LEADER GUIDE

FATHOM BIBLE STUDIES

FATHOM
A DEEP DIVE INTO THE STORY OF GOD

the bible
WHERE IT CAME FROM AND HOW TO READ IT
FATHOM: THE BIBLE
WHERE IT CAME FROM AND HOW TO READ IT
LEADER GUIDE

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Websites are constantly changing. Although the websites recommended in this resource were checked at the time this unit was developed, we recommend that you double-check all sites to verify that they are still live and that they are still suitable for students before doing the activity.

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About Fathom

Fathom.

It’s such a big word. It feels endless and deep. It’s the kind of word that feels like it should only be uttered by James Earl Jones with the bass turned all the way up.

Which means it’s the perfect word to talk about a God who’s infinite and awe-inspiring. It’s also the perfect word for a book like the Bible that’s filled with miracles and inspiration, but also wrestles with stories of violence and pain and loss.

The mission of Fathom is to dive deep into the story of God that we find in the Bible. You’ll encounter Scriptures filled with inspiration and encouragement, and you’ll also explore passages that are more complicated and challenging.

Each lesson will focus on one passage, but will also launch into the larger context of how God’s story is being told through that passage. More importantly, each lesson will explore how God’s story is intimately tied to our own stories, and how a God who is beyond our imagination can also be a God who loves us deeply and personally.

We invite you to wrestle with this and more as we dive deep into God’s story.
How to Use This Book

First, we want to thank you for teaching this class! While we strive to provide the best material possible for leaders and students, we know that your personal connection with your teens is the most important part of the lesson.

With that out of the way, welcome to the Fathom Leader Guide. Each lesson is designed around Kolb’s Learning Cycle and moves students through five sections: Sync, Tour, Reveal, Build, and After.

Sync introduces the students to the general theme of each lesson with a fun activity. There is both a high-energy and low-energy option to choose from in each lesson. Tour is the meat of the lesson and focuses intensely on the central Scripture each week. Reveal is a time for reflection where youth can digest the information they’ve heard and start to make sense of it. Then the Build section puts this newfound knowledge to practice using creative activities and projects. Finally, After gives the students options for practices to try throughout the week to reinforce the central concept of the lesson.

Additionally, before each lesson, a Theology and Commentary section is provided to give you a little more information about the topic being discussed that week.

This Leader Guide is designed to be used hand-in-hand with the Fathom Student Journal. Each student will need a journal, and the journals should be kept in the class at the end of the lesson. At the end of the study, give the students their journals as a keepsake to remember what they’ve learned.

Finally, at the end of this book we’ve included an Explore More section that offers short outlines for additional lessons if you and your class want to keep diving into these Scriptures after the end of this four-week study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Showtimes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stories</td>
<td>Parts of Genesis, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Law</td>
<td>Parts of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisdom</td>
<td>Job, Some Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, James</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psalms</td>
<td>Psalms</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Prophets</td>
<td>Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters</td>
<td>Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apocalyptic Writings</td>
<td>Daniel, Revelation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Fathom Bible Storylines

Create

Invite

Act

Redeem

Experience

Hope
Introduction to The Bible

Background

The Bible we study today is a collection of 66 books—39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament—comprised of laws, histories, stories, poems, and letters exploring God’s relationship with humanity. These books were originally written in three languages: Hebrew in the Old Testament, Greek in the New Testament, and Aramaic in the Books of Ezra and Daniel, as well as various other passages. Today the Bible is the most translated book of all time and is available in over five hundred different languages.

It only makes sense that a book written and compiled over hundreds of years by dozens of writers would be complicated and sometimes confusing. Add to that language differences and the need to wade through a variety of genres, and the Bible can look downright daunting.

This study is about empowering your students to begin that task. Over the next four lessons, they’ll learn about the history of the Bible and the types of stories it tells. More importantly, they’ll learn and practice the methods they’ll need to read and understand the Bible for themselves.

In some ways, the Bible is like a treasure chest. It’s filled to the brim with riches, if only you can find the key to unlock it. It’s a book filled with stories of courage and wisdom, inspiration and practical advice; but above all, it’s a book that gives us insight into a God who is both far bigger than we can ever imagine and by our side at all times. This study, if they’re willing, will help your students find the key to unlocking this holy book and all that it has to offer.
Fathom Strategy for Reading and Understanding the Bible

“The Bible is written for us, but not to us.”

