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# Getting Acquainted with the Bible

ITS MAKEUP, PURPOSE, AND STORY



David Anguish

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Searcy, AR

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CarChlex Books  
1210 North Main Street  
Searcy, AR 72143  
www.davidanguish.com

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*Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes;  
and I will keep it to the end.  
Give me understanding, that I may keep your law  
and observe it with my whole heart.  
Lead me in the path of your commandments,  
for I delight in it.*

— Psalm 119:33-35

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# Introduction

IN 1983, I WAS hired to teach Bible courses in a Christian school. One of the classes assigned to me that year was the Old Testament survey course we taught to seventh graders.

As I began to plan, I soon realized that I was in a position similar to the veteran football coach who, as the story goes, gathered his team on the first day of practice, held up a ball, and said, “Gentleman, this is a football.” He knew that before he could teach his players the finer points and strategies of football, he had to make sure they knew the fundamentals.

Likewise, I knew that before we began the Old Testament survey in Genesis, I needed to teach my students some basics about the Bible. Many of them had attended weekly Bible classes at church since infancy. A significant number had attended our school since kindergarten. But those experiences did not guarantee they knew (or remembered) the basics. Even if all of them did, several of their classmates had different backgrounds and many of that group were newcomers to our school. A Bible course was a new experience for them. I needed to start with the fundamentals.

So, I developed a study unit on basics. What is the Bible? How is it divided? What are its parts? Why do we call its different writings “books”? What are those books? Why study

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the Bible? What is its story, its plot? Where do the individual books and divisions fit in that story?

Practically speaking, could my students find their way around the Bible? Did they know the names of the books and where each of them is in relation to the others? If asked to look up Ephesians 4:1, did they know what that meant and how to do it? Could they distinguish Ephesians from Ecclesiastes, or 1 Chronicles from 1 Corinthians? Or would they, as more than one student did that year and later, turn to one when I asked them to look up a passage in the other?

Relative to more specific content, did they know the meaning of a term like “old covenant”? Did they know what the Gospels are, or that there are four of them? Did they know the difference between an apostle and an epistle? Experience with different classes over the years proved that questions like these were not hypothetical.

Since no textbook had been assigned to help answer such questions, I wrote short manuscripts on the different topics and distributed them as handouts. Students were assigned to read and answer questions over each one. In class discussions, I went over each handout, fleshing out details, clarifying and elaborating as needed, and making sure they heard the correct answers to the questions. Tests were given after a review of the material.

My decision to teach that unit was validated that year and later by comments and questions of students who showed they did not know the basics. Additional confirmation came from multiple parents, independently over several years, as their sons and daughters joined our student body. Almost word for word, they voiced the same concern. They worried how well their child would do in the class because they “don’t really have any background in Bible.”

After two or three years, I was assigned to teach other courses to older students. A colleague continued to teach the unit I had written for a few years after that, adding her own

creativity to the material. I periodically used parts of it for other courses and the occasional church class. But aside from those exceptions, the material remained in a notebook on a shelf in my library. I would sometimes glance at it as I was looking for a different notebook and think that someday I needed to polish it and make it available in more permanent form. But other demands were always pressing and someday never became today.

Events in early 2018 prompted a different course. A friend told me about a student in a Christian university who had grown up in his congregation and shared with him the observation that other students in his university Bible courses did not seem to know the basic *story* of the Bible. Apparently, they had studied many Bible lessons, but had little sense of how it all fit together.

A few weeks later, another student in the same university shared with me how the church where he had grown up was asking him to teach the teens while he was home for the summer, an assignment they had also given him the previous year. He was concerned that his students did not know the basics. He also lamented that the material he had been given for their class (and would probably be given again) was woefully inadequate to teach what they needed. He asked if I knew of any material that might help.

I recommended a couple of books to him, and also shared with him that I had the material I had prepared thirty-five years before along with a modified version of it that I had used in a church class just a few years ago. I briefly described it and told him I would make copies for him. It was while organizing the material for copying that I thought again that it needed to be reworked. At the time, I was between projects and trying to decide which one to begin next. The timing appeared right for today to finally be someday.

This book is the result. Before you begin, you should know some things I was thinking as I wrote it.

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First, I intend it to be a *primer*, an elementary writing that serves as an introduction. It puts into practice an important lesson I've learned about teaching, one I have had reinforced many times. As a teacher, never assume your students know foundational facts or concepts that set the stage for other ideas. At the very least, it's a good idea to ask some questions to find out whether or not they know those things.

