

## WEEK 2: INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE - PART 2

### HIGH SCHOOL

#### GOALS

What are oral tradition and Holy Tradition?  
How did we get the Bible?  
Why is it important to read the Bible?

#### LESSON

**Materials Needed:** whiteboard, dry erase markers, and student assignment handout

**Extended Learning Opportunities:** “Introduction to the Bible - Lesson 4: Oral Tradition”

by Dr. Jeannie Constantinou

[https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/searchthescriptures/  
introduction-to-the-bible-lesson-4-the-oral-tradition](https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/searchthescriptures/introduction-to-the-bible-lesson-4-the-oral-tradition)

“Understanding the Scriptures Through the Church Fathers”

by Dr. Jeannie Constantinou

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#### WHY IS THE BIBLE IMPORTANT TO ME?

Generations before us have found themselves struggling through famine and war, seeking help when sick, and rejoicing at the birth of a baby or the wedding of a loved one. We listen intently as grandparents tell us stories filled with important lessons through the cumulation of their life experiences. These stories are their lives - as they share their faith, their suffering, their beliefs, and how they found peace and comfort in these moments.

The classic bedtime story finds its origination here, in the darkness of night, long before electricity had been invented. Grandparents, parents, and relatives would tell the children about their experiences and about the lives of those who came before them, which taught the children about the family’s religion, culture, and history. These stories about their lives were told over and over again until they were memorized by all. The life and experiences shared with each other were the **oral tradition** of the family and are still told today as well.

Now, imagine if you had a direct experience with Christ. How much more would you want to tell others about this experience in your life? The impact of Christ's life on those around Him was immense! People were being healed and even brought back to life. Christ had literally thousands of people gathering around Him everywhere He went. They traveled great distances just to catch a glimpse of Him or to hear Him preach.

After Christ's death and Resurrection, the apostles traveled to many countries in order to share the life and teachings of Christ with everyone. An apostle is someone who is "sent out" to instruct those around them that Jesus lived, died, and was Resurrected for our salvation. The apostles' love for God, and their faith in Him, enabled them to face all danger and threat with peace - even unto their own deaths. They longed to teach others about Jesus in hopes that more people would believe and be baptized into the Body of Christ - the Church.

**How did we get the Bible?** Eventually, the life of Christ and what he taught the apostles were written down by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in their gospels many years after His Ascension. Later, we have the apostles writing down the history of their works in the Book of Acts. We also have the epistles from the apostles to individuals and communities that were copied and preserved, along with, the Book of Revelation. For several hundred years, we see the Church Fathers sharing lists of their canon (*accepted writings*) of Holy Scripture - and not everyone agreed on which books should or should not be included. It's important to remember that there wasn't simply any one person or council who decided which books would be included in it. This was something that was worked out over time by the Church as a whole. The Holy Scriptures were written by holy people and inspired by the Holy Spirit.

As Orthodox Christians, the Bible is part of our **Holy Tradition** preserved in writing. The Bible is our experience of God. Even if every Bible in the world was destroyed, the saints could still rewrite the Bible because it is eternally written on their hearts. (Fr. Maximos referring to the words of St. Silouan in "The Inner River") The Bible is the collective experience of the saints.

**Why is it important to read the Bible?** The Church Fathers explained that the Bible exists for our benefit, correction, and the salvation of all of humanity.

Their understanding Of the Bible and their experience with God allowed them to teach extensively about the Holy Scriptures, defend the Church against heresies (*false teachings*), give moral instruction, and convey doctrines (*collective teachings*) of the Church.

Some of the Church Fathers are:

- St. John Chrysostom
- St. Basil the Great
- St. Gregory the Theologian
- St. Gregory of Nyssa
- St. Athanasios

The Church Fathers emphasized the Bible as a crucial part of our daily lives. So much so that St. John Chrysostom addressed the excuses of the people (in the 300's!!) for not reading their Bible. Many of us are under the impression that most people could not read prior to the invention of the printing press since books were too expensive and rare possessions for most people. That is not necessarily the case, at least when it comes to the large cities of Antioch and Constantinople where St. John preached.

