• The Bible is “a disturbing, wonderful, perplexing, and inspiring book.”
  o The Bible is not an owner’s manual, guidebook, science or history book, or a book of promises.

• The Bible is situated in pre-history (Genesis 1-11) and in history (Genesis 12-Revelation)
  o The story of Israel begins with the call of Abraham, and while we don’t know when he lived, it is presumed to be about 2000 BCE. Dates are also approximate for Moses & the Exodus, presumed around 1300 BCE. Beginning with King David, more historical evidence exists.

• The Bible takes place in the Fertile Crescent, or Mesopotamia (between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates)
  o Jews shared land with the Samaritans, and they struggled to get along, which continues today.

• The Old Testament – consisting of the law, the prophets, and the writings – are accounts of the traditions of the people of Israel – how they understood themselves in relationship to God and the world, and how they perceived their future in light of those relationships.
  o “The Old Testament is both Israel’s story and the story of the God who chose them to be his people, who loved them as a parent loves a child or a lover loves the beloved, who delivered them from slavery and gave them a land of their own, yet who watched as they turned from their covenant, worshipped foreign gods, and oppressed their own people. It is the story of God hiding his face from his people, and of the neighboring nations attacking and destroying the Jewish people to control their small but valuable piece of real estate. And in the end it is the story of God restoring them once more, bringing them back from exile, and promising them a new king.” (37)
  o The faith of Jesus is surely shaped by the faith as handed down to him by the Hebrew Bible, but some writings it would seem were more primary than others, particularly the portrayals of God’s mercy, foreshadowing Jesus’ own mission.
  o Prophecies in the Old Testament should be understood as references to events closer in time to the prophets than Jesus. But they were not foretelling so much as they were “forth-telling,” speaking on behalf of God offering comfort and calling for repentance, the pattern of relationship between God and God’s people that would culminate in the work of Jesus Christ.
• The New Testament - begins with the story of Jesus Christ, who was sent from God to “seek and to save those who are lost,” and follows the life of the early Church as it sought to continue his ministry.
  o The first 3 gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) are accounts of the good news that the kingdom of God is upon you, and the world will be restored by preaching of the kingdom and the repentance of God’s children. The gospel of John focuses more on the life which Jesus gives us, and that by our believing and abiding in him, we find life filled with love.
    ▪ Matthew, Mark and Luke (also known as The Synoptic Gospels, or “those that look alike”) focused on the life and work of Jesus, while the gospel of John focused on the theological significance of Jesus and its implications for our life who live in him.
    ▪ Hamilton keenly points out that the differences between the gospels highlights the liberal/conservative divide in biblical interpretation - the 3 synoptic gospels primarily focused on what Jesus did and stood for, while John primarily focused on the life of faith and transformation we are to lead because of him.
  o The early Christian Church was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, and continued the ministry of Jesus’ healing and preaching. Paul started new faith communities and wrote to them words of clarification, admonition and encouragement as they sought to be faithful to the promises of God in Jesus Christ as they waited for ultimate redemption.
  o Revelation insists that the kingdom of God will ultimately triumph over any earthly empire, and those who remain steadfast in Christ through faith will inherit this kingdom.
  o The New Testament canon was formed according to the criteria of 1) usefulness, 2) consistency, 3) association with the first generation of Jesus followers, and 4) the faith community’s acceptance – all of which helped determine or measure each text’s supposed inspiration.

• The development of the Bible is more complex and more intriguing (with multiple traditions spliced together by multiple authors in different times and contexts) than is usually supposed by readers.

• Is the Bible inspired?
  o “Through the words of the Bible, the Holy Spirit has spoken and continues to speak. It is inspired, and it inspires.... And it also reflects at times the limitations, biases, and assumptions of its human authors.” (143)

• Is the Bible the Word of God?
  o The bible is a biography of God, not autobiography. You can read God’s actual words in its pages, but you’ll also hear the human authors’ reflections upon God and their attempts to put into words God’s nature, character and will.
  o “The Bible contains the word of God found within the words of its human authors.” (152).
  o The Bible is neither inerrant nor infallible, but whatever God knew we needed to know for salvation is found by engaging with its pages.
  o A “high view of scripture” approaches the Bible with a deep appreciation for its history and the way God has spoken and continues to speak through it, recognizing both its humanity and its divine inspiration, seeking to study carefully in order to be shaped and guided by it. Someone
with a high view of the Bible reads it, listens for God to speak through it, seeks to be shaped by its words, and tries to follow its commands. (182)

- **Science and the Bible:** The Bible is not a science lesson. Genesis 1 lays the foundational theological claims of faith, not through historical fact but through forward thrust. Genesis 2-3 tell an archetypal story about the human condition and the nature and will of God in light of it. These lessons are not in conflict with science, they are deeper truths about the nature of the universe and our place in it.
  - Truth in Genesis is not dependent on its history or fact, as it is instruction about faith and hope.