This where we start on our quest. When we read the Bible, we have to constantly remember that the Bible is written for us, but not to us. Understanding the original context of the Bible helps us ask the right questions when interpreting Scripture.

For the first steps in our process, we need to understand how each passage we read functions in context and examine the historical background. When we read a passage, we should ask questions about the era, location, and culture of the original audience, as well as how a particular writing relates to the larger narrative of the Bible. This strategy not only helps us understand a passage’s primary meaning, it also gives us guidance on how to translate that meaning into our specific circumstances today.

Working Definitions

**Canon**—the books of the Bible collectively recognized by the Christian church throughout time as inspired by God

**Covenant**—a solemn promise between God and God’s people that defines their relationship to one another

**Exegesis**—the critical process of explaining and interpreting the Bible

**Inductive Bible Study**—a type of study that moves from generalized thoughts to specific application by using the Bible as the primary source of understanding

**Lectio Divina (Divine Reading)**—an ancient Latin practice of reading Scripture that involves reading, meditation, and prayer
Summary

Students will gain an understanding of how we have come to have the Bible we read and use today.

Overview

• **Sync** with the concepts of transmission and translation through a group activity.
• **Tour** through the history of the Bible, introducing the key concepts of inspiration, transmission, and translation.
• **Reveal** how inspiration, transmission, and translation can affect our faith through journaling.
• **Build** understanding of the Christian tradition of translation through an activity that allows students to personalize the history they have learned.
• **After** the lesson, apply these ideas through activities that encourage the use of multiple translations of the Bible.

Anchor Point

• 2 Timothy 3:16-17—*Every scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for showing mistakes, for correcting, and for training character, so that the person who belongs to God can be equipped to do everything that is good.*
Supplies

• Student Journals
• Pens or pencils
• Ream of blank paper
• Stapler

Parent E-mail

We are beginning our new study on how to read and understand the Bible with a lesson that will help youth learn about how we came to have the Bible we read today. They will learn about important concepts like inspiration, transmission, and translation. Here are some ways to engage this week:

• Show them family Bibles that have been passed down.
• If your child does not have a Bible of her or his own, allow the youth to pick one out online or at a bookstore.
• Ask the youth to explain the lesson to you.

Leader Notes

“How did we get the Bible?” “Who wrote it?” “How do we know that the Bible is true?” When left unanswered, these questions are the first roadblocks young people face when engaging Scripture. The origins of the Bible are powerful, and understanding them helps us gain confidence in our grasp of even the most difficult passages. This lesson will help students understand how we came to have the Bible as we know it, guide youth through a history of the Bible, and introduce the key concepts of inspiration, transmission, and translation.
Theology and Commentary

Inspiration

The popular expression of the doctrine of biblical inspiration is largely based on 2 Timothy 3:16. The word translated in English as “inspired” is *theopneustos* in the original Greek—literally meaning “divinely breathed into.”

There are many theories explaining the process of inspiration. Dictation Theories propose that God spoke the exact words in the original documents and humans wrote them down, so every word in the Bible is the very Word of God. The Neo-Orthodox Theory argues that the Bible is primarily the human account of God’s larger revelation. In this theory, Jesus is the Word of God—or ultimate revelation of God—and the Scriptures bear witness to Christ. Limited Inspiration Theories present the Bible as primarily human writings with very little divine guidance.

It’s important to understand biblical inspiration as a divine mystery. While the doctrine of inspiration helps us affirm that God is the ultimate “author” of the Bible, we should strive to seek balance in our practical understanding of inspiration. When we regard the Bible as too sacred, it becomes cold and distant—a book to be feared. When we view it as merely human, it begins to lose its authority. A Wesleyan understanding of inspiration is one that leaves room for balance and conversation. Wesleyan tradition holds that human authors divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit indeed wrote the Bible, but also proposes that these human authors were given great freedom in their expression of God’s revelation (not dictation). The Bible is certainly authoritative as Divine Revelation, but it is to be understood through the distinctly human nature of its writing. For Wesleyans, the Bible reveals the Word of God given to humanity.
Transmission