St. John grew increasingly more worried about his parishioners because they enjoyed their entertainment and parties far more than going to church or reading the Bible. This led St. John to instruct his parishioners to study the Bible regularly, which tells us most people could read in these two cities.

From St. John Chrysostom's 32nd homily (*sermon*) on the Gospel of John:

Sanctify (*make holy*) then your soul, sanctify your body, by having these ever in your heart, and on your tongue. For if foul speech defiles and invites devils, it is clear that spiritual reading sanctifies and draws down the grace of the Spirit. The Scriptures are divine charms, let us then apply to ourselves and to the passions of our souls the remedies to be derived from them. For if we understand what it is that is read, we shall hear it with much readiness. I am always saying this, and will not cease to say it. Is it not strange that those who sit by the market can tell the names, and families, and cities of charioteers, and dancers, and the kinds of power possessed by each, and can give exact account of the good or bad qualities of the very horses, but that those who come hither should know nothing of what is done here, but should be ignorant of the number even of the sacred Books?

These are some of the excuses given to St. John Chrysostom for why his parishioners were not reading their Bible and his responses to them:

**I don't have a Bible.**

At this point in time, a Bible cost roughly the amount of money you would make in an entire year because each page was hand copied! That's an incredibly expensive book! However, St. John did not sympathize with the enormous cost of purchasing a Bible. Instead, he told them he knew that if they needed something badly enough for their job that they would put forth great effort to get it. The same effort should be put forth in acquiring a Bible so they could read it daily. What would St. John say to us today when Bibles are inexpensive and easy to acquire?

**I don't have the time to read the Bible.**

He pointed out that they found the time to hang out with friends, go to the theater, and watch the races. They indeed had enough time and needed to include reading the Scriptures in their daily lives.

**My children do not need to read the Bible because they are not going to grow up to be a monk or nun.**

He responded to these parents that reading the Bible does not make your child a monk or nun. It will make them a Christian!

**I don't understand what I read.**

The Scriptures are how God teaches us about Himself in human language. Through the Bible, God responds to human needs by meeting them at their level, like the way that an adult tries to explain something to a child. You use a language the child will understand. That is what God is doing for us in the Bible.

- Dr. Jeannie Constantinou, Search the Scriptures Podcast on the Church Fathers

There are many things that seem foreign to us until we immerse ourselves in it. Surely, some of your teachers and most of your parents would find the teenage phrases you use with your friends at school odd or difficult to understand. You may even have to explain the phrases to them. The same may be true of the Bible. There may be some terminology or words you have difficulty pronouncing or understanding because it is unfamiliar to you, but that will change as you spend more time reading the Bible. One of our goals this year in Sunday School is to help explain the Holy Scriptures and to help you to become more familiar with them.

All of this is important to us because the Bible contains the lives of the people - their immense faith, how deeply they suffered, their beliefs, and how Christ came to save us all! It is the story of our life too as we strive to have faith in God, not be swallowed up by our sufferings, and find peace in the hope of our eternal life with God. The Bible provides guidance to our lives and reading it is a direct participation in the grace of God. It is within the framework of **Holy Tradition** that we are provided the common, collective understanding of the Church and therefore understanding of the Bible in our own life. Holy Tradition is the cumulation of life, experiences, and worship within the Church.

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## REVIEW

- Provide a brief description of oral tradition. What is it?
- What is Holy Tradition?
- Who decided what books would be in the Bible?
- Why is it important to read our Bible regularly?

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## WEEK 2: INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE - PART 2

### MIDDLE SCHOOL

#### GOALS

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#### LESSON

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The Church Fathers emphasized the Bible as a crucial part of our daily lives - it sanctifies (*makes holy*) us. So much so that St. John Chrysostom addressed the excuses of the people (in the 300's!!) for not reading their Bible. Many of us are under the impression that most people could not read prior to the invention of the printing press since books were too expensive and rare possessions for most people. That is not necessarily the case, at least when it comes to the large cities of Antioch and Constantinople where St. John preached.

