

The Didache

[DID-uh-kay]

The *Didache* is the first known Christian catechesis. Written in the first century, the *Didache* is the earliest known Christian writing outside of Scripture. The name of the work, "*Didache*," is indeed appropriate for such a catechesis because it comes from the Greek word for "teaching," and indicates that this writing contains the teaching of the Apostles.

The *Didache* is a catechetical summary of Christian sacraments, practices, and morality. Though written in the first century, its teaching is timeless. The *Didache* was probably written by the disciples of the Twelve Apostles, and it presents the Apostolic Faith as taught by those closest to Jesus Christ. This series of books takes the name of this early catechesis because it shares in the Church's mission of passing on that same Faith, in its rich entirety, to new generations.

Below is an excerpt from the *Didache* in which we see a clear example of its lasting message, a message that speaks to Christians of today as much as it did to the first generations of the Church. The world is different, but the struggle for holiness is the same. In the *Didache*, we are instructed to embrace virtue, to avoid sin, and to live the Beatitudes of our Lord.

My child, flee from everything that is evil and everything that is like it. Do not be wrathful, for wrath leads to murder, nor jealous nor contentious nor quarrelsome, for from all these murder ensues.

My child, do not be lustful, for lust leads to fornication, nor a filthy-talker nor a lewd-looker, for from all these adulteries ensue.

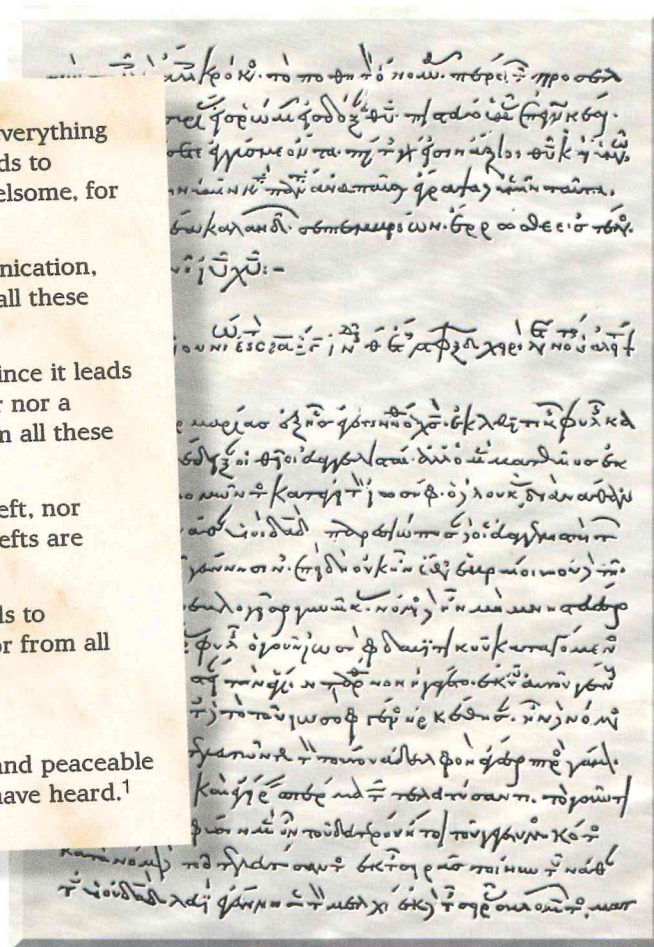
My child, do not be an interpreter of omens, since it leads to idolatry, nor an enchanter nor an astrologer nor a magical purifier, nor wish to see them, for from all these idolatry arises.

My child, do not be a liar, for lying leads to theft, nor avaricious nor conceited, for from all these thefts are produced.

My child, do not be a complainer, since it leads to blasphemy, nor self-willed nor evil-minded, for from all these blasphemies are produced.

Be meek, for the meek will inherit the earth.

Be long-suffering and merciful and guileless and peaceable and good, and revere always the words you have heard.¹



The *Didache* is the teaching of the Apostles and, as such, it is the teaching of the Church. Accordingly, this book series makes extensive use of the most recent comprehensive catechesis provided to us, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The *Didache* series also relies heavily on Sacred Scripture, the lives of the saints, the Fathers of the Church, and the teaching of Vatican II as witnessed by the pontificate of John Paul II.

1. Swett, Ben H. "The Didache (The Teaching)." © January 30, 1998. <http://bswett.com/1998-01Didache.html>

Understanding The Scriptures

A Complete Course On Bible Study



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Chapter 1

What is the Bible?



Read

2 Timothy
3:10 - 4:5

1 Peter
1:12 - 2:22

The revelation of God in Jesus Christ is transmitted through Scripture and Tradition as one common source. The Tradition includes the Scriptures which are a privileged expression of the Tradition. "Sacred Scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit. And Tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit" (DV 9). The Word of God in written or oral form is interpreted authentically by the magisterium of the Church. Scripture—the Bible—has to be read and explained in the Church.

The Bible is the *inspired and inerrant* Word of God. In seventy-three books, it gives us the history of God's plan for our salvation, beginning with the creation of the world and ending with the beginnings of the Christian Church. Together with the teaching of the Church, the Bible tells us what we need to know in order to be saved.

Although the Bible is made up of many books, together those books tell one story. God created us perfect in the beginning, but our first parents, through their free will, sinned and brought death upon themselves and their descendants. The rest of the Bible tells how God gave human beings the means to salvation. We learn how God chose the people of Israel to lead all people back to himself, and how God the Father completed that work in his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, and his sacrifice on the Cross. Finally, we learn the truth about the end of history: good triumphs, evil fails, and the People of God live forever in paradise. That is the story of our faith.

Sacred Scripture is not the *only* authority for our faith, as Scripture itself tells us. The Church was founded by Jesus Christ to keep the *living Tradition* of the faith alive. As Catholics, we believe that the Church is not simply a religious institution that preserves tradition. At Pentecost, after the death and resurrection of Christ, God poured out the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, and because of that gift, the Holy Spirit continues to dwell in and guide the Church. The teaching of the Church opens up all the riches of the Bible to us. Because we have the living truth of the Church, we can read Scripture with more confidence, more understanding, and more freedom.

