

LESSON ONE

Grasping God's Word.

A study in how we read, translate, and trust the Bible.

A QUESTION TO BEGIN

What is
this?

THE BIBLE

A library between two covers.

The Bible is not just a single book. It is a collection — sixty-six separate books, bound together as one.

Written across roughly fifteen hundred years, by some forty authors, on three continents, in three languages — and telling one story.

39

OLD TESTAMENT

27

NEW TESTAMENT

~40

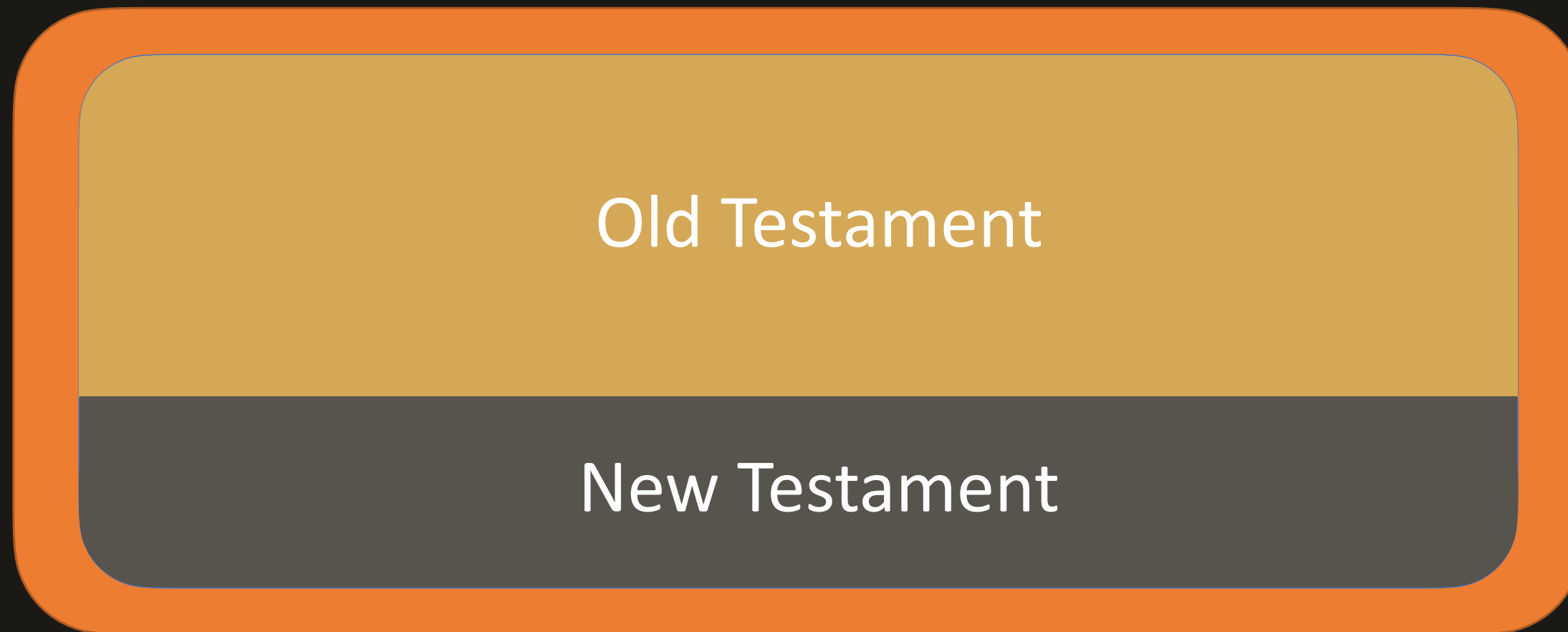
AUTHORS

1,500_{yr}

SPAN

A DISTINCTION WORTH KEEPING

The book around the book.



A DISTINCTION WORTH KEEPING

Not just around the text

devoured the territory. Then I said:

"O Lord GOD, cease, I pray!

"Oh, that Jacob may stand,
For he is small!"

6 So the LORD relented concerning this.

"This also shall not be," said the Lord GOD.

Vision of the Plumb Line

7 Thus He showed me: Behold, the Lord stood on a wall made with a plumb line, with a plumb line in His hand. 8 And the LORD said to me, "Amos, what do you see?"

And I said, "A plumb line."

Then the Lord said:

"Behold, I am setting a plumb line
In the midst of My people Israel;
I will not pass by them anymore.