Much in this book, especially in its early chapters, will seem obvious to many. But in a world where both formal surveys and experience demonstrate that many people, even among professing Christians, do not know the basics about the Bible, it is evident that these things are not obvious to all. Perhaps one reason many don't know them is because we always assume they do. We need to build (or secure) the foundation.

Second, this book is about the big picture, not the details. In every chapter, more can be said about the subject than I will say. This is especially so in the survey of the entire story in chapter 4 and of its parts in chapters 5-8. I intended only to present an overview. I know the intricacies and nuances of the story are vitally important. But I'm convinced that many of those details often go unappreciated because people do not see the big picture that gives the details their context.

Third, I designed the book to be profitable for individual reading, but also, if desired, to be a resource for Bible class teachers. No, it is not divided into the customary thirteen chapters so common in lesson quarterlies. But the material can be readily adapted for courses of varying duration. It might be a course that lasts only eight weeks. Or, depending on how much a teacher decides to elaborate or how ready students are for more details, it can be used for classes of longer duration. The questions at the end of each chapter, along with the additional notes on individual chapters and the material in the appendices, can facilitate even more explanation and discussion.

Fourth, the chapter questions have multiple purposes. They can be used to review content, the facts in the story. Al-



though many today see facts as tedious, they are the necessary framework for understanding and applying principles. Several questions were written to help teachers determine whether students are understanding the concepts beyond the facts. Others have a component that serve as a catalyst to look deeper, to consider important lessons, meanings, and applications.

Fifth, “there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:11). I have learned from the work of many others who have shared their knowledge about the things covered in this book, in both oral and written forms. I have drawn on their work to develop and organize this material. But I have generally adopted a minimalist approach when it comes to citing sources. This decision was made in the interest of leaving the text less cluttered and therefore (I hope) easier to digest.

Sixth, I hope this material will help make the content of the Bible less daunting, a goal that will in turn lead to a greater desire for more study of its story. It is a story with “depth” that is “unsearchable” and “inscrutable.” At the same time, it lets us in on many things about “the mind of the Lord,” truths we can both understand and be amazed by. It is a “gift” that is increasingly beautiful the more we examine it (quoted words in this paragraph are from Romans 11:33-35).

In Acts 17:1-10, we read about Paul and Silas preaching the story of Jesus in the Macedonian (Greek) town of Thessalonica. Results were mixed. Some were persuaded and joined them. But others persecuted them severely enough that Paul was sent away. People he met in the next town, Berea, shared the same heritage as his Thessalonian persecutors, but their attitude was very different. Acts 17:11 says about them that, “these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.”

We need more students like the Bereans. I hope you will be one of them and that this brief book will help you as you examine the Scriptures.





# Acknowledgments

THE LIST OF PEOPLE to whom I am indebted for this project begins with my parents, Ralph and Irma Anguish, who always modeled lives of faith and influenced my early belief. They also allowed me to question, investigate, and develop a faith of my own, not one I merely inherited.

Encouragement, questions to pursue, and invaluable insights also came from teachers and students—in both church and school settings—as well as mentors, colleagues in ministry and education, and others with whom I have had many enriching discussions on a variety of subjects.

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David Parker, a friend whose professional training is Geography and Environmental Engineering and is one of the best Bible students I know, pointed out several places where

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the points I intended could be better made or would we better received. Dr. Harold Redd, minister of both the Midtown and Raleigh Springs churches of Christ in Memphis, and a first-rate Bible scholar, also read the book and offered encouragement. Kenneth Mills designed the cover and made helpful suggestions for improving its content and appeal. His passion for the way of the Lord and growth of his people is inspiring.

Of course, none of these good people are accountable for any errors of fact, detail, or style that remain. That responsibility is mine alone.

Cancer took my wife Carlynn from us in 2017. Had she lived, she would have shared numerous wise insights and important suggestions that would have helped every facet of this project. I'm sure of that because that's what she consistently did throughout our nearly forty years of married life. She was my closest friend and biggest booster. She also made it easier for me to focus on the study and work necessary to finish tasks like this. I miss her greatly.

Carlynn had an insatiable desire to pursue Berea-like Bible study and pass on a thoughtful faith to children. I have no doubt she would have continued her study and been quite passionate about encouraging her grandchildren to grow their own faith. I dedicate this volume to her memory with the hope that it will be true to her desire to understand Scripture and contribute to her dream of passing on the faith to her grandchildren and other eager learners.

“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen” (2 Peter 3:18).