

Is the Bible a Handbook or a Story about Love?

Year Group: Y5 & Y6

A Suggested “Christianity School Development” Unit
for Cambridgeshire



Materials to Support The Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education in Cambridgeshire

For the Teacher - The Christian beliefs and teaching in this Unit

This unit is asking what kind of book the Bible is and what is its core message—it links with the KS1 unit about the BIG Story which is also looking at the concept of salvation. So,, what kind of book is the Bible?

- To start with, it is in essence not one book but a library of books (39 Old Testament, 27 New Testament) and its books cover different types of writing (history, myth, law, letters etc). The books were written over about 1100 years from 1000 B.C. to A.D 100 and many of them include sections of oral history which predate the written version by generations. It was written by a collection of people, many anonymous, yet all believing that they conveyed insights about God and humanity and, in some cases, the actual words spoken by God to believers.
- The Bible uses metaphor, myth and history to explore truth. It would be misleading to assume that it was all intended to be literally true. The literature also bears the vocabulary, style and ideas of the culture of the day, which was very different from our own (e.g. it presupposes a flat earth; it is patriarchal). There can be conflict between Christians as to how some stories and content should be understood – for example some stories may be taken literally by some Christians, whilst others will see them as symbolic (e.g. Creation, miracles). Both viewpoints are represented within different denominations and will be put forward by theologians – it should not be assumed that people start with a literal view of the scriptures and grow up into a symbolic one!
- It is an adult book written by believing individuals/communities for believers to learn and worship, but it speaks of experiences common to all people, including children.
- The Bible is called Holy by Christians and is used in private and public worship as the Word of God. But Christians also believe that Jesus is God's Word (John chp1) as he is the *full* revelation of God and His will.
- The Bible says of itself that it is 'inspired by God'. This means that it is the record of God's dealings with his world. Starting with the Jewish scriptures (the Old Testament) then moving on to the fulfilment of the promise of the Old Testament in the birth of Jesus, (The New Testament) the Bible's claim to be inspired (literally God breathed) means that these are the writings that have been judged to be a reliable and insightful record of what God has done, and is doing. It is this 'inspiration' from God that gives a remarkable coherence and unity to a collection of books with one of the most diverse authorships and backgrounds imaginable.
- The Bible is the world's number one best seller by a huge margin, and has been for centuries. It is not a dead book from the past, it has a living message for the present. Christians believe and experience that God is at work in their lives through the words of the Bible for teaching, for encouragement and for training in the way to come to the right relationship with God. This being said, the Bible is not to be

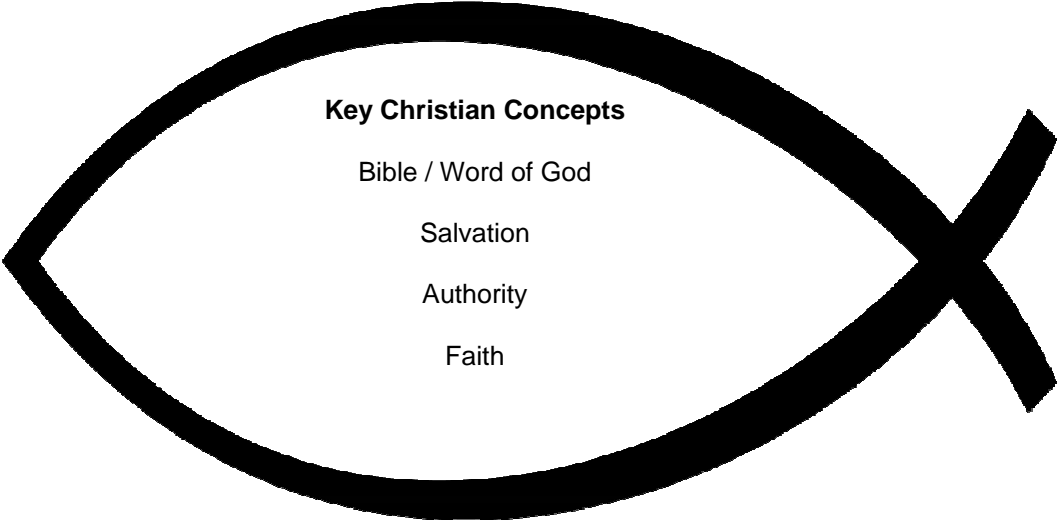
seen as a list of rules, it is more something which gives structure to a believer's life through an ongoing conversation with God. II Timothy chp 3 vs 16: is a key verse: "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach what is true and make us realise what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right".

When looking at the overarching question for this unit ("Is the Bible a handbook or a story about love?") much will rest on how you end up defining a handbook and which Christians you speak to! However, most Christians will say that it is not a set of instructions to be followed rigidly, as if you were building a bookcase for example, but perhaps something more like books called "Treasures" which have very diverse content, but a common theme and purpose. With this particular Treasury, however, there is real treasure within for the believer – the message of God—and that message is the "story of love". The love story is about God's love for mankind and mankind's love for God summarised in verses such as:

- John 3:16 *"God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."*
- John 15:13 *"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."*
- Matthew 5:43-45 *"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."*
- I Corinthians 12:4-8 *"Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."*
- Mark 12:30-31 *"And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."*
- John 13:34-35 *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*
- Romans 5:6-8, *"For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

The answer therefore to the first part of the question "Is the Bible a handbook" should be **"not really although it does have lots of advice and instructions"** - and it must also be recognised that, **"yes"**, some Christian people do treat it like a handbook! And is the Bible a love story? Christians would definitely say **"yes"**!

