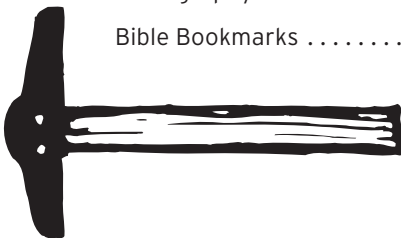


CONTENTS

	<i>Acknowledgments</i>ix
Chapter 1	Discovering the Bible Blueprint1
Chapter 2	Overcoming “Bibliophobia” 9
Chapter 3	Preparing to Enter God’s Library19
Chapter 4	The Bible’s Floor Plan 29
Chapter 5	Information Blocks: Footnotes and Cross-References 43
Chapter 6	Recognizing Symbolic Language in the Bible 57
Chapter 7	Do the Math—Numbers in the Bible 69
Chapter 8	Draftsman Tools: The Tools of Interpretation81
Chapter 9	First Steps and Next Steps 95

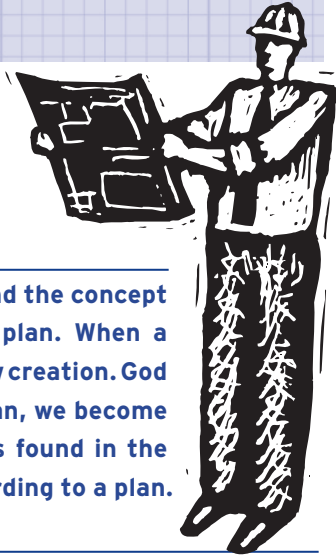
Bible Resources

	How to Begin a Bible Program in Your Parish 104
	Conducting a Bible Workshop for Young People (Middle and High School Students) 109
	Annotated Bibliography for Catholic Scripture Study 114
	Books and Their Abbreviations in Biblical Order 118
	Books and Their Abbreviations in Alphabetical Order 119
	Salvation History Timeline 120
	Map of the Holy Land 122
	Bibliography 124
	Bible Bookmarks 125



Chapter One

Discovering the Bible Blueprint



You don't have to be an architect to understand the concept of a blueprint. Simply put, a blueprint is a plan. When a blueprint is followed properly, the result is a new creation. God has a plan for us, and, when we follow that plan, we become a new creation. The blueprint for salvation is found in the Bible, and the Bible itself is constructed according to a plan. Welcome to The Bible Blueprint!

Sitting above my desk at work is a painting of my patron saint, Joseph the carpenter, doing what we tend to associate with the role of a carpenter—carving wood. In fact, it's quite common for us to see images of the child Jesus carving wood as his earthly father, Joseph the carpenter, looks on. We tend to conclude that carpenters, in those days, were makers of “tables, chairs, and oaken chests” (as described in the song “Heaven on Their Minds” from *Jesus Christ Superstar*). In truth, during the time of Jesus, a carpenter was not merely a cabinetmaker but was comparable to an architect: someone who was skilled at designing buildings. It makes perfect sense that Jesus' earthly father, Joseph, was an architect since his heavenly Father is the “architect” of all creation.

Plain and simple, an architect is someone who designs a detailed plan—a blueprint.

For in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the force and power in the word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and everlasting source of spiritual life. (*Dei Verbum*, 21)

God, indeed, is an architect with a plan:

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. (Jeremiah 29:11)

God's plan for us is no secret. He has provided us with a blueprint for our salvation: the Paschal Mystery—the suffering, death, and resurrection—of Jesus Christ. And where do we find this blueprint laid out for us? In the Bible.

So, just what is the Bible and how is it a blueprint for our salvation? Let's explore.

Jesus the Architect?

When the Bible refers to Jesus as a *carpenter* (Mark 6:3) and as the *carpenter's son* (Matthew 13:55), it uses the Greek word *tekton* which suggests not only a worker in wood but a builder. It should come to us as no surprise then, that Jesus uses the imagery of *building* quite freely in the Gospels:

- On this rock I will build my church . . . (Mt 16:18)
- The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone . . . (Mt 21:42)
- I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days. (Mt 26:61)
- That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply, and laid the foundation upon rock . . . (Lk 6:48)
- I will pull down my barns and build larger ones . . . (Lk 12:18)
- For which of you, intending to build a tower . . . (Lk 14:28)