St. John grew increasingly more worried about his parishioners because they enjoyed their entertainment and parties far more than going to church or reading the Bible. This led St. John to instruct his parishioners to study the Bible regularly, which tells us most people could read in these two cities.

These are some of the excuses given to St. John Chrysostom for why his parishioners were not reading their Bible and his responses to them:

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### **I don't have the time to read the Bible.**

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### **My children do not need to read the Bible because they are not going to grow up to be a monk or nun.**

He responded to these parents that reading the Bible does not make your child a monk or nun. It will make them a Christian!

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All of this is important to us because the Bible contains the lives of the people - their immense faith, how deeply they suffered, their beliefs, and how Christ came to save us all! It is the story of our life too as we strive to have faith in God, not be swallowed up by our sufferings, and find peace in the hope of our eternal life with God. The Bible provides guidance to our lives and reading it is a direct participation in the grace of God. It is within the framework of **Holy Tradition** that we are provided the common, collective understanding of the Church and therefore understanding of the Bible in our own life. Holy Tradition is the cumulation of life, experiences, and worship within the Church.

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## REVIEW

- Provide a brief description of oral tradition. What is it?
- What is Holy Tradition?
- Who decided what books would be in the Bible?
- Why is it important to read our Bible regularly?

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## WEEK 2: INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE - PART 2

3RD - 4TH GRADES

### GOALS

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How did we get the Bible?  
Why is it important to read the Bible?

### LESSON

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introduction to the bible lesson 4 the oral tradition](https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/searchthescriptures/introduction%20to%20the%20bible%20lesson%204%20the%20oral%20tradition)*

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### WHY IS THE BIBLE IMPORTANT TO ME?

What do you think moms and dads or grandmas and grandpas did at night when the sun had gone down and electricity had not been invented yet? They told bedtime stories to their kids and grandkids!

They couldn't see well enough after the sun went down to do much of anything else, so they told stories to each other all the time. They were important stories! They were unusual stories! Maybe grandpa told you about the time someone saved his life in the great war or grandma told you about how they fled away from being persecuted in their country and immigrated to America. These experiences were heard countless times, and oftentimes memorized, by everyone in your family. They were lived experiences of your family. They showed how they incorporated their faith and beliefs with how they handled the situation. These stories are called your family's oral tradition.

How does this apply to the Bible? Now, imagine if you had a direct experience with Jesus. How much more would you want to tell others about the experience? How much more would that story be shared over and over again? The people talked about Jesus often and with great detail for a long time!

As Orthodox Christians, the Bible is our part of our Holy Tradition preserved in writing. It's part of our life story. **Holy Tradition** is what Jesus taught to the apostles and has been passed down from one generation to the next. It is the life we live and experience as Orthodox Christians. This includes reading the Bible, participating in the Divine Liturgy, iconography, the lives of the saints, and much more.

**How did we get the Bible?** The Old Testament had been around for hundreds of years by the time of Christ's birth. It was written by the prophets. The New Testament was written by the apostles. The gospels were not written immediately after the Resurrection of Christ. They continued as Holy Tradition for quite some time before people started to write it down. For several hundred years, we see the Church Fathers sharing lists of their canon (*accepted writings*) of Holy Scripture - and not everyone agreed on which books should or should not be included. It's also important to remember that there wasn't simply any one person or council who decided which books would be included in it. This was something that was worked out over time by the Church as a whole. The Holy Scriptures were written by holy people and inspired by the Holy Spirit.

**Why is it important to read the Bible?** The Church Fathers are holy men who were well educated and taught the people around them about the Bible and what it meant.