What Catholics Believe About The Bible

- The inspired Word of God comes to us through Sacred Scripture.
- The living Word of God also comes to us equally through the living Tradition of the Church.
- The infallible Word of God as transmitted by Scripture and Tradition has been entrusted solely to the living Magisterium of the Church which exercises its authority in the name of Jesus Christ.

Sacred Scripture is inspired and inerrant. "Inspired"—from a word meaning "breathed in"—means that God himself guided the authors who wrote the books of the Bible. The writers' intellects were enlightened directly by the action of the Holy Spirit to write what God wanted and nothing more. This process took place over several thousand years. The Spirit moved them to write without in any way impairing their freedom to write what was in their intellects. Though God is the principal author of scripture, the human authors are also true authors because they acted as free, subordinate, intelligent instruments of the Holy Spirit.

"Inerrant" means that it does not err: properly understood, Scripture always teaches truth, never error. "Since, therefore, all that the inspired authors, or sacred writers, affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error, teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures" (Vatican II, *Dei Verbum* 11).

Reading Sacred Scripture is, in a way, like receiving the Eucharist. In both cases, the Word of God comes directly to us. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (103) tells us that "the Church has always venerated the Scriptures as she venerates the Lord's Body. She never ceases to present to the faithful the bread of life, taken from the one table of God's Word and Christ's Body."

For the Catholic believer the Word of God alone is supreme. But the Scriptures are not the only source for God's Word, as the Scriptures themselves will tell you.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:15, St. Paul reminds the Thessalonian believers that they must hold fast to the traditions that the apostles have passed down either in writing or by word of mouth. "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter." Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition form one source from which the Word of God comes to us, as the New Testament itself tells us.

The true interpretation of both Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition is expressed in the infallible teaching of the Church, the Magisterium. "Infallible" means that, because of the divine help of Christ himself, the Church cannot teach error in matters of faith.

The Great Qumran Isaiah Scroll, ca. 100 B.C., is the oldest complete manuscript of any book of the Bible. Remarkably similar to the standard Hebrew text, it provides overwhelming proof of the accuracy of the Book of Isaiah we read today.



In order to preserve the Church in the purity of the faith handed on by the apostles, Christ who is the Truth willed to confer on her a share in his own infallibility. By a "supernatural sense of faith" the People of God, under the guidance of the Church's living Magisterium, "unfailingly adheres to this faith" (LG 12; cf. DV 10). (CCC 889)

The mission of the Magisterium is linked to the definitive nature of the covenant established by God with his people in Christ. It is this Magisterium's task to preserve God's people from deviations and defections and to guarantee them the objective possibility of professing the true faith without error. Thus, the pastoral duty of the Magisterium is aimed at seeing to it that the People of God abides in the truth that liberates. To fulfill this service, Christ endowed the Church's shepherds with the charism of infallibility in matters of faith and morals. The exercise of this charism takes several forms: (CCC 890)

"The Roman Pontiff, head of the college of bishops, enjoys this infallibility in virtue of his office, when, as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful—who confirms his brethren in the faith—he proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals....The infallibility promised to the Church is also present in the body of bishops when, together with Peter's successor, they exercise the supreme Magisterium," above all in an Ecumenical Council (LG 25; cf. Vatican Council I: DS 3074). When the Church through its supreme Magisterium proposes a doctrine "for belief as being divinely revealed" (DV 10 § 2), and as the teaching of Christ, the definitions "must be adhered to with the obedience of faith" (LG 25 § 2). This infallibility extends as far as the deposit of divine Revelation itself (cf. LG 25). (CCC 891)

Divine assistance is also given to the successors of the apostles, teaching in communion with the successor of Peter, and, in a particular way, to the bishop of Rome, pastor of the whole Church, when, without arriving at an infallible definition and without pronouncing in a "definitive manner," they propose in the exercise of the ordinary Magisterium a teaching that leads to better understanding of Revelation in matters of faith and morals. To this ordinary teaching the faithful "are to adhere to it with religious assent" (LG 25) which, though distinct from the assent of faith, is nonetheless an extension of it. (CCC 892)

What does it mean to say the Bible is divinely inspired?



The Holy Spirit enlightened the intellects of many different specific authors over thousands of years so they could conceive all that which God wanted them to write and nothing more. Divine inspiration infallibly moved the will of each sacred author—without impairing his freedom in any way—to write what was in his intellect. Divine inspiration assisted the human author to use the correct language and expressions to describe what was being infallibly written.

This means God is the principal author of Scripture; the human authors are also true authors. These sacred authors were free, intelligent, subordinate instruments of the Holy Spirit. Because of this, each book of the Bible is inspired and can at the same time be called the work of God and of the human author. There is nothing in Scripture not inspired by God. "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tm 3: 16).

The Holy Spirit, principal author of the Bible, can guide human authors in the choice of expressions in such a way that the latter will express a truth the fullest depths of which the authors themselves do not perceive. This deeper truth will be more fully revealed in the course of time and discerned in the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Periods Of Bible History

The Old Testament Period - 4000 B.C. to 400 B.C.

The Inter-Testamental Period - 400 B.C. to 4 B.C.

The New Testament Period - The A.D. Period

4000 B.C. to 2120 B.C. The Primeval Period

2120 B.C. to 1900 B.C. The Patriarchal Period

1900 B.C. to 1400 B.C. The Egyptian Period

1400 B.C. to 1050 B.C. The Tribal Period

1050 B.C. to 900 B.C. The Davidic Period

900 B.C. to 600 B.C. The Assyrian Period

600 B.C. to 540 B.C. The Babylonian Period

540 B.C. to 330 B.C. The Persian Period

330 B.C. to 170 B.C. The Greek Period

170 B.C. to 70 B.C. The Maccabean Period

70 B.C. to 100 A.D. The Roman Period



The Gezer Calendar, a limestone tablet listing the agricultural year, is one of the oldest Hebrew inscriptions dating to the time of Solomon, late 11th to early 10th century B.C. The city of Gezer was given to Solomon by the Pharaoh of Egypt as part of the dowry for Solomon's marriage to an Egyptian princess. David had left Gezer unconquered out of respect for Egypt's claim to the city.