9 The high places of Isaac shall be desolate,

10 I will turn your feasts into mourning,
And all your songs into lamentation;
I will bring sackcloth on every waist,
And baldness on every head;
I will make it like mourning for an only son,
And its end like a bitter day.

11 "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord GOD,
That I will send a famine on the land,
Not a famine of bread,
Nor a thirst for water,
But of hearing the words of the LORD.

12 They shall wander from sea to sea,
And from north to east;
They shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD,
But shall not find it.

13 "In that day the fair virgins
And strong young men

14 Then Amos answered, and said to Amaziah:

"I was no prophet,
Nor was I a son of a prophet,
But I was a sheepbreeder
And a tender of sycamore fruit.

15 Then the LORD took me as I followed the flock,
And the LORD said to me,
'Go, prophesy to My people Israel.'

16 Now therefore, hear the word of the LORD:
You say, 'Do not prophesy against Israel,

17 led away captive. To Assyria ca. 722 B.C.

18 summer fruit. In this fourth vision, as fruit was fully ripened by the summer's sun, so Israel was ripe for judgment

19 New Moon. Based on a lunar calendar, Israel would celebrate the day with a festival. Like the Sabbath, no work was to be done' (1 Sam. 20:5,6; 2 Kin. 4:23; Ezek. 46:3). The merchants' eagerness for the day to end revealed their appetite for greed. ephah small...shekel large. By dishonest weighing, the merchant decreased the cost of the

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7:1-9:10 Amos introduced 5 visions, with a historical interlude (7:10-17). The first two depict the Lord's commitment to spare a remnant, while the last 3 announce the inevitability of judgment.

7:1-3 The first vision, symbolizing God's action, saw a swarm of locusts devouring the people's portion of the later cuttings, after the king had taken the first cutting (cf. Joel 1:2-12).

7:3 the LORD relented. Much like He did at Abraham's pleading over Sodom in Gen. 18:22,23.

7:4-6 Under the figure of fire, the second vision concerns a devastating drought, causing the underground water supplies to dry up and the fields to be consumed (cf. Deut. 32:22). Amos again pleaded Israel's cause (cf. vv. 2,3).

7:7-9 The true spiritual nature of Israel was here tested (and found wanting) by God's plumb line of righteousness in this third of 5 visions. The sword of judgment was about to fall on the nation.

8:7 pride of Jacob. As surely as the nation was filled with pride, so the Lord would not forget her works (cf. 6:8).

8:8 Heave and subside like the River of Egypt. Like the Nile, which annually provided water and rich soil deposits for farmers by greatly overflowing its banks, so judgment would overflow the land.

8:9 the sun go down at noon. Probably referring to the total eclipse of the sun ca. 763 B.C. as a picture of God's coming judgment.

8:10 sackcloth. See note on Joel 1:8.

Five Visions of Amos

1. Vision of Locusts (7:1-3)
2. Vision of Fire (7:4-6)
3. Vision of the Plumb Line (7:7-9)
4. Vision of the Summer Fruit (8:1-3)
5. Vision of the New Moon (8:4-6)

THE BIBLE WAS NOT WRITTEN IN ENGLISH.

Three original languages.



OLD TESTAMENT

Hebrew

The language of ancient Israel. Reads right-to-left. Concrete, picture-rich, built on three-letter roots.



PARTS OF DANIEL & EZRA

Aramaic

A Semitic cousin of Hebrew. The common language of the Ancient Near East in the Babylonian and Persian eras.



NEW TESTAMENT

Koine Greek

Not the polished Greek of philosophers — the working, common Greek of merchants and soldiers across the first-century Mediterranean.

A SIMPLE FACT

None of us read *Hebrew*,
Aramaic, or Greek.

So between the original text and the page in your lap, someone has done work.
That work is called translation — “to carry across.”

A HEBREW IDIOM, TWO WAYS

The translator's dilemma.

Genesis 39:19 describes Potiphar's reaction. In Hebrew, it says — literally —

WORD-FOR-WORD

“His nose burned.”

Faithful to the Hebrew. Confusing in English.



MEANING-FOR-MEANING

“His anger was kindled.”

Faithful to the meaning. Loses the picture.

Every verse has a decision like this behind it. Multiply that by 31,000+ verses.

TWO BASIC PHILOSOPHIES

Word for word, or meaning for meaning.

FORMAL EQUIVALENCE

Stay close to the original words.

Preserve word order, grammar, even idiom where possible. Let the English bend toward the Hebrew or Greek.