Transmission is the process through which the original stories and writings of the Bible were dispersed. Before the printing press, hand-copied manuscripts were the only way to copy and distribute important writings. While there are no known original “source” documents of biblical writings, we have over 5,500 manuscripts of the New Testament alone transmitted from the ancient world. The sheer volume of New Testament manuscripts is overwhelming when compared to other well-known ancient documents without original “source” documents—like the writings of Plato, Aristotle, and the historian Pliny—that are considered authentic today. There is no doubt that God was at work in the transmission of the Scriptures just as God was at work in its inspiration. These manuscripts help us to understand the history of how the Bible came together, as well as bolstering our confidence in its reliability.

Translation

Translation is the process of rendering a text from one language into another language. Since the Bible was originally written and transmitted in Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic, we largely rely on translations in our churches today. Because of the vast differences between these ancient languages and modern English, there are a variety of theories about how best to translate the Bible. Some translations emphasize a more literal, word-for-word formal method. This is known as Verbal Equivalence. Translators using this method search for the best word-for-word match from the original language while taking into context order and syntax. Other translations employ a more pragmatic, or thought-for-thought method. Much like our own writing and speech, Scripture is full of idioms that don’t hold their meanings well when translated word-for-word. Translators using this approach seek to recast the larger ideas of the original words into our language. This is called Dynamic Equivalence. A paraphrased translation is an extreme version of the Dynamic Equivalence method that adds words to the original text in an effort to clearly convey the original meaning.
Leader Reflection

I met John a few years ago. When he discovered I was a youth minister, he said, “I really need to talk to you! You see, my wife and I are interested in starting some kind of religion, but we don’t know which one. A few weeks ago, I invited a priest, a rabbi, an Imam, a Jehovah’s Witness, a Christian pastor, and a Buddhist monk over to my house for dinner. We had a wonderful dinner and then I asked them to tell me what they were all about.”

I was astounded. “So what did you think?”

“Well, I don’t know. We were both impressed with the Christian pastor and what he believes about the Bible. He actually believes in the Bible—that it’s from God and that it helps him. I’ve got tons of respect for that. The others seemed afraid of the Bible, or made me afraid of it, or didn’t care about it at all.”

“So what’s the problem?” I pushed.

“Well, my wife knows the pastor because she works near his church. And, well, he’s a jerk. I don’t understand believing something so amazing if it’s not changing who you are.”

It’s one thing to have a high opinion of the Bible. It’s another thing entirely to allow the Scriptures to change us in tangible ways. We need a working relationship with the Bible. As you prepare to teach, pray that God will drive fear, apathy, and rigidity away from our hearts when it comes to the Bible.
SYNC (10-15 minutes)

High-Energy Option—So You Think You Can Dance

SAY: I’m going to break you into three groups. I’ll need one volunteer dance teacher from each group. We’re going to go into a separate space where the rest can’t see us, and I’m going to teach you a dance. Each of you will write down instructions for the dance in your own words. You will then come back and teach the dance to your group. Once you’ve taught your group the dance, we will have a dance-off.

[Show the three volunteers the simple six-step dance move below. Perform the dance at least three times. Do not explain the dance or give instructions. Give them a few minutes to write down instructions for the dance. Bring the dance teachers back to their groups.]

The Dance Move
1. Left leg step out, left arm folded on hip.
2. Hands joined, arms make a circle from left to right across the body.
3. Clap.
4. Right leg front kick.
5. Take three steps back starting with the left leg.
6. Stretch right hand high in the air.

SAY: Without performing the dance, each teacher is going to teach his or her group the dance only from spoken descriptions. Teachers may not demonstrate the dance. I’ll give you a few minutes to learn. Each group will then perform their dance for the whole group. I need a group to volunteer to go first, second, and third.

[Give each group five minutes to learn the dance. Then allow each group to perform their dance as a team. You may give scores and choose a winning group.]

ASK:
1. How were the group’s dances different?
2. Were there things about the dance that all groups did the same?