Because we have both Scripture and Tradition, interpreted for us by the Magisterium, the *Catechism* tells us (108), "The Christian faith is not a 'religion of the book.'" Instead, Christianity is a religion of the Word of God, and the Word of God—Jesus Christ—is still living today and will live forever. Eucharist

But Scripture is the way we come to know who Jesus is. As St. Jerome declared, "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ." If you want to feel at home in the Kingdom of God, then the Bible is your map. If you want to understand whom you receive in Holy Communion, then you need to understand how God was preparing his people for centuries before he finally gave us the Bread of Life in the Eucharistic Liturgy.

All Sacred Scripture is but one book, and this one book is Christ, "because all divine Scripture speaks of Christ, and all divine Scripture is fulfilled in Christ" (Hugh of St. Victor, *De arca Noe* 2, 8; PL 176, 642; cf. *ibid.* 2, 9; PL 176, 642-643). (CCC 134)

"For the Word of God is living and active," says Hebrews 4:12, "sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." To live in a way that truly pleases Jesus Christ, we need to study—and meditate on—the Bible. That is the only way to get to know what Jesus Christ is like.

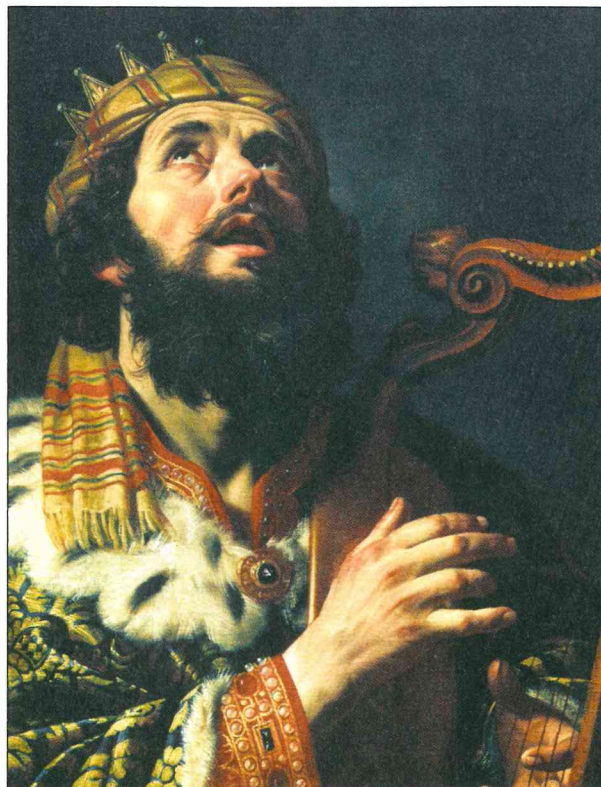
How The Bible Was Written

- The Bible was written by inspired human writers in their own styles.
- The human writers of the Bible wrote only what God wanted them to write.
- The whole Bible, properly interpreted by the Church, is true and completely without error.

The Bible is a collection of many works written by different authors at different times and in different languages. Those different authors had different ways of thinking and writing. Some of them wrote beautiful poetry, as in the Psalms. Others, like St. Luke, wrote detailed history based on accurate research. Some, like Ezekiel, had symbolic visions that they wrote down. Some simply recorded facts, like the catalog of the tribes of Israel recorded in Numbers. Some books are written in a very simple style; others, like Ecclesiastes, are philosophical and intellectual. Just as with writers of other books, **the personalities of the authors come through in what they wrote.**

The works which make up the Bible are different from other writings. Even though they were written by human authors, **the ultimate author of the whole Bible is God.** The human authors wrote in their own styles, but they wrote what God wanted them to write. So, unlike any human book, the Bible is completely free from error. Of course, we need to remember that the Bible is teaching us the way to salvation. The sacred authors presented their message in ways the people of their own time could understand, so sometimes their ideas of physics or astronomy seem outdated to us. **But the real truth that God wanted us to learn is presented without error. Everything in it is true.**

The inspired books teach the truth. "Since therefore all that the inspired authors or sacred writers affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures." (CCC 107)



That doesn't mean everything in Scripture is easy to understand. But the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, helps us understand how to find the truth in the books of the Bible in light of the living Tradition.

How did that inspiration work? Inspiration is one of the great mysteries of our faith—a mystery very much like the mystery of the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. **Like Christ himself, the inspired books of the Bible are fully human and fully divine.** The two natures are inseparably united but still distinct. Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, took on the weakness of human flesh, becoming a true man. In the same way, the Bible, the Word of God inspired, takes on the weakness of human language, becoming a book that humans can understand.

King David, the youngest of the eight sons of Jesse, is credited with the authorship of the Psalms. His story is told in 1 Samuel 16 through 1 Kings 2:12. King David reigned ca. 1000-960 B.C.

The Bible Is Sacred Literature

- The sacred authors used literary techniques to express their meaning.
- We cannot understand the whole meaning of Scripture without understanding those literary techniques.

The Bible is sacred literature because God is its author. Because Sacred Scripture is written in human language, it is possible for humans to understand it. Understanding it correctly, however, sometimes requires some preparation.

The first thing to remember about Scripture is that it is *literature*. **That means it uses literary forms and techniques to convey its meaning.** Unless we understand how those forms and techniques work, we cannot understand the meaning the inspired authors wanted to convey to us.

For a good example of how the sacred authors convey meaning with literary techniques, turn to the very beginning of Genesis. When creation begins, the earth is "without form and void"; then the first thing God creates is light.

