

01 - The Beginning

Welcome to Scripture in 12 Minutes: the podcast where we go through the Holy Scripture in 12 minute increments. St Paul writes to St Timothy that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. We ask the Lord to give us His wisdom and to speak through the mouths of His servants.

This is Episode 1.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1) The first verse of the first chapter of the first book of the Bible. The beginning, if you will.

The Book of Genesis is originally written in Hebrew, and as with all the Hebrew texts, its Hebrew name comes from its first few words. So, the name of Genesis in Hebrew is Beresheet which means "In the beginning." The name Genesis comes from the Greek "Γενεσις" which also means "the beginning." And this is a good summary for what the Book of Genesis is - the beginning.

In the book of Genesis, we will find many beginnings and many firsts - some good, and some bad: The beginning of time and matter; the beginning of Creation; the first Man and Woman; the first sin and the Fall of Man; the first sacrifices; and many more.

But before we delve into the text, we should talk about Genesis in the context of the rest of the Scripture! And before we do that, we should talk about the Scripture in general.

What is Scripture? Well, you heard it in the introduction from the man himself! St Paul writes to St Timothy that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. Another common translation for that is that all Scripture is God-breathed. Scripture is the breath of God; the word of God; God - Himself... it's His words! It is a message from God to each individual; profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and for instruction in righteousness.

But hang on, let's take a step back... who is God? God is Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There is One God. They are not three gods, but rather Three Persons (or Three Hypostases) of the Trinity. To put it simply, the Father is God. The Son is God, The Holy Spirit is God. the Father is not the Son; the Father is not the Holy Spirit; the Son is not the Holy Spirit. It is a mystery ineffable, incomprehensible by the human mind. And if you think about it... of course it is! If I could fit God in my mind, He wouldn't really be God, would He!

Back to Scripture. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. St Gregory of Nyssa comments on this, saying "The Scripture is of the Holy Spirit, and its intention is the profit of men." When I was young, being Coptic Orthodox, I was always taught that God, the Holy Spirit, is the "author" of the Scripture. But it wasn't until I grew up that I really understood what that meant. The words of Scripture were penned by human authors - Moses, King David, King Solomon, Matthew, Mark, Luke,

John, St Paul, etc. They recorded the real events as they saw them happen, or as they were received by them through an oral tradition. They wrote to specific audiences and for specific purposes. They had their own writing styles.

So, where is the work of the Holy Spirit in all of this? God, the Holy Spirit, illumined the minds of the Biblical Authors. And although we can recognize these different writing styles of the different authors, we can also recognize the consistency of the Message. The common thread that runs through every book, every chapter and every verse. The Lord Jesus Christ told the disciples that when they received the Holy Spirit, then the Holy Spirit would teach them all things and bring to their remembrance all things that He had said to them. This same Holy Spirit - God - worked through these men to compose what we call the Scripture, which is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness.

So how do we glean this Message from the Scripture?

To be brief, I'll mention three steps.

The first step should be pretty obvious. READ the Scripture! Open the Scripture and read it! Meditate on its words. Choose a lesson for yourself to apply in the coming day or week or month. As the Prophet Jeremiah writes: "Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." (Jeremiah 15:16). We often want to pick up the newest books or commentaries, listen to many sermons or podcasts, watch lectures, etc... and these are all good things. But we must make sure not to fall into the trap of doing those things IN LIEU of reading the Scripture. HH Pope Shenouda III used to say that "the difference between us and the saints is seriousness." Be serious in reading the Scripture, my beloved.

The second step is to LIVE the Scripture. Let the Scripture influence the way in which you live your life. Don't think of the Scripture as some hypothetical but unattainable model of perfection. Don't think of the Scripture as some "pretty good but not really practical" advice. Don't think of the Scripture simply as "knowledge for my mind." But instead, allow yourself to be filled with the Scripture so that your life becomes a reflection of God's word.

