Immerse: The Story of God and Us (November 1 – 22)

Week 1 – What is the Bible?

How Did We Get the Bible?

A 25–30 Minute Adult Bible Study

Introduction (3 Minutes)

Opening Question: If someone asked, "How do you know the Bible we read today is trustworthy?" how would you answer?

Many people assume the Bible was written by one person, at one time, as a single book. In reality, the Bible's journey from its original writings to the book in our hands today is one of the most fascinating stories in history.

We will explore:

1. How the Bible was written
2. How it was preserved
3. How it was recognized as Scripture
4. How it was translated and spread throughout the world

Part 1: The Bible Is Really a Library (5 Minutes)

When we hold the Bible, we're actually holding a collection of books.

Bible Facts

- 66 books total
- Written over approximately 1,600 years
- More than 40 authors
- Written on three continents (Asia: ancient Near East, Middle East, Asia Minor encompassing locations like modern day Israel, Iraq, Iran, and Turkey; Africa: Egypt; Europe: Greece, Rome, Macedonia)
- Written in three languages:
    - Hebrew
    - Aramaic
    - Greek
- Two Major Sections

Old Testament

- 39 books
- Covers Creation through the prophet Malachi
- Written approximately 1500–400 BC

New Testament

- 27 books
- Covers the life of Jesus and the early church
- Written approximately 45–100 AD

Discussion Question

How remarkable is it that dozens of writers over sixteen centuries tell one unified story about God's relationship with humanity?

Key Point

The Bible was written by many human authors, but Christians believe God guided them through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Read:
2 Timothy 3:16-17
2 Peter 1:20-21

Part 2: The 400 Silent Years (3 Minutes)

Between the Old and New Testaments lies a period often called "The Silent Years."

For approximately 400 years:

- No prophets were sent
- No Scripture was written
- No recorded messages from God

The Old Testament ends with anticipation of a coming Messiah.

Then, after four centuries of silence, God speaks again through John the Baptist who came to prepare the way Jesus Christ.

Discussion Question

What do you think it would have been like to wait 400 years for God to speak again?

Part 3: How Were the Books Chosen? (5 Minutes)

Many people ask, "Who decided what books belong in the Bible?"
The answer surprises many people.

Church leaders did not "invent" Scripture. Instead, they recognized which books had already been accepted as God's Word.

Old Testament Recognition

Jewish leaders recognized books that:

- Were written by prophets or those closely connected to them
- Agreed with previous revelation
- Were accepted by God's people

New Testament Recognition

Early Christians recognized books that:

- Were written by apostles or close associates
- Agreed with established doctrine
- Were widely used in churches
- Demonstrated spiritual authority

Illustration

Think of a jeweler identifying a genuine diamond.
The jeweler doesn't create the diamond.
He recognizes what is already genuine.
Likewise, church councils recognized books that already carried divine authority.

Discussion Question

Why is it important to understand that church leaders recognized Scripture rather than creating it?

Part 4: The Amazing Accuracy of Bible Copying (6 Minutes)

Before printing presses, every Bible had to be copied by hand.

The Scribes

Jewish scribes developed extraordinary methods to ensure accuracy.

They:

- Counted words
- Counted letters
- Verified the middle word of a book
- Verified the middle letter of a book

If a mistake was found, the manuscript might be discarded.

A Fun Exercise

Ask the class:

Imagine copying an entire book by hand.
How many mistakes do you think you would make?

Manuscript Evidence

Today we have:

- More than 5,300 Greek New Testament manuscripts
- Thousands more ancient translations
- Thousands of quotations from early church leaders

Compared to other ancient writings, the Bible is extraordinarily well documented.

For example:

- Many works of Plato survive in only a handful of manuscripts.
- Many works of Aristotle survive in far fewer copies than the New Testament.

Key Point

The abundance of manuscripts allows scholars to compare copies and identify copying variations with remarkable confidence.

Part 5: The Dead Sea Scrolls Discovery (5 Minutes)

The Archaeological Discovery That Shocked Scholars

In 1947, a Bedouin shepherd threw a rock into a cave near the Dead Sea.
Instead of hearing a thud, he heard pottery break.
That accidental discovery led to one of the greatest archaeological finds in history.

What Was Found?
Ancient manuscripts dating from approximately 250 BC to AD 70.

The scrolls were over 2,000 years old!

Among them:

- Portions of nearly every Old Testament book
- A complete scroll of Isaiah

Why Was This Important?

Before the discovery, the oldest Hebrew manuscripts available were about 1,000 years old.
When scholars compared them, they found remarkable agreement.

Key Point

The Dead Sea Scrolls demonstrated that the biblical text had been preserved with extraordinary care over centuries.

Discussion Question

Why do you think discoveries like the Dead Sea Scrolls strengthen confidence in the Bible?

Part 6: The Bible Goes Global (3 Minutes)

The Bible was never intended for one nation alone.
Jesus commanded His followers to take the gospel to all nations.

As Christianity spread:

- The Bible was translated into new languages
- Missionaries carried Scripture around the world

Translation growth, according to Rose Publishing:

- Around AD 200: 7 languages
- AD 500: 13 languages
- AD 1400: 28 languages
- AD 1900: 537 languages
- Today: portions of Scripture exist in thousands of languages

Discussion Question

How many Bibles do you own?
Many believers throughout history never owned a Bible at all.

Conclusion (2 Minutes)

Consider this journey:

- God inspired His Word.
- Dozens of authors wrote it over sixteen centuries.
- Faithful scribes preserved it.
- Jewish and Christian leaders recognized its authority.
- Archaeological discoveries confirmed its reliability.
- Translators carried it to the world.
- And today many of us have multiple copies sitting on our shelves.

Final Reflection

The miracle isn't just that God gave us His Word.
The miracle is that after thousands of years, countless copies, translations, and generations, we can still open the Bible and read the same message of God's salvation through Jesus Christ.

Closing Question

If God worked so hard to preserve His Word for us, what should we do with it? (Read it, learn it, obey it, share it!)