This unit requires pupils to engage with the Biblical text, so it will be necessary to look at the organisation of the Bible into chapters and verses and become familiar with these. If this has not been part of pupils' RE at an earlier date then this exercise will be a necessary part of the introductory session.



Key Christian Concepts

Bible / Word of God

Salvation

Authority

Faith

UNIT TITLE: Is the Bible a handbook or a story about love?

Key Question: What type of book is a handbook? Do people use the Bible in the same way?

Learning Objectives	Suggested Teaching and Learning	Learning Outcomes (Can be written as success criteria)	Points to note
<p>To discover if the Bible can be used in the same way as a handbook on any other subject</p> <p>To read and apply Biblical texts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In groups, look at a selection of different handbooks (which could include online materials) or the countryside code etc. Consider the benefits and disadvantages of handbooks e.g. write down questions relating to your handbook then see if it does, or does not, give you answers you want in a way you can understand. Agree the characteristics of a useful handbook and of a poor handbook (e.g. possibly difficult language, logical layout, technical terms,) Find Jesus' comment on those who mis-read the scriptures in John chp 5 vs 39-40. What is his view of the religious people of the time? (Legalism taking over from true relationships with God.) For contrast see Paul's view in II Timothy chp 3 vs 16 and his advice to the churches about the importance of Scripture. How do these two verses help us answer (or confuse!) the first part of the key question? Take turns opening the Bible at random and selecting a verse—is the verse helpful? What kind of question or problem might it answer in someone's life? Is it just plain confusing? Does the Bible work like your handbooks? Discuss how useful a process it might be going to the Bible for an answer to every question. Think about difficulties of language and application. 	<p>I can describe how people use handbooks and ask questions about whether the Bible is used in a similar way Level 3</p> <p>I can show my understanding of some Biblical texts about the scriptures and apply these ideas to thinking about how the Bible should be used. Level 4</p> <p>I can comment on how the Bible can be thought of and handled in more than one way and suggest answers relating to the special nature of the text. Level 5</p>	

What do we want from working with this question?

Pupils to get a sense that the Bible does have the answers to life's questions for believers but that it requires deeper study rather than a "pick and mix" approach.

Key Question: Did God “write” the Bible?

The key concept here is one of “authority” - what authority does the Bible have because of its origins?

Learning Objectives	Suggested Teaching and Learning	Learning Outcomes (Can be written as success criteria)	Points to note
<p>To recognise that the Bible is composed of books / different styles of writing written over a lengthy period for different purposes</p> <p>To begin to understand why Christians call the Bible “the Word of God”</p>	<p>When you read the Bible does it say that it was “dictated” by God? Look together at some examples of different types of literature which are clearly not claiming to be God speaking e.g: Psalms – worship songs addressed to God; History and Gospels <i>recording</i> events; Epistles (letters) from different authors (chiefly Paul) to churches in particular situations <i>giving advice</i>. Compare these with the prophetic books where the prophets claim that they are speaking words given them by God (e.g. Amos) and the laws in Leviticus which are written up as the words God gave to Moses. Do we think God dictated the whole or part or any of the Bible? (You could explore the idea of authors working with ideas from God, but not taking it down like dictation.) Why do Christians call the whole book “the Word of God” when they read it out in services? Gather up your questions from this exercise and invite your vicar to come and talk about them with you!</p> <p>Important question to discuss: What difference does it make to how a person lives their life if they believe the Bible is the “Word of God”?</p>	<p>I can name some the different types of writing in the Bible. I can ask questions about how the Bible was originally written. Level 3</p> <p>I can raise questions about the origins of the Bible and ask about how the Bible is seen by people as special or different from all other books Level 4</p> <p>I can begin to explore the idea of the authority behind the Bible and express my own and Christians views on its nature. Level 5</p>	<p><i>The Bible as a whole makes no claim to divine authorship.</i> There are a lot of verses that can be looked at for this section, but one example for each type of literature could be: Psalm 139 – clearly addressed to God; History - Judges chp 6 vss 36-40 has God and Gideon having a conversation about a fleece; Gospel – Luke chp 15 vss 1-7 Jesus tells a parable story (lost sheep); Gospel – describes the activity of Jesus in the third person; Matthew chp 9 vss 1-8; Epistles – Philippians chp 1 Paul writes from prison to tell the Christians at Philippi about his circumstances and to give them advice; Prophets delivering the word of God – these are always difficult reading, but you can see where the prophet says he is delivering the direct message of God as it is punctuated with phrases like “thus says the Lord” (Jeremiah chp 9 vss 23f)).</p> <p>If no one is available to answer questions you may like to use instead the activity at http://www.bible4schools.org/files/files/8-9_yrs_christians_and_the_bible_activities.pdf on how Christians use the Bible “like bread”</p>

What do we want from working with this question?