Examples · NASB · ESV · NKJV · KJV

FUNCTIONAL EQUIVALENCE

Stay close to the original meaning.

Render the thought in natural English. Let the Hebrew or Greek bend toward the reader.

Examples · NIV · CSB · NLT · NCV

A MAP OF COMMON ENGLISH BIBLES

The translation spectrum.



No spot on this line is “wrong.” Each is a tool. The question is which tool for which task.

ROMANS 12:1 — ACROSS THE SPECTRUM

One verse, many voices.

ESV · FORMAL

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

NLT · FUNCTIONAL

¹ And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice — the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.

NIV · MEDIATING

¹ Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God — this is your true and proper worship.

THE MESSAGE · PARAPHRASE

¹ So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life — your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life — and place it before God as an offering.

PROFILE · FORMAL EQUIVALENCE

When you want the shape of the original.

STRENGTHS

- Preserves wordplay, repetition, and structure
- Easier to study word-by-word
- Good for memorization & close reading
- Translator's interpretive footprint is smaller

TRADE-OFFS

- English can feel stiff or unfamiliar
- Idioms can puzzle a new reader
- Sentence length follows Greek/Hebrew — not English

PROFILE · FUNCTIONAL EQUIVALENCE

When you want the sense of the original.

STRENGTHS

- Natural English — reads aloud well
- Accessible to new readers and to children
- Better for reading large sections at a sitting
- Confusing idioms are explained, not preserved

TRADE-OFFS

- Translators have already made interpretive calls
- Wordplay and structure can disappear
- Less ideal for word-level study

NIV

CSB

NLT

NCV

GNT

A CATEGORY OF ITS OWN

Paraphrase — a caution.

A paraphrase is not really a translation. It is one author's restatement of the text in their own voice.

Sometimes vivid. Sometimes refreshing. Always shaped by the paraphraser's interpretation.

RULES OF THUMB

Read it *alongside*, never in place of.

Never build a doctrine on a paraphrase.

Don't use it as your primary study Bible.

*“All Scripture is **breathed out by God** and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”*

— 2 Timothy 3:16

A COMMON QUESTION

Why so many English Bibles?

- 01 **English keeps changing.** The English of 1611 is not the English of 2026. New translations refresh the language.
- 02 **Manuscripts keep being found.** We have older and perhaps more reliable manuscripts today than translators in 1611 had access to.
- 03 **Audiences vary.** A children's reader and a seminary student need different translations.
- 04 **Translation theory matures.** Scholars keep refining how to handle idiom, gender, and ancient grammar.

This is not a problem. It is a gift.

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE

Choosing your translation.

PRIMARY

Pick one to live in.

A formal or mediating translation you can study, memorize, and grow familiar with over years.

Try · ESV · NASB · CSB · NIV

COMPARISON

Keep one for contrast.

Something on the other side of the spectrum — to surface what your primary may be smoothing over.

Try · NLT · NIV (if primary is ESV)

REFRESH

Occasional fresh eyes.

Read a familiar passage in a paraphrase or a very different translation just to hear it new.

Try · The Message · NLT

Most important rule: pick one, and actually read it.

A WORD ABOUT THE KING JAMES

A word on the KJV.

The King James Bible is a magnificent translation — and one of the most influential books in the English language.

It was completed in 1611, from the best manuscripts available *at that time*.

Since 1611 we have gained:

- Older Greek and Hebrew manuscripts
- Four centuries of language change
- Broader scholarship on ancient idiom

If you love the KJV, keep reading it. Pair it with a modern translation.

Discussion.

01

Which translation have you read most of your life? What do you love — or struggle with — about it?

02

Does it surprise you that the Bible was written in three different languages? Why or why not?

03

Where on the translation spectrum do you usually want to read — and where might it help to visit the other side?

TAKE IT HOME

This week's homework.

- 01 **Compare translations.** Complete handout assignment 1.1, comparing five translations. Write it out.
- 02 **Reflection questions.** Complete assignment 1.2 reflecting on this past week's reading.
- 03 **Read the front material.** Complete assignment 1.3 by reading through the front material of your Bible and then answering the study questions.
- 04 **Read chapter two.** Read chapter two of Grasping God's Word, *The Interpretive Journey*

NEXT LESSON · 02

The Interpretive *Journey*

We'll learn the process from which we go from reading to understanding and then applying God's Word.

THANK YOU · SEE YOU NEXT WEEK