Now turn to Jeremiah 4:23, and see how Jeremiah describes the destruction brought on by God's judgment against Judah:

**I looked on the earth, and lo, it was
waste and void;
And to the heavens, and they had no light.**

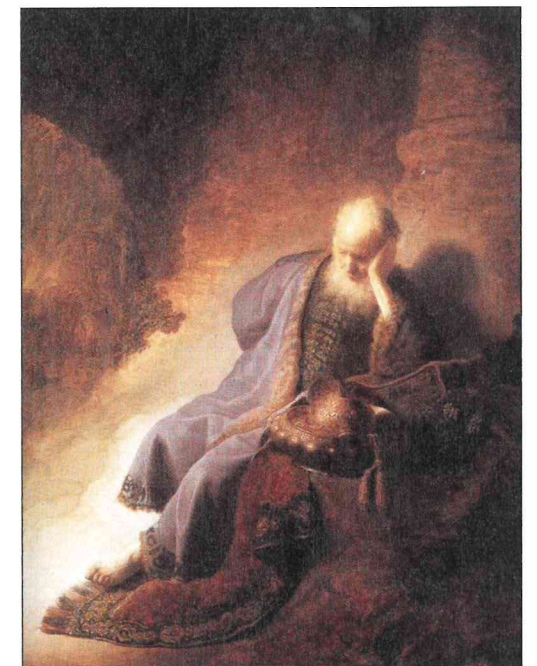
Reading only the verse in Jeremiah gives us some of the meaning. Reading it with the beginning of Genesis in mind, however, brings out much more of the meaning. Jeremiah uses the same words as in Genesis. The destruction is so terrible, Jeremiah is saying, that it completely undoes the work of creation!

There are many different kinds of literature (stories, poems, dialogue, figurative language, and others) in the Bible, and the sacred writers used many different literary techniques. **Because they lived at different times and had different personalities, they used those techniques differently.** Those differences make reading Scripture endlessly fascinating.

We also need to remember that the Bible is *ancient* literature. Even the most recent books of the New Testament were written almost two thousand years ago. The authors of Scripture did not write the same way modern authors write. To understand what they meant to say, we have to understand the way they saw the world.

In Sacred Scripture, God speaks to man in a human way. To interpret Scripture correctly, the reader must be attentive to what the human authors truly wanted to affirm and to what God wanted to reveal to us by their words (cf. DV 12 § 1). (CCC 109)

In order to discover the sacred authors' intention, the reader must take into account the conditions of their time and culture, the literary genres in use at that time, and the modes of feeling, speaking, and narrating then current. "For the fact is that truth is differently presented and expressed in the various types of historical writing, and in other forms of literary expression" (DV 12 § 2). (CCC 110)



Prophet Jeremiah lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem.

The Bible Is Religious

- The sacred authors see everything in the light of religion.
- Because God sees the whole truth, Bible history is the only truly objective history.
- All Bible history is really salvation history.

We also need to remember that the Bible has a different purpose from other human literature. The Bible is religious. Although the sacred writers told great stories and wrote great poetry, all that literary technique was in the service of the religious purpose of the Bible.

In discerning the meaning of inspired Scripture it is traditional to distinguish two senses, the literal and the spiritual (CCC 115-119). The literal sense is that which the authors intended to express; historical and linguistic analysis, by shedding light upon the processes which gave rise to the biblical texts help to determine this sense which is also intended by God as principal author of the Scriptures and to determine the direction of thought expressed by the text. The spiritual sense is the meaning expressed by the biblical texts when read under the influence of the Holy Spirit in light of the mystery of Christ. There should be no contradiction between the two senses of Scripture; they belong together because scholarship together with faith is needed to enable us to grasp the religious meaning of Scripture.

People today usually think of religion in terms of personal experience. But that isn't how the authors of the Bible—or other ancient peoples—saw it. The word “religion” comes from a Latin word meaning “binding.” To the ancients, religion was what held everything together. Their view of history, culture, politics, and everything else was a religious view.

Because of that view, the Bible writers don't write history the way we write history. We see history as a list of important events—wars, treaties, inventions, and so on. The main characters in our history are kings, presidents, and generals.

Although we pretend to write “objective” history—history that tells just the facts—all our history is biased. Even by deciding which facts are important, we make biased decisions. There's no getting around that personal bias in ordinary history, because every history has to be written from some point of view.

But there is one point of view that's completely unbiased. God sees everything exactly the way it is. The Bible writers tell history from God's point of view.

To the Bible writers, the important thing about history is what it tells us about God's relationship with his people. Many of the most important characters in Bible history seem to be just ordinary people—not emperors, not kings, not even governors or mayors. Jesus himself, the Son of God, looked like an ordinary carpenter's son to the people around him. But those ordinary people carried God's message, and that made them more important than all the mighty emperors who fill our history books. Because God sees history objectively, the Bible often ignores the emperors and concentrates on the people who were really important.

In fact, all the history in the Bible is really “salvation history”—the history of how God's plan to save us unfolded through the ages.

Does the Bible contain any errors? Is everything in the Bible true?

Since He is perfect, God can neither deceive nor be deceived. Scripture is affirmed as true by God. Because both the human author and the Holy Spirit are true authors of Scripture, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit guarantees Scripture is free from error. Scripture is true and contains no errors because God Himself is the true author of all its parts by divine inspiration given to the human writers. The word “inspiration” is chosen to indicate the Holy Spirit “breathed” into the writers what he wished them to write.