The third step is to STUDY the Scripture. St John Chrysostom in his 53rd Homily on the Gospel of John says this: "If we are willing to examine the Scriptures in this way, carefully and systematically, we shall be able to obtain our salvation. If we unceasingly are preoccupied with them, we shall learn both correctness of doctrine and an upright way of life."

You see, studying the Scripture is NOT the same as reading it. They go hand in hand. Reading should be a daily occurrence - just like eating! Studying, on the other hand, can take different forms.

Which leads me to talk about... this podcast. In this podcast, by God's grace and according to His will, we will read the Scripture, and we will study from several different perspectives. We'll look at Historical Context, Cultural Context, Patristic Commentary, Allegory, Typology; we'll see how Scripture interprets Scripture; we'll see what pastoral messages we can glean from the text.

How can we apply lessons in our own lives to guide us to repentance, spiritual growth, and a virtuous life? How does the Orthodox liturgical tradition, and specifically the Coptic tradition, reflect the sound understanding of the Scripture? We will see some apologetics: what attacks does the enemy engage against the Scripture and how can we give a defense for them? We will see some theology: what has God revealed to us about Himself? Eschatology, Soteriology, Hamartiology, Angelology - and several other "ologies." If you don't know what these words mean, that's okay! We'll get to it!

The primary goal of this podcast is, to be frank, my own edification. My own growth: in knowledge, in my relationship with the Scripture, and in my personal spiritual life. The secondary goal of this podcast is YOUR edification. Your growth: in knowledge, in your relationship with Scripture, and in your spiritual life.

This is Scripture in 12 Minutes. I chose 12 minute increments because sometimes... that's all we have! It's just enough time to listen to an episode during your commute to school or work. Maybe two episodes. Or, if you have an hour available to you, then it's just enough time to listen to five episodes! And everything in between.

The primary audience for this podcast are those in High School or older who desire the knowledge of the Scripture. If you didn't really grow up in the Church, but, by God's grace and the work of the Holy Spirit in you, you want to make a comeback - this is for you. If you grew up in the Church but maybe forgot to pay attention in Sunday School and maybe took a nap during the sermons, and you want to make a comeback - this is for you. If you grew up in the Church and paid attention at Church, but never really got into reading the Bible at home, and you want to make a comeback - this is for you.

I encourage you to listen to this podcast in addition to (and not in place of) attending your Orthodox Parish's local Bible Study, if there is one. Nothing can beat dedicated time in God's house, with His Scripture in your hand, hearing the words of the Holy Spirit from the mouth of one of His servants.

And I'll emphasize one more time - daily Scripture reading is a MUST. Don't let the enemy deceive you. When you hear yourself saying "well I listened to the podcast today, I don't necessarily need to read the Scripture" - this is deception. Open your Bible, sit in your room, and read.

I'll leave you with the words of the great saint, John Chrysostom. In his homilies on the Gospel of John, he says "if you ask them who was Amos or Obadiah, or what is the number of the Prophets or Apostles, they cannot even open their mouth; but for horses and charioteers, they compose excuses more cleverly than sophists or rhetoricians." He's saying that we sometimes can name all of our favorite sports teams and players, or musicians, actors and content creators. But we fail to name the Apostles or the Prophets. Later on, he says: "Is it not strange that those who sit in the marketplace tell the names, and races, and cities and talents of charioteers and dancers, even accurately state the good and bad qualities of horses, while those who assemble in the church understand nothing of what is taking place here and even are ignorant to the number of the sacred Books?" He's saying that we seem to put our minds to work in all of our endeavors - whether our education, our career, our purchases, and our hobbies, but we neglect the knowledge of God and of

His Scripture.

Through your prayers, my beloved listener: May the Lord soften our hearts to His word and His will for our lives. May He grant to us success in our studies of His word. May He give His servant a mouth and wisdom and be present in the time of preparation for this podcast, and at any time that it is played. To Him is due all glory now and forever, and unto the age of all ages. Amen.

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