These are some of the Church Fathers:

- St. Athanasios the Great (*page 22 of "101 Orthodox Saints"*)
- St. Basil the Great (*page 24 of "101 Orthodox Saints"*)
- St. Gregory of Nyssa (*page 44 of "101 Orthodox Saints"*)
- St. Gregory the Theologian (*page 45 of "101 Orthodox Saints"*)
- St. John Chrysostom (*page 55 of "101 Orthodox Saints"*)

Why did the Church Fathers think the Bible was so important for us to read all the time? They explained that the Bible exists for our benefit, correction, and the salvation of all of humanity. St. John Chrysostom explained that it would sanctify us (*make holy*) because the Bible is a medicine chest that heals and protects us from the temptations in this world. What are some of the temptations we have to fight against every day? (*Watching too much tv or playing video games for too long, being nice to our brother or sister instead of yelling at them, following directions from our parents, etc.*)

The Church Fathers emphasized the Bible as an important part of our daily lives. So much so that St. John Chrysostom addressed the excuses of the people (in the 300's!!) for not reading their Bible. Many of us are under the impression that most people could not read prior to the invention of the printing press since books were too expensive and rare possessions for most people. That is not necessarily the case, at least when it comes to the large cities of Antioch and Constantinople where St. John preached.

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**I don't have a Bible.**

At this point in time, a Bible cost about the same amount of money you would make in an entire year because each page was hand copied! That's an incredibly expensive book! St. John told the people that he knew they would figure out how to get expensive items for their jobs. If they could figure out a way for those things, they could also figure out some way to get a Bible. Are Bibles that expensive today? Could you ask for a Bible as a birthday or Christmas gift?

**I don't have the time to read the Bible.**

He pointed out that they found the time to hang out with friends, go to the theater, and watch the races. They definitely had enough time to read the Bible!

**My children do not need to read the Bible because they are not going to grow up to be a monk or nun.**

He told these parents that reading the Bible does not make your child a monk or nun. It will make them a Christian!

All of this is important to us because the Bible contains the lives of the people - their immense faith, how deeply they suffered, their beliefs, and how Christ came to save us all! It is the story of our life too as we try our best to have faith in God, not be swallowed up by our sufferings, and find peace in the hope of our eternal life with God. The Bible provides guidance to our lives and reading it is a direct participation in the grace of God. It is within the framework of **Holy Tradition** that we are provided the common, collective understanding of the Church and therefore understanding of the Bible in our own life. Holy Tradition is the cumulation of life, experiences, and worship within the Church.

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## REVIEW

- Tell me one reason why we should read the Bible.

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## WEEK 2: INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE - PART 2

1ST - 2ND GRADES

### GOALS

What are oral tradition and Holy Tradition?  
How did we get the Bible?  
Why is it important to read the Bible?

### LESSON

**Materials Needed:** “101 Orthodox Saints”; student assignment handout

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They couldn't see well enough after the sun went down to do much of anything else, so they told stories to each other all the time. They were important stories! They were unusual stories! Maybe grandpa told you about the time someone saved his life in the great war or grandma told you about how they fled away from being persecuted in their country and immigrated to America. These experiences were heard countless times, and oftentimes memorized, by everyone in your family. They were lived experiences of your family. They showed how they incorporated their faith and beliefs with how they handled the situation. These stories are called your family's oral tradition.

How does this apply to the Bible? Now, imagine if you had a direct experience with Jesus. How much more would you want to tell others about the experience? How much more would that story be shared over and over again? The people talked about Jesus often and with great detail for a long time!

As Orthodox Christians, the Bible is our part of our Holy Tradition preserved in writing. It's part of our life story. **Holy Tradition** is what Jesus taught to the apostles and has been passed down from one generation to the next. It is the life we live and experience as Orthodox Christians. This includes reading the Bible, participating in the Divine Liturgy, iconography, the lives of the saints, and much more.

**How did we get the Bible?** The Bible was not written immediately after Jesus rose from the dead. It took a long time before it was all written down by many holy people who were inspired by the Holy Spirit. With time, the Church eventually had a list of all the writings they thought should be in the Bible and put them together in one book.

**Why is it important to read the Bible?** The Church Fathers are holy men who were well educated and taught the people around them about the Bible and what it meant.

These are some of the Church Fathers:

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St. John Chrysostom explained to us that it was super important to read the Bible every day because it helps to teach us right from wrong and that Jesus came to save us.

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## REVIEW

- Tell me one reason why we should read the Bible.
- Tell me about the life of one of the Church Fathers

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## WEEK 2: INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE - PART 2

PRE-K - KINDERGARTEN

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### LESSON

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