

\*\*\*WORD COUNT: 548

## **BIBLE BASICS FOR CATHOLICS**

### **A New Picture of Salvation History**

by John Bergsma

Ave Maria Press, 2012

192 pages, 14.95

To order: [www.avemariapress.com](http://www.avemariapress.com)

“You ought to know the Bible better than you do, and you probably feel vaguely guilty that you don’t.” This opening sentence to *Bible Basics for Catholics: A New Picture of Salvation History* by Dr. John Bergsma, Associate Professor of Theology at the Franciscan University of Steubenville, is the author’s motivation for writing this concise but rich book in which he hopes to make “the Bible’s big picture [...] begin to make more sense” for the reader. He fulfills this goal admirably.

Bergsma’s approach is to give an overview of salvation history as presented in the Bible as a series of covenants between God and man, or what he calls “mountaintop experiences.” One chapter is devoted to each of the six covenants (with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus), with an additional chapter exploring the prophets’ role in anticipating the New Covenant, that is, Jesus Christ.

In the introduction, three key terms (covenant, mediator, and mountain), integral to the entire approach of the book, are explained. For each chapter, suggested scripture readings are given at the beginning of the chapter and sometimes in the section headings as well. In

addition, the reader will be given many, sometimes extended, quotes from the Bible in the text itself. Simple line drawings in the author's own hand may provide a chuckle or two but serve to reinforce and make memorable what is learned. Each chapter ends with a pictorial recap of all covenants explored to that point. Particularly powerful is the last chapter, which shows how Jesus fulfills the expectations of each covenant and establishes the New Covenant promised by the prophets, neatly tying together everything presented to that point. An afterword provides encouragement to the reader to respond to the message of scripture with a deeper appreciation and enthusiasm for the sacraments, the Catholic faith, scripture, and evangelization.

Even though this is a basic, non-intimidating overview of the Bible, the author is not afraid to deepen our appreciation of scripture by occasionally introducing some important technical terms and Hebrew and Greek words, always explaining them thoroughly and understandably. He also regularly brings out profound and interesting points, like the meaning of the word *manna* or the importance of the seemingly obscure figure Melchizedek. Humor is interspersed occasionally, lightening things up, but always serving to make a point.

The book would have benefited from discussion and reflection questions after each chapter for those who wish to use it for more formal Bible study or meditation. Also, for those who have been away from the scriptures for a while, and are wondering about the best translation to use, a recommendation for a Bible version does not appear until well into the second chapter. The suggested reading section is not very extensive, but the concluding "Notes" section (be sure to keep a finger in this section while you're reading!) makes up for it with

references to many scholarly resources for those wanting to take deeper dives into certain areas of interest.

This book is based on the very popular “Principles of Biblical Study” courses that Bergsma teaches, in one of which I had the pleasure of being enrolled a few years ago. While nothing beats his engaging live presentation of the material, this volume is the next best thing to being there.