Archaeological Periods And Biblical Events

Paleolithic (Old Stone Age)	Before 10,000 B.C.	Genesis 1-11
Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age)	10,000-8000 B.C.	Genesis 1-11
Neolithic (New Stone Age) Pre-Pottery Neolithic Pottery Neolithic	8000-4500 B.C. 8000-6000 B.C. 6000-4500 B.C.	Genesis 1-11
Chalcolithic (Bronze/Stone Age)	4500-3150 B.C.	Genesis 1-11
Bronze (or Canaanite) Early Bronze I II III IV Middle Bronze I IIA IIB Late Bronze I IIA IIB	3150-1200 B.C. 3150-2200 B.C. 3150-2850 B.C. 2850-2650 B.C. 2650-2350 B.C. 2350-2200 B.C. 2200-1550 B.C. 2200-1950 B.C. 1950-1750 B.C. 1750-1550 B.C. 1550-1200 B.C. 1550-1400 B.C. 1400-1300 B.C. 1300-1200 B.C.	Genesis 1-11 Abraham Jacob enters Egypt The Exodus and Conquest
Iron (or Israelite) Early Iron IA IB Middle Iron IIA IIB IIC	1200-586 B.C. 1200-1000 B.C. 1200-1150 B.C. 1150-1000 B.C. 1000-800 B.C. 1000-900 B.C. 900-800 B.C. 800-586 B.C.	 David becomes King Israel and Judah Fall (722 and 586 B.C.)
Babylonian (Persian) (or Late Iron)	586-332 B.C.	Babylonian Captivity (586-539 B.C.)
Hellenistic (Greek) I II (or Hasmonean/Maccabean)	332-37 B.C. 332-152 B.C. 152-37 B.C.	
Roman I (or Herodian) II (or Middle Roman) III (or Late Roman)	37 B.C.-324 A.D. 37 B.C.-70 A.D. 70-180 A.D. 180-324 A.D.	Jesus Christ
Byzantine (Early Church Age of Roman Empire)	324-640 A.D.	

What "Salvation History" Is

- God has always had a plan to save us.
- Salvation history is the story of how that plan works in history.
- We can look at all salvation history as a series of seven covenants between God and his people.

From before the beginning of time, God had a plan to save us all from our sin. The Bible, taken as a whole, tells us the history of that plan of salvation. That's what we mean when we say "salvation history": the story of how God's plan to save us was worked out over thousands of years. But salvation history is different from other kinds of history; it deals not only with the past but also with the future. Because God's Word has been revealed to us, we know how the plan of salvation will keep working until the end of time.

One good way of looking at salvation history is to see it as a series of covenants between God and us. In the Old Testament, a covenant was an agreement between God and mankind made through individual persons. A covenant is similar to a contract, but it is much more than merely a contract. A covenant establishes bonds of sacred kinship: it unites the participants in a family relation. A contract is a temporary business agreement, meant to last as long as current circumstances make it necessary. God's covenant unites persons in a union that is meant to last. A corporation is a contract; a marriage is a covenant.

Salvation history is the story of how we, sinful humans that we are, have been brought into God's covenant family. We can see seven covenants between God and us in salvation history. (The number seven is a symbol of covenant completeness in Scripture, so it is especially appropriate here.) Each covenant is made through a covenant mediator, and although each covenant reflects a promise God makes to all humanity, each covenant takes the form of a wider social relationship.

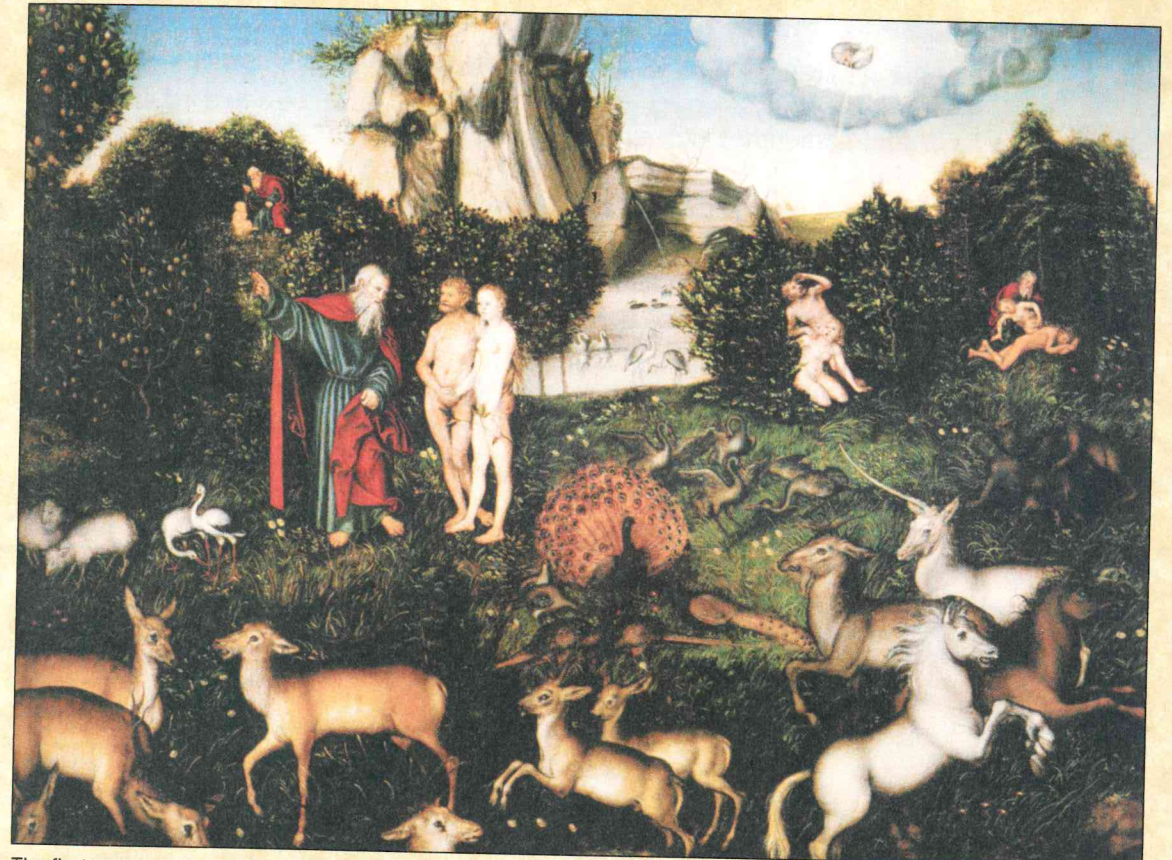
1. The first covenant we read about in the Bible is the covenant with Adam. In Hebrew, the name "Adam" is also used to refer to the whole human race. So this first covenant is really the one from which all the other covenants spring.
2. The second covenant is with Noah and his household after the flood.
3. The third covenant is with Abraham and his whole tribe.
4. The fourth covenant is with the whole nation of Israel through Moses.
5. The fifth covenant is with all the nations through David and Solomon.
6. The sixth covenant is the New Covenant with all humanity through Jesus Christ.
7. Finally, at the end of time, there will be a seventh covenant for all eternity.