SAY: This activity involved three processes: inspiration, transmission, and translation. The three dance teachers were inspired when they saw the original dance. Their writings transmitted the instructions of the dance. Then, each group translated their teacher’s writings into a dance. Today we will examine these processes in the history of the Bible.
Low-Energy Option—Cool Story, Bro

[Make stacks of nine pieces of paper for every student. Staple each stack in a top corner before the game.]

SAY: Everyone sit in a circle. I’m giving each of you a stack of paper and a pen or pencil. Write a sentence on the first sheet of paper. Do not share your sentence with anyone. Make it random, and make sure it has a noun and a verb! Now pass your papers to the left. Illustrate your neighbor’s sentence with drawings only—no numbers, letters, or symbols—on the next blank piece of paper.

[Give them one minute to draw.]

SAY: Fold the first sheet back so that your drawing is on top of the stack. Pass your paper stacks to the left. Now, write a sentence describing your neighbor’s drawing on the next blank piece of paper without looking at the first sentence.

[Repeat the drawing/sentence pattern until the paper stacks are full. Be sure to end with a sentence.]

SAY: Without flipping through the papers, try to find your original paper stack based on the final sentence written.

ASK:
1. Was the final sentence on your paper anywhere close to your original sentence?
2. Even if sentences changed dramatically, were there subjects, verbs, or themes that still made it through?

SAY: This activity involved three processes: inspiration, transmission, and translation. The first sentence inspired the first drawing. The message of the sentence was transmitted and translated through writings and drawings around the circle. Today we will examine these processes in the history of the Bible.
TOUR (15-20 minutes)

**ASK:** How do you think we got the Bible?

[Affirm every response. After giving everyone an opportunity to answer, ask a second question.]

**ASK:** Does it matter how we got the Bible? Why or why not?

[Affirm all responses to allow for a good discussion. After several minutes . . .]

**SAY:** There seems to be a lot of confusion around the Bible and how we use it. Understanding the history of the Bible gives us confidence that the Bible is a reliable source of God’s revelation throughout human history and for our lives today. Our understanding of the Bible’s history also helps us understand better how to read it. I need a volunteer to read 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

[Volunteer reads 2 Timothy 3:16-17.]

- 2 Timothy 3:16-17—Every scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for showing mistakes, for correcting, and for training character, so that the person who belongs to God can be equipped to do everything that is good.

**SAY:** The apostle Paul, in his second letter to his young disciple Timothy, presents ideas about the significance of the Bible in our everyday lives. What does this verse say about the Scriptures?

[Help the students affirm the concepts of “inspired,” “useful for teaching, for showing mistakes, for correcting, and for training character,” and “equipped.”]

**SAY:** Our earlier activity helped us understand just a little bit about the inspiration, transmission, and translation of information. These three key concepts help us understand how we have the Bible we do today.

[Introduce these concepts and help the students understand them. Have them write down in their journals the basic definition for each concept.]
Inspiration—the process by which the Holy Spirit initiates communication from God.

Transmission—the process by which the original stories and writings of the Bible were dispersed, including by manuscripts and oral tradition. The core message is broadcast beyond the original sources.

Translation—the process of reproducing the meaning of something that exists in one language in another language.

[Walk the students through the provided History of the Bible Timeline. Ask the students to consider the order of events as they relate to the writing, transmission, and translation of the Bible.]

**ASK:** Which of these events or time periods are you already familiar with? Where do you see the three processes at work in this timeline?

