

BIBLE BASICS FOR PODCASTS 6-10

The notes below accompany listening to the “Bible Basics Podcasts 6-10”

Basic 6: The “Canon” of the Two Testaments

Here we look at the "Canon" of the First and Second Testaments, that is, how the collection of writings came about, what's been included and later additions to the First Testament written in Greek (called the "Deuterocanonical" or "Apocryphal").

- Decision for the First Testament collection ("Tanak") occurred in late first century CE, as reflected in liturgy and teachings. There are 39 books:
 1. **The Law** (Torah)
 2. **The Prophets:** (Nebiim), Former and Later Prophets, and Twelve Prophets.
 3. Writings (Kethubim) Greek OT writings considered "deuterocanonical or apocryphal writings" (included in Catholic and Orthodox traditions): Tobit, Judith, 1&2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus and Baruch.
- Second Testament (27 writings): Gospels, Paul's letters, later writings and Book of Apocalypse, agreed upon in the Council of Trent (1545-1563 CE).

Basic 7: Biblical Fundamentalism

Drawing on the Catholic Church's 1993 document from the Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, this podcast reflects on Fundamentalism, its nature and problem.

Parts of the document's statement on Fundamentalism reads:

"Fundamentalist interpretation starts from the principle that the Bible, being the word of God, inspired and free from error, should be read and interpreted literally in all its details. But by "literal interpretation" it understands a naively literalist interpretation, one, that is to say, which excludes every effort at understanding the Bible that takes account of its historical origins and development. It is opposed, therefore, to the use of the historical- critical method, as indeed to the use of any other scientific method for the interpretation of Scripture...

“...Fundamentalism is right to insist on the divine inspiration of the Bible, the inerrancy of the word of God and other biblical truths included in its five

fundamental points. But its way of presenting these truths is rooted in an ideology which is not biblical, whatever the proponents of this approach might say. For it demands an unshakable adherence to rigid doctrinal points of view and imposes, as the only source of teaching for Christian life and salvation, a reading of the Bible which rejects all questioning and any kind of critical research. The basic problem with fundamentalist interpretation of this kind is that, refusing to take into account the historical character of biblical revelation, it makes itself incapable of accepting the full truth of the incarnation itself. As regards relationships with God, fundamentalism seeks to escape any closeness of the divine and the human. It refuses to admit that the inspired word of God has been expressed in human language and that this word has been expressed, under divine inspiration, by human authors possessed of limited capacities and resources. For this reason, it tends to treat the biblical text as if it had been dictated word for word by the Spirit. It fails to recognize that the word of God has been formulated in language and expression conditioned by various periods. It pays no attention to the literary forms and to the human ways of thinking to be found in the biblical texts, many of which are the result of a process extending over long periods of time and bearing the mark of very diverse historical situations...

"...The fundamentalist approach is dangerous, for it is attractive to people who look to the Bible for ready answers to the problems of life. It can deceive these people, offering them interpretations that are pious but illusory, instead of telling them that the Bible does not necessarily contain an immediate answer to each and every problem. Without saying as much in so many words, fundamentalism actually invites people to a kind of intellectual suicide. It injects into life a false certitude, for it unwittingly confuses the divine substance of the biblical message with what are in fact its human limitations."

Basic 8: The Bible's Different Literary Forms

The Bible is a library of writings from different time periods that consists of different literary forms:

- The Bible is a collection of various books and of different styles of writing: history, prophecy, Legal, epics, wisdom sayings, gospels, parables, Jesus sayings, miracles and signs (John), letters, apocalyptic writing.
- Literary forms communicate the author's sacred encounter with God. They invite a recognition that there are various ways of communicate the Sacred Encounter and "Biblical Truth" (Vatican II).

Basic 9: The Major Periods in History behind the First Testament

There are six major historical periods that shape the books of the First Testament:
These periods later influence the writings of the First Testament.

1. **The Patriarchs** (1250 BCE): Migration movements brings Abraham to centre stage in his journey from the Fertile Crescent into the land of the Canaanites. Egypt is a dominant power, though other powers arise: Persians, Assyrians and Babylonians.
2. **Exodus** (1250-1130 BCE): Moses appears as the great leader and unites the diverse people of the Israelites. The story associated with this period is found the Books of Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy and Joshua. God forms a covenant with the desert-wandering Israelites, arriving finally in the land of the Canaanites. How this happens is open to interpretation--rather than immediate conquest, perhaps gradual assimilation and peaceful settlement.
3. **Judges** (1130-1020 BCE): Charismatic leaders ("Judges") organise a loose confederation of tribes. God is the only "King" and aversion to monarchy grows.
4. **Monarchy** (1120-587 BCE): Transition towards monarchical institution with Saul (1020-1000 BCE), David (1000-960 BCE) and Solomon (960-930 BCE). Solomon over taxes the tribes and dishonors past loyalties. Division results under Rehoboam and a split into two Kingdoms: North (Israel) and the South (Judah). Assyria crushes the northern Kingdom in 724 BCE. The south is invaded by Babylon in 587 BCE, Jerusalem falls and Solomon's Temple destroyed.
5. **Exile and Return** (587-332 BCE): Exile in Babylon by the Jewish Jerusalem elite ushers in serious reflection and Torah integration. The return to Jerusalem under the Persian king, Cyrus, leads them to those who remained considered suspect and corrupt. Tensions emerge between Jews and Samaritans. Ezra and Nehemiah rebuild the Temple. Israel is fragile.
6. **The Greek Conquest and Rise of Hasmoneans** (332-39 BCE): Greek conquest by Alexander the Great in 332 BCE. Greek culture is imposed. On Alexander's death, Greek empire is divided between two family powers: Seleucids (ruled Syria) and Ptolemies (Egypt, Palestine). Seleucids take over the rule of Palestine and impose taxation and rigorous Greek culture. Revolt occurs by the Maccabees. Hasmoneans now rule for 100 years. Pharisees and Essenes emerge in reaction to the corrupt Hasmonean rule supported by a Jerusalem aristocracy. Rome intervenes and plants Herod as regal vassal of Rome.

Basic 10: The Geo-political Context of the Second Testament

This brief podcast reflects on the Greco-Roman context for the Jesus Movement and the growth of the Second Testament. Its writings emerge from a Jewish context and move into a non-Jewish Mediterranean world.

- Herod's death (4BCE) brings about the division of his kingdom between his three sons: Antipas (responsible for Judah and Samaria), Herod Philip (Galilee, Upper and Lower), Archelaus Transjordan),
- Rome imposes heavy and intolerable taxation on the Jews.
- Revolt occurs and Rome, under Titus, destroys Jerusalem and its Temple in 70 CE. A major moment that causes Jewish self-reflection on Israel's survival and future.
- A second revolt (132 CE) brings Rome's complete occupation of Israel/Palestine until the end of the Byzantine Empire.
- Tumult and revolt becomes the context of Jesus' ministry
- The Jesus movement moves from a Jewish world, into the non-Jewish world, expanding north, south, east and west. Its expansion engages the culture and politics of the Greco-Roman world governed by imperial politics and theology.