When you learn to see salvation history this way, it will be easy to make sense of the Bible as a whole. That's what this book is about. You'll learn to see how every part of the Bible fits as part of God's plan for our salvation.



The third covenant is with Abraham and his whole tribe. Abraham is the Ancestor of Israel and a model of one who has faith.

Covenant History



The first covenant we read about in the Bible is the covenant with Adam. In Hebrew, the name "Adam" is also used to refer to the whole human race. So this first covenant is really the one from which all the other covenants spring.

With Each Additional Covenant, The Relationship Between God and Humanity Is Manifested Through A Wider Form Of Human Relationship.						✝
Covenant Mediator	Adam	Noah	Abraham	Moses	David	Jesus
Covenant Role	Husband	Father	Tribal Chief	Judge	King	Royal High Priest
Covenant Form	Marriage	Household	Tribe	Nation	National Kingdom	Catholic Church
Covenant Sign	Sabbath	Rainbow	Circumcision	Passover	Throne	Eucharist

The Church Will Be Our Guide

- The Bible can be hard for us to understand.
- The Church was created by God to teach us what we need to know.

The Bible is a large and sometimes difficult book. All of it was written over several thousand years, by writers who lived in times very different from ours. Without help, we might misunderstand what some of the Bible writers are trying to tell us.

But we are not left without help. The Church, founded by Jesus Christ himself, and guided by the Holy Spirit interprets the Bible without falling into error. Just as Christ promised, the Catholic Church is always here to teach us how to understand the Bible in light of the living Tradition.

Without that help, we would be lost. If we had no divinely guided teacher to help us, we would be left with human interpretations of the Bible. And those human interpretations disagree. If we want to follow the Word of God and understand Sacred Scripture, then we must learn what our Mother the Church teaches.



In 382 A.D. the Pope commissioned scholar and churchman Jerome (St. Jerome) to make a new translation of the Bible into Latin from the Greek and Hebrew. This translation is known as the Vulgate, from the Latin *vulgata editio*, roughly translated "edition for common circulation."

What is the Canon of the Bible?

The books of the Bible are inerrant under the guidance of divine inspiration. Therefore, only God can reveal which books He has inspired. The list of inspired books is called the canon from the Greek for "measuring rod." In order for a book to be included in the canon, it must be divinely inspired. The Church has answered the question of the inspiration of a book by turning to Sacred Tradition. The Magisterium interprets Tradition with the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

The Church, from Her beginning, has held the books of the Bible to be inspired. "By means of the same Tradition the full canon of the sacred books is known to the Church, and the Holy Scriptures themselves are more thoroughly understood and constantly actualized in the Church" (Vatican II, *Dei Verbum* 8).

Important documentary evidence from the early Church comes from the Councils of Carthage in the fourth century and from the ordinary Magisterium afterwards, including the Council of Florence in 1441. The Council of Trent in 1546 solemnly defined the canon of Scripture.

How The Canon Came To Be

- The "canon" of Scripture is the list of books proper for reading in the Liturgy.
- The whole Church, meeting in a general council (Trent), decided on the canon.
- It was by the apostolic Tradition that the Church discerned which writings are to be included in the Canon (CCC 120).

The Bible is divided into two sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is made up of books that were written before the time of Christ; the New Testament books were written after the time of Christ. Both parts are equally important. As we'll soon learn, the New Testament does not cancel the Old Testament. On the contrary, the New Testament writers themselves constantly refer to the Old Testament as "the Scriptures."

But how the Bible was written is only half the story. Many other books were written during that time besides the ones that ended up in the Bible. How did the Church decide which books belonged in the Bible and which books didn't? For that matter, what did it mean to say that a book was part of the Scriptures?

The answer to that last question has to do with the celebration of the liturgy. The liturgy is the service of the Church, and the center of the liturgy is the celebration of the Eucharist.

When the early Christians met, they celebrated the liturgy in two parts: the Liturgy of the Word and the Eucharist. Anyone could attend the Liturgy of the Word, but only baptized Christians could stay for the Eucharist. (We still keep the same division today, although we no longer ban non-Christians from the church when we celebrate the Eucharist.)

In the Liturgy of the Word, the early Christians heard readings from the Scriptures, just as we do today. The Old Testament scriptures were the same ones Jewish congregations heard in their synagogues—in fact, many early Christians continued to go to the synagogues until the synagogue authorities banned them. But they also heard letters from the Apostles and stories from the life of Christ. Which of these new books were suitable for reading in the liturgy? That was the question the early Church had to answer.

The "canon" is the answer to that question. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Church came up with a list, or "canon," of approved books. The inclusion of a book in the canon meant it was divinely inspired. ("Canon" is a Greek word meaning "measuring rod" or "rule.") Other books were rejected because they were not divinely inspired.

In the Old Testament, the Church accepts some books as canonical that Jewish tradition does not regard as Scripture. These books are called "deuterocanonical," from a Greek word meaning "second canon":

Tobit
Judith
Wisdom

Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)
Baruch
1 Maccabees

2 Maccabees
Parts of Daniel
Parts of Esther

Protestant churches usually follow later Jewish tradition, so most Protestant Bibles omit those books. But according to the Catholic Church, these deuterocanonical books have the same authority as the rest of the books of the Bible; they are part of Scripture. These books offer, quite explicitly, certain doctrines which are recognized as Catholic teaching and practice. For example, the book of 2 Maccabees shows conclusively the concept of creation and that Jewish believers prayed for the souls of the dead many years before the coming of Jesus Christ. The book of Tobit demonstrates the existence and action of guardian angels.