The Bible Blueprint

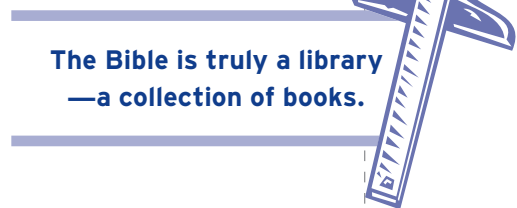
While it is great to know that the Bible is a blueprint for our salvation, it is also helpful to know how to read blueprints. I recall years ago, when my dad was making plans to open a new family pharmacy to replace the old one that was being demolished, he had a set of blueprints drawn up for the new store. Although I couldn't make heads or tails of them, I was amazed at how various construction workers and electricians were able to

glance at those blueprints and know exactly where to install a new store fixture or an electrical outlet. In a similar way, we need to be able to read God’s blueprint for salvation as revealed in the Bible. The nice thing is, the Bible itself has a blueprint of sorts: a plan for its own arrangement. Here’s what it looks like:

Old Testament	Catalog	New Testament
Pentateuch (Torah)	Table of Contents	Gospels
History		Acts
Wisdom		Letters
Prophets		Revelation

In fact, I find it helpful to carry this image of a blueprint even further and to think of the Bible as a building—a library, actually. I call it God’s Library. If the Bible were indeed a building, then the above blueprint reveals to us how it is arranged. In short, we find the following:

- God’s Library has two wings: an Old Testament wing and a New Testament wing.
- Both wings of the building are divided into four smaller stack rooms.
- In the Old Testament wing, which is more than twice the size of the New Testament wing, we can find rooms dedicated to the Pentateuch, History, Wisdom, and the Prophets.
- In the New Testament wing, we can find rooms housing the Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, the Letters, and Revelation.
- There is also a foyer or front desk housing the card catalog or Table of Contents.



Of course, no such building exists. However, the Bible is truly a library—a collection of books. This metaphor can help us understand how to approach the Bible and, like an architect or construction worker, be capable of reading the blueprints and understanding how it will lead us to encounter God.

The Bible: What Is It?

Some years ago, Pepsi ran a television commercial that took place in a futuristic setting with a professor leading a group of students on an

archeological dig. As they all drink from their Pepsi cans, one of them unearths a find; an object caked over with centuries of mud and dirt. Unable to make out what the object is, the professor places it in a device that quickly removes all of the layers of dirt, only to reveal an empty bottle of Coca-Cola. With puzzled expressions, the students look at the object and ask the professor, “What is it?” The professor, with

the same puzzled expression, tilts the bottle this way and that before responding, “I have no idea!”—a clever poke at Coca-Cola.

When we encounter the Bible, the very first question we should ask is, “What is it?” and we need to come away with a much better answer than, “I have no idea.” So, just what is the Bible?

First, when it comes to describing what the Bible is, I would like to lay to rest a cute acronym

B-asic

I-nstruction

B-efore

L-eaving

E-arth

Now, I know this acronym is likeable and there’s nothing erroneous about it, but it does a disservice to the Bible. Yes, the Bible contains instruction; however, the Bible is much more than an instruction manual. Instruction manuals don’t bring readers into intimate relationship with the books’ authors. The Bible does. We receive far more than instruction from the Bible: we receive an invitation to an intimate relationship with the Creator of the universe.

Even better than an acronym for the Bible is one word that summarizes what the Bible is: *revelation*.

Now, I know that at first glance that word sounds deeply theological. It is not. The root word of revelation is, of course, the word *reveal*. Revelation



We receive far more than instruction from the Bible: we receive an invitation to an intimate relationship with the Creator of the universe.

occurs when someone or something is revealed. We humans know that revealing ourselves to others is the key to any relationship. When we meet someone for the first time, we exchange basic information about where we live, what we do for a living, who we live with, where we grew up, where we went to school, and so on. Why? To establish a relationship. The deeper we want the relationship to go, the more we reveal. If we don't want the relationship to go any further, we continue to talk about the weather.

So, the Bible is basically the record of God's revelation of himself to us. Why

would God do this? To enter into a relationship with us. The Bible is an invitation to intimacy with God. If the Bible were solely an instruction manual, we could read it and still not know God. In reality, the Bible is one of the most crucial ways that we come to know God. Remember that for the Jewish people, the verb *to know* suggested intimacy (for example, Mary responding to the angel's announcement of her pregnancy by asking, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" [Luke 1:34, NKJV]). By reading the Bible, we enter into a more intimate relationship with God who reveals himself to us throughout salvation history, culminating in the Incarnation of Jesus—the Word made flesh.

We don't read the Bible to find answers. We don't study the Bible in order to be able to debate others about its meaning. When all is said and done, we *pray* the Bible so that we may encounter the living God who is revealing himself to us from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21.

A New Acronym?

