work and worship in chapter 3.

Nehemiah

- **Theme/story:** Nehemiah leads a rebuilding project for the city walls of Jerusalem.
- **Key characters:** Nehemiah; Ezra; and several opponents.
- **Don't miss:** The worship service in chapter 8.

1 Maccabees

- **Theme/story:** God's involvement in history. The account of the successful Jewish revolt in 168 BC against the Seleucid rulers of Syria.
- **Key characters:** Mattathias the priest and his five sons, including Judas Maccabeus, Simon, and Jonathan.
- **Don't miss:** The farewell address of old Mattathias at the end of chapter 2.

2 Maccabees

- **Theme/story:** Martyrdom and resurrection. Events from the same period covered in 1 Maccabees 1–7.
- **Key characters:** Judas Maccabeus and his family; the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV.
- **Don't miss:** The author's very honest account of his own work in 2:19–32.

BIBLICAL NOVELLAS

Tobit

- **Theme/story:** God's mercy and support in the challenges faced by a devout Jewish family.
- **Key characters:** Tobit; son Tobias; son's wife Sarah; and the archangel Raphael.
- **Don't miss:** The song of praise in chapter 13.

Judith

- **Theme/story:** A brave and clever Jewish widow saves her people from a foreign general.
- **Key characters:** Judith; Assyrian general Holofernes; Uzziah, a Jewish official.
- **Don't miss:** Judith's hymn of deliverance in chapter 16.

Esther

- **Theme/story:** A Jewish girl saves her people by confronting the Persian king.

- **Key characters:** Esther, cousin Mordecai, King Xerxes, prince Haman.
- **Don't miss:** The challenge in 4:14, "for a time like this."

WISDOM BOOKS

Job

- **Theme/story:** A righteous man faces an onslaught of tragedies. His friends help him try to understand it—until God speaks into the situation.
- **Key characters:** Job, four friends, and God.
- **Don't miss:** The hint of the Resurrection in 19:25.

Psalms

- **Theme:** The songbook of Israel's life and worship, full of praise, lament, insight, faith, and questions.
- **Don't miss:** David's confession in Psalm 51.

Proverbs

- **Theme:** Practical wisdom for a young student.
- **Don't miss:** Proverbs 3:5–6 might be worth memorizing.

Ecclesiastes

- **Theme/story:** A man who "has it all" questions the meaning of life.
- **Don't miss:** Amid the cynicism, there's an honest nod to the Creator in 12:1.

Song of Songs

- **Theme/story:** This love story has various interpretations, but it has long been seen as a picture of Christ's relationship with the Church.
- **Key characters:** The Beloved woman, the Lover.
- **Don't miss:** The beautiful poetry throughout, but especially in 8:6–7.

Wisdom (aka The Wisdom of Solomon)

- **Theme:** God will eventually reward the righteous. Seek the wisdom to remember that.
- **Key characters:** Wisdom is personified as a character here.
- **Don't miss:** The similarities of Wisdom in 9:9 with the Word of John 1:1.

Ben Sira (aka Ecclesiasticus, Sirach, or The Wisdom of Ben Sira)

- **Theme:** A collection of proverbs and moral instructions.
- **Don't miss:** "Limit the time you spend among the stupid ..." (27:12).

PROPHETIC BOOKS

Isaiah

- **Theme/story:** The historical Isaiah lived in the 700s BC, but beginning in chapter 40, it's a message of comfort for the Jews in Babylonian captivity, two centuries later.
- **Key characters:** Isaiah and Kings Ahaz and Hezekiah, plus "the Suffering Servant."
- **Don't miss:** The prophecies in chapter 53 that Jesus fulfilled.

Jeremiah

- **Theme/story:** This prophet foretold the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem—a message his people refused to hear.
- **Key characters:** Jeremiah, his assistant Baruch.
- **Don't miss:** The "new covenant" in 31:33–34.

Lamentations

- **Theme:** This poem of mourning is attributed to Jeremiah, after the fall of Jerusalem.
- **Don't miss:** Hope in God's faithfulness in 3:19–26.

Baruch

- **Theme:** Confession, wisdom, and encouragement.
- **Don't miss:** The comfort of chapters 4–5.