There was a division among the Jewish scholars between the Septuagint or Alexandrian canon, a collection of forty-six books translated into Greek by seventy Jewish scholars, and the Palestinian canon which did not contain the deuterocanonical books. Protestant churches usually follow the Palestinian tradition, thus most Protestant Bibles omit those deuterocanonical books. The Catholic Church has determined the deuterocanonical books have the same authority as the rest of the books of the Bible.

The Canon Of Scripture

This is the complete list of all the books in the Bible, as determined by the Catholic Church.

The Old Testament

Genesis	1 Chronicles	Wisdom	Jonah
Exodus	2 Chronicles	Sirach	Micah
Leviticus	Ezra	Isaiah	Nahum
Numbers	Nehemiah	Jeremiah	Habakkuk
Deuteronomy	Tobit	Lamentations	Zephaniah
Joshua	Judith	Baruch	Haggai
Judges	Esther	Ezekiel	Zechariah
Ruth	Job	Daniel	Malachi
1 Samuel	Psalms	Hosea	1 Maccabees
2 Samuel	Proverbs	Joel	2 Maccabees
1 Kings	Ecclesiastes	Amos	
2 Kings	Song of Solomon	Obadiah	

Many Bibles put the two books of Maccabees after Esther. With that arrangement, all the historical books of the Old Testament are grouped together. On the other hand, the books of Maccabees make a good historical introduction to the New Testament, so there are good reasons for both arrangements.

The New Testament

Matthew	Ephesians	Hebrews
Mark	Philippians	James
Luke	Colossians	1 Peter
John	1 Thessalonians	2 Peter
Acts of the Apostles	2 Thessalonians	1 John
Romans	1 Timothy	2 John
1 Corinthians	2 Timothy	3 John
2 Corinthians	Titus	Jude
Galatians	Philemon	Revelation

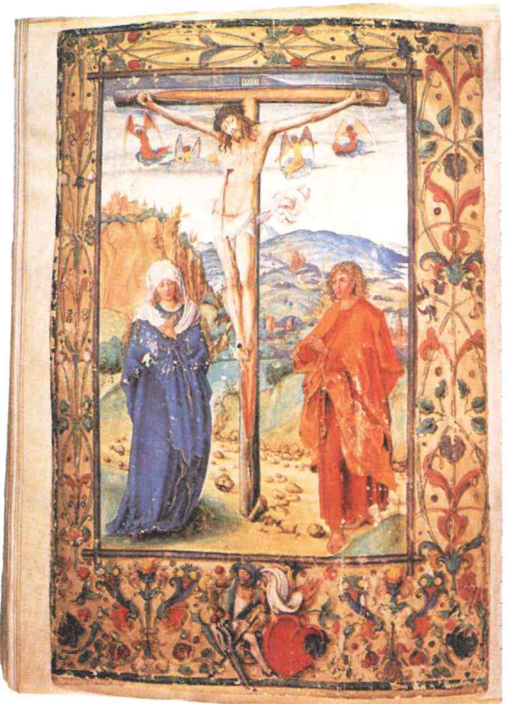
SUPPLEMENTARY READING

John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*

10. Contemplating Jesus as revealer, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council stressed the salvific character of God's Revelation in history, describing it in these terms: "In this Revelation, the invisible God (cf. Col 1:15; 1 Tm 1:17), out of the abundance of his love speaks to men and women as friends (cf. Ex 33:11; Jn 15:14-15) and lives among them (cf. Bar 3:38), so that he may invite and take them into communion with himself. This plan of Revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them. By this Revelation, then, the deepest truth about God and human salvation is made clear to us in Christ, who is the mediator and at the same time the fullness of all Revelation."

11. God's Revelation is therefore immersed in time and history. Jesus Christ took flesh in the "fullness of time" (Gal 4:4); and two thousand years later, I feel bound to restate forcefully that "in Christianity time has a fundamental importance." It is within time that the whole work of creation and salvation comes to light; and it emerges clearly above all that, with the Incarnation of the Son of God, our life is even now a foretaste of the fulfillment of time which is to come (cf. Heb 1:2).

The truth about himself and his life which God has entrusted to humanity is immersed therefore in time and history; and it was declared once and for all in the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth. The Constitution *Dei Verbum* puts it eloquently: "After speaking in many places and varied ways through the prophets, God 'last of all in these days has spoken to us by his Son' (Heb 1:1-2). For he sent his Son, the eternal Word who enlightens all people, so that he might dwell among them and tell them the innermost realities about God (cf. Jn 1:1-18). Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, sent as 'a human being to human beings,' 'speaks the words of God' (Jn 3:34), and completes the work of salvation which his Father gave him to do (cf. Jn 5:36; 17:4). To see Jesus is to see his Father (Jn 14:9). For this reason, Jesus perfected Revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making himself present and manifesting himself: through his words and deeds, his signs and wonders, but especially through his death and glorious Resurrection from the dead and finally his sending of the Spirit of truth."



This page is from a parchment codex, ca. 1505. A codex (Latin for "book") is a handwritten book from late Antiquity or the Middle Ages. The codex was an improvement over the scroll. Because it was single pages stitched together with leather, it could be opened flat at any page, allowing easier reading, and both sides could be written on. Parchment and vellum were made from fine calf skin, sheep skin or goat skin. Parchment is named after the city Pergamon where it was first invented. In the Middle Ages, calf and sheep skin were the preferred materials for making parchment in England and France, goat skin was more common in Italy.

VOCABULARY

BIBLE

Scripture. The collection of all the canonical books. The Bible is divided into two parts: the Old Testament, made up of books written before the coming of Jesus Christ, and the New Testament, made up of books written after the coming of Jesus Christ.

CANON

The list of inspired books. Greek for "measuring rod."

CATHOLIC

Universal. Catholic can describe the Church or one of her members.

CHURCH

The faithful. This can refer to the Roman Catholic Church or an individual diocese.

COVENANT

An agreement that establishes a sacred family bond between persons. A covenant is more than a contract; a contract establishes a temporary relationship beneficial to both parties, whereas a covenant is intended to bind both persons in kinship forever.