Perhaps a better acronym for B.I.B.L.E. would be the following:

B-lessed

I-ntimacy

B-egets

L-ife

E-verlasting

It is through an intimate relationship with the God of love that we find everlasting life!

**“Fight truth decay—
study the Bible daily!”**

—C. S. LEWIS

Scripture and Tradition

The Word of God takes the form of both the written word (Scripture) and of a living Tradition. For Catholics, Scripture and Tradition are inseparable, forming one “sacred deposit of the Word of God” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 97). Some people like to think that the Bible is the final word on all matters. There’s only one problem with that. The Bible, as we know it today, is the product of Tradition. In other words, an oral tradition of preaching the Gospel existed before the New Testament was written down. Likewise, the final arrangement of the books of the Bible as we have it today was set in place by the leaders of the early Church. The Bible, which flows from Church Tradition, is part of a single source of God’s revelation. It is the revealed Word of God.

Blueprints and Libraries: Why Use Metaphors?

Not all people need metaphors to grow in their understanding of the Bible. However, in my experience as a teacher, I have found that people, young and old, tend to learn more effectively when metaphors are employed in the process. Personally, I developed this blueprint/library metaphor almost thirty years ago when teaching high school religion in Chicago. I discovered early on that my freshman students were fairly clueless when it came to the Bible. Although the designated topic for freshmen was the sacraments, I asked my chairman if I could set aside one week to do a crash course on the Bible, which he agreed to.

I realized that the Bible as a whole was just too huge and that the students needed it to be broken down into bite-size pieces. Lo and behold, the arrangement of the Bible itself provided me with the clue I needed to help my students. Noticing that the table of contents for most Bibles arranged the Old Testament according to the categories of Pentateuch, History, Wisdom, and Prophets, and the New Testament according to Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, Letters, and Revelation, the image of a blueprint for a library building quickly entered my mind.

I immediately set out to work and created a cardboard model of a library building and called it God’s Library. The building reflected the blueprint pictured earlier in this chapter. Next, I created bookmarks for the students—one for each of the eight sections of the Bible. Each

bookmark included a brief overview of a particular section of the Bible along with a bulleted list of highlights to be found in each section. Using these bookmarks, I embarked on a crash course with my students designed to dramatically increase their knowledge of the Bible. At the end of the week, I invited my department chair to come to my class and invited him to call out the name of any famous Bible character, guaranteeing that the majority of my students would find a passage related to that character in under a minute. Thankfully, they were able to do so, and I kept my job!

“I Don’t Know Anything about the Bible!”

It was not long thereafter that a DRE friend of mine invited me to come to her parish to do a shortened version of this activity with her sixth-grade religious education students. Over the next few years, I did dozens of these Bible workshops for students in religious education programs. I soon began to notice a pattern. At each event, the catechists who were present would come up

to me afterward and tell me how much they enjoyed it, how much they thought it would help the kids, and how much they learned themselves. They would often say, “I don’t know anything about the Bible . . . this really helped me.” More and more I realized that adult Catholics were hungry for greater

knowledge of the Bible. I began doing the presentations for groups of adults and eventually wrote the book *God’s Library* to address this need in the Church. Now, some thirty years after this concept evolved out of a high school religion class, I offer you this basic introduction to the Bible—*The Bible Blueprint: A Catholic’s Guide to Understanding and Embracing God’s Word*. I hope you enjoy it and come to know our Lord more deeply through his Sacred Word in Scripture.




Copyright © Doug Hill, 1991. Used by Permission.

So, What's Stopping Us?

If the Bible is indeed a blueprint for how we can enter into a deeper, more intimate relationship with our loving God, what's stopping us from plunging headlong into its pages? Well, the fact is, we seem to have lots of reasons for keeping the Bible at arm's length. In the next chapter, we'll address these obstacles and begin to lay the foundation for overcoming them.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- How can it help us to approach the Bible by comparing it to a blueprint? a library?
- What is an example of a passage or story from the Bible that you find difficult to comprehend?
- With which of the eight sections of God's Library (Pentateuch, History, Wisdom, Prophets, Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, Letters, Revelation) are you most familiar? least familiar?
- Why is it not sufficient to say that the Bible is Basic Instruction Before Leaving Earth?
- Can you think of a time when you came to know someone more intimately because of something they had written (in a card or letter)? How can such examples help us to understand how we can become more intimate with God through Scripture reading?
- What is *revelation* and what does it have to do with the Bible?
- What do we mean by Church *Tradition*? How would you explain the relationship between Scripture and Tradition?



There was this gracious lady mailing an old family Bible to her brother in another part of the country. "Is there anything breakable in here?" asked the postal clerk. "Only the Ten Commandments," answered the lady.