- **Violence and the Bible:** If we take the Bible’s humanity seriously, we invite the possibility that the violence of scripture is a reflection of the values of its authors, not the God they served. We judge all other words of the Bible in light of God’s definitive Word, Jesus Christ, who taught that the divine way was through forgiveness and prayer, not violence. Bible nonetheless reminds us how easily we can be led to invoke God’s name as a justification of violence in the world. The Bible, therefore, can help free us from this tragic dimension of our human condition, if we read it right.

- **Suffering and the Bible:** Some biblical authors believed that God controls everything and bad things happen as punishment for sin. Others asked why the innocent sometimes suffer. New Testament authors claim Jesus bore the consequences of sin, as if to put to an end the idea that God was in the business of inflicting us with suffering for the bad things we’ve done. (230)
  - The biblical view of God’s providence (causing things to happen) was shaped by what the biblical authors could know in their time (like infertility or the weather).
  - The book of Job challenges the orthodox viewpoint that God causes suffering. Job experiences suffering that is not God’s doing, nor is it a result of his having done wrong.
  - God does not dispense suffering, nor is suffering divinely orchestrated to test us. But God is with us in suffering, and that presence we can access through faith as we hurt.
  - There are consequences to our actions and bad things happen. God may not cause these things, but God will bring good from all, and not even death can separate us from God’s love.

- **I share Christ with others not because I believe they are going to hell, but because I believe in him we see the clearest picture of who God is and what God longs for from humanity.** (252)

- **Homosexuality and the Bible:** We must articulate a clear view of scripture that recognizes its inspiration and its humanity.
  - Even those who believe every word of the Bible is inspired have grounds for re-thinking the church’s traditional interpretation of the biblical passages related to same-sex intimacy.
    - There is no record in the Torah of two men seeking to share their lives together as companions and lovers.
    - Genesis 18: In Sodom, men come asking to rape Lot’s sons, and instead Lot gives them his daughters. What does this passage have to say about loving, same-sex relationships? It seems to condemn male rape, while being silent about female rape, and therefore not very articulate about what we would understand to be the will of God for human behavior today.
Then centuries later the prophet Ezekiel cited Genesis' account of Sodom, and condemned them for their neglect of the poor and needy, and they did “abominable things” so I removed them. Among the abominable things cited were attempting to gang-rape two strangers.

- The gang rape in Sodom in fact is the only example of same sex activity in the Torah up to the point of the Mosaic law, which prohibits “a man lying with a man.” In the context of the Torah, it would seem that Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 were condemnations of rape and excess, not two people sharing their lives.

- In addition, there are a host of things described by the Law of Moses as unclean or an abomination that we would not consider abnormal today. (eating pork, seafood) Is the passage prohibiting lying with a man something deemed unclean because it was abnormal at the time?

- Leviticus says that men who lie with another man should be put to death.

- Leviticus is not at all articulate about what it is condemning, and the punishment suggests something different than homosexual relationships.

  - Paul’s condemnation of “unnatural intercourse” comes in the context of his condemnation of idolatry in the pagan temples, likely a reference to ritual prostitution. Pederasty, mature men taking boys as students and lovers, was also a practice of the pagan temples that is perhaps a more appropriate target for Paul’s teaching.

- Bible seems to articulate clear condemnation of gang rape, temple prostitution, idolatry and pederasty, practices we would agree about condemning today.

- There are things in the Bible, commanded in the name of God, that today we recognize as immoral and inconsistent with the heart of God (like slavery and subjugation of women).

- Material in the Bible could be thought of as fitting into three “buckets” of classification:
  - 1- texts that reflect the timeless will of God for human beings
  - 2- texts that reflect God’s will in a particular time but not for all time
  - 3- texts that reflect the culture and historical circumstances in which they were written but never reflected God’s timeless will

- At times we are called to set aside things that do not represent the timeless will of God.

- The Book of Revelation: Revelation challenges us to examine our hearts and place God first there. It challenges us to be careful when it comes to the state, even our own. We are meant to influence the state, but always putting God first. Resistance may come at a cost, but when God’s kingdom comes, all will be redeemed. In the end, none of the gods we construct will be left standing.

- Encouragements for encountering the Bible: see yourself in its story and stories, discover the situation in which it was written, and ask what it teaches about us and me and God, pray as we read, memorize it, study with others, and bring scripture into your life situation, and imagine what might have been.

  - “Read the Bible. The Bible is Israel’s story. It is the church’s story. It is God’s story. As we read it carefully, we see that it is our story. When we read with ears and hearts open to hear, God speaks and the scriptures convey to us the wonderful words of life.” (309)