Ezekiel

- **Theme/story:** During the Jews' captivity in Babylon, this prophet brought a number of messages from God, often in very strange ways.
- **Don't miss:** In chapter 37, the vision of the "dry bones" getting connected and coming back to life.

Daniel

- **Theme/story:** A Jew captured by the Babylonians, Daniel became a government official and faced opposition when he continued to serve his God.
- **Key characters:** Daniel, his three Jewish friends, and several rulers of Babylon and Persia.
- **Don't miss:** The story of the lions' den in chapter 6.

Hosea

- **Theme/story:** This prophet's marriage to an unfaithful woman becomes a mirror of the relationship between God and his people.
- **Key characters:** Hosea, wife Gomer.
- **Don't miss:** The heartfelt poetry of 14:2–10.

Joel

- **Theme:** When a natural disaster hits, this prophet calls his people to return to God.
- **Don't miss:** The promise of the Spirit in 3:1–2, which was quoted by St. Peter at Pentecost.

Amos

- **Theme:** Preaching in the northern kingdom of Israel just before it fell, this prophet sorely criticizes the nation for its corruption and complacency.
- **Don't miss:** The well-known verse "Let justice roll down" in 5:24.

Obadiah

- **Theme:** This prophet pronounces God's judgment on a neighboring nation.
- **Don't miss:** "The day of the Lord" (v. 15) is a common theme for many of the prophets, looking toward a time of judgment ... and justice.

Jonah

- **Theme/story:** A prophet tries to run away rather than preach where God sends him. A "great fish" (or whale) turns things around.
- **Don't miss:** The strange epilogue in chapter 4.

Micah

- **Theme:** This prophet calls the people of Judah to return to the Lord and act with justice.
- **Don't miss:** The summary of "what the Lord requires" in 6:8.

Nahum

- **Theme:** Writing around 660 BC, this prophet declares God's judgment against the enemy superpower, Assyria.
- **Don't miss:** The language in 2:7–9 describes a water-based method of attack that might have been used by the Babylonians to conquer the Assyrian capital of Nineveh in 612 BC.

Habakkuk

- **Theme:** As his people's enemies keep winning, this prophet struggles to understand what God is doing, and why.
- **Don't miss:** The "call to worship" in 2:20.

Zephaniah

- **Theme:** For those who think God has gone silent, this prophet assures them that divine action is imminent.
- **Don't miss:** Singing in the middle of crisis (3:14).

Haggai

- **Theme:** After the Jews have returned to a damaged Jerusalem, this prophet calls on them to rebuild the Lord's temple.
- **Don't miss:** The hopeful message of 2:9.

Zechariah

- **Theme:** As Jews resettle their homeland after the Babylonian captivity, this prophet looks ahead to the Lord's future plans.
- **Don't miss:** Multiple prophecies about the coming Messiah, including one fulfilled on Palm Sunday (9:9).

Malachi

- **Theme:** This prophet asks his people to honor God with their attitudes, their actions and their money.
- **Don't miss:** The promise of Elijah's return in 3:23—which Jesus later saw fulfilled in John the Baptist (Matthew 11:14).

The New Testament (27 Books)

THE GOSPELS

Matthew

- **View of Jesus:** The fulfillment of Jewish Scripture and tradition.
- **Unique to Matthew:** The nativity from Joseph's standpoint; the magi; five major discourses; frequent quotation of Hebrew prophecy.
- **Don't miss:** The Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5–7 and the Final Judgment in 25:31–46.

Mark

- **View of Jesus:** Miracle-worker.
- **Unique to Mark:** The shortest of the Gospels; no birth story; emphasis on action; no sermons, but many clever quips.
- **Don't miss:** The challenge of humility in 10:42–45.

Luke

- **View of Jesus:** Savior of the World.
- **Unique to Luke:** Birth of John the Baptist; Annunciation and Magnificat; shepherds in birth story; Jesus tells extended parables, like Prodigal Son and Good Samaritan; disciples on the road to Emmaus.
- **Don't miss:** All the meals in this Gospel.

John

- **View of Jesus:** The Word, the Bread, the Light, the Way, etc.

- **Unique to John:** The Wedding at Cana; in-depth conversations with Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, and Pilate; the Eucharist discourse in chapter 6; the extended Last Supper teaching and prayer (13–17).
- **Don't miss:** The beautifully restorative “Feed my sheep” moment with Peter after the Resurrection.