Pupils to begin to ask questions about the authority of the Bible. and to ask if it has a single coherent message.

Key Question: Which messages in the Bible are important to people?

Learning Objectives	Suggested Teaching and Learning	Learning Outcomes (Can be written as success criteria)	Points to note
<p>To understand which important themes emerge from reading the Bible and how these can be important to Christians.</p>	<p>Are there any special sections of the Bible which people / Christians like to read and find particularly helpful? This is an opportunity to find out people's favourite Bible verses and ask them "Why?" This can be done by questionnaires in your local community, (writing letters to famous people?) or using materials already on-line. Work in small groups to create a "favourite Bible verses" resource (library book / powerpoint /display) including, as appropriate, any (biographical) details which help to explain the choice of verses. Comment on what you think the verses mean, especially if you can show how following their teaching would affect people's lives.</p> <p>Is there a theme or themes emerging from these selections of favourite verses? <i>It should be something to do with the message of salvation, God's love and the way to live your life, as these are the key themes in the Bible as a whole.</i></p>	<p>I can begin to describe the impact of the Bible on modern people's lives and identify how Christians can be inspired by teachings in the Bible Level 3</p> <p>I can show my understanding of the impact the Bible has on people's lives and raise questions about how this is related to the nature of the text Level 4</p> <p>I can explain how the Bible is used to give authoritative answers to questions of Christian belief and practice and relate this to the sacred nature of the text Level 5</p>	<p>http://rollingout.com/culture/famous-americans-and-their-favorite-bible-verses/ includes Barak Obama and five other famous Americans.give their favourite verses</p> <p>Prince Charles' favourite Bible verse is said to be Matthew chp 7 vs 12 while David Cameron chooses Philipians chp 4 vss 8-9 http://www.christianpost.com/news/what-are-david-camerons-favorite-bible-verses-61609/</p> <p>There are a few footballers at http://www.faithandfootball.org.uk/</p> <p>A UK poll is at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1547877/Trust-in-the-Lord-with-all-your-heart-tops-poll-of-favourite-Bible-verses.html</p> <p>100 most popular verses on an online Bible website https://www.biblegateway.com/blog/2009/05/the-100-most-read-bible-verses-at-biblegatewaycom/</p> <p>Or what verse is so important you would have it tattooed on your body? Here's some answers: http://www.buzzfeed.com/tjb2/30-inspirational-bible-verse-tattoos-7kc6</p>

What do we want from working with this question?

Pupils to begin to discover the key themes of the Bible through "conversation" with others and to ask and answer questions about how the Bible impacts on the everyday lives of believers.

Key Question: Is the Bible a book for life today?			
Learning Objectives	Suggested Teaching and Learning	Learning Outcomes (Can be written as success criteria)	Points to note
To investigate and assess evidence for the popularity and influence of the Bible in people's lives today	<p>o People say the Bible is the most translated, published and read book in the world – what's the evidence? Explore Bible websites to collect facts and figures about Bible translation and distribution. How up to date is the Bible – are there new translations for young people – are there Bible apps? How up to date is the Bible now? Why not try writing key verses like the Lord's Prayer in textspeak... (You can extend this aspect of the enquiry by following up some of the personal worldwide stories on the Bible Society website e.g. the Bible being used as a tool for literacy for impoverished people.) Why is it so popular?</p> <p>Plenary – bring together all you have discovered about the Bible to debate an answer to the unit question. Write a personal opinion piece for assessment.</p> <p>OR The Bible has a lot of images it uses to describe itself which can counteract the "handbook" picture:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food – Hebrews chp 5 vs 12ff • Mirror – James chp 1 vs 32 • Gold and honey – Psalm 19 vs 10 • Lamp and light – Psalm 119 vs 105 • Fire – Jeremiah chp 20 vs 9 • Hammer – Jeremiah chp 23 vs 29 • Sword – Ephesians chp 6 vs 17, Hebrews chp 4 vs 12 <p>Pick up some of these images (creatively?) and apply them to what you have learnt about the Bible. (Why might the Bible be described by Christians as ...?)</p>	<p>I can begin to describe how the Bible is used around the world. Level 3</p> <p>I can show my understanding of how the Bible is being adapted for widespread use today. Level 4</p> <p>I can demonstrate how the Bible is translated in many different ways and suggest reasons why this is important. Level 5</p>	<p>Class materials on the original languages of the Bible are at http://www.bible4schools.org/road-to-king-james-bible/the-original-languages-of-the-bible</p> <p>For the worldwide spread of Bible translations try - http://www.biblesociety.org.uk/ and you can download a free Bible app at https://www.youversion.com/en-GB/mobile and see exciting news at http://www.biblesociety.org.uk/news/could-new-technology-lead-to-personalised-bibles/</p> <p>http://www.lausanneworldpulse.com/research.php/705/05-2007?pg=all a summary of a 2005 UK poll asking not how many people own a Bible, but how many Christians read it regularly at home</p>

What do we want from working with this question?

Pupils to realise that the Bible is read throughout the world, and be able to link this with the message of love and salvation that it contains.