INERRANT

Making no mistakes or errors. Scripture is inerrant; that is, it always teaches truth, never falsehood.

INFALLIBLE

Incapable of failing. The Bible and the teaching of the Church are infallible because of a special protection by God.

INSPIRED

Guided by God. From a word meaning "breathed in." The human writers of Scripture wrote in their own language, but through God's inspiration they wrote what God intended them to write and nothing more.

MAGISTERIUM

The teaching authority of the Church which, guided by the Holy Spirit, interprets Scripture and Tradition.

PROTESTANT

A Christian not in communion with the Church. A Protestant owes allegiance to one of the reform movements, most of which began in the 1500s.

SALVATION HISTORY

The story of God's plan to save humanity from the consequences of sin. This plan begins with Creation, is unfolding now, and will continue until the end of time.

SCRIPTURE.

See Bible.

TRADITION

The living transmission of the message of the Gospel in the Church.



Before the printing press was invented in 1455, the Bible was copied by hand on stone, clay, leather, papyrus and vellum. Special scribes developed intricate methods of counting words and letters to insure that no errors could be made.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Name the two original sources for Catholic teaching.
2. What is the Bible?
3. What is Tradition?
4. What does "inerrant" mean?
5. What does "inspired" mean?
6. What is the divinely chosen interpreter of Scripture?
7. What does "infallibility" mean?
8. What is the purpose of the Magisterium?
9. Who exercises the supreme Magisterium?
10. What does the phrase "in a particular way" mean in reference to the teaching authority of the pope?
11. Who is the author of the Bible?
12. Explain the meaning of number 107 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.
13. How did the authors of the Bible differ from many people today in their view of religion?
14. Why do we say the Bible is "objective history"?
15. What is "salvation history"?
16. How does salvation history differ from all other history?
17. What is a "covenant"?
18. How many covenants has God made with his people?
19. What does the word "canon" mean?
20. List the three sources used to determine canonicity.
21. List the five rules for determining correct scriptural interpretation.
22. What are "deuterocanonical" books?
23. In what covenant period are we living?

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1. Numbers 75 to 78 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explain how divine revelation has been passed on to us from the very beginnings of the Church in two distinct but not separate ways; Sacred Scripture and Tradition are the one common source making present the revelation in the Church. How does the *Catechism* distinguish between these two sources of Revelation? How does the "continuous line of succession" from the Apostles to our present day bishops assure us that we are receiving the same truths which were received by the Church two thousand years ago?
2. There are many passages in the Bible which may be interpreted differently by different people. One such passage is Luke 12: 51-53. Try to come up with two possible interpretations for the meaning of Jesus' words: "Do you think I came to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division; for henceforth in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against her mother..." How can we be sure of what Jesus was trying to tell us? What special quality does the Magisterium of the Church have which allows it to aid us?

FROM THE CATECHISM

80 “Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, then, are bound closely together, and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing, and move towards the same goal” (DV 9). Each of them makes present and fruitful in the Church the mystery of Christ, who promised to remain with his own “always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28: 20).

82 As a result the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, “does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honoured with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence” (DV 9).

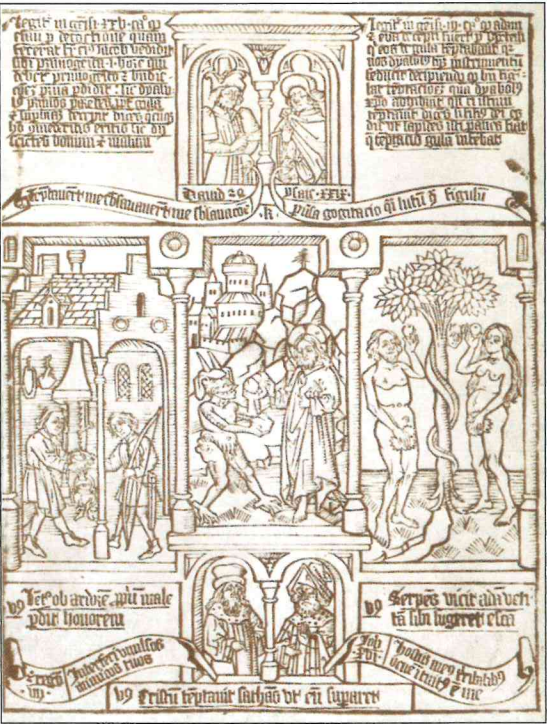
85 “The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ” (DV 10 § 2). This means that the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome.

104 In Sacred Scripture, the Church constantly finds her nourishment and her strength, for she welcomes it not as a human word, “but as what it really is, the word of God” (1 Thes 2: 13; cf. DV 24). “In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children, and talks with them” (DV 21).

132 “Therefore, the ‘study of the sacred page’ should be the very soul of sacred theology. The ministry of the Word, too — pastoral preaching, catechetics, and all forms of Christian instruction, among which the liturgical homily should hold pride of place — is healthily nourished and thrives in holiness through the Word of Scripture” (DV 24).

135 “The Sacred Scriptures contain the Word of God and, because they are inspired, they are truly the Word of God” (DV 24).

2653 The Church “forcefully and specially exhorts all the Christian faithful... to learn ‘the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ’ (Phil 3: 8) by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures.... Let them remember, however, that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that a dialogue takes place between God and man. For ‘we speak to him when we pray; we listen to him when we read the divine oracles’ (DV 25; cf. Phil 3: 8; St. Ambrose, *De officiis ministrorum* 1, 20, 88: PL 16, 50).”



A page from the *Biblia Pauperum*, ca. 1470. The *Biblia Pauperum* or Poor Man's Bible is thought to have been used by poorer members of the clergy to prepare sermons. Each page of the *Biblia Pauperum* illustrates a subject from the life and Passion of Christ, two parallels from the Old Testament, and witnesses from among Biblical personages. In the woodcut illustrated here, we see the Temptation of Christ in the center panel, Jacob and Esau on the left, and the Temptation of Adam and Eve on the right.