Acts

- **Theme/story:** The sequel to Luke's Gospel, Acts traces the spread of the Church from Jerusalem to Rome.
- **Key characters:** Peter; John; deacons Stephen and Philip; Paul and Barnabas and other colleagues; and a number of people—lame man, magician, centurion, jailer—touched by the message of Jesus and the power of the Spirit.
- **Don't miss:** An angel springing Peter from prison in chapter 12.

NEW TESTAMENT LETTERS

Romans

- **Theme:** How God saves us. With legal precision, this letter from Paul describes the problem of sin, the importance of faith in Jesus, and the activity of God's Spirit in our lives and in the Church.
- **Don't miss:** Chapter 8 is possibly the most powerful chapter in the Bible. Check it out.

1 Corinthians

- **Theme:** Troubleshooting issues in a struggling congregation: dissension, immorality, public worship, and confusion about spiritual gifts.
- **Don't miss:** Chapter 13, the famous “love chapter.”

2 Corinthians

- **Theme:** In a kinder, gentler connection with Corinth, Paul still asserts his authority in the face of certain detractors.
- **Don't miss:** The “ministry of reconciliation” described in 5:11–21.

Galatians

- **Theme:** In Christ, we have freedom from the law and from the flesh.
- **Don't miss:** The "fruit of the Spirit" listed in 5:22–23.

Ephesians

- **Theme:** God's eternal plan, and how it involves the Church.
- **Don't miss:** The beautiful prayers at the ends of chapters 1 and 3.

Philippians

- **Theme:** Joy in the Lord ... even in difficult situations.
- **Don't miss:** The apostle's confidence in 1:6 that God is still working in us.

Colossians

- **Theme:** Keeping the faith ... together.
- **Don't miss:** Music and the Word in 3:16.

1 Thessalonians

- **Theme:** Personal greetings from Paul and exhortations for the church.
- **Don't miss:** The percussion of holy living in 5:16–22.

2 Thessalonians

- **Theme:** The Christian's responsibility to work diligently and avoid deception.
- **Don't miss:** The glimpse into Paul's own ministry in 3:7–8.

1 Timothy

- **Theme:** Paul advises the young leader Timothy on matters of worship, organization, and right teaching.
- **Don't miss:** Warnings against the love of money in chapter 6.

2 Timothy

- **Theme:** Often considered Paul's final epistle, this letter contains both personal and ministerial advice.
- **Don't miss:** What it says about Scripture in 3:16–17.

Titus

- **Theme:** Guidance for church leadership.
- **Don't miss:** What appears to be an early Christian hymn quoted in 3:4–7.

Philemon

- **Theme:** Paul urges his friend Philemon to welcome back a runaway slave.
- **Don't miss:** In verse 24, the mention of two Gospel-writers among Paul's companions.

Hebrews

- **Theme:** How Christ has fulfilled the Jewish traditions.
- **Don't miss:** The heroes and heroines of faith in chapter 11.

THE CATHOLIC LETTERS

James

- **Theme:** Living what you say you believe.
- **Don't miss:** Touches of satirical comedy in 1:23–24; 2:1–4; 2:15–16; and 3:5.

1 Peter

- **Theme:** God provides comfort to those who suffer for Christ.
- **Don't miss:** Guidance for talking with non-believers in 3:15–16.

2 Peter

- **Theme:** The danger of false teaching.
- **Don't miss:** Qualities of the growing believer, in 1:5–8.

1 John

- **Theme:** Love and truth.
- **Don't miss:** The value of confession in 1:9.

2 John

- **Theme:** Christian love.
- **Don't miss:** The size of this letter; it fit on one sheet of papyrus.

3 John

- **Theme:** Offering a loving welcome to traveling ministers.
- **Don't miss:** The brief descriptions of Diotrephes and Demetrius. Imagine what they would have been like.

Jude

- **Theme:** The danger of false teachers.
- **Don't miss:** The beautiful blessing of verses 24–25.

Revelation

- **Theme:** This highly symbolic work encourages believers with assurance of God's ultimate victory over the forces of evil. The connection between the Catholic Mass and the book of Revelation is striking. Read and observe.
- **Don't miss:** All the songs: "Holy, Holy, Holy"; "Worthy is the Lamb"; "Hallelujah."

