



Church

JANUARY 2007

CHAT

WHY STUDY THE BIBLE IN THE SPACE AGE?

by Dr. Patrick Walsh

All those Bible stories are 2000 years old – and the world we live in today is so different from those ancient days.

Why in our age of technological advances telling us modern stories in movies, videos, action games, and virtual realities, would anyone want to read those old stories? Which are so difficult to read and understand? So old-fashioned?

But are those old stories really so different from what is going on in our world today?

Why is our world so full of empty, discontented, unhappy lives?

Why is the world still full of wars, still seeking peace?

Why are we still struggling to make our lives happy, abundant, successful, prosperous and filled with interest?

St. Jerome, who translated the original documents of the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into Latin in the Fourth Century, says: *“To ignore the Scriptures is to ignore Christ If there is anything which sustains a person in times of strife and amid disasters and upheavals in the world, it is, in the first place ... meditation on the Scriptures and knowledge of them.”*

This might be good advice for our age: when we are assailed and troubled by adversity and misfortune we can draw comfort and the strength to suffer and endure with patience.

The Bible is not one book, but many. And they are ancient books, written in strange tongues with the truth expressed in many complex

ways. The Bible has a surface simplicity that reaches out to the mind of a child with remarkable clarity and purity. Yet it also has depth and subtlety that have baffled philosophers down through the ages.

The books of the Bible seem unrelated in many ways, and yet a pattern is deliberately interwoven, sometimes hidden, sometimes obvious. God has not laid out the truth in stark clarity for all people to see. The truth will come, but it may come slowly. Sometimes we need a guide, yet individuals must search out the answers for themselves.

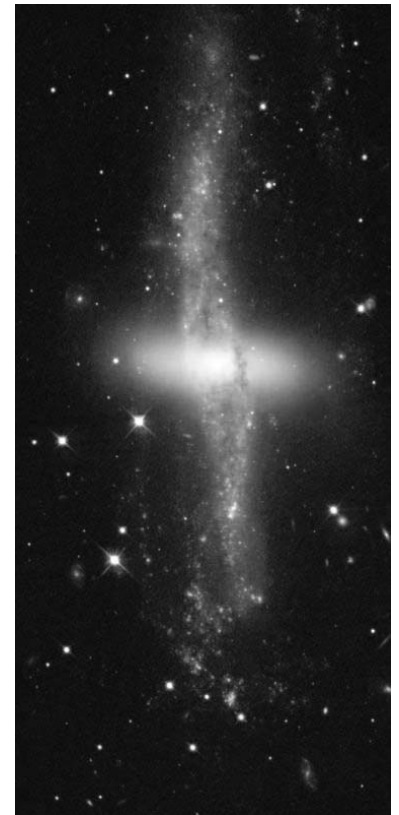
All of us as human beings, are called to a deep and abiding relationship with the mystery of life we call God. We believe this loving and life-giving God has entered into a relationship with human beings – that we are a unique expression of God’s love and life-giving Spirit.

The stories in the Bible came down to us in oral stories and later written documents from thousands of years ago. We believe that our ancestors told these stories and wrote these documents to explain how they came to know and understand the mystery of their loving God, their “Abba”/ Father, and enter into a personal relationship with God – and in a “new age,” with the Son of God, Jesus the Christ, and the sustaining aspect of God, the Holy Spirit.

These Bible stories remain important to us today. God equipped us with powers and abilities to discover and use the laws of science and technology. But no tools or instruments

of science and technology can ever tell us if there is life after death, or the purpose of being alive, or where we are going, or the way to a happy, fruitful life in universal peace here and now. Our scientists, our world leaders and statesmen, our human institutions, have failed utterly to tell us these answers, or to lead us to the universally desired peace and happiness.

Through the Bible we can come to see that God is Love, not a harsh stern God, and that we are called into a loving relationship with God – and thus with all people – every other person of whatever culture, ethnic or



national origin, or religion – all fellow human beings. The bottom line: we must love God and our neighbors – as God loves us – unconditionally.

Here at St. Anthony's we have an inspiring bible-study program to help us understand the vital relation of the Bible to our everyday life and the current events in the world around us. If you want to understand a map of the world, put your finger on Calgary – that's where we start – and to clearly see and understand the rest of the world around us, we have to understand our own location first.

Then, to understand today's world better, we consider the Bible. What is the history of the writing of the Bible? What did it mean back then, now, and in the centuries in between? Who told or wrote its stories? When? Why? What was their world like? As we search the Bible to come to know our God better, we shall find the Bible a light for our path, a light in our current age of darkness – because the people of the age of the Bible asked and thought about and worked their way through the same basic questions we are working our way through today.

- 1) To really study the Bible – all the stories, poems, prayers, and laws;
 - 2) To figure out what they meant then, and mean now;
 - 3) To understand what they meant to all the different audiences who read them; would be a lifetime study. But if you want to see for yourself what some of the Scriptures that we hear every Sunday, really mean, here's how our bible-study program can help you.
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- 1) You don't need a degree or special knowledge. We have people with all different life experiences – and lived experience is more valuable than theoretical knowledge un-lived!
 - 2) All you need is a desire to know about the truth in the Bible.
 - 3) No one will lecture or give a long, boring talk.

- 4) We will give you a small resource book, free!
 - a) The book is written in simple, clear, direct and understandable language;
 - b) The Bible texts are at the beginning of each short section, so you don't have to research the text;
 - c) Each section has a simple commentary by an outstanding teacher.
- 5) We will give you a small pamphlet with discussion questions for each section of the resource book.
 - a) The answers are not for a test, but for a discussion,
 - b) About the text or how you may have experienced in your own life the ideas in the Bible,
 - c) You can share your own experiences, or
 - d) You can just listen to the others.
- 6) Each session ends with an inspiring short video by one of the authors.

[The booklets are from the Little Rock Bible Study Program and Collegeville Abbey, an award-winning, extremely popular program.]

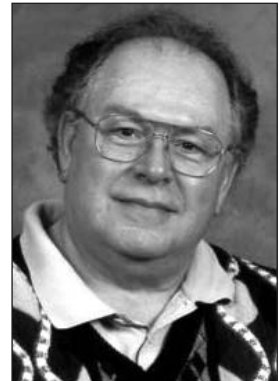
The most inspiring aspect of our bible study groups is the SHARING that takes place. We become friends, we help and support and pray for and with one another through the trials and tribulations of our own lives. In other words, we establish deep and sustaining relationships with our fellow parishioners – which is the essence of the Bible's message. We find moments of insight, enlightenment, wisdom and patience in suffering – as well as lots of laughter and joy – in our bible study members. Our bible study is not a dry, academic experience, but a deeply felt communion of the spirit, bringing us closer to God and each other.

We would love to have you join us in this uplifting experience.

CHAT

Question Box

1. Who was St. Jerome? What was his important message to all of us?
2. Have Catholics always been encouraged to study the scriptures? Why or why not?
3. When the lectors at Mass read *The Word of God* at our Eucharistic celebrations, do we know where these readings come from?
4. In your Bible, do you know where to find the Hebrew scriptures? What is the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament?
5. Do you have a favourite line or verse from the Bible? Do you pray it often?



Dr. Patrick Walsh is a retired University professor who taught English both here in Calgary at St. Mary's University College, and at St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia.

At present, he is the past chairman of St. Anthony's Parish Pastoral Council, and the Bible study co-ordinator, with his wife, Jacqueline.

In his free time, Dr. Walsh is a playwright, poet, artist and writer of non-fiction. He is a husband, father and grandfather.