### History of the Bible Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-History</th>
<th>Oral traditions and storytelling (Insp)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3200 BC</td>
<td>Early Mesopotamian/Sumerian writings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 BC</td>
<td>Birth of Abraham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000–1500 BC</td>
<td>Book of Job written (possibly) (Insp)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1500 BC</td>
<td>Moses receives the Law on Mount Sinai (Insp)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000 BC</td>
<td>Israel begins recording history; David is king (Insp) (Transm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>621 BC</td>
<td>Book of the Law discovered in temple by King Josiah (2 Kings 22) (Transm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>587 BC</td>
<td>Jerusalem destroyed; ancient Israelite writings compiled in captivity (Transm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250–135 BC</td>
<td>Books of our Old Testament translated into Greek Septuagint (Transl)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200 BC–AD 70</td>
<td>Dead Sea Scrolls written in Essene community (Old Testament) (Transm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 30</td>
<td>Ministry of Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 52</td>
<td>Paul writes first letter to Thessalonian church (Insp)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 70</td>
<td>Mark writes his Gospel (Insp)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 80–100</td>
<td>Matthew writes his Gospel (Insp)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 100</td>
<td>Last of the New Testament books written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 350</td>
<td>Books and segments of the Bible translated into Latin (Transl)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 383–405</td>
<td>Jerome’s Latin Vulgate (Transl)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 393</td>
<td>Council of Hippo defines New Testament books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 397</td>
<td>Council of Carthage issues a complete canon of the Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 600–1100</td>
<td>Masoretic Text of Hebrew Scriptures compiled (Transm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 1225</td>
<td>Present system of chapters added</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 1382</td>
<td>Bible translated into Middle English by John Wycliffe (Transl)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 1455</td>
<td>Gutenberg makes first printed Bible with movable type (in Latin) (Transm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 1516</td>
<td>Erasmus publishes a Greek-Latin parallel New Testament (Transm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 1517</td>
<td>Luther starts the Protestant Reformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 1526</td>
<td>Tyndale publishes the first English New Testament from Greek (Transl) (Transm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 1539</td>
<td>The Great Bible published in English as the first authorized Bible of the Church of England (Transl)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 1551</td>
<td>Present system of verses added</td>
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<tr>
<td>AD 1611</td>
<td>King James Version published in English (Transl)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 1946–1956</td>
<td>981 Essene manuscripts found in Dead Sea caves (Old Testament) (Transm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 1978</td>
<td>New International Version published in English (Transl)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 1989</td>
<td>New Revised Standard Version published in English (Transl)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 2011</td>
<td>Common English Bible Version published in English (Transl)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REVEAL (10-15 minutes)

SAY: Spend some time thinking about these questions and recording your answers in your journals. In a few minutes, I will call us back together to review and would love to hear some of your thoughts and answers then.

[After seven to eight minutes, call the group back together and ask the questions out loud, calling for a few volunteers to share their thoughts on each question.]

Journal Questions
1. How do you think differently about the Bible after today’s lesson?
2. What is your personal understanding of inspiration?
3. What are some ways that you think other people understand inspiration, and how does that affect the way they treat the Bible?
4. Does God still speak to us through the Bible today? How?
BUILD (10-12 minutes)

The Translators Late Show

[Divide the group into four teams, and assign each team one of the four translator descriptions in the Student Journal: Jerome, John Wycliffe, King James, and The Essenes.]

SAY: It’s amazing to think about how many people God has used over thousands of years to allow us to compile the Bible we have today. I’ve assigned each team an important person or group involved in the transmission and translation of the Bible. I want your team to determine how your translator would have answered the two questions listed in the Student Journal. Each team should select a representative to play the part of their translator in a “Late Show”-style interview format where they’ll answer these questions.

[Give the teams three to five minutes to read and discuss. Then begin the interviews. Welcome the four guests as a talk-show host would, and have them sit at the front of the room. Be creative! Have fun with the talk-show format. If you have access to audio, play theme music as the guests are introduced and enter the room. Then ask each question to the four guests.]

ASK:
1. What inspired you to translate the Bible?
2. Tell us what’s special about your Bible translation.
My Favorite Verse

SAY: Sometime this week, look up a favorite Bible verse on www.biblegateway.com. Select three different translations of the verse and note the differences and similarities. Finish by writing the verse in your own words.

An Encouraging Word

SAY: Sometime this week, find a Bible verse that would be an encouragement to a friend. Use www.biblegateway.com to choose the most appropriate translation. Text or direct-message this verse to your friend.

Inspiration Transmitted

SAY: Sometime this week, take a picture, or series of pictures, representing how you feel about God’s faithfulness through the processes in the history of the Bible. Post it on social media with #fathombible. What image helps you to reflect on inspiration, transmission, and translation?
SAY: Let’s all say this closing prayer out loud together.

God over all of time, we thank you for your great kindness and care in providing us with the Bible. Help us, in Jesus’ name, to understand its life-changing message of love. Amen.