RESOURCE B: BIBLICAL PHRASES IN THE MASS

Greeting	In the name of the Father, and of the Son ...	Matthew 28:19
	The Lord be with you ... and with your spirit	2 Timothy 4:22; Galatians 6:18
The Penitential Act	I confess to almighty God and to you ...	James 5:16
The Gloria	Glory to God in the highest...	Luke 2:14
Profession of Faith (Creed)	I believe in one God ...	Old and New Testament
Sanctus	Holy, Holy, Holy ...	Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8; Matthew 21:9
Eucharistic Institution	Take this, all of you, and eat of it ...	Matthew 26:26–28; Luke 22:19–20
Doxology	Through him, with him, and in him ...	Romans 11:36
The Lord's Prayer	Our Father who art in heaven ...	Matthew 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4
The Rite of Peace	Peace I leave you, my peace I give you ...	John 14:27
The Fraction of the Bread	Lamb of God, you take away the sin of ...	John 1:29
Commingling	May this mingling of the Body and Blood ...	John 6:54–56
Communion	Behold the Lamb of God ... I am not worthy	John 1:29; Luke 7:6–7

RESOURCE C: THE CATHOLIC VIEW OF SCRIPTURE

Here are a few excerpts from the **Catechism of the Catholic Church**. You can find a more complete presentation in paragraphs 101–141 of the Catechism.

- In the Sacred Scripture, the Church constantly finds her nourishment and her strength, for she welcomes it not as a human word, “but as it really is, the word of God.” (#104)
- “In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children, and talks with them.” (#104)
- *God is the author of Sacred Scripture.* “The divinely revealed realities, which are contained and presented in the text of the Sacred Scripture, have been written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.” (#105)
- God inspired the human authors of the sacred books. (#106)
- The inspired books teach the truth. “... [W]e must acknowledge that the Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures.” (#107)
- To interpret Scripture correctly, the reader must be attentive to what the human authors truly wanted to affirm and to what God wanted to reveal to us by their words. (#109)
- “For the fact is that the truth is differently presented and expressed in the various types of historical writing, in prophetic and poetic texts, and in other forms of literary expression.” (#110)
- According to an ancient tradition, one can distinguish between two *senses* of Scripture: the literal and the spiritual ... (#115)
- “Therefore the study of the sacred page should be the very soul of sacred theology ... [P]astoral preaching, catechetics, and all forms of Christian instruction, among which the liturgical homily should hold pride of place ... is healthily nourished and thrives in holiness through the Word of Scripture.” (#132)

- The Church “forcefully and specifically exhorts all the Christian faithful ... to learn the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures. Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.” (#133)
- “The Church has always venerated the Scriptures as she venerated the Body of the Lord”: both nourish and govern the whole Christian life. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105; cf. Isaiah 50:4). (#141)

RESOURCE D: LECTIO DIVINA

After watching the 25-minute training video in this ancient spiritual practice, follow this guide to try it for yourself. (Part 1 of the video is all you need to watch now, but you might be interested in Part 2 later.)

Opening Prayer

Lord, your Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness where your angels ministered to him. Send your Holy Spirit to us now as we enter this Gospel passage and seek to understand and apply its lessons in our lives.

Lectio

Read Matthew 4:1–11, the Temptation of Jesus.

In the story of the temptation, Jesus is revealed as a true Israelite. Each of his refusals are found in the language of the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy where a true Israelite is reminded to love God with one's whole heart, whole soul, and with all one's strength.

Meditatio

- Forty days.
- Led by the Spirit into the wilderness.
- Alone.
- The nature of each different temptation.
- The use and misuse of Scripture.
- We have never heard of a story like this before.

Oratio

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." (Deuteronomy 6:4–5)

Father give me the grace today to love you with every thought, with every action, and with all that my thoughts and actions produce today. Lead me out of temptation and deliver me from evil.

Contemplatio

- What temptations do I face? What are the nature of these temptations? What is at the root of these temptations?
- What wilderness has the Spirit led me into at times?
- What has been the result of my wilderness experiences?
- What is God saying to me in this passage?